

This thinksheet is a 65th birthday gift to myself, who am more and more experiencing the paradox of life both closing down and opening up--as healthy religion teaches should happen (2Cor.4.16-18).

1. The balance shifts, as we go through life, from experiencing beginnings without (apparent) end to experiencing endings with at least outward diminishment of beginnings. Here biblical religion is healthily ambivalent: the Shalom dream is of Glory without end--without death, "the final enemy" (1Cor.15.26); but death acceptance is the final act of obedience to God (Joseph, Gn.50.22-26; Jesus, 1.23.46). Not native to the core of biblical religion is the Stoic view of death as *kata physin*, according to nature--*lex naturae*, natural law; though it occurs peripherally, e.g., Eccl.3.2, a much overused passage in this current time of the dominance of "death and dying" theology by Saint Kubler-Ross. *Vox media*, which I espouse, is (as Dylan Thomas) to "rage, rage against the dying of the light" (since death is the triumph of that Something Profounding Wrong in the universe) while also quietly receiving death as the final necessary divine gift within the order of deformed nature. Biblical religion rules out the tensionless Stoic doctrine of *ataraxia*, the "no-problem," "cool," "noble," "death-with-dignity" approach whose highest form is suicide (which is coming in fast as this pagan teaching wins more and more converts in America). I am appalled at ministers, priests, and rabbis who have freaked out of the biblical ambivalence into blue-lagoon Stoicism vis-a-vis death. I "rage, rage against the dying of" the biblical tension, essential to the biblical moral vision of God, the universe, history, our humanity today and tomorrow.

2. Artists through the ages have served the limits-sense by presenting us with experiences of compression of matter (e.g., El Greco and Modigliani), time (e.g., Greek tragedy, with everything happening within a few hours), place (e.g., the limits of the Shakespearean stage), and action (e.g., Beethoven's *Fidelio*)--and all at once in the Neo-Classical dramas of Racine. And Robert Frost's poetry, and the glorious though lean poetic prose of Abraham Lincoln, and great hymns and hymntunes. Again, time as Kronos is noncompressible, but time as Kairos (inwardly reverberant event) is accordionlike; and as my inner world has grown richer and more interesting, and the outer world thinner and less interesting--not a bad definition of schizophrenia and sainthood!--I find I'm better at being good news to folks faster (providing, of course, that they hold still, which of course few do, but enough to keep me singing praises). (I can't resist one more item on compression: I'm a horse-opera freak, and stuff like *HIGH NOON*, with its severe-stark life-death constriction, awes me no less than it did when I paid 5¢ every Saturday for Tom Mix serials.)

3. My Bates College Annual Lecture, "The Unconfined" (thinksheet #80), deals with the upper side of limits, viz., God's limitlessness (whether relative, as process theologians hold; or absolute, as in traditional theism; or both, as I maintain). Life's various dimensions-experiences offer us various degrees of limits-awareness. High-hormone, intuitive types (e.g., me) are sharply, painfully aware of the need to set conscious limits on erotic reaching-out, on pain of being more servant of hell than of Heaven. Only in a society whose restrictions, limits, on Eros are strong and in good repair is it possible (1) to engender erotic self-discipline in the young and (2) to enforce sanctions on the self-undisciplined. As with sex, so with violence: spirituality and sociality are the only controls (and so there's a mint of money to be made by those who manipulate fantasy with sex-and-violence formulae).

4. *Via media* as limiting peace against pacifism, war against atrocity.