

*Basis of*  
*16 Aug 83*  
*sermon*

This thinksheet promotes the vital balance between action (with activism or actionism as its extreme) and reaction (with quietism as its extreme). Its occasion is my sadness and perplexity over the unproductive-of-good institutional tendency to extremism--e.g., the Rev. Jim Jones, the Rev. Jerry Falwell, and the United Church of Christ. My personal condition, at age 65, is this: after an action career often radically activist, I'm now in danger of quietism. (Is this another vital balance, the young activist and the old quietist? Only if there's vigorous intergenerational dialog.) ~~Societal condition:~~ Our young today are quietistic, and our old are apathetic--soil for tyrants.)

1. I see the biostages thus: from reaction (infancy through adolescence) to action (middle age) to reaction (maturity, Ericson's "generativity"). To the extent this is true of humanity, good-productivity depends on good communication (1) within the person between and among the life-stages, and (2) among persons of all ages within society. Further, I see a natural coalition between the reactive stages (the children and the grandparents, both of whom are--ideally--free from the burdens and toils of life maintenance).

2. Societies tend to slide into some distortion of this ideal. Old China destroyed the vital balance by relating aging and authority-respect on the same curve: the older you were, the more awe you were held in; and if you were power-hungry, you were better off dead (= ancestor worship). American history: authority slipped from the elders down through middle age to youth, where it has fragmented into solipsism (anarchic anti-authoritarianism). Youth-dominated cultures are fad-prone and protest ("movements")-prone; and highly acculturated ("with it") denominations have been capitvated by this mystique..... none more than my own UCC.

3. As in nature God enables us to walk upright by the living gyroscope of the inner ear (literal vital balance!), God provides the person as whole being and the body social as whole being with gyroscopic energies and visions. Mystic corrects militant and vice versa --if either or both are open to correction. So also with reason and passion, feeling and thinking, active and reactive, active and passive.

4. The folks who gave us Harvard and Yale have ironically fallen into antiintellectualism. I had hope that the 1958 union of us C&Cs with the E&Rs would help correct this imbalance, but alas: nine years in the national office disabused me of this hope. Reason was disparaged, making active programming impossible: reactive programming ("The world sets the agenda.") was "in," and the energies poured out into fads and movements while the churches languished. Instance: With the publication of Harvey Cox's sappy urban romance (THE SECULAR CITY, with its outrageous ripoffs of biblical imagery), Jerry Jud tried to set up a series of eight Monday lunches for national staff to think through the book and its impact in the light of my thinksheet on it. Nobody came: everybody "too busy" revving up passion for his/her "thing" in and out of his/her cubbyhole. No better now (Aug/83), I'm told.

5. In the 70s and early 80s, we at NYTSeminary fought against "three sins" (racism, sexism, classism): I failed to persuade my colleagues to add tribalism-nationalism as a fourth. According to nationalistic ideology, every people should have right now the "right of self-determination" (a Wilsonian slogan of less range when coined). Where the interests of humanity and the individual questioned this ideology, they were overridden: "liberation" was green flag, "oppression" (meaning everything else) was red flag. This simple-minded moralism, for one thing, destroyed the British Empire (empires and colonialism being *per se* naughty) and aided the politization of Marxism.

will die if we fail to cultivate it in private and public life. (9) God limits our powers to create/destroy. (10) God calls us to accept/be the Good News....Maker of inner ear, and homeostasis.

6. "Yes, AND" is an expression reminding of what's left out, which would create/restore balance. Jesus (KJV): "These things ye ought to have done, and not to have left the others undone." Creator/Judge balance is restored by the Book of Job, who with his friends had overweighted God as Judge (as has "movement" and "liberation" theology). Social/individual as vital balance: imbalance =, respectively, tyranny and anarchy (e.g., current Lat.American and Mid-East politics). Submission/resistance: a creative instance of this as vital balance is the Jews in Babylon, 6th c. BC, humiliated and (in maintaining their own life, and producing the Babyl.Talmud) triumphant; an uncreative instance: British India, Ghandi joining the nationalists in their cry against humiliation (resulting in 1 million dead Hindus and Muslims, national breakup, and unstable governments in both India and Pakistan--worth it?). Rights/responsibilities: the citizen-member vis-a-vis institutions, which should be defended, attacked and defended, and subverted vis-a-vis vital balance. The vital balance of stabilizing (permanence) / destabilizing (change) in every society, even including guerilla organizations (community, strike-points, regrouping, defense). Habit/adventure, settledness/pilgrimage, work/leisure, society/solitude, bodysoul (the need, culturally and spiritually as well as physically, to keep body and soul together--classically dramatized as psychomachy in Goethe's FAUST: PART ONE), receiving from / giving to life, faith/doubt (bumper sticker: "HONK IF YOU BELIEVE IN ANYTHING").

7. In my 14Aug83 Craigville Tabernacle sermon, I pointed to some vital-balance convictions (under control of my central conviction that "God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself," the God who is "Maker of heaven and earth"): (1) The hunger for both sense and nonsense, as in bumper stickers. (2) The hunger for heavy sense (profundity, penitence-tears-weeping, tragedy) and light sense (comedy, laughter). (3) The double reaching-out: in will to shape the world, in love to embrace the world. (4) Relation/restoration through forgiveness. (5) Old/new sense-making (My reply to "Life used to make sense, but it just doesn't any more": "Thank God the old sense broke down. God wants to give you a new sense appropriate to where you are now and who you are now. Are you willing to receive this gift, and live it?"). (6) Our perpetual decision-making vic-a-vis what lies within/beyond our control. Current anguished areas: intimacy, remunerative employment, national security. Too high a frustration-level in these areas, and a society breaks up into suicide (e.g., highschoolers in upper-suburb-to-Dallas Plano), anomie, apathy, accidie ("I don't give a damn."), anarchy (economic, political both domestic and foreign). (7) Grace/task (auf Deutsch, "Gabe" and "Aufgabe"): "God never takes away anything without offering you something better," I often say to counselees. "The question is, Are you ready and willing to accept, as gift and assignment, the something better?" (8) We have to do, as biblical persons, with the at-stake and the not-at-stake, a vital balance. That the earth and its life are good is not at stake: God made it so, putting this meaning beyond the reach of demonic powers that would deny and destroy it. But I am at stake: I worship this God, Maker of heaven and earth, who has come among us and suffered the worst the world could do to him, and was not and is not defeated in his loving will to reach out his hand to us when our hands are empty of idols and illusions and meanings we thought we could catch and hold by our own powers. The good that affirms and confirms and fulfils our life comes to us not by our will but, by grace, from God's own nature, who is eternal goodness. We are not at the mercy of nature's and history's uncontrollables; but we are in a new Babylon, and our faith