

Walter Wink rightly notes that demonic forces--"principalities and powers" as fallen--operate in all the dimensions of creation, including the Zeitgeist [the dominant "spirit" of a particular people/time/place]. This thinksheet has both theoretical and practical foci. THEORETICAL: When "the times" exaggerate one constellation of realities-truths to the neglect of another or others, how can Christian leadership avoid going awhoring after the then-salable fads--leaders themselves, and in their leading? what correctives, sacred and secular, are available? what prophylaxes? PRACTICAL: Since this hyper/hypo-trophy sickness of the Fall is almost always-everywhere, what are the implications for theological education? right now vis-a-vis the "feeling" madness [contemptuous of reason and hard data, language and tight logic, "doing theology" in its analytic and constructive aspects] of many middle-and-upper class clergy, especially white?

1. By "feeling madness" I mean the doctrinaire tendency, in this Romantic time, to take personal feelings, one's own especially, as primary both in the data and in the agenda senses--Goethe's "Gefühl ist alles." Literally hundreds of books exhibit the attention-pathology of obsessive-exclusive feeling-orientation--narcissistic, masturbatory, monadic, contributive not to maturity but to neurotic loneliness and exacerbated alienation [sometimes called "liberation," "freedom into my own space" or "to do my own thing" or "to fulfil my self-expectations"--or, in hinduist fads, "self-realization," "self-fulfilment," "self-possession"].

2. Who is God in this current mode of Romanticism? The "self" (a) as relational center ("relationships" thus judged, created, terminated on the basis of pay-off to one's "self") and/or (b) as ontological ultimate (hinduist atma=Brahman). In either the "(a)" [Western] or the "(b)" [Eastern] version, this "self" is now understood to be knowable primary through awareness of one's feelings, secondarily through "encounter" with others who are willing to take one's feelings with ultimate or at least proximate seriousness. Under these dogmatic assumptions, "group" tends to mean meeting-in-which-my-feelings-will-be-taken-seriously. "Agenda" tends to mean taking-my-feelings-seriously [if it's a "personal" or "encounter" group] or that first + a common task [if it's any other kind of group, e.g. educational]. The category "sin" includes all efforts to contract-factor out the feelings so as to get the job, whatever it is, done--a situation in which high rational development ["education" in the narrow, traditional sense], the oscillative corrective to Romanticism, is impossible., or at least won only at great emotional cost.

3. In this present situation, integrative theological education needs to develop a model different from (a) the traditional "rational" headtrip seminary, (b) the human-potential center, and (c) the urban training center. NYTS is the most exciting place in theological education today precisely because we are living with the messy tensions toward the birth of a structure that will honor God and serve church and world without sycophancy to the Zeitgeist or to the past and without uncritical assimilation to alien sociomodels (church, business, "school," government).

4. "America" was a mix of Enlightenment values and Romantic vision--the latter term here meaning "messianic," more of the classic/male/power-oriented/1Is. type than of the sensitive/female/peace-oriented/2Is. type. The Enlightenment element squeezed out much of the Romantic element, so you "lost" your religion when you went to college and seminary; now, you are more apt to lose your mind, or at least fail to find processes that give it dignity and promote its development. I have Enlightenment abilities and skills and a Romantic heart: I who for decades had to fight for the heart find myself now--now that the culture has, since WWII, made a wild swing to the opposite pole--having to fight for the mind. [Some even misidentify me as "an intellectual"!]

5. Hans Kung's ON BEING A CHRISTIAN (Doubleday/76) is a sign of integrative hope. Today "feeling is again predominant: rationality is...washed out by sensitivity." [p.52] But this book is a harbinger of balance, for which I thank God--and pray.