

"Getting to the core," literally, means it's time to throw the rest away-- but as a metaphor, the reverse is true: you cut away, and throw away, all but the core! This thinksheet explores that metaphor.

1. Jn. Scott Everton, whose friendship is one of the blessings of our move to Cape Cod, was ambassador to Burma under JFK and is exec of the C.C. Council of Churches. When living with Ghandi for two weeks in 1945, he asked why--in light of Ghandi's positive attitude toward Jesus and use of Christian hymnody--G. had not become a Christian. G. (as Jn. reports him, 9, ANTS's TODAY's MINISTRY, Winter/83/84): "I was raised a Hindu--it is my background, my heritage, my culture. I try to push aside all the accretions that have crept in around the essential truth which is found in the Vedas." Then, pointing at Jn., he said, "Now, you shouldn't be a Hindu. You come out of a Christian tradition and what you should do is exactly the same thing I'm doing. You should push aside all the accretions and get to the essential truth offered in the Bible. You know, there are many paths up the mountain but only one summit and we will meet there." A skilful lawyer, G. knew how to be disingenuous. His slippery answer evaded two facts: (1) That Jesus, more than any Hindu, was his model; and (2) That when you get to the Veda's core, you have something very different from G. in spirit and life. Generalization: Corists are slippery though kindhearted. QUESTION: To be kindhearted, do you have to be slippery?

2. Never before in human history has the paradox been so stark as now: (1) More communication than ever before on this globe; (2) Less community within and among nations...and so more talk about community, about "ecumenism" at all levels (culture-wide, religion-wide, religions-wide, species-wide). Both Gn.11 (Babel) and Ac.2 (Pentecost) are now at their intensest. Some responses to this situation: (1) Nativism, fundamentalism, political chauvinism, restorationism, triumphalism, ethnoism (Khomeini combines a fistful of these, as does Jerry Falwell). The mindset is antipluralistic (as at the turn into the 20th c. fundamentalists of all flavors, both Protestant and Catholic, were antimodernistic). Let's call this "antipluralism." (2) "Indifference," of course, we always have with us. Some folks just don't give a damn about the destiny of any one or more of our human traditions/divisions, at least not till strife from some friction between heritages/commitments touches them personally. And some are immobilized with confusion and ignorance and "not knowing where to start." These are, respectively, type #1 and type #2 pluralists. (3) "Laissez faire" overlaps with indifference. But some who say "Live and let live" have a positive feeling, a commitment, to noninterference. These are type #3 and type #4 pluralists, respectively. (4) "Interventionist pluralism" is of two sorts. Type #5 pluralism is philosophical, the action being mainly of the mind--so call it "philosophical pluralism." Type #6 pluralism offers a process or processes for turning differences to humane uses--so call it "method pluralism." Let's look further at these two:

3. "Philosophical pluralism" has a superb example in Ghandi, who (1) was inwardly syncretistic, (2) practiced evenhanded benevolence to individuals, and (3) preached both *satyagraha* (letting "truth" grasp us) and roots (the obligation to explore, live, and expound the tradition into which you were born). On closer inspection, however, only half of these features--viz., the benevolence and *satyagraha*--are coristic (i.e., nonparticular-universal) or (to use G.'s phrase) "essential truth." The other two features (syncretism and anticonversionism) are, though respectable Hinduism, antiChristian in essence (Christianity being, like Judaism, essentially exclusivistic and missionary--though both religions, esp. Judaism, tend to settle down into quietism, which satisfies only the Wisdom tradition within them).

4. "Method pluralism," the search for and celebration of truly human and humanizing universals as "core," is (1) positive, not least-common-denominator, and (2) evangelistic in the sense of finding/living/announcing the good news of human solidarity. Example: Transculture, Inc. A lesser form of this essentialism might be called "survival pluralism": e.g., the UN (+ its NGO affiliates)...What does all this have to say to Hospice, the religion-in-the-public-schools issue, U.S. Foreign Policy? Cores are inedible!