"TO SECURE THE BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY TO OUR POSTERITY"

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On the Sunday nearest the fourth of July, we had evening ecumenical worship in the Craigville Tabernacle, with Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant clergy as coliturgists. Good friend of mine, Roman Father Jn. Perry, in his homily thanked God for "the blessings of (American) liberty." As we left the service, a black woman of dignity and Christian conviction said to my wife Loree, "I didn't feel included, as I know you understand." She is the posterity of black Africans who, unsuccessful in resisting enslavement, were unable to secure the blessings of liberty to their posterity. So in the persons of her ancesters she got dragged to "freedom." Which set me to thinking....

1. We dream, and Scripture promises, that "some day" (to use a phrase all Americans can still hear Martin Luther King say) "the blessings of liberty" will be available to (and another MLK phrase) "all God's children." **Realists** emphasize "some day," the "not yet" dimension of the Reign of God; **idealists** ask us to attend to and act individually and collectively on, the "here and now" potential, demanding that the spiritual goal be here-and-now the political program, that there be no time-lapse in the availability of the blessings of liberty to all human beings in each and every land under any and all forms of government. I'm against them both.

2. What's wrong with the **realist** position? It gives aid & comfort to the privileged enemies of justice & peace. It preaches that God shows partiality, an idea Scripture can be quoted on both sides of. It tells the unblessed that liberty is not for the likes of them or their posterity--or, benign form of this evil, liberty will be for their posterity "some day." (Or is that insidious, only appearing benign? But grant that some honestly ask the unblessed to wait a little longer, not forever.) And it corrupts with smug selfrighteousness those who preach such messages from above to those down below, effectively blocking their ears to reason & the cries for "justice."

3. What's wrong with the **idealist** position? It subverts reason & therefore justice & peace by its verbal-scribal-literalistic dogmatic temper, synonymizing "liberty," "freedom," & "equality" in slogans & on posters that impede discourse toward actual incremental advances in liberty, justice, & peace. Preaching the populist tenet that "one persons is as good as another" (with the implication that all privilege is per se evil), it cozens, albeit unwittingly, those who want to see "liberty & justice for all" but without loss of justice. It simplemindedly strengthens hyperindividualism, the Enlightenment dogma, in line with Protagoras, that the human isolated person, "the individual," is the measure of all things: what happens to the here-&-now individual skinbag is the philosophical, pragmatic, & religious test of right/wrong, good/evil. Accordingly, justice to the ancestors does not come into view.

4. **Justice to the ancestors** was implicitly in view when Jas. Madison wrote, and Congress signed, the Constitution, in whose preamble occurs the phrase that titles this Thinksheet. More than sad subsequent human experience permits us to, they believed in the practical identity of <u>the rights God gives</u> & <u>the right might makes</u>.

5. But consider how slippery is the political use of these two meanings of "right[s]."

¶ Though their Qoran converges them, Islamic lands conquered & to be held in perpetuity, both by the will of Allah, the Muslim Palestinians claim that their repeated military failures vis-a-vis Israel have no bearing on their right to Palestine: Israeli might cannot make right (though Islamic might can!). Disingenuous crafty appeals for world support for their cause on an ethical & historical basis should fall on sophisticatedly deaf ears, though humanitarian appeals based on simple human needs should not. (Here, of course, we confront another heavily politicized word, "needs.")

¶ It ill behooves Americans, whose might gave us "the blessings of liberty" over against both Europe & those we've come to call Native Americans, to criticize the Israelis & the "European" South Africans for wanting "to secure the blessings of liberty" to their posterity as well as to themselves. Giving equality to our "natives" does not defeat this value, as would Tel Aviv's & Pretoria's giving equality to theirs.

6. Woodrow Wilson tried to export to the world a secular version of religious Calvinist missions, viz., "democracy" as end & "the self-determination of peoples" as means. His professorial idealism was, though noble, as flawed as his political actions were naive. Plato's REPUBLIC made a mess of Syracuse, & Wilson's principle has made a mess of Lebanon (among other places). The current verson of this goodhearted but wrongheaded American secular missionary impulse is one-person-one-vote "equality," and its ambiguous results are weighing increasingly on the side of bad news.

7. Not that **equality** is not a value. It's a very great value indeed, & essential to full political justice. But it is demeaned, not honored, when defined as one-person-one-vote, i.e., as equal weight of franchise. Yes, there's equality of vote. But also equality of opportunity, & equality of assets, and jobs equality, & housing equality, & knowledge equality, & skills equality, & experience equality, & (beyond our reach) bio-equality (of talents, health of mind-brain-body, energies). Yes, some inequities are built into every social system, & removing a particular inequity from a particular system might increase the society's net injustice, decreasing it being the other possibility. But huge inequities are built into "nature," God being directly or (by action of "the principalities & powers") indirectly responsible. As to the latter, a humane society will structurally, as well as by encouraging the populace to "charity" (individual & corporate compassionate action), try to compensate for these natural inequities. But for theism it's one of the two "natural" conundrums, the other being the one Darwin finally found insuperable to theism, viz., nature red in tooth & claw, the inexorable violence in the food chain. (Subsequent to Darwin we've learned to take a number of mollifying factors into this complex calculus, such as ethological leaps & semantic projections & a profounder, unmoralistic, Job-like understanding of God. But the theodic crux has not been disposed of.)

8. Can America without hypocrisy preach ballot equality to any othernation? Yes, several. For one, **Japan**, which continues to forbid its minuscle native Korean population citizenship with franchise equality. The ugly unstated reason for the refusal is racial purity, in defense of which little can be said, esp. after Hitler. Our Korean population is too small as yet to be politically significant, i.e., for it to be much advantage to a vote-seeker. But why don't our churches take up the cause of Japan's oppressed, unenfranchised native Koreans? Surely these outsiders would constitute, if given citizenship, no threat to the Japanese way of life. Instead, our churches are pressuring governments whose very existence is threatened by the changes being preached, viz., Israel & South Africa.

9. Why the irrationality & injustice of both excess & defect I laid out in the ¶ above? The political, not entirely cynical answer is that while America has a Korean populace of little clout, the same cannot be said for blacks & Jews. The uncynical reason is that while nonJewish, nonblack Americans are increasingly aware of Jews & blacks in their midst, few have any contact with Koreans. But I have, having had a number of them in my Manhattan classes at NYTS & Adelphi University. On my most recent commute to NYTS, a Korean pastor invited me to dinner in his home with a number of other Korean exstudents of mine. I hear their pain over their sisters & brothers in Japan, as I can hear the pain of American Jews vis-a-vis the continuing Arab threat to the existence of Israel & the pain of American blacks vis-a-vis the glacial pace of black participation in the American dream and the low status of blacks vis-a-vis Pretoria. *While proximity can increase sympathy & therefore promote humanity, it can also warp judgment, decrease rationality, & thus advance injustice.* What gets our attention gets us whether it should or not, & what doesn't get our attention doesn't get us whether it should or not. And then there's proportionality: held in the right position, close to the eye, a coin is larger than the sun.

10. A culture, a way of life, is at once tough & delicate, complex & fragile, ever at risk from internal educational failure to pass it on & from external threats. Both ultimate & proximate warrants are necessary to its health & existence. Understanding these warrants, & what makes for its peace (as the weeping Jesus said of Jerusalem) is one aspect of the discipline called "theology of culture."