

\*The class I was born into avoided, in language, both sacrality (so, no "hell"--or "heaven" either!) and scatology (so, no Anglo-Saxonisms, four-letter-words such as "shit"). When in my late teens I learned the biblical languages, I was shocked at the Bible's earthy language [concealed in the prissiness of traditional English translations]....Holy reduced to sacred reduced to class-sanctioning tabus(sacrosanct!).

This is a philosophical/history-of-religions analysis of two incidents illustrating the theme of this thinksheet. Yesterday my wife, after we returned home from worship (12Nov78), spoke to me of her mixed feelings about having participated in the stewardship bazaar (during the coffee hour), selling food she'd baked and so doubling the "seed money" I'd signed for & taken from the church--a dramatic reenactment of our Lord's parable of the wise investor and the foolish noninvestor. Now, my sense of tabu was against this angle in our annual "Stewardship Drive," & I said so when the senior minister asked me what I thought should be done after, without consultation with clergy, the committee had announced it--but I said "Let's let it go: let's trust the people to be self-correcting, or we might even learn something." Loree and I conclude that the experience is wholly to the good and diametrical from (another Jesus passage she mentioned, in evaluating the experience) "moneychanging in the temple."

The other illustrative incident occurred a few weeks before, in the Manhattan church whose continuous worship is the oldest in the U.S.A. In the first incident, tabu was violated in the interest of humanizing change. In this incident, the worship planners intended to violate certain tabus seen as dehumanizing, i.e. as functioning to resist humanly desirable change: (1) having the worship in an informal room of the building, rather than in the very formal "sanctuary" (where it had been before, in this annual event; and where it eventuated this time also); (2) having no clericals or academic regalia or procession (but, under pressure from tradition, we had all this); (3) having no printed order of worship (though the worship was planned in minute detail; this tabu we did break, to the irritation of many); (4) having an informal, "warm" quality in the worship, including some gospel songs (which proved to be extremely awkward and squelched in this extremely formal Solomon's-Temple-like room). This constellation of clashing liturgical values and tabus was enough to foredoom "the spirit of worship" (whatever that means: a tabu-loaded phrase!). But atop all this, the formal-style liturgist did not show, <sup>^</sup>another person<sub>^</sub> grabbed to lead (a beautiful person: no criticism implied here) whose style was extremely informal and whose leadership was from the nave level. And atop all this, my sermon (1) tried to combine informal and formal values, and largely failed, and (2) included a story--a story of family reunion through Christian counseling, told from the verbatim--in which the words "hell" and "shit" were used as the Bible\* uses them and as "good church folk" were parent-taught not to use them. Leading from the nave level violated the sacrality of "the height" of "the pulpit," and my using the pulpit violated the people-level informality of the worship-leader!....Now, I have never experienced, on any previous occasion, anywhere near as many tabu violations in one public worship: it's a classic of its genre, and well worth study from many angles--not the least, in analyzing sick and effete qualities in public-worship styles of Christian ethnic groups (meaning all of us) and class levels, so as to get at afresh the question *What is CHRISTIAN worship?* And as to preaching, *What is true/false prophecy?* As to the latter, everybody knows that false prophets avoid offending either the conventional pieties or the powers that be: the fact that I offended both takes me out of the false-prophet class (but does not necessarily put me into the true-prophet class: I may just be in limbo!). As for the true prophets, the consequences of their committing these two offences against tabus functioning to avoid change and maintain power are well know, including the crucifixion of our Lord.