

Dear reader: This assumes you've read #3079.

some have martyrdom thrust upon them

1 What put the coup de grace on Jim Crow was the 1963 bomb-deaths of four African-American girls in Sunday school (for which the 1st bomber to go to prison went there this week, 2001!). They weren't born martyrs. They didn't achieve martyrdom. They had martyrdom thrust upon them: nothing personal (indeed, much of the crime's horror was due to its impersonality). The decisive antiracist Federal legislation came in the subsequent two years. Consider that the deaths (martyrdoms?) of three men--JFK, MLK Jr, & RK--were not as psychopolitically efficacious, vis-a-vis Federal legislation, as the deaths (3rd-class martyrdoms) of those four girls. The political deaths of the absolutely innocent touch the heart with unique pathetic power. It's a strand in the hawser of christology: Jesus was innocent of sin toward God or ill-will toward humanity. Further: in the plan of God he was born for martyrdom, achieved martyrdom (by his persistent confronting of the powers that be--commercial, religious, political), & had martyrdom thrust upon him.

2 The model for this Thinksheet's three classes of martyrdom is the quote (above) from Malvolio (Ital., "ill will"), a pompous ass whom Shakespeare satirizes for excessive self-esteem (a vice that currently America's public schools are using as a virtue-term). M.'s motivation is complex. Like the rest of us animal males, he wants to impress his female (so "that my lady loves me"). And there's a streak of idealist in this egoist: he speaks up for the abused, has the courage to state unpopular political positions, & isn't afraid to stand alone when conviction bids him do so. But he can't get greatness, his greatness, out of his head--as some folks can't get out of their heads that they are martyrs (Freudians say they have a "martyr complex," the sickest of them believing they were born martyrs [1st class]).

The Shakespeare quote? It popped into my head as in memory I heard my Skakespeare-quoting father say it. Dad believed that greatness was almost entirely a matter of courageous integrity, for which time & again he paid a high price but never, as far as I know, thought of himself as a martyr. For him, the order of priority was (1) what God thought of him, (2) what he thought of himself, (3) what his family thought of him, & (4) what the world (public opinion, including that of his power-superiors) thought of him. As we his family saw him, he had martyrdom thrust upon him in the sense that for personal advantage & power survival he would not compromise on truth & honor: he was a martyr 3rd class. But in that he could have shaved it, prevaricated, dissimulated, his martyrdom was achieved: he was a martyr 2nd class. Elijah (1K.19.4 TANAKH) said "I am no better than my fathers" (TEV, NIV, NRSV "ancestors"). I am no better than my father (& not as good at quoting Shakespeare, or at oratory).

3 On our window-diagram, the horizontals distinguish between individual martyrs & groups who are martyred. Encarta 2001 names the four girls martyred 9.16.63 in Alabama, so they're in the top horizontal; but since they were killed as members of a group, viz. African-Americans, they're in the bottom horizontal also. As for the verticals, in which are they? Since they were not aware of taking any risk in going to Sunday school that Sunday, they are in the right-hand vertical. Conclusion, they are BD (ie, unconscious individual-&-group martyrs).

But since the primary meaning of "martyr" is somebody killed for a cause which he/she was, knowing the risk, publicly espousing at the time of death, the four girls were not martyrs in the primary, 2nd-class sense. But since they were killed for a cause, though being unconscious of the particular risk they were taking that day in going to Sunday school, they were martyrs. Let's call them secondary, 3rd-class martyrs.

	risk	
	conscious	unconscious
individual	A	B
collective	C	D

(ie, unconscious individual-&-group martyrs)

4 A corpse is an ontological reality, but "martyr" is a sociolinguistic construct applied to a particular corpse-person: "martyr" is what some dead are called by some people, viz. people who admire them, celebrate them, & preserve their memory. And since "martyr" is an honorable social role promotive of a cause, some aspire to martyrdom (a phenomenon perplexing & exasperating ancient Roman authorities confronted by such Christians). Right now, some Egyptian youth, girls as well as boys, having seen a movie romanticizing the Palestinian suicide-bombers, are saying "I want to go to Palestine and die for our brothers and sisters." These wannabes sadden us, their intention seeming to us not only pathetic but also evil. But are they unwise? Fools? Only if there's no audience to call them wise in their would-be martyrdom. And such **audience** there indeed is: virtually the whole Arab world, & much of the Muslim world beyond the Arabs. When you are dead, will you be called by any title of social significance? They will be. They will be called martyrs. And they have a double consciousness as individuals (**A**) & as a group (**B**): (1) they are conscious beyond risk, conscious that death will be certain if they carry out their intention; & (2) conscious of the social fact that after death they will be called martyrs. (A WWII parallel: the kamikazi pilots.)

5 The full meaning of the Gk. for "martyr" is someone who persists in some particular witness to the point of anticipated death. That includes thousands of Christians now being killed for persisting in their faith (refusing to convert to Islam) in the Sudan, Nigeria, & some places less in the news. *Broadly*, Gk. users meant "anyone who can or should testify to anything" (eg, Ro.1.9: "God is my witness"); "witnessing by eye and ear" (eg, Heb.12.1); "witnesses who bear a divine message" (eg, Ac.1.8: Jesus' disciples as "my witnesses"). *Legally*, court witnesses & signatories to legal documents (eg, Mt.26.65). *Narrowly*, Christians killed for refusing to cease witnessing to/for Jesus (eg, Rev.11.3-8)--a meaning narrow in specifying a small class of testifiers, but extended in consequentiality ("martyring" [witnessing] extended to include death). *Sympathetically*, "martyr" came to be loosely used for (1) those willing to suffer **faith-based death** (yes, a neologism), & perhaps facing it, but not having undergone it (the Greeks even neologized for it: "protomartyr"; in the Apostolic Fathers, Hermas' SIMILITUDES 9.28, the distinction between "martyrs" (as "perfected," "sealed" by death) & "confessors" was not yet sharp: 425 W.H.C.Frend, MARTYRDOM AND PERSECUTION IN THE EARLY CHURCH [Doubleday/67]); (2) those not saying anything but being something (eg, gypsies, homosexuals, & Jews in Hitler's Konzentrationslagen [death-camps]); (3) those not saying anything but doing something (eg, my teacher Samuel Zwemer, founder of modern Christian missions to Arabs, for passing out tracts in Cairo; or, right now, eight Christians facing possible execution in Afghanistan for showing [in private!] a film on Jesus; & (4) those not saying anything but refusing to do something (eg, sign a draft card: our son Mark had too high a number ever to be drafted, but went to his draft board & gave all information but refused to sign, "to put a pinch of incense on Caesar's altar" [as Marvin Karparkin, a Jew & the Vietnam era's most prominent defender of Vietnam refusers, said in defending him in Federal Court, where the great African-American judge Constance Baker Motley agreed that government does not have the right to force a citizen's signature--a principle established by that trial--though Mark suffered various legal onslaughts from his objecting only to the Vietnam war & not to war in general, neither he nor his family would call him a martyr: but his Jewish lawyer analogized to early Christian persecution, & his action-refusal "witness" has had a continuing beneficent public effect])).

6 I promised "sometime" (the last wd. in #3079) to say more about "martyr"--master Donald Wayne Riddle, who did a doctorate in Germany right after WWI & became a memorable teacher of mine in '41, a decade after the U. of Chicago Press published his THE MARTYRS: A STUDY IN SOCIAL CONTROL. He sociologized martyrdom before the Freudians psychologized it. He was himself martyrial in his walk-your-talk integrity, & he despised pastors he knew in Germany who learned "the higher criticism" & refused to let it influence their preaching, becoming submissive to Hitler. But when his marriage went on the rocks, so did his faith. I remember his twitching mustache as in his last class session he said "Gentlemen, that is all I have to say"--& left religion teaching for good, becoming a professor of English.