

This reflection on my 66th birthday (4Feb84) won't be all readers' cup of tea--but then, no thinksheet is. If you're older, you may think "Just wait till you're my age! You can prattle about contentment now, but just wait till 'the outward man' is more obviously perishing!" If you're younger, you may think (1) "Your message on this matter doesn't come alive for me; as far as I know, contentment isn't even an unconscious goal of mine"; or (2) "I'll take your word for it, though I can't get into what you're talking about; but maybe you're doing modeling for my future--in which case I thank you ahead of time." If you're about my age, I might be helped by hearing from you how your journey is going.

1. No doubt about it, I'm so contented I feel guilty about it--and also grateful to God and to all humans who've cared about me and my journey. Guilty and grateful correspond, roughly, with the Bible's shalom part--now and full--later, with the NT's Kingdom--"now" and Kingdom--"not yet." Another correspondence: All those proverbs and aphorisms pointing to the relative values of trip and destination, (1) some weighting the scale *l'allegro* on the destination side, (2) others *il penseroso* on the trip side, and (3) a few trying to level the balance.
2. Many a hymn, and a high percentage of sprituals, set forth "heaven" (which is inclusive of contentment) as future surcease from sorrow and suffering, "rest for the weary." Not at all to be down-put, say I, though a peril when escapist. At the moment, I'm not sorrowing or suffering enough to need much of this kind of comfort, which comes in four types: (1) Biblical, which includes the restoration of relationships and the creation of new relationships in the ultimate "fellowship of the saints" and the beatific vision by which "we know (God) as we are known": the biblical type is radically interpersonal; (2) Islamic, which emphasizes paradisaic conditions to come; (3) Buddhist, nibbana-nirvana positive deliverance from the burdens of suffering and self; (4) Stoic, with oblivion as negative deliverance (but acceptance of oblivion as a "natural" event in the turning of the bio- and cosmo-wheels).
3. One of Willis' aphorisms is "If you've got to get to heaven, you won't." Straining toward goals of goodies for yourself can't be said to get you nowhere, but the wheres it gets you are not worthy of your soul: soul-worthiness is by-product and gift to those whose focus is elsewhere than on self; and soul-quality, soul-character, is a mirror reflex from whatever/whoever that other-focus is on. Me? Jesus (my primary focus for ½ century come 9Mar84, a few weeks from now) says "Be not anxious." By God's grace, I obey this instruction vis-a-vis "what's going to happen to me when I die," convinced as I am that the God Jesus preaches and is loves me, cares for me more and more intelligently than I can love and care for myself. But in many affairs of less consequence, I am--I think neurologically (we used to say "temperamentally")--"anxious," slightly paranoid. Romantic, passionate, paranoid, omniscious, with an inmost abiding peace and joy, not always as eager to do God's will as to discover it (exception: always eager to deliver benighted souls from darkness and to help the Spirit guide pilgrims on their way). (According to the ancient Stoics, who didn't think it sinful to have an occasional good look at yourself, and did consider it stupid not to, old ones should be able to thumbnail themselves by synecdoche, i.e., by presenting certain angles of refraction through whose facets cosmic light from beyond within shines for benefits to humans and honor to God. Something like Ericson's "generative" life-stage.)
4. "Satisfied dissatisfaction" (satisfied with God, dissatisfied with self and suffering world). Unsaved till the whole creation is saved: that avoids the peril of contentment. The goal: God's gifts to me, through me to God's children.