

STAGES OF DOUBT : NEGATIVE DEPARTURES ----- ELLIOTT #1866

Stages of growth (Erikson), stages of faith (Fowler)--I've been thinking about the stages of doubt. Here are some of my ruminatings.

1. Words describing "stages" are warped in the interest of the conservative principle in human life, viz., resistance to change. The title of this thinksheet contains both that resistance (in the word "doubt") and a corrective word ("departure" being a metaphoric neutral). "Belief" and "faith" and "trust" affirm where one is (and, by implication, should remain): "doubt" is a Trojan Horse within the gates (in the sense that the ground is being threatened) and a seducer beyond the wall (in the sense that one is being tempted to abandon the ground).

2. But, peeling off the "establishment" (i.e., ground-maintaining) negative connotation of "doubt," there remains an essential negativity, viz., the fact that doubt is a NEGATIVE departure symbiotic with the fact that new faith is a POSTIVE departure--the two, the systole and diastole of the soul, an essential life-process (for which, accordingly, I used as metaphor the body's heart-action as essential life-process).

3. In Hebrew poetry, "comings in" is the antonym of "goings out," departures. But in life there are two antonyms of "departure," viz., "return" and "new departure." E.g., 90% of youth who "depart" into cults "return" to their families within six months--which means that 10% either stay or go on to new departure(s), some becoming cult-tramps, cult-hoppers. See the excellent RADICAL DEPARTURES: DESPERATE DETOURS TO GROWING UP (Harcourt, B, J/84), by psychiatrist Saul V. Levine--the publishing of his intensive 15-year study of youth who suddenly take off into an ideological (religious, political, or therapeutic) commune. More on this later, after I've done my own thing with the subject of this thinksheet--which explores, primarily, my cogitating when I came up with "negative departures" as synonym for "stages of doubt."

4. "New occasions teach new duties" and require (1) new language and (2) new uses of familiar language and (3) the recovery of forgotten language in the forms of (a) words in one's own mothertongue and (b) words lying, in unter-languages, beneath the surface of one's mother-tongue, and so my use of Hebrew/Greek/Latin terms where our current language can't do the job--e.g., Bill Webber preached last Sunday (22 July 84) in Craigville Tabernacle, from Jer.29, on "Seek the shalom of the city"--a "translation" I suggested to him a decade ago in response to his asking, "Willis, isn't there a better translation than 'welfare'?" --to which I responded "No translation into English will do: 'shalom' is so rich it's untranslatable, so educate people to hear and use it"). ....The terms of this thinksheet are my own current mix to (1) analyze and (2) promote, chiefly the former: I'm striving to enrich and widen the perspectives and contexts of "faith"/"doubt."

5. Many a booktitle is THE DYNAMICS OF.... This thinksheet is on THE DYNAMICS OF DOUBT (more accurately, ...FAITH/DOUBT). Here's the diagram I've used for years on this, accommodated to my present purpose:

DOUBT-TYPE #1: Doubting is in abeyance (may even seem nonexistent) in this condition of contented commitment ("faith")....DOUBT-TYPE #2: Doubt is shrinking, losing energy to faith, which is making deeper and wider sense....DOUBT-TYPE #3: Doubt is increasing, weakening faith-commitment and so preparing the soul for "departure" into new, former, or non- commitment.

ENERGY

	decreas- ing	constant	increas- ing
D	1	stable	
O			
U	2 stabil- izing		
B			
T	3		destabil- izing

OVER

6. One skill of soul-work ("the cure/care of souls") is the discerning of the soul's locus in stable faith/doubt, growing commitment, or movement out of the present faith-commitment into (1) a new commitment, (2) a former commitment (as the Prodigal's "return"), or (3) non-commitment. These five conditions of the soul call for discrete (in both senses) ministry. Miss a soul's location and you're on the side of increased alienation from your faith-commitment on that soul's part: instead of being no news or the good news you want to be, you're bad news. I'm increasingly convinced that every soul, especially every religious leader, needs continuous spiritual direction 1:1 with a spiritual director who has both the gift and the skill of x-ray eyes on the person's particular present dynamics of faith/doubt....As for the pastor, I like this from Norman Depuy (midJuly, First Bap.Church of Newton, MA): Unlike other professional people-helpers, the pastor knows the people's strengths and weaknesses from being with them in various situations and can nurture their strengths "in preparation for those inevitable bad times," being "tender without being maudlin" and "available without being obsequious or messianic."....1:1 mentors are coming in in other professions, especially in the case of public-school teachers to stanch the severe loss of teachers in the first three years.

7. God is (1Ti.3.15) "ground of the truth." We are, faith-wise, grounded in biofaith (one's parental "world"), as was Timothy (through the influence of mother and grandmother: 2Ti.1.5). Here our faith/doubt, trust/fear consciousness is undifferentiated from "family," i.e., the primary support-persons/group. Our "YES" is almost automatic and defines the safety-sphere within which we utter testing, sometimes testy, "NO!"--but this "NO" is not life-transitional (*Entscheidung*, watershed-decisional). We have left the first womb (the visible one), but not the second (the conditions of which are as far, in all cases, from perfect as the conditions of the first womb are near perfect)....ANTI-FAMILY (i.e., family surrogate) #1 is the peergroup we drift into--and, later, all our leisure associations in which we spend (to use my definition of "leisure") our "expendable hours and disposable dollars beyond life's exigences." This is first-level exteriority. "Faith" here is the belief our association will satisfy certain desires, and departure comes when "doubt" of this sets in....ANTI-FAMILY #2, the first level of interiority, is first love, the psychosomatic seizure for which God-in-nature prepares us by the flip from repulsion toward to attraction to the opposite sex of our generation (unless we suffer the tragedy of not making this transition, or making in only as a straddle). This seizure hath the quality of eternity and entirety: "All You Need Is Love" sang Jn. Lennon & Paul McCartney. Departure, here, is more painful. "Miss America" promotes this important developmental illusion, so Vanessa Wms.' deviancy forced her to resign (Jul/84). Reminds me of Mort Saul (11CCT1Aug84): "We're in an 'instead of' society: violence instead of justice, pornography instead of romance, bitchery instead of social satire, and discussion of the issues instead of (taking) a position."....ANTI-FAMILY #3, the second level of exteriority, is one's work-world, where affiliation/alienation express faith/doubt....ANTI-FAMILY #4, the second level of interiority, is a "spiritual" (in the senses of basically noneconomic and nonsexual) society "of choice," no matter its degree of difference from the parental spiritual society. Levine says the distance from the parental values will be small; I observe that the differentia and sanctions will be noticeably variant from those of the parents....ANTI-FAMILY #5 is whatever soul-satisfying society (if any) one joins after doubting one's (adolescent) doubts, + "communion with God"--the third level of interiority expressed in and through one's adult-chosen spiritual society (which is still apt to be a "return" to the parental spiritual society). (NOTE: Levine is responsible, in this thinksheet, only for what I mention of him.)