

AN OPEN LETTER TO MEL YOSSO

Dear Mel--

Since this letter is being written only a few hours after your 26 Oct 77 meeting with us the NYTS Administrative Faculty, whose next meeting is the 9th of next month, what I've written here is only jottings of impressions I have from the meeting and occasional comments of my colleagues.

1. What you and I intended was more exposure than demonstration, as the unicultural situation (NYTS being not only Christian, but in its very existence Jesus-promoting) did not lend itself to demo as much as do most of the situations Transculture is designed for (e.g., excellent for my U. of Hawaii students, with need to feel, instead of only think, their way inside each others cultural skins). But AF is even more narrowly unicultural: we nine have extensive exposure to Western higher education; and while I can't imagine using Transculture in AF, I have used it productively in some of the NYTS programs, particularly store-front and MidCareer Exploration.

2. My fault: When I saw that you were being given the polite treatment, and that my colleagues were not about to break through into real dialog, I should have switched roles from co-expositor to questioner, asking you the questions I felt they had but were loth to raise. The subtitle of this letter signals the general area of questioning which should have surfaced, by me since not by my colleagues. [In church work, we have a saying for this phenomenon that makes so many church meetings so unreal and therefore so soporific: "The real meeting comes after the meeting," out on the street and on the way home. Confronted with this evasive behavior, church members usually present as their motive for being nice in the meeting the biblical virtue of kindness. We now have a little black box called the "Consensor," by which people can honestly and, on a TV screen openly, and immediately report their feelings and convictions; it was used last Sunday for the first time in a church meeting.]

3. Our fault: When we found the response so poor, we should have tried, on the basis of material already presented, to elicit responses of other types than critical (having failed to elicit critical, i.e., hard-questioning, responses). Wrongly, I had assumed my colleagues would engage you, and was unprepared for the meeting's deadness. Understandably, you went on to provide more illustrations of and comments on Transculture, but that only snowed them. After the meeting, one of them, with words from another, insulted the group by saying that the meeting dynamic was verbal rape--the insult being that rape is an act of the stronger on the weaker, and I do not consider my colleagues, individually, weaker. To continue the metaphor, what makes rape cases so difficult, according to traditional jurisprudence, is the problem of determining distributive guilt: how seriously did the victim try to resist the crime? The group today was guilty of nonresistance. But the accusation of "verbal rape" has a more serious, even somber, aspect. As Ervin Goffman and Peter Berger indicate, subcultures tend to develop a style that is self-sanctioning, operating as a self-sealing system that functions, chiefly unconsciously, as exclusionary. Minorities may maintain their subcultures, but persons entering institutions of the majority culture are under relentless pressure, chiefly unconscious, to conform; and the same is true of individuals whose genes, permitted natural "potential" development, are dissonant with the culture or subculture, which defines the behavior, again chiefly unconsciously, as deviant--so primitive cultures remain primitive by ostracizing all forms of dissent, including creativity; so operates the NYC School System, against innovations. (A rabbi friend of mine, ministering to Stoic-goy-aping yids, uses upperclass goy style--except when at home; and jokes with me about it. If Jews could be taught this en masse, antisemitism could be eliminated in one generation--though the effort would be better put into attacking the tyranny of majority style--maybe with TranSTYLE!!)

4. For the integrity of our community, we Christians must resist the two extremes visible in the NT, viz. gnosticizing and judaizing, yet be open to learning from all. While you are a gnostic, I consider your Transculture method as a tool separable from the metaphysics by which you exposit it (whether or not the gnostic metaphysics actually grounds your method, for you. Last week we won the federal case against TM in the public schools, on ground that it's not a tool in practice separable from Hinduism. Not I, but some of my colleagues, are wondering about Transculture....