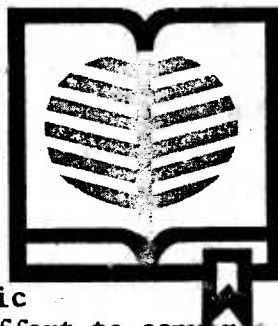


# NEW YORK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CONTINUING THE BIBLICAL SEMINARY IN NEW YORK

235 E. 49TH ST. • NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017 • 212-355-4434



21 Sept 76

WILLIS E. ELLIOTT, Dean  
Exploratory Programs

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Just before the Shalom service yesterday, you told me it felt good to have gone public with your anger at me for my saying "The effort to converge Jung and Teilhard is an instance of the truth that sometimes a thing not worth doing is worth doing well." In a former situation you'd gulped down your anger, and it felt bad, and wrong. No question in my mind: You would have wronged yourself, and me, and the fellowship, by not going public with your anger. [Since you did so, and my response was public, I feel free--indeed, obliged--to share this letter with the NYTS staff members present; and of course you are, from my standpoint, free to share it with anyone.] As a mature Christian and seasoned pastor, you know what a precious gift pain can be, and how sad it is when human beings confine their encounters within the limits of pain-avoidance, at the price of shallow relations. Life is zombielike and lonely, conversations are stereotypic and colorless, "fellowships" suffer starvation on the surface because the deep divine-human food that's available in the depths--the gospel of trust and therefore vulnerability, of love and therefore humility, of truth and therefore forgiveness--is never within reach. After the fact, after the effort to be "together" painlessly and cheaply, avoiding authentic encounter by being "nice to each other" [also called "being kind" and "loving," in which context these great words are prostituted to sentimentality], the parallel prescribed inauthentic behavior is just as reality-and-humanity-and-divinity-avoiding as was the prior masked ball, crippled with tabus dishonoring the Holy One....Please do not imagine that my numbers below indicate a systematic treatment! The numbers are only for easy reference [like Scripture verses!].

1. Working through emergent agenda is, as you know now, one dimension of our D.Min. program. (I stress "one": it's the heart of "the training - encounter movement," but only one dimension of our D.Min.) The 1:1/group encounter yesterday was and is emergent agenda, and it can be treated as (a) an ugly and unfortunate disturbance of the loving, trusting community we had created, (b) a reality-breakthrough into the artificial togetherness-without-pain that we had created, (c) an invitation to premature reconciliation at the expense of truth and integrity, and/or (d) a God-given opportunity both to learn something more of both love and truth and to let the Spirit create authentic community.

How are you feeling

2. Now that we've gotten to point #2? If I were you, I think I'd be feeling that somebody was manipulating my pain to lay another trip on me! More of the same! That's the feeling I'd be tempted to if I centered my attention on myself instead of on the human-divine potential of the relationship and occasion. Yesterday's encounter was painful for both of us, not just you; and we all have something to learn from it, not just either one of us. Indeed we are in grave danger: If we turn away from this learning opportunity, to that extent the D.Min. will not be education but hypocrisy, hypocrisy cognate with that of sad and superficial churches whose folk try to avoid painful encounter, then, inevitably failing, fail to make creative use of the anger, and so going on living in fear instead of love, in wariness instead of trust, in self-concern instead of communion and service.

OVER

\*In our church, I had to tell big George that he was crushing my hand [which is like your courage yesterday], and he's been more gentle ever since; and little Janet, she of arthritic hand, had to tell me that my handshake was normal but painful, and for the past ten years Sunday I've barely, gently, touched her hand.

3. One possibly fruitful way of viewing the Orientation Retreat is this: Its evening was structured not just as a get-acquainted but for encounter significant enough to begin relating deep enough to reach springs of motivation and healing not usually reached in "courses" and "programs." The visual and we were using words like "risk-taking" and "honest" and "open." Letting it all hang out may be the rape of privacy and [as I know it can be] self/other-destructive; but more common is the opposite crime against humanity and therefore sin against God, viz. swallowing it all in tight. We are all survivors, God's damaged and hurting children, and it's easier to be turtles than soft-shelled crabs. In the final section of that evening's process [just before the worship], we were given in plenum the opportunity for further "risk-taking," "honesty," "openness." In my opinion, the risk factor was too high, and the plenum didn't really come off. We endured its consequent discomfort and embarrassment. The atmosphere asked of us a trust-level premature for our community, which was only hours long. [To dramatize this, I suggested, for paradoxical intention, something that would increase distrust, viz. that we name a person and then not state the question we had in mind!] This is not meant here as a criticism of the authorities, but rather as emergent agenda in our educational process. Take this question, e.g.: Since "trust-building" is first on the conner's agenda, what significances may we find in the fact that (a) it's first on the NTL/HPM-type secular agendas and (b) it's now de rigueur in the first meeting of most sophisticated church groups? Are words like "trust" and "love" to be informed for us Christians primarily by the gospel, or primarily by the world's current psychosocial wave?

4. Since "love" means vastly more than never to have to say "I'm sorry," risk-taking is love in the action of vulnerable trust. I didn't take much risk--nobody did!--during the evening process, but [delayed reaction?] I did when I made my remark on Jung/Teilhard, the only names offered in the first ("singing") part of the two-step process before the Shalom service. I risked (a) over-hurting the person, unknown to me but guessed to be you, who referred to Jung/Teilhard, and (b) being misunderstood as to my intention, which was not to shaft anybody but precisely to invite to authentic encounter, which I presumed would occur in private, just the two of us, but occurred, as I'm glad it did, in public. [Incidentally, please don't forget that I said your converging Jung and Teilhard is "worth doing well" even though, in my opinion, it's "not worth doing" in comparison with some other head-tasks you might be into.]...They prayed for Peter to come and were shocked when he did, Rhoda gape-mouthed at the door. We believe in authentic encounter and structure for it and are surprised when it happens, and sometimes even wish it hadn't! It sure wasn't "nice" of me to say what I did, was it? If "nice"="loving," I'm knocked out of the ballgame. Precisely my point: The church is languishing because it's victimized by the "nice"="loving" syndrome combined with the swallow/explode process. The skill of outwitting this victimization, in our own hearts and lives and relationships, is one of the "ministry skills" the D.Min. addresses.

5. Am I being "defensive"? Note how the heavy connotation of that word in NTL/HPM acts as a sanction against, not for, openness and authenticity! People imagine they can get rid of each other, and God's coming at 'em through each other, simply by use of this interpersonal, negative-sanctional, smelly word! Consider how defensive I'd have been had I oversaid "I'm sorry" [meaning "I'm sorry I said what I did, seeing that it hurt you so much"]. Another defensive posture would be the opposite, hard and impenitent instead of soft. In between, I could say, and did, that I was sorry that what I meant as a light touch of invitation felt like a heavy blow of attack: I was, and am, sorry to have been the occasion of so much pain--gut-sorry even if the pain level was, in God's eyes, not too high for the work the Spirit was doing. [That I do not know: I do know that God calls me to honor love without falling into sentimentality and truth without falling into cruelty, and believe that this delicate balance is the primary skill of the Christian counselor, pastor, teacher.] How hard should you shake hands? \*

.....Grace and truth, *William*