

If we call "covenanters" those (for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls / Qumran communitarians) for whom covenant is central, we might call "lovers" those (for example, the communitarians to whom we owe the Gospel and Letters of John) for whom love is central. In this sense, this thinksheet is about "lovers."....All developed religions have love-sects: love is a sociological stratum or vein running through all of "the world's great religions." This stratum or vein I use a Sanskrit word for: bhakti (root *bhaj*, both devotion and service--in short, love in action, motivated, as Shankara says, by the fact that "everything is provided for me" by God's "grace"). Says God in the *Gita* locus classicus (4.11), "I serve (*bhajami*) people on whatever way they set out toward Me": the divine sanction motivates our love for and service to God. Why, instead of *bhakti*, do I not use *agap *? Because my readers are, in the main, Christians, who would then imagine that what I'm speaking of is theirs instead of being common to the great religious traditions: I need a love-word that can distance us Christians from our heritage, so we can return to it with greater intelligence, wisdom, and love for it and for humanity as well as Deity.

Back to "lovers." I heard two of them in church yesterday--one that church's pastor, the other Bernard Siegel (prof. of surgery, Yale U. School of Medicine). Dear reader, you need not have been there to appreciate (I hope) my comments on the experience.

1. The present convergence of religion and medicine is not as remarkable as the former divergence: "religion and health" have been mates "everywhere and at all times," almost. Western man failed to keep the machine model in a psychosocio-position inferior to the body model--indeed, elevated the former above the latter, thus becoming more impressed by man-controlable powers than by the energies beyond our control by magic, alchemy, necromancy, and science. (Even Jung (*Psychiatric Dictionary*, 267) is in thrall to atheistic mechanistic materialism in his description of "the energetic viewpoint": "energy maintains itself....The flow of energy follows the fall of potential.") "Captive Greece laid captive conquering Rome" has a theological parallel: "Captive nature laid captive conquering theism." This reversal (= Wieman's "naturalistic theism," more honestly "theistic naturalism," still more honestly "neo-naturalism") has had at least two effects on "lovers": (1) Many medics who are not theists (i.e., do not believe in the biblical God) seem, because of their use of God-warmed language, to be theists (e.g., Jung; I don't know about Siegel); (2) Many clerics believe more in (natural) "process" than they do in the (trans-natural, intra-natural) God of the Bible, and they modernize Jesus by assimilating him into their own basically naturalistic paradigm. *Caveat emptor* on both. (No major work has yet appeared on the fascinating modern history of "process," its sources and associates and its claimers and disclaimers and its philosophical and theological colorations. Right now it's practically everybody's holy word, code word, slogan word; and for some its the centering, governing, control word.)

2. "Everybody loves a lover" says the old saw. Anyway, right now almost everybody in the people-helping professions loves the term "grace" and (ab)uses it according to their lights and likes. I wasn't surprised that in church for "Bernie" we sang his favorite "Amazing Grace" (even the part about our all being wretches, which I'm fond of). In the English language, "grace" is the word nearest both denotatively and connotatively to Sanskrit's "bhakti." So now we have three terms for this strand: bhakti religion, agap  religion, grace religion. At 17 I was hit by this religion and have never since had the slightest

OVER

doubt of God's love for me in and through Jesus Christ my Lord. It's my primary clue as to how to see, and live in, the world (the words "clue" and "primary" saving me from overclaiming, with its attendant evils of arrogance, blindness, and violence).

3. Gross but useful oversimplifications: With Jesus at the center (in action, then in devotion), the NT exhibits a number of religions: (1) trust religion (Jesus), (2) faith religion (Paul), (3) hope religion (Rev.), (4) wisdom religion (James), (5) book religion (the Judaizers), (6) knowledge religion (cool type, the intellectuals, chiefly Stoics: warm type, the gnostics--Paul learned from both), and (7) love religion (John). Intelligent Christians will ask the Word and the Spirit and the texts and the scholars and fellow Christians-in-community to help them learn from all these religions gathered around Jesus Then (which Jn.Knox called "the Christ-Event") and Jesus Now ("Now the Lord is the Spirit," says Paul)...Note that both this UNITY (in Jesus) and this DIVERSITY (of religions) are strengths in Christianity, history's most open and toughest founder-type religion. A gross song of a half-c. ago claimed "Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better": early Christianity made and sustained that claim, collectively, against all its rivals (though of course each of them could, severally, do something better than could Christianity). Now for the title of this thinksheet: YES, love religion is against Christianity wherever love-religion (1) centers elsewhere than in Jesus and/or (2) claims to be religion itself.

4. Wherever a culture or subculture is sickness/health-minded (as the Hellenistic World and our Neo-Hellenistic World), love-religion tends to function as a therapeutic cult. In the paragraph above, I did not list the therapeutic cult as a religion of the NT, because no NT documents are primarily therapy-oriented (a contrast with Jewish and pagan literature of the time). The Mediterranean world was crawling with healers, and the Church (naturally) claimed that Jesus was the Greatest Healer (doubtless heightening the NT's presentation of him as *therapeus* and the soon inflation thereof as *thaumaturge*--with magician's wand, in catacomb paintings). The pastor of the above-mentioned church sees the church as primarily a therapeutic (including health-education) institution and movement, and (among others) "a primary health-care-delivery service." In addition to present distortion, the church will face a problem when he leaves: should it choose its senior clergy only from the small but enlarging pool of love-therapy-religion?

5. Love-religion expresses itself in a number of sub-forms: (1) Power (i.e., healing), (2) Pleasure (= Dionysianism, as most denizens of Esalen when I was there), (3) Peace, (4) Justice,....Where am I here? It deserves a thinksheet in itself.

6. My 1952 debate with Ashley Montagu (a love-religion anthropologist) bore this title: "Is Love God (his position) or Is God Love (mine)?" As atheist to the biblical God as was Jung, unlike Jung Montagu refused the slippery incorporation of biblical language into his thing. Today, many intellectuals (especially many clerics and medics) make epexegetic use of warm God-talk, though their heart is on some idol (the hottest current populist idol being "love"). Note especially the current flowing together of the incantatory lexica of religion and medicine. At Esalen in its early days I observed the fusion of medic/cleric Western incantatory rituals with (1) the shamanic and (2) Far East philosophy/religion/medicine. "Holistic" soon became this mix's codeword.

7. All my life I've been love-spoiled; if love-starved, this thinksheet would be somewhat different.

attached to #1668

10 Jan 83

DAVID YOHN
W. BARNSTABLE PARISH

Prof. J. Seng, York Mt. Sch.

Dear David--

Loree, Mark, Denise, and I were joyed by your meetinghouse (sic!) worship yesterday--and by nothing more than by your storytelling to the children. (When "Bernie" Siegel twice stood up to see what you were doing, one of my grateful thoughts was "What a witness of a cleric to a medic--and just preceding the witness of a medic to us clerics!") Anything else in this letter is not meant to reduce by an erg the power of the Holy Spirit in that service. What I am doing, as a theological commentator, is this (and you may want to share it with Craig, anybody for that matter): I'm, from my point of view as human-religious-Christian, CONTEXTING the event on the Typology-of-Religions Map. Another caveat: In this categorizing, I'm not being reductionistic (for, like everything else seen intellectually, all religions fall into categories), nor am I stating a prolegomenon to a schema in which some other type is superior to yours-and-Bernie's (for, in my opinion, no type of religion is superior to BHAKTI, the religion that centers the numinous in "love" and, in its pure form, claims and lives a metaphysical-and-moral identity of the numen, the god, God, and love).

1. Yes, as you said at our house when here for dinner a few evenings ago, Bernie is "fey," inhabiting the narrow isthmus (though this was not your figure) between "this" and "that" world. Such persons are precious in every society (for only through them does a society hear from "that" world, and without such hearing a society sickens and dies), and are viewed by power as pernicious (for listening to "that" world threatens the invested orders of "this" world)-and so bhakti everywhere and always suffers social pressure, since bhakti is one form of action/word response to listening to "that" world).

2. Bernie reminded me of a man I had a public bhakti-debate with 31 years ago: Ashley Montagu, as fey an anthropologist as Bernie is a medic. Subject: "Is Love God (his position), or is God Love (mine)?" Ashley was atheist to the biblical God, and Bernie may be (in which case he makes, as Ashley refuses to this day to do, a slippery incorporation of biblical language into his thing--like Ike Asimov and the mystical naturalists of HUDSON REVIEW). Clerics and medics necessarily ritualize their practice and tend to incorporate each others' verbal formulas in their incantations.

3. When I was asked to teach at Esalen in its early days, I observed a fusion of medic/cleric Western incantatory rituals with (1) the shamanic and (2) Far East philosophy/religion/medicine. Because

"pant"

c: Beverley (theologian) and Paul (medic) Jaques,
who also were in yesterday's worship.

our media puffed up Esalen for its "newsworthy" (read, "garish") aspects, HP (human potential) soon became AHP (Association for...), and USA was off on a binge of "healing centers" and "holistic healing" theorizing. In many ways we're back in hellenistic times (so we may call this the Neo-Hellenistic Age), not least in the outburst of therapeutic cults. (ASIDE: History could afford correctives to many of the present excesses, and a maturing influence on the present naive, if we'd study now the qualities of the ancient East/West healing deities reflected/affected daily life. E.g., Asklepios/Hygeia had a very different public/private influence from that of Adonis/Isis;) and Apollonius of Tyana was an East/West healer.)

4. Paradigms of how "that" world (the Beyond, the More Than, the Transcendent, the Numinous) affects "this" world are sustainable only by positive feedback in (1) community and (2) personal experience. These two forms of feedback converge in a professional who works on the isthmus. Bernie's community (so far as I know: is he an any communitarian religious praxis?) consists of (1) those who've been blessed by his bhakti-medical practice and (2) those who agree with, and positively reinforce him on, his theory and praxis. Nothing wrong with that unless you let yourself be seduced by it (and so our Lord's "Beware when all men speak well of you"--the "all," in this case, being your close-in concentric social circles).

5. As you know, the Pilgrim-Puritan practice of love was radically different from metaphysical bhakti (= belief in "the energies of love," to use a Teilhardian phrase). Turn-of-the-century French vitalism (with you and Francis Whiting in our livingroom, I alluded to Bergson) has, in its effects, widely overflowed the banks of philosophy; and the whole movement contains warnings as well as positive illuminations for the current energy-oriented movements (including various sorts of charismatic and spiritism). PROBLEM: Very difficult to moderate the equal and opposite arrogances, or at least prejudices, of the intellectualism/romanticism extremes. (First Sun. of this new year, I preach in Centerville on 1Cor.1, Paul's clearest statement on intellectual blindness-deafness; later in 1Cor., he hits spiritistic blindness-deafness. As I say in the '83 Kirkridge lectionary, the devil is brighter than we are.)

6. All developed religions have a bhakti movement/sect/denomination. I've observed that persons converting from one religion to another tend to remain on the same vein. E.g., my good friend and protege Al Bloom, prof. of Jap.rel., U. of Hawaii, has always been bhakti. A Phila. Jew of loving parentage, he converted to Johannine Christianity (derivative from the bhakti communitarians who gave us the Gospel and three letters), then to Pure Land Buddhism (which is, within Buddhism, what Gita-bhakti--e.g., Hare Krishna--is to Hinduism). Among my Roman friends, Nouwen is the most influential practitioner of bhakti (Menninger Clinic added to his loving parents and Bernie ended his sermon with a Nouwen quote. In the electronic church, Schuller is the outstanding bhakti-practitioner (whose "self-esteem" is more sophisticated than Peale's "positive thinking"--both tending, as sure as do the various versions of Jung-religion, to narcissism). "The energy of...")

7. I grew up with loving parents and have been, this more than 1/3rd century, profoundly and intelligently loved by a woman I consider my superior as a human being. At 17, I had a conversion to bhakti Christianity, and from that moment have never doubted God's love for me. In short, I'm love-spoiled. If I were love-starved, doubtless this letter would be at least somewhat different.