

Now ('83) I'm finding, among ministers who come to me as individuals (often on sabbatical) and groups, a subtle aspect of what is inaccurately being called burnout. Implicit in the "burnout" metaphor is the notion of exhaustion, of running out of gas, out of energy and the energy sources one has been depending on. The focus is interior. This thinksheet focuses on one aspect of the exterior side of this phenomenon of ministerial malaise, viz., the Sisyphean fact that (in more than the Wordsworthian-romantic sense) "the world is too much with us."

In my title, the quoted words are those of F.O. Matthiessen (FROM THE HEART OF EUROPE, Ox/48, pp.45f). He's witnessing to the releasing effect the reading of Henry James had on many young Americans soldiers during WWII: "They had felt a great need, during the unrelenting outwardness of those years, for his kind of inwardness, for his kind of order as a bulwark against disorder." According to another observer of our soldiery of that period, Nathan A. Scott, Jr. (MODERN LITERATURE AND THE RELIGIOUS FRONTIER, Harper/58, p. 71), Herman Melville's MOBY DICK--with its monomaniacal Capt. Ahab and the ominous situation of the crew--had the same releasing effect on our military, who found there "a strange analogy to something in themselves" vis-a-vis the human condition in general and esp. as imperiled....Ministers today must minister up against both psycho-historical and socio-historical pressures of outwardness: unemployment, international commercial and military competition, prejudices of race/place/face/sex, techno-materialism (esp. the media's buy-buy-buy), moral/social/educational chaos, petty wars and their ripple effects, rising distrust of authority and institutions, the agonizing mismatch between the old eco-political systems (feudal, private-capitalist, and state-capitalist) and contemporary realities....Ministerial project: So to divert attention away from these clamorous sirens of outwardness as to direct attention to God without being, or even looking like, a preacher of inwardness against outwardness (as, e.g., Vedanta and the pop Hinduisms of America) or over outwardness (e.g., Jungianism).

Of our biblical doctrines, the best for enabling this complex task is the doctrine of creation. Langdon Gilkey (MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, Doubleday/59/65, pp.94ff) lays out its theology: (1) no creature is, even in any aspect, divine; (2) every creature "is equally capable of error and of truth," free to sin and to obey God; (3) creaturely reality "points beyond itself to God," alongside of whom it exists; (4) creation is good, but since undivine is unworthy of worship in whole or part; (5) this God/creatures ontological distinction is not by fall, turning away from God, but by God's creating; (6) though finite and conditioned, all creatures are real and good; (7) creation's wilful alienation from God is real--but we are, as not essentially divine, not essentially demonic; (8) "God can be the judge only of a creation that is alienated from Him"; (9), ditto, redeemer; (10) creation implies that we are, essentially, both dependent on and distinct from God; (11) as our eternal and self-sufficient Source, God is distinct from us: creation is not His body, or of His substance; his "holiness" is the Godness of God in all His actions and attributes (so He's not a kind of grandfather or the man upstairs, a being among beings to whom we might submit but could not surrender ourselves): "both the simple God of popular religion and the esoteric God of process philosophy, by their essential lack of ontological transcendence, are never holy enough to be object of genuine religious

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up to us, plunged, then stood on the edge and soaped herself. The old roué seemed to be giving his full attention to a glory of creation, and I accused him of paying no attention to what I was saying. He: "Maybe you can't do two things at once, but I can." (He was 75, I 50.)

concern." (The arrangement of the argument is mine, but all the points are Gilkey's.)....Note that according to this, the classic Christian conception of creation, all three aspects of conversion --religious, moral, and intellectual--take their form and shape and drive from a carefully and warily crafted understanding of God's relation to creation and creation's relation to God. Here, Jews and Christians differ only in Christianity's intensifications of God's rapprochement to fallen creation, viz., incarnation (self-coming) and atonement (self-sacrifice).

To stick with the phrase of our title, the doctrine of creation makes outwardness relent, parallel with inwardness' relenting--both as subject to the Creator-Redeemer. Biblically, "Babylon" is a code word for "unrelenting outwardness," the almost irresistible pressures of "the world" against person/soul/faith/community of faith. "Babylon," in the Bible's second and last apocalyptic book, is Rome; and in its first, Daniel, it's both the city as fact and the city as fictional setting. From this literature I choose just one person as model for handling the pressures: Susanna (Dan. 13, Jerusalem Bible). Read the chapter in light of the points Gilkey makes about "creation."

They falsely alleged. The Story of Susanna reverses the sexes in the OT's Potiphar's wife story and adds the bathing-woman theme from the OT's Bathsheba story. S., caught naked at her bath by two "judges" (eminent leaders among "the elders" of the people) whose lust she refuses to accommodate, is up against "unrelenting outwardness": if she yields to the adultery pressure, she's subject to execution; if she resists, she's still subject to execution because the scoundrels will accuse her of adultery with a young man who was (as they were) peeping-tom- ing on her. Either way, she's a dead "God-fearing" woman of "great beauty." Double bind. Damned if she does and damned if she doesn't. History's first (1) detective story and (2) instance of the cross-examination of witnesses (for Daniel, meaning "God Is My Judge," separates the witnesses, asks each the kind of tree she committed adultery under, gets two trees, and achieves--as in the case of Haman in the Book of Esther--reversal: truth wins, the innocent is liberated and honored, the guilty get the pain (execution) they tried to get for the innocent, and God is praised). Note, in God's speech, the radical social action (vs.5): "Wickedness has come... through the elders and judges posing as guides to the people." (I write this the day after the House censured Crane and Studds for seducing Congressional pages--another instance of the victory of sensuality over spirituality in the betrayal of the public trust.) (Two other OT stories, in JB, of God vindicating the righteous and punishing the wicked: Tobit and Judith.)

The "unrelenting outwardness" to which the creation tempts and pressures us takes many forms. (1) Our bodies try to rivet out attention on the world: lusting for S., the two judges "threw reason aside, making no effort to turn their eyes to heaven, and forgetting its demands of virtue," "inflamed by passion," "ashamed to admit the longing to sleep with her," yielding to the temptation to "spy on her" daily. Contrast (what I hate to call) "the distaff side of" the story: S. says, "I am trapped whatever I do....But I prefer to fall innocent into your power than to sin in the eyes of the Lord." Condemned, "she turned her eyes to heaven, her heart confident in God."... (2) Our souls are seduced by power, our minds by subtleties.... Personal S.-like story: As Fritz Perls and I were naked alone in an Esalen bath, a gorgeous naked young woman came