

Exactly ½ century ago (1932), three books hit me hard: (1) Shaw's *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (Anglo-Irish atheism), (2) Fosdick's *Twelve Tests of Character* (American modernist theism), and (3) Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (British naturalistic-antitheistic mysticism). While all three have stuck in my memory for various reasons, the common reason is that certain sayings in them gripped my age-14 soul. E.g., Fosdick: "Most of the things we worry about never materialize." And how devastatingly honest-to-God Shaw was! And the music analogy in Huxley's title, promising harmony when my hormones were creating chaos! Young Lord Tantamount (Huxley, chap.III) is meditating suicide as a cure for his accidie; but becoming bored with death, he picks up a magazine: "Perhaps it would bore him less than death was doing." Then these words, which became for him a life-text, hit him: "The life of the animal is only a fragment of the total life of the universe."* He became a world-famous physio-chemo-biologist. (His root-religious experience was the same as Szent-Gyorgyi's response to Loree, #1631.)

This thinksheet is about this fact. Sayings do shape our souls. Sayings serve as signs of feelings and ideas and as sacraments of the Holy. Augustine and Luther are remembered for emphasizing the power of sayings when put to music in the form of hymns. And hear Goethe: "Let me write a nation's songs, and I care not what else tries to compete for power over its soul."

1. Hummmmm....Goethe: "*Denn eben, wo Begriffe fehlen, / Da stellt ein Wort zur rechten Zeit sich ein*" (For just when ideas fail, / A word comes in to save the situation.). This emergence of "a Word" feels like revelation/inspiration/intuition or whatever other term seems fitting to the moment and the person.

2. Whence cometh "the Word" in the Goethean sense? Often it's just there, there welling up at the intersection of life and the moment: it comes "from" or at least "out from" inside me. Sometimes it seems my own creation, or recreation. Sometimes I'm convinced it's a memory from another, but the reference is in shadow. Sometimes it seems "a word from the Lord," as it gradually dawned on Eli and Samuel (1Sam.3); and sometimes, sudden (Acts 9.3-6: Saul Paul on the road to Damascus).

3. And sometimes it comes from others--spouse, children, work associates, friends, teachers and other leaders, students. E.g., two students of mine--both artists: (1) Marjorie Michael, who played around with a saying she got from me (and which impressed her more than it had me, and then because of her came to impress me more): "Are you just about to hear the most important thing you have ever heard?" We speak, in education, of "reading-readiness": the soul, to receive soul-shaping words, needs hearing-readiness. One might well argue that education is not so much a soul-shaping process as it is a soul-preparing process (as Plato's receptacle), a soil-preparation to receive the word-seed (the analogy in Jesus sower-parable, Matthew 13)...(2) John Lefton, whose birthday present on my 64th was a drawing showing an open door and the Spirit-wind blowing through one's upper and lower coils (brain and viscera), and these words of his: "The Holy Spirit, Ruach the breath of God, can come to us at anytime. Leave the door open if you like surprises."...In different senses, these words from Marjorie and John are "from others."

4. Rabbi Chaim Stern got me going on this, by suggesting that he and I each prepare a list of "the 50 most soul-shaping sayings in my life-story." Sorting is an essential intellectual and spiritual discipline.