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WHY WON'T "RACE" JUST GO AWAY?

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Walking to church I got something irritating in my shoe & got it out before proceeding. Well, more than irritating: painful, something offending my foot. Since the Rodney King Event, "race," "the race issue," "the race problem," what some prejudicially call "the black problem" (as Hitler spoke of "the Jewish question") just won't get out of our face. It just won't go away by itself, & we have no shoe we can take off & remove it. It's painful, & we as a nation (if we still are "one nation") have no shoe to shake it out of. We have to walk with it no matter how painful it is, no matter how much it offends us....This Thinksheet says what's my present irritation, pain, offense, puzzlement, &--to return to my opening analogy--limping. It can't be of much interest to you, but your own can if you let it rise to consciousness as you read about mine. In that case, it could even be of some help to you.

1 Limping is not my thing. When it happens, I write a Thinksheet to help me walk upright again. A childhood-memorized verse (IK.18.21 KJV) comes to mind: "Why go ye limping between two opinions?" Well, that's the way I remembered it; it's actually "How long halt yet between two opinions [the LORD & Baal]?" But NRSV: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions?" That gets it! I go limping on "race" because I just can't make up my mind whether to patronize or blame the victims thereof. It'd be easy if I could foretell which would do them more good: (1) to help them stand up after we-the-majority have knocked them down? or (2) to tell them to shape up & stop yammering like crybabies & irritating the hell out of the rest of us? I just don't know. Do you?

But I do know a few things.

2 I know the Bible considers "the human problem" (which by definition includes "the race problem") intractable without the grace of God. In the Lord's Prayer, only direct divine action can save us from the mess we've made of ourselves & the world; & Paul reads Christian baptism as the path to the unity of humanity (Gal.3.23-29). Gospel counsels of perfection, such as Jesus' command to love your enemies (Mt.5.44, L.6.27,35), set the right atmosphere & attitude but leave to us the thorny questions of action, of agenda. And of course the Bible endlessly preaches righteousness, justice, peace, faith, faithfulness-loyalty, hope, love, humility, patience in well-doing, endurance under affliction--values & virtues essential to the good society but even to decent living. But we falter & fail when we try to draw straight lives from these goods to "race." Indeed, often they are used more as weapons than as medicines, more as slogans than as solutions.

3 Let's try an analogy, painting. If the goods in §1 are the light end of the palette, what do we have on the dark end? What dark feelings must we include if our painting of race in America is to be accurate & honest? And another analogy, storytelling: In telling the race story & describing the race situation in our country today, (1) *what* ***dark feelings*** *must we not leave out if our story is to be accurate & honest,* & (2) *knowing that how we distribute these feelings will determine the pitch, the tilt, even the politics, of the story, how shall we craft the story with these emotions so as best to* ***honor*** *truth, unity, & thus humanity & God?*

4 *In no particular-partisan order, here are the dark emotions:* ***guilt, shame, fear, hate, rage, vengefulness.*** *Which of these feelings were present, & how, in the whole American picture of Black Power, Red Power, Willie Horton, Clarence/Anita, Rodney King, Sister Souljah?*

5 One sorting factor in assessing the present dynamics of an historical divide is this: on one side are loser feelings, on the other side winner feelings. Another fact: at the beginning of a confrontation, the loser feelings are stronger. And a third: when the historical story is told from the loser side, the losers' self-designation &/or designation by others gives clues as to how the story will be told. "Losers" is never one of the labels. Here are some: "the oppressed," "minorities," "marginals," "the marginalized," "the disenfranchised," "the stigmatized," "the excludeds," "the poor," "the disadvantaged," "the dispossessed."

6 Of the many factors waylaying truthful & therefore real dialog in racial & ethnic conflict, none is peskier than the humanly understandable fact that the losers try to conceal the shame of their having lost by pointing the finger at the winners' guilt. How else maintain their dignity, their self-esteem, their claim to have a righteous cause against "injustice"? As yesterday I was jettisoning most of my materials from a 1958 trip among the Palestinians (their camps, their shops, their homes), I came upon an anti-Israel pamphlet claiming that the well-armed, well-organized Israeli army in 1948 easily overwhelmed poorly armed, unorganized Arabs who wanted to regain their "rights" by nonviolent appeals to the U.N. to reverse the decision to give 40% of Palestine to Jews for a homeland. From this piece of Palestinian propaganda, you'd never guess (1) that it was the Arabs who started the war & (2) that five Arab armies, better organized than were the Jews, planned a five-angle attack.

Two observations: (1) The current Middle-East peace-talks are fouled by false storytelling on both sides, but especially on the Palestinian side; & (2) Justice is on both sides, & both sides use the divine sanction for their land-claims: God gave the land to the Jews, then (forgetfully?) gave it to the Arabs. (My personal index to the Qur'an shows God did this in sequence, first giving Palestine to the Jews [1.10.90] & later to the Arabs [2.33.29].) Land-gifts &/or land-grabs? Then the U.N. got into land-giving, an obvious (yes?) injustice. The losers will have to accept (from Israel!) the gift of a nonmilitarized state, suffering the humiliation of not being able to raise a military challenge to Israel, choking down their fear, hate, rage, & vengefulness.

The full range of dark emotions exist also on the Israeli side. They are guilty, & ought to be ashamed of themselves--but how much guilt & shame do they feel? Fear, yes. And especially since the intifada, hate, rage, & vengefulness.

7 Now, using all the dark colors, tell the story of South Africa. What "justice demands" is not at all clear, it depends on how you tell the story. History, the saying goes, is written by the winners, but the blacks have been working hard to rewrite it. Though they vastly outnumber the whites, it's improbable that they'll be able to mount successful military action to replace the white government, so it's probable the losers (which, so far, the blacks are) will have to submit to participation in the current government.

8 Ideal-utopian peace is by reconciliation, historical peace is by winners' continuous success in convincing the losers that revolt would be suicidal. Always & everywhere we Christians must work for reconciliation while resisting the temptation to replace realism with romanticism. Thank God for Rodney King's "Can't we, can't we get along together?" I hope & pray so. It depends. It depends partly on realism about the past (telling the race story in America with accuracy & honestly) & the present (facing the full range of dark feelings on both sides, all sides).

9 Back to race in America, the topdog/underdog theme grants the underdog **immunity** from topdog criticism. The American conscience considers such criticism unfair. The feeling applies to gender (men not to attack women), religion (goys not to attack yids), & of course race. The police (white) were automatically wrong in beating Rodney King (black). Jesse Jackson said Clinton was wrong in attacking Sister Souljah (for her kill-whites remarks). The Senate committee (white) was wrong in its treatment of Clarence & Anita (both black). And Bush in 1988 was wrong in mentioning a black parolee (Willie Horton) rather than a white. This immunity (1) violates truth by inhibiting frank dialog, (2) damages the immune by patronism, & (3) intimidates critics from attack lest they be called racists.

10 Social sanctions, in a good society, work against the distorting-debilitating myth of immunity, the pernicious notion that some are untouchable by criticism & others aren't. Yet more & more I'm seeing prejudice presented as a privilege! Some, goes the argument, should have the privilege to be prejudiced, others shouldn't. Who should? Underdogs: topdogs, people in power, should be free of prejudice. Prejudice is wrong for Clinton but right, or at least acceptable, in the

case of Sister Souljah, whose race hate Clinton had compared with that of David Duke, the skincolors being reversed. Just today I read this dangerous nonsense: "People of color acknowledge the rights of whites to have prejudices once they are stripped of their power to enact this prejudice by acts of domination, subjugation, and oppression." The underdog, or identifier with underdogs, who wrote that is **power**-minded, not responsibility-minded (the responsibility to see that anybody's prejudice is wrong because essentially antisocial & in violation of love, truth, justice, & unity [peace]). The topdog should be, noblesse oblige, **responsibility**-minded, the responsibility of using power & privilege for the common good.

6 In his analyses of topdog/underdog psychology-pathology, Fritz Perls factored in the negative feelings of both (not both "sides," but both top & bottom). Mixed into the prejudices of both are guilt, shame, fear, hate, rage, vengefulness. ANC's Mandela has broken off talks with Pres. deKlerk, accusing that topdog of alliance with underdog Inkatha against underdog ANC. It's M.'s latest move to reject being side dog in the play to become topdog. I'm not objecting to M.'s dream of a black South African government in which whites would be underdogs. It's what he was in prison 27 years for, & prison didn't cure him of. Is he grateful deKlerk let him out? Not as grateful for that as resentful of the fact that that white man had the power to let him out. He has tried to convince the world that deKlerk had to let him out, even though that explanation is patent nonsense. Why the insistence on the nonsense? Because it shifts from the beggar's shame to the potentate's pride & deprives the releaser of pride, dignity, honor--since the black ideology insists the whites are to be consistently seen as guilty oppressors who'll give up no power, but from whom power must be torn....Or we might consider the dog-reversal in the case of Gorbachev/Yeltsin. The game's the same. Always power & weakness, always a mix of health & pathology.

7 "Race" (ie, racism) won't go away till society meets certain <u>conditions</u>. Three of them are:

(1) **<u>FESS UP</u>** Tops & bottoms, haves & have-nots, in & outs will have to deal more honestly with their negative feelings. Let's stay with the topdog/underdog model, which applies to the person & to every <u>personal</u> (parent/child, spouse/spouse, friend/friend) & <u>societal</u> (employer/employee, government/governed, ins/outs) relationship. On it, here's a favorite passage of mine in Fritz (GTV 17f): "If we are willing to stay in the center of our world,...we are ambidextrous--we see the two poles of every event....If there is a *super*ego, there must also be an *infra*ego. Freud did half the job. He saw the topdog, the superego, but he left out the underdog which is just as much a personality as the topdog....The topdog usually is righteous and authoritarian; he knows best. He is sometimes right, but always righteous. The topdog is a bully, and...manipulates with demands and threats of catastrophe....The underdog manipulates with being defensive, apologetic, wheedling, playing the cry-baby, and such. The underdog has no power. The underdog is the Mickey Mouse. The topdog is the Supermouse. ...Like every parent and child, they strive for control." In self (& society), "this is the basis for the famous self-torture game." If the game is "cursed with perfectionism, then you are absolutely sunk," because the other (whether top or bottom) can never live up to this "ideal," for "the essence of the ideal is that it is impossible, unobtainable, just a good opportunity to control," to do a utopian power-grab. (Yeltsin: The U.S.S.R. "suffered from 70 years of utopianism.")

Why is prejudice so important in topdog/underdog power-struggles (in racism, sexism, classism, nationalism, et al)? Because power resides more in opinions than in either thought or imagination.

One piece of the current American white/black anguish is the resistance of both to fess up to their baleful contributions to making the mass black condition such a mess. Each dog is afraid that confession will relieve the other dog of necessary therapeutic pressures. Further complicating the unreality game is feel-good: blacks feel good about asking whites to repent of racism, whites feel good about asking blacks to "return to family values." The law of the spiritual-moral world is inexorable: no confession, no forgiveness, no renewal of life, so no hope.

So the answer to Rodney King's question "Can't we all get along?" is "No. Not till there's more confessional reality on both sides. Unreality permits only superficial, bandaid togetherness." (Perotmania is driven by the public's hunger for reality in public discourse. As a master salesman, P. exudes reality whether or not what he's selling can bear the weight of his sales-pitch.)

(2) **OPEN UP** is the second condition for racism to go away. I visited Amerind schools where children were eager to prepare themselves to participate in the general American society. What happened? After graduation, they found that the general society would not open up to them, would not give them jobs. So they returned to the reservations & took to the bottle, closing the white vicious circle of accusation that "Indians are lazy." Truth: They are distinctly not lazy when given opportunity to create their own businesses, though they need guidance in business management. Do Indians, too, have to open up if racism against them is to disappear? Yes: many white employers have told me their Amerind employees have low achievement-motivation, low-to-poor work-records, & are in need of consumer ed. But the greater challenge to open up is on the side of the general society. Except for the steeplejack trade, our society has been largely closed to our Native Americans.

(3) **STEP UP** is the third condition for racism to go away. Underdogs must step up before they can step off into the general society, as you must go up the steps in an elevatorless building in order to walk on the next floor up. Happiness, self-esteem, & even most freedoms are fringe benefits from personal & group self-discipline. I consider it tragic & ominous that some groups, some "races," are engendering in their young not so much self-&-group discipline as self-&-group affirmation--not so much doing well as feeling good about themselves & their ethnos. Bilingualism helps children step in (into their ethnos), not step up (into the general society). Ditto for multiculturalism in general, bilingualism being only one expression of it. Affirmation is cheap & easy, discipline is expensive (in caring, carefulness, & sacrifice) & hard.

Well, does racism disappear when underdogs discipline themselves & step up? Not in a closed society, whose doors are closed to underdogs who do step up: you go upstairs only if you believe the next floor will be open to your walking around. The 1960s civil-&-human rights legislation opened doors on the upper floors, & increasing numbers of "minorites" have been stepping up to step out & in. These achievers are encountering some, but ever less, prejudice. For them, racism is gradually going away.

It's good & bad that conformity is the cost of entry. Check your prejudices at the door, & learn the "majority" processes, which have been & decreasingly are white-male. Many who want to step up resent this conformity requirement (Mandela has a raging hatred of it). If the resentment is strong enough, the person is second-level unassimilable. (First-level unassimilability is unpreparedness for general-society jobs even when they open up.)

8 Two groups in America, the Amerinds & the African-Americans, tragically must face some majority negative feelings other outsiders-to-the-general-society need not face. And because of their greater subjugation (the former from having been moved in on, the latter from having been dragged here), they had some negative feelings to overcome that the other "minorities" have not & do not have. They cannot be helped, but only further hurt, by liberal paternalism within the majority. The stronger the white sense of guilt & shame vis-a-vis these two groups, the greater the temptation to unwittingly hurt them this way.

9 Lenin's warning against Russian domination in the U.S.S.R. failed. Said he, don't oppress the minorities, as the Czarist empire did, or one day they'll destroy our Communist union. Lincoln (1858) said the same of our union, the U.S.A.: After "dehumanizing the Negro,...are you quite sure that the demon you have roused will not turn and rend you?"....The nonRussian nationalities have now torn up the U.S.S.R. The Amerinds are in no position to "rend" the U.S.A. But are the African-Americans?