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SHALOM AS DREAM, DELIVERANCE, DESIGN, & DENOUEMENT

HOW POWER FUNCTIONS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE & PEACE

As I write this, two Christian armies are killing each other in Lebanon. I hate war, esp. when we (some Christians) are killing us (other Christians). Are we about to witness the Lebanonization of the USSR (situation B on this grid)? Gorby's victory yesterday renders Tiananmenization (situation D) impossible... This Thinksheet has one eye on the present global political dynamism, at the highest pitch since WW2, the second eye on AD/CE 66 Jerusalem (situation B) for what lessons it may yield for the world today as well as for what we may learn, in our context, about the matrix of rabbinic Judaism & Christianity, & the third eye (see under "Hinduism") on our Craigville Colloquy VII theme ("Good News & Good Works"), whose subtitle is the Thinksheet's first line.

1. Sit. A signals all the goodies in this Thinksheet's second line, as does the Hebrew word opening it. I recall the titles, prescient of today, of two old anti-communist books: THE DREAM THAT FAILED & THE GOD THAT FAILED. Shalom, we Jews & Christians believe, is a dream (1) that has not succeeded & (2) will not fail. We participate in designing it (dream & design in reciprocal relationship), but its denouement is not in our hands. Call it total peace & prosperity, or "liberty & justice for all": who does not yearn for it, & is not such yearning, prayer? (And is not walking in the Presence a receiving of it as earnest, the partcome anticipating the fullcome?) And is it not, here & now & always & everywhere,....

2....deliverance? Instead of being creation, shalom is new creation. Four evenings ago I was startled to see-hear (on McNeil-Lehrer) the editor of IZVESTIA say "If you believe the Bible, you know that chaos precedes creation [on the grid, BA]. In this light, the situation in eastern Europe is hopeful." God intends shalom out of every chaos, but often the event is C (destruction) followed by D (oppression, the pendulous swing from anarchy to tyranny). Deliverance is the central theme of both Testaments--from enemies, sin, death, Satan, suffering, chaos, destruction, oppression; deliverance of a people, of peoples, of persons. The Hebrew root ys^hr & the Greek root $\sigma\omega\zeta$ provide almost all the Bible's instances of "deliverance" & "salvation," both roots meaning both. Justification is the juridical description of how, by grace through faith, God delivers-saves us.

This deliverance-salvation-justification is always to as well as from. It's always linked with covenant, obligation, duty, responsibility, accountability, & thus with justice. Philip B. Harner (GRACE AND LAW IN SECOND ISAIAH: "I Am the Lord" [Edwin Mellen Press/88]) shows--in the OT's use, in the mouth of God, of the ancient Near East's royal formula "I am..."--just how close are deliverance/obligation, grace/law. Thirty of the 160 instances are in 2Is. We are delivered (from foreign enemies, et al) in order that we "do justice," do covenant, take up the responsibilities of our enlarged space (this being the image in the Heb. root). "Good news" is unto "good works."....We all pray that the good news of enlarged freedoms in the crumbling Soviet empire, in S.Africa, & elsewhere will lead to the good works of eco-political stability & social health, "that the word of the Lord may run & prosper."

3. The grid's left side shows the two forms of stability, with freedom (A) & without it (D). Without stability, society shrivels, life's normal processes slow toward death (as in the physical body's "shutting down"); but without freedom, the soul shrivels. Between this rock & this hard place, if you were Lebanese right now you'd probably figure you could get along without freedom for a spell--but if you were one of those Chinese students who survived Tiananmen Sq.? Or if you were a liberationist Jerusalemite in AD/CE 66, would you not have regretted it four years later, with less freedom than you had before 70 (all self-government denied you, your city in ruins, your temple leveled)? Liberationism is heady stuff: "Give me liberty or give me death." But there are very few Patrick Henrys; almost everybody finds oppression tolerable in comparison with threatened destruction: almost everybody's conservative. Radicals believe risk toward freedom is preferable to living under oppression, & they sometimes succeed in tipping the populace into disorder, law-disobedience, uprising--as so often in eastern Europe the past four months.

In situations A & D, power is stable, firm, reliable, established (under an "establishment," a power elite, whose base is secure, so that law & order are reciprocal, ie "lawncorder" [as it was snidely called by '60s rebels]). The difference? In sit. A, the people are calm & content; in D, outwardly calm, inwardly seething, inflammable, short-fuse. Again: In A, power is in the hands of a benevolent elite (aristocratic, plutocratic, meritocratic), a benevolent democracy or republic (responsive to the claims & pains of all groups), or God (indirect: hierocracy; direct, God). Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Paul are rich studies in A-type power. David, history's only Hebrew-Israelite-Jewish empire-builder, is an example also of D-type power, but on a small scale in comparison with Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, China, Europe (17th-20th cs.), Japan, the USA.

4. The grid's right side shows the two precarious forms of power, B with freedomless liberty (a low-grade power-vacuum) & C with devastation (a high-grade power-vacuum). As D is order without freedom, B is freedom without order (Judges 17⁶) & C is an abyss without either order or freedom.

5. History testifies to many movements among these power possibilities. In §2 I mention BA. You can think of examples of AB, BC, BCD, BD, AD, CA, CD, DB,....

6. BCD happened to Jerusalem in the short period AD/CE 66-70. An/epigraphic evidence for the tragedy, & our hermeneutic refinements, are making what happened considerably less dim. I'll tell the story, best as I now can, for the two purposes I mention in this Thinksheet's introduction.

(1) First-century Palestine was a hot stew of everything, cultural-religious-political, then available in the Mediterranean & Near Eastern worlds. You name it, they had it. All through my 55 years of studying that time & place there's been a steady upgrading, in scholarly opinion, as to the complexity of the world in which Jesus & Christianity were born & Judaism took essentially its present shape. The empire ruled Palestine from, in order, Rome, Damascus, Maritime Caesarea, Jerusalem.

(2) Like most empires before & since, Rome ruled as indirectly as feasible for the goals of (1) taxation & (2) tranquility--always through identifying & further empowering each territory's ruling elite or, where necessary, creating such (as the Nazis the Quisling government in Norway, & the USA, Noriega in Panama).

(3) According to Martin Goodman (p.25 of THE RULING CLASS OF JUDAEA: THE ORIGINS OF THE JEWISH REVOLT AGAINST ROME A.D.66-70 [Cambridge UP/87]), the trigger for the tragedy was a power struggle within Judaea's ruling class. In terms of our grid, power moved from left (stable) to right (precarious), where it moved from top (chaos) to bottom (destruction).

(4) Before this disintegration, revolt, & crushing, Palestine was a fairly peaceful & very creative pluralistic culture, religions east & west jostling & stimulating each other. We used to think that Hellenistic Judaism, the soil of Christianity, was almost entirely a diaspora (nonPalestinian) reality. It's now clear that pagan influences in Palestine itself impacted Judaism's range of sects from what I may call fundamentalist to modernist. Item: Jerusalem's Pool of Bethzatha had a corner for the worship of Asclepios-Serapis, the conflate healing god (west, A.; east, S.): who was moving that water (Jn.5^{3b-4}KJV)? That was a proto-world for our pluralism, which accordingly the NT well fits.

(5) Jerusalem's squabbling elites (a) fed radical hopes (eg Jesus & the Zealots) & (b) made Rome nervous: would the eastern threats (esp. Parthians & Sythians) intensify, perhaps allying themselves with Palestinian radicals? would the eastern frontiers crumble?....Was Jesus de/stabilizing? We can't say. His activities were premised on God's inbreaking Kingdom, so on balance could have encouraged more patience (quietism) or more impatience (zealotry).

(6) Herod had dismantled the religious (chiefly temple) power-base of the Jews, so Rome had no natural elite (the Jews, unlike other peoples, having no elite based on birth or wealth). In the power-&-authority vacuum, many upstart messiahs.

(7) When in response to the riots of 66 the Romans bypassed the would-be elites, the latter threw in their lot with the rioters: the riots became the revolt, the would-be revolution. Jerusalem became a pagan city, Julia Capitolina.