

In my *Meditational Dictionary*, "overhearings" includes (1) statements I've heard and (2) statements I've imagined hearing. Since the distinction is unimportant, entries do not note it...My purpose in both the entries and the commentaries is to encourage your own meditation: only secondarily is it to encourage dialog with me or anyone else.

Human life can't be serious. If it were, it wouldn't be so short.

1. Is it short? Yes, at least in disproportion to our infinite yearnings. This assumes (1) that "human life" here means *die-se Seite*, "this side" of death, and (2) that the one who says yes believes that for us human beings there is no *jene Seite*, "that side" beyond death. For balancing reasons I'll not adduce here, I believe that the burden of proof here--as to whether death ends all, or in some sense of senses life goes on--lies equally on both sides. The balance is tipped by other considerations: in my case, on the side of life after death, by my theology proper, i.e., by my view of God as holy love visible most luminously in Jesus (the Christ Event).

2. The statement puts an relative torque on "serious." Our daily patois rightly judges of differential weight the happenings of interpersonal, intrapersonal, social, and natural life --a gamut from "trivial" to "weighty" (this being, in many languages, the dominant metaphor for antonyms of frivolity--in the case of Hebrew, "glory"; cf. "weighed down," "burdened").

3. To the extent that I live by agapé (taking your needs/woes more seriously than my own), your situation/condition is serious but mine is not. From the viewpoint of worldly wisdom, this is folly; from the viewpoint of Christian faith, a learned folly, a second-level (higher) naiveté, the divine forgetfulness (as of the father in the Prodigal Son, and--supremely--as of the Son moving toward the evitable Cross). This forget-yourself ("deny" is Jesus' verb) is the opposite of Human Potentialism's fulfil-yourself, and clergy are now hanging on this transept, a seeming split between Creator and Redeemer--for me the resolution being in the doctrine of Providence.

4. Philosophically, the statement has been taken as true by a number of schools (e.g., the Epicureans and Cynics) and as false (e.g., the Stoics and Taoists). True or false, it's always in tandem with ontology: the being of our life (no matter its mood at any moment) is light/heavy vis-a-vis our vision of Being itself (or the Ground of being, or Ultimate Reality). Theology has not developed this synergism "seriously."

5. Christian hymnody is a mine of meaning here. ("How tedious and tasteless the hours / When Jesus no longer I see.") And many of the West's classics wrestle with the question of our life in the light of the serious--e.g., Goethe's FAUST. If our life is primordial, it's Prometheanly serious: we're burdened with being gods, and much of modern literature bears this burden (e.g., nontheistic Existentialism: vide Nathan A Scott, Jr., MODERN LITERATURE AND THE RELIGIOUS FRONTIER). But if our life is derivative, not only need we not bear the burden of divinity, but it's a sin to: human life is not that serious (vide Langdon Gilkey, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH).

OVER

10. I have 100s of 3x5s with "Serious" in the upper-left corner, but this thinksheet is (I think) the first thing I've ever written on "Serious." This means that I'm more serious about recording my findings/thoughts on 3x5s than I am about doing anything with them. "What the hell" (to use a wonderful expression for delivering the soul from superseriousness).

6. The limits of human life in general and in particular (i.e., particular languages/cultures/subcultures/persons) are serious/nonserious, both. Take gifts, e.g. My gift of "seeing" is far in excess of my gift of "saying," so I experience the gap as serious (since I'd be a genius author if my saying were up to my seeing, and naturally--like everybody else--I suffer from not being a genius), but also as nonserious (since it's only seriocomic to try to claw your way up through the ceiling God puts on your gifts). In another dimension, thank God for the space for awareness-decision-action between serious and nonserious, a space impossible did not ignorance keep us in tentativeness as to what, moment by moment, is serious/nonserious. Note here the convergence of the time mode ("short") and the power mode ("gifts"--"limits" on).

7. One burnout factor--esp. for professionals who struggle to maintain (I.A. Richards) "their conspiracy against their laity"--is the art-of-living failure to attain and maintain balance between the storgic (seriously doing one's duties vis-a-vis guild and laity, as well as in private life) and the ludic (distanting oneself from duty by shifting into the playful mode of consciousness). Here, in life, the storgic/ludic tension is, interiorly, the serious/nonserious debate. When the serious mode wins at both ends of the tension, one programs one's play to such seriousness that stress increases even when "off work." The serious *mood* dominates both the storgic and the ludic *modes*. An architectural metaphor: the "hurricane joint" the M.I.T. architectural computer devised for our home (the first building to have it) is both storgic (stressing under wind) and ludic (otherwise relaxing). As a guide to clergy on sabbatical, I include this dimension....The recent Am. institution called "happy hour" (psychotropic use of alcohol) is ambiguous: when "spirit" and "spirits" cooperate ludically, it's good; bad when one expects chemistry to do the whole job (=a form of chemical dependency, dangerously open to alcoholism).

8. Go through a whole week without belly laughter, and you're sick: we didn't need Norman Cousins, but he's helping. A serious question: Where, in you life and days, are you putting your mind to getting belly-laughs--absurdity challenging sense, the comic the tragic?...Metaphor: Life's waves are incoming ("waves") and outgoing ("undertow"). In joyful abandon a child rushes into an ocean wave--and is never seen again. Now how belly-laughter? More needed than ever! Humor and faith are the only victories over the demonic-absurd.

9. Ludically, I sometimes say that boredom is the only thing you have to go to hell for. God offers a full range of feeling: boredom signals that the soul has constricted that range and so rejected this divine offering and so rejected God. (In psychobabble, *apatheia* producing *abulia*.) Boredom is the soul condition of one whose attentional range has so shrunk as to produce, as primary symptom, emotional flattening. While I do not rule out chemogenic cases of this condition, most cases are noogenic (i.e., from soul decisions, for whatever reasons, to shrink one's attentions and risks on pain of shriveling one's life and the good one is called to do). In short, it's more apt to be sin than sickness, and the counselor should be pre-disposed so to view any instance of it (as should the preacher and teacher).