

1. More than of any other historical period, I am a student of Hellenistic times, the Mediterranean world a few centuries before and after Jesus. So naturally I get excited about "connections" between that world and ours, "ours" meaning in particular late-twentieth-century USA [but also "the West" in general, and now increasingly, "the Globe," including "the East" and "the South" (=the mass of "the Third World," dynamically disturbed, as is the East, but the West)]. Few parishioners have consciousness of such matters, even as between Bible and personal issues; but the pastoral counselor should. Ellwood's assertion that the current increasing taste for the occult [RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL GROUPS IN MODERN AMERICA] is Hellenistic more than Eastern sent me back to the classic of Gilbert Murray (FIVE STAGES OF GREEK RELIGION, Anchor/55) in his great chapter on the Hellenistic "Failure of Nerve," a phrase as appropriate to our time/people as to that time: "A great foreign religion came like water in the desert to minds reluctantly and superficially enlightened, but secretly longing for the old terrors and raptures from which they had been set free" (p.137). Much of the current "breaking over the traces," the Dionysiac element in the human potential movement, and liberation psychology [in all liberation movements] roots in this longing to be free of the ratrace technopsyche, the attenuated consciousness of the third industrial revolution, the secular shriveling of the spiritual, reductionistic "science," and what have you. "The disturbed" who come to you may feel guilty for not having "sinned" enough--a new guilt stranded with old guilts, especially as part of the middlescent syndrome, which is now hitting the middle and upper classes in the late 30s.

2. So I got to meditating on the Hellenistic psyche vis-a-vis ours--both highly individualistic, chaotic, lust-for-life, fearful (yet Hell-for-leather), radical (yet hedge-your-bets). At the extremes, the pastoral counselor will either bless this mentality ("consciousness") or, with appropriate biblical references, damn it--in rough correspondence two millenia ago to, respectively, gnosticism or libertinism (in hypo/hyper forms), or scribalism or asceticism. One may translate into the current "life-styles" and "adaptive behavior" of one's counselees!

3. A high-potential ambivalence [psychodynamic] in the Zeitgeist is the yearning for freedom, "liberation," individual self-determination [mysticized as "self-realization," culturized as "self-fulfilment," psychized as "self-actualization"] + the contrary, almost self-canceling, yearning for dependence, for freedom from freedom, i.e. from the weight of radical self-decision-making. In Hellenistic times, the philosophies promised the former and the mysteries the latter; and of course the catch-as-catch-can cults combined the two in saleable mixes. PROBLEM: Priestcraft (including "counseling" of all varieties, sacred and secular) either has a saleable mix or ceases to exist. POTENTIAL: What, for the pastoral counselor, is here and now the saleable mix most faithful to the Christian commitment? The purist ["scribe," "fundamentalist"] is anti-mix, claiming only the biblical element or only the psychoanalytic or only some other school worldview/therapy. My conviction is that the globe has transcended ideology, and purism is a fossil fading away: the future will belong to the most human mixes of these elements: biblical, primitive religious, justice-sensitive, human potential, phypsyhic (nature-conscious), and global-traditional (sensitive to the great humane heritages). What does this say about tomorrow's "theological curriculum"?!

4. "The religion of later antiquity is overpoweringly absorbed in plans of escape from the prison of the seven planets" (GM 141). What, now, are "the seven planets"? What gods function as demons because their foreknowledge fates us? Where do your people feel helpless, doomed, desperate for any deliverance? We did not really manage, in modernity, to get rid of "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and we'd do better to admit it: "liberalism" was, on its dark side, a disease against "liberation." Is, now, "liberation" another disease? This issue joins social responsibility and individual-group therapy and direction.