

I'm writing this fast in my home study because it's 58° and I'm too proud of saving fossil roots--oil, in our case--to turn up the heat. The energy crisis and Alex Haley and my biblical-language course on "The Roots of the Roots" have me consciousness-raised on roots. Also, rootlessness. This is being written in preparation for leading a five-hour for NYC institutional chaplains tomorrow, and the present moment of my meditational preparation centers on rootlessness. I'm trying to see your "typical" ministered-unto by these urban institutional chaplains, and so prepare my heart and mind by seeing what they daily see, knowing that I cannot wholly succeed, and expecting that they'll help me and each other see better.

1. Now it's happening in S. Am. and Africa, what happened to "the West" in recent generations and to "the Near East" in biblical times, making the Bible an urban book. I mean the suction of the cities, drawing the rooted out of their soil because (a) the soil failed and (b) the city life lured. In the soil was the god, the group, and the soul. My phrase "the triple alienate" describes the zombielike, aimless, faceless existence of hundreds of millions of "moderns," relieved only in places--e.g., China--where, for the time, a passionately embraced ideology provides a pseudosubstitute for real triple roots....Come to think of it, I've a direct example, from a few minutes ago, of not losing roots: I tended the hydroponic garden of lettuce in our recreation room, and noted the three types of roots under the water (two types: major and minor) and the one type above (the aerial, from which the plants take some of what they need directly from the air)....make of the metaphor what you will!

2. No scenario will suffice, under present urban conditions, to restore the triple roots: the shifts in social structures must be major, to create a synergy of city/soil, an orchestration of degrees of population concentration and of individual experience on that spectrum, the individual an obbligato on the polyphony. But every pro-human scenario is a help, and for this thinksheet I'm suggesting that counselors meditate within the parameters of the root metaphor: counseling as aiming to help people reroot themselves in as many of the three as they may: the god, the group, the soul--past-, present-, and future-oriented. [NOTE: Here, by "god" I mean the ultimate/intimate of all who live on the nurture of cosmic roots--which is more than "God," which means the cosmic root of those who live biblically, in devotion to YHWH-Jesus. In counseling urban alienates, "God" is in many cases worse than useless, for it signals a shrunken corpse at enmity with present and future. But I aim, in the counseling situation, to use "God" as "my God," as the one who in Jesus is coming to me, and is daily present with me, from the future, overflowing with more life than the world has ever known; I'm concerned about the re-rooting of religious sounds, for human beings sub-direct their lives in an audiochamber of cries and shouts out of the past and into the future.]

3. Cox's romantic poem on urbanism [THE SECULAR CITY] rhapsodized "anonymity," which is the new urbanite's positive experience of freedom from the pre-urban social sanctions. Give the honeymoon with the city a little time to wear off, and the person becomes anonymous not just to the pre-urban group, but also to the god and the soul. "D" in the diagram represents this triple alienation. "Gone urban" =, for "the patients," gone rootless-aimless-estranged-individualized-depersonalized-dehumanized. As for ethnic groups, assimilation seems at first freedom forward, but turns out to be at the cost of loss of freedom backward...."A" on the grid is wholeness--being owned by one's God [providing the god is pro-human], both being owned by and owning one's group, and owning one's own soul-self--"D" being, as farthest from "A," triple schizo [-thenia,-genia,-phrenia]. ROOTS: Alex Haley's triumphant moment when the tribe of his ancestor called him "Kunta Kinte!"..."B" is the group neurotically dominant over the individual, as K.K. and all his American ancestors on his black side, as slaves and ex-slaves; or at least the way many urbanites felt "back home."..."C" is individual alienation from the group (as a slave treated only as an individual).... WHOLENESS: The God above-around-within.

