

June '79

This meditation is an ellipse with two focal events:

(1) An American Baptist state executive, bumping into my wife, answered a letter of mine in one sentence. When Loree reported it to me, I felt completely satisfied, and even thought "How efficient! No paper. No phonecall. No formal need to contact me in any way as an individual."

(2) The shock of discovering that whereas I'd answered a letter by speaking to the addresser's spouse, for months the addresser had held it against me that I did not go through the formality of addressing the addresser as an individual.

COMMENTS:

1. Is M/F a factor? The satisfied person in case #1 was male; in case #2, the dissatisfied person was female.
2. Biblical marriage, as I understand it, is a joyous maturation out of individual to person--a contrast on which I've written a number of previous thinksheets. I remember a widow and divorcee (one woman, two men) who was enraged that she could not drive a wedge between Loree and me, so as to divide and conquer both: she constantly drove her attack into "one flesh," and finally quit trying. To stay with the "one flesh" metaphor: as I write, in a 16-hour operation Siamese twins joined at the head have been successfully separated. In a biblical marriage, the two are joined at the head and everywhere else visible and invisible "till death do us part." The neighbors should be served notice that whatever is said to the one will be blabbed to the other: no secrets, because one consciousness flows throughout the "one flesh."
3. Buber's biblical mysticism of "betweenness" as the locus of God (in I AND THOU and in BETWEEN MAN AND MAN) reinforces my conviction about the communication implications of "one flesh." The spouse is an It rather than a Thou whenever one considers oneself a separate individual from the spouse: either the marriage in the full sense has not yet occurred, or it is in the way of dissolution, when the mental reservation of "I am an individual when it comes to communication, not a person-in-relation," obtains. [I say "person-in-relation" as the full expression for what I mean, in ellipsis, by the simple word "person" in distinction from the "individual," which for me is the ellipsis of "individual-in-isolation."]
4. Traditionally, in virtually all cultures and civilizations women have become persons, who have become persons, without ever becoming individuals: it has been the male's puberty rite-de-passage hyperindividuation-for-authority-and-risk that has created "the individual" and, as structural linguists aver, sexist language (specifically, the generic function of masculine forms). As I worked with dharma bums and their successors, the hippies, I became aware that one dimension of their revolt was against this very hyperindividuation with its macho implicates: these young men did not want to be women, but they wanted to be "human" instead of [culture-meaning] "men" [read, "real men"]. Not just the butches, but many feminist females (I consider myself a feminist male) strike me as wanting to become "individuals" in the sense of "real women" modeled after the hyperindependence of the past's "real men." This syndrome is especially disastrous, according to my observation and study, in marriage, especially in a marriage in which there are two "individuals." But my guess is that we need more time to judge: I have no doubt that many marital changes from "the movements" are for the better. But we shall make progress, I believe, not by abandoning "one flesh" but by revalorizing and re-experiencing it in light of emerging consciousnesses from the impact of the old-strange (e.g., Sinism in the West) and of the new-strange (especially from sexual and communications technology and from more scientific understanding of the interpersonal and transpersonal).
5. The divine dimension provides a perspective in which the above individual/person distinction is transcended: as persons to God, we are to be only individuals to each other, so that God can give us the gift of personning each other.