

The premise of this thinksheet is that "curiosity/longing" [to be defined below] is (1) an integral experience constitutive of our humanity and (2) the most fruitful criterion for differentiating civilizations past and present. Only the first aspect of the premise will be developed here, and only in one direction.

1. Definition: By "curiosity/longing" I mean to embrace all experiences of reaching out beyond our mammalian necessities, all "excesses" beyond animality as we observe it in our and other species; and I mean to distinguish upper-coil [i.e., neocortical] reaching-beyond--as "curiosity"--and lower-coil [i.e., "heart"] reaching-beyond--as "longing" (including "infinite longing," "eternal thirst," "ultimate concern," "thirst for Being," the yearnings for God expressed in the Psalms). And I mean to claim integrality for all such experiences: "human" action is action that has this reaching-out quality, not any other reaching-out of our or any other species. And I mean to confine "curiosity" and "longing" to this one-experience meaning, excluding other meanings of "curiosity" and "longing."

2. While this particular reaching-out constitutes our "humanity" and therefore is everyday, some Moments of Intensity heighten our awareness of this essential quality of our human existence. Since language is functional to the experience of dailiness, i.e. "ordinary" and "profane" occurrences, language itself must strain and fail in trying to give voice to the special, "extraordinary," "sacred" Moments --and calls them experiences of "new birth," "conversion," "ecstasy," "grace," e.g. Such expressions, while inadequate, have their own special functions: (1) To celebrate the Moments with one's own larynx; (2) Audio-sharing of the Moments; (3) To ritualize the expression of the Moments, personally and communally, against Lethe [the natural tendency to forget]--i.e., to "memorialize," the past-oriented function of worship; and (4) To prepare both for life-in-world and for further extraordinary experiences of reaching-out--life-in-world including witnessing to one's and one's community's Moments ["mission," "evangelism"]....The cost of neglecting the Moments--failing either to remember or to be open--is the experience of Reversal: instead of making heightened sense, life "doesn't make any sense any more," not even the animal sense of dailiness (biblically, a liturgy of "creation" moment-by-ordinary-moment rejoicing in the Creator and "all his works").

3. In addition to its celebrative-mnemonic and preparatory functions, formal religion seeks to render impressive certain signs-symbols-sacraments-relationships that tend to motivate toward valuing the Moments [e.g., Abraham's call or any other biblical or postbiblical "vocation," including one's own--for "call" is the Moment viewed under the aspect of divine invitation/demand/opportunity] and toward seeking to discern in "the world" the Presence calling us to "come up higher." Since what gets our attention gets us, public worship seeks to hold our attention steadily on "the other dimension" vis-a-vis our life-in-community-and-world. [Quotation is title of Louis Dupré's excellent Doubleday/72: THE OTHER DIMENSION: A SEARCH FOR THE MEANING OF RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES, on the meaning and location of faith --against objectivism and subjectivism, stopgap ideologies, obscurantism, nihilism, piecemealism, pragmatism, utilitarianism.]

4. "God" and "faith" are holophrases--the former, for the "Other" side of the Moment ["revelation," "communion"]; the latter, for the control-attitude of the "religious" person/community. [I use "control" here in both senses, personal and social control.] "Jesus," for me, is both the person and the holophrase of intimate relation and ultimate horizon--ontology within and beyond phenomenology. For me, Jesus centers history ["historical Jesus"], cosmos ["cosmic Christ"], the Moments ["discipleship"], society [the triumphant-militant-potential "Church," lit. the community "belonging to the Lord (Jesus)"], and the future ["the Parousia," "New Creation"].

5. Faith has its existential grounding in "curiosity/longing," especially in Moments so intense-impressive as suggesting the birth metaphor [dying-rising, e.g. Ro.6]. Its ontic grounding is its own internal premise, arrived at by natural-supernatural leap. In judging both grounds, and particular Moments and Moment-claims, reason must make its own leaps.

6. While "theology" explicates all this for a particular community, "philosophy of religion" does so for the general domain and, particularly, vis-a-vis other intellectual disciplines--locating and clarifying the reaching-out-ness in which religion roots; interpreting-ordering religious utterances ["myths," "symbols," etc.] and religious individual-social practices; concluding thus on "humanity."