ON BEING A SUBJECT PEOPLE

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ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS
309 L.Eliz.Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone 617.775.8008
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This Thinksheet is to convert a widespreach current assumption into a question: If you personally are one of a presently subject people, is it automatically God's will that you struggle to ascend out of your subjection? To put the question from another angle, Is it perhaps God's will that, instead of trying to throw off what you call the "yoke of oppression" etc etc, you attend rather to making the most of your situation, "redeeming the time" for the glory of God & the good of all?

1. Expect the Bible to say on this, as on so many other matters we call socio- & eco-political, yes/no. Jeremiah, a passive liberation theologian, preached against the active liberation theologians (chap.29), who called Jer. a "madman" who should be "placed in chains with an iron collar around his neck" for preaching that the Jews dragged to Babylon "would be prisoners there a long time and should build houses, settle down, plant gardens, and eat what they grow." But the Lord both (passively) "allowed" the captivity (v.4) & (actively, v.14) "sent...(them) into exile." Indeed, God says to the captives (vv.4-7), "Build...plant...eat...marry... have children...let your children get married, so that they also may have children....Work for the good of the cities where I have made you go as prisoners. Pray to me on their behalf, because if they are prosperous, you will be prosperous too." A flawed but not entirely implausible & untrue generalization from this is that God wants you, if one of a subject people, to bless, not curse, your oppressor (cf. your persecutor, passim in NT; cf. also the political-quietistic passages in NT, eg Ro.13).

2. The wider truth is that God wants us (as I suggest in the intro) to make the best of our situation (Sitz in Leben) whatever it is: freedom/subjection, prosperity/adversity, et al. As a Quaker hymn has it: "For not with swords' loud clashing,/Nor roll of stirring drums,/With deeds of love & mercy/The heavenly Kingdom comes."

3. Elevated to a philosophy, such quietism is counterrevolutionary: "the powers that be" would have commandeered not only all the machinery of riot-control but also all the arguments, even God! I agree with Jefferson (and ! the National Rifle Association ?) that the people should retain the means of revolution, for there's nothing so refreshing as a good revolution when the situation calls for it.

4. Which brings us, in each situation of destabilizing political confrontation, to the question, Does this situation call for revolution, we subject people to tilt the scale toward further destabilization with the aim of toppling the government to which we see ourselves as unjustly, oppressively, subject? Or should we go nonpolitical, attending to other business? Or should we lend our weight to the peace-&-order side of the psychopolitical scale? If the answer to the first question is yes, then this: Should we fight for what we see as our freedom nonviolently, violently, or both?

5. Recall that this Thinksheet aims at nothing more than converting an assumption into a question, or series of questions. Here are a few items to irritate/stimulate your further thinking: (1) When a subject people is so crushed as to cease to dream of revolt, that people is (ironically) free in these senses: (a) Free from that dream, which historically has produced more blood than political sovereignty; and (b) Free to pursue "the things of peace."...(2) Instances: My people the Scots, who for the past 2½ cs. have not revolted against the English; the Japanese & Germans West & East, since WWII....(3) King was right in feeding the dream of revolt, but is Tutu?....(4) Is political autonomy (eg, West-Bank-&-Gaza Palestinians) necessary to a people's dignity?....(5) Should embattled peoples (eg, Lebanon,N.Ireland, Central Am.) accept empire?