

## JERUSALEM, ATHENS, BERLIN

Craigville  
Theological Colloquy X.7

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Having just returned from re/visits to some cities abroad, my mind is returning to three cities first visited more than 1/3rd c. ago, the three cities that have the highest symbolic value for my mind, my inner life. This 2600th Thinksheet expresses gratitude to God for the blessings of being a spiritual native & thrice-born heir of Jerusalem, Athens, & Berlin, &--throughout my career--a partisan spokesman for them severally in situations in which their contributions & continuing challenges have been forgotten or never known.

The other pole of this meditation is my desire to continue a long conversation begun Thursday in his office with Dr. Luis Fidel Mercado, president of the Evangelical (ecumenical) Seminary of Puerto Rico (776 Ponce de Leon Av., Rio Piedras, San Juan, P.R.00925-4523). So many changes since my 1960 visit! The lovely campus is across the street from the stunningly beautiful grounds of the University of Puerto Rico, & the two schools are surrounded by a city similar to N.Y. in complexity, problems, & opportunities. Our subject was urban theological education now & tomorrow, & I was deeply impressed with his vision & commitment & the school's curricula (on which I ran parallels with the recent history & mission action of N.Y. Theological Seminary).

1 **Religion** (Jerusalem), **philosophy** (Athens), & **science** (Berlin) are the essential trivium (Lat., "convergence of three roads") of theological education for today & tomorrow--as basic as were grammar, rhetoric, & logic, the liberal trivium, in medieval schools. Obvious, yes. But each city has its own ambience, atmosphere, mind-set, mood, mode of consciousness. Worried that philosophy was encroaching on religion, Tertullian (d.230?) asked "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" When I was 16, somebody offered to pay all my expenses if I'd go to a certain Bible school (strictly Jerusalem!), for me an intellectual impossibility. I've heard many Roman Catholic priests complain that their seminary education was almost exclusively Athens via Aquinas. And Protestant modernist seminaries of the 1930s-50s were so Berlinish, so historical-critical-analytical-objective, as to starve the heart (Jerusalem) & slight philosophy-theology (Athens)...eg, my beloved U. of Chicago Divinity School. U. of C. founding president W.R. Harper was a man of Jerusalem-Athens-Berlin balance; but his model for the university was the University of Berlin, history's first modern university, "modern" meaning research-oriented ("science"-oriented in the advancement-of-knowledge sense).

2 My inner life is a tale of these three cities which are "forgotten" only in the sense that sown seed is forgotten during the harvest of new seed. The cities themselves are, as ever, churning with life. But what about other cities? With the possible except of Rome, all less important. Smaller but real debts I own to Antioch, Alexandria, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Chicago, New York. Now I'm being slightly influenced by post-WWII-emerging "cosmopolies" (Gk., "world-class cities"). Then there's the marginal influence of "uncivilized" (lit., "uncitified") areas of the globe....I'm being descriptive, not elitist. I speak for my cities: let others speak for theirs. Drop Berlin & add Istanbul & you have the Orthodox East. Drop Berlin & add Rome & you have the Catholic West. Leave the Thinksheet title as it is & you have progressive Protestantism. Drop Berlin & you have fundamentalist Protestantism. I am an heir & partisan of progressive Protestantism. But Rome is of enormous force behind-within Protestantism & is now of increasing influence on progressive Protestantism.

3 **Intercritical triangularity** is how the three cities function in me & should, I think, function in Christian theological education for today & tomorrow. The three-legged stool seems a static image till you think about the integrated dynamic support each leg provides the other two. Without Berlin's analytic objectivity, how can theological schools define their situation in changing church & communities in the ever-changing world? Without Athens' philosophical-theological concern, how can Christian leaders acquire the conceptual power to re-imagine the Faith for the faithful & compete for the Faith in the world marketplace of ideas? And without Jerusalem, spiritual formation by perpetual attending unto God, what can prevent the Faith's declension into mere beneficent humanism (L.18.8: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find the Faith on earth?")?

4 Of the three cities, the most endangered is Jerusalem. Before we got into WWII, the three theological schools I'd been graduated from all took spiritual formation seriously, some spiritual disciplines being demanded & others encouraged.

Not only the congregation but also the seminary was to center in the worship of God. After WWII, things speeded up & fragmented, the seminary as worshipping community faded--& with it, the emphasis on spiritual disciplines. In his *TO UNDERSTAND GOD: WHAT'S THEOLOGICAL ABOUT A THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL* (Westm./Jn.Knox/93), David H. Kelsey worries about a clerical professionalism squeezing out the seminary's "overarching goal: to understand God more truly," avoiding both ideology (using God for one's own agenda) & idolatry (absolutizing anything within nature-history-society). He corrects for the seminary's tendency to drift off into the Berlinish objectivity of "religious studies" or the seminary-sans-church Athensish paideia by insisting that the seminary's "study of various subject matters [focus] within the horizon of questions about Christian congregations." Indirectly, this brings worship strongly to the attention of the seminarian, but public worship is weak unless uplifted by personal-&-group spiritual disciplines. Besides, isn't there a danger of the congregational focus as too narrowing, a danger of making the congregation an idol of mission to the neglect of the ever widening & deepening missions questions in community, nation, world?

5 It's good that the need for "Jerusalem" is being more widely recognized in the culture. Eg, Peter H. Van Ness, in *SPIRITUALITY, DIVERSION, AND DECADENCE: THE CONTEMPORARY PREDICAMENT* (State U. of N.Y. Press/93) promotes spiritual discipline as a means of political resistance to powerful institutions exercising social control for promulgating addictive patterns of consumption. And Wade Clark Roof's upcoming book (*A GENERATION OF SEEKERS: THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEYS OF THE BABY BOOM GENERATION* [HarperSanFrancisco/93]) reports that Americans born 1946-62 tend to be spiritually minded, though most of them not in traditional channels. Jerusalem is there as hunger and search but not as being Christ-found & Spirit-fed.....Now, throughout our culture, that generation is coming into full power. I believe that an intelligent, compassionate evangelism arising among them can reach them.