

(134) GUILT AND GUILT FEELINGS

Guilt and guilt feelings are two entirely different realities. Once people knew about guilt. They confessed guilt. They sought, asked for forgiveness. Nowadays we often feel awkward when we hear about guilt, when we are told that we are guilty. We often feel annoyed, threatened. We don't have a clear insight in what guilt is and we don't know either what to do when we are called guilty. We are convinced that we are put down, that it will be used against us.

Nowadays we know about guilt feelings, the feeling to be guilty. These feelings are not at all about guilt in the old sense, guilt to others, to God. They are feelings which have to do with our own position amidst of others. If there is in some manner guilt in guilt feelings, than it is guilt to us ourselves, because we endangered our position amidst of others.

Thus, in a deep sense, guilt and guilt feelings have very little to do with each other, or, maybe better, they are more or less each other's opposites.

1. GUILT

Guilt presupposes responsibility, and thus an instance, opposite of which we are responsible. It presupposes external mediation. It presupposes the triangle we are living in external mediation: Transcendence, the other(s) and I myself. I trespass a law, a prohibition, over which I don't have a say, which are more than I am, which belong to transcendence. I wrong somebody else, a human, humans, God. I fall out of the whole, out of the community, with the others, with God, because of my doings. I broke up a vital relationship, with other humans, with God. I am guilty.

Being guilty means that I shut myself out of the community I belonged to because of my deeds. It too means that I am dependent on others, or on the other, in order to have the possibility to get back into this community. I am dependent on forgiveness. I have to ask for forgiveness. If I really, honestly ask forgiveness, then it cannot be refused. If it is refused when it is honestly asked for, in that case the refuser is trespassing, breaking again in her or his manner human relationships, thus showing that she herself, he himself does not belong.

This was the predicament of Gregory VII in 1066, in Canossa, when the emperor, Henry IV, asked for forgiveness. Politically it was foolish to forgive, but Gregory had to, he did not have another choice, if he wished to stay in the community to which they both finally belonged and of which he himself was the head.

Asking for forgiveness always was risky (Henry IV took an enormous risk). You could be humiliated, if you were misunderstood or, worse, if the other would show that she herself or he himself was out of the reality of transcendence, going on with the power game. It

probably is one of the reasons that the Medieval Church ritualised the asking for forgiveness in the confession: The risk to be humiliated is in that manner much smaller. On the other hand, just because you took the risk by honestly asking for forgiveness, it could not really be refused.

If it seems worthwhile, this can be elaborated further. If a real question for forgiveness is refused, scapegoating is going on and we come into the neighbourhood of martyrdom.

Again in another manner: Asking for forgiveness was an act of humility. That means that the texts in the Gospel about humility are true for those who honestly ask for forgiveness: Matth.23, 12 "Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and anyone who humbles himself will be exalted." Cf Matth.11, 29, where Jesus says of himself that he is "gentle and humble in heart." Of course, how the exaltation will be is not in our power. It might be by persecution...

Being humiliated is a consequence of rivalry, of internal mediation. To be humble is an act of freedom, an act out of living in external mediation.

2. GUILT FEELINGS

Guilt is a possibility and a reality and a reality as long as we are living in external mediation, under a transcendence. Guilt feelings belong to internal mediation, when transcendence has faded away, when we are not any longer living in a triangle, but are always and directly at the mercy of the direct relationships with each other, the endless model-rival-and-model-obstacle-relationships, which are the only possible ones in internal mediation.

In internal mediation, where transcendence has disappeared, guilt is not any longer a reality. Guilt belongs to and is a spiritual relationship, which only is possible if there is transcendence. Guilt feelings are, per definition, no spiritual reality. They are feelings, which means that they represent the Other (all the others together, around us) in me, the dangerous other(s), who has (-ve) power over me, a power, which I become aware of just because of my feelings.

Guilt feelings in an important sense are a warning signal, making it clear to me that the Other is penetrating into me. It might be, although of course it need not be, the first step of the penetration of the powerful Other in me, resulting in the end in illness of some sort.

Having guilt feelings thus means that I am aware that I am losing in the eternal struggle in internal mediation. Not the other, the other who "wins", who has the power in the relationship. I, who is losing, put down, I have them. If it is possible to speak of any guilt, it

is guilt to myself. I made myself ashamed, I humiliated myself, not because I did something objectively wrong (which, in a deep sense does not any longer exist), but because I wronged my interests, playing the games in obviously the wrong manner...

Of course I have these specific guilt feelings, which the Other does not have, because she, he is, in this case, winning. But that does not mean that I am the only one with guilt feelings. We all are everywhere in this internal mediation, engaged with everybody in model-rival and model-obstacle-relationships. Thus we all have guilt feelings. Guilt feelings are the scourge of internal mediation.

When we have guilt feelings, we don't ask for forgiveness. We know that we make, in that manner, things worse. We show again that we are the loser. The other does not know about transcendence exactly as we don't know, does not know about forgiveness in a spiritual manner. The other will take the opportunity to make again another point and sees in the asking for forgiveness that I lost and consequently the confirmation that she, that he "won". So asking for forgiveness out of guilt feelings is madness. We do only, when we still mistake our guilt feelings for real guilt or/and when we are masochistic.

We try to get over our guilt feelings by just forgetting them. By doing good deeds, by compensating, by in fact winning again, putting our opponents down, so giving them again guilt feelings.

To put it again in another manner: Guilt feelings belong totally to an overall scapegoating reality. Feeling guilty, having guilt feelings means to come to the conclusion that I ended up as the scapegoat in this special relationship because of which I have guilt feelings. I try to get rid of them by reversing the relationship, bringing myself in the one-up position, the other(s) in the one-down, the scapegoat position.

Guilt feelings and the enduring anxiety in which we all nowadays are living thus are akin. Our anxiety indicates our fears that we will be scapegoated. Guilt feelings indicate that it actually happened.

Making others our scapegoats means that we desperately try to evade every responsibility for our doings. We always find good reasons why we did things, if not in the others (the Other) whom we scapegoat, then in the circumstances, in our past, where ever. As long as we succeed in that, we escape the final "humiliation", the guilt feelings. In fact in that case we succeed in scapegoating others. Only when we don't find a way out of the difficulties with the help of this scapegoating, we disappear into guilt feelings, which means that we have to accept that we ourselves are the scapegoats. Not guilty, by all means. We don't even really know what that means. The scapegoat! Having guilt feelings we are more than ever convinced that life is mean and that we are the victim of it. Which of course, seen from the viewpoint of internal mediation, is perfectly true.

Guilt feelings are in every sense a parody, the opposite of guilt. Guilt and guilt feelings can't exist together. They belong to two different worlds, the spiritual reality, in which there is transcendence, and the emotionally reality of internal mediation, out of which transcendence disappeared.

3. IS THERE A WAY OUT OF GUILT FEELINGS?

Do we really wish to get out of the world of internal mediation and of guilt feeling? That of course is the first question.

If we do, there only is, as far as I understand, a way out, when we leave the whole scapegoating-system behind us, which in fact is the origin of all the guilt feelings. That means that we take again the responsibility of our doings upon ourselves and stop the eternal trying to make others responsible for what we did. It means that we find ways back to human dignity, which again means that we find ways back to humility.

This means that we have to go back to transcendence and thus to the triangulation of our relationships. It means that we recognize again a reality over us and that we are not any longer our own kings. That we find again a place in the whole of life and are not any longer monads, fighting to all sides.

It means that we take again risks, other risks than those we are accustomed to, the risk of humility. In internal mediation we are so extremely afraid that we will lose and be smitten out as scapegoats, not even acknowledging that we are not in a real community at all, that we cannot take the risk of being humble, although humility, an expression of spiritual freedom, is the only possibility to find ways to the other and so to community itself. In the world of internal mediation the words humble and humility have simply become obsolete.

The way back is going the way back to the other. It means is to ask for forgiveness, with open, honest eyes, without fear or apprehension, from those whom we wronged.

