

"WHOLE SIGHT" :

TOWARD A GOD-PLEASING EPISTEMOLOGY ----- ELLIOTT #1904

New books, of which I see enough to become bleary-eyed, are divisible into the little, the laborious, and the luminous: respectively, 83%, 16%, and 1%. I've not ever given the time of day to the first category (even items become "book of the month"); and, as life winds down (with, probably, only a quarter-century to go), it's getting tougher to rev up enthusiasm for the second category. Which leaves the precious third category: sometimes a book will light up, which subjectively means it "turns me on," convinces me that I'm in the presence not just of a book but of a soul, and therefore of God....Books I put in this third category (and I must emphasize that only you, dear reader, can fill this category for yourself!) are of no particular genre. As the book MASQUERADE (Kit Williams, Schocken/80) asks you on its titlepage to "find the hare in every picture that may point you to the prize," the prize you are after will be your locator of the books with the bunnies in 'em....Here's a bit of something from my recent reading:

1. "Wholesight" is, I think, a neologism of Parker J. Palmer in his TO KNOW AS WE ARE KNOWN: A SPIRITUALITY OF EDUCATION (Harper/84). A "wholesight" epistemology, leaving nothing out, is (my analogy) a 3-legged stool: not just curiosity and the will to control, but also the will to affirm the other (i.e., compassion). Today (Nov/84), who can avoid seeing, in 2-dimensions, shriveled-dying Ethiopian children --and the outpouring of compassionate action, both well- and ill-advised, illustrates Palmer's 3rd dimension of "knowing."...It's easy to see why compassion is the weakest leg: it's more costly than the other two. "The truth (of compassion) will make you free, but first it makes you miserable!"--Coffin, "Religion and Politics," 30 Sept 84 SERMONS FROM RIVERSIDE. (A good sermon despite his usual activist distortions--e.g., "The Exodus story tells us that liberation is primarily the work of the oppressed themselves." Which would have been news to Moses, who thought the point was that the deliverance was GOD's work in blessing/cursing through submissive reps.) In the spirit of Pendle Hill, which he's been a part of for the last decade, he aims at authentic dialog by the touch of full humanity on full humanity: "wholesight" perceives reality as does God, transcending the divides of heart/mind, subject/object, thisness/otherness.

2. Dying the year St. Francis of Assisi was born, the Christian nature-mystic HILDEGARD OF BINGEN (MEDITATIONS WITH..., ed. by Gabriele Uhlein, Bear/83) had "wholesight" long before Palmer came up with the word. Here's a bit of her simple, profound stuff--reminding one of Meister Eckhart, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Julian of Norwich, and Black Elk. Currently, this particular mindset is being called "creation-centered spirituality," a phrase coined by Mt. Fox. I can't add Annie Dillard, but the only reason is that she's agnostic: hers is, sans metaphysics, the same type of spirituality. I rejoice in Hildegard's joyful internal logic of gift-so-Giver; and my mind, in speaking of "internal logic," warns my soul that "wholesight" NOW requires transcending one's particular metaphysics for whole-humanity thinking, communing, living.

Glance at the sun.

See the moon and the stars.

Gaze at the beauty of earth's greenings.

Now,
think.

--p.45, MEDITATIONS WITH HILDEGARD OF BINGEN, ed. by Gabriele Uhlein (Bear/83)

What delight
God gives
to humankind
with all these things.

Who gives all these shining, wonderful
gifts, if (not) God?

*Come to remember--he used to follow me around, he delightfully full of questions and delightful over my playful and come-on-ish responses....It's been almost 1/2 century....I almost forgot....And it's not important: just a blink of happy, thankful-to-God memory.