

INTEGRATION (ASSIMILATION)OR TRANSFORMATION (REVOLUTION)?

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For supper this evening we are to have a brilliant, impeccably trained young biblical scholar who for more than two years has been seeking a teaching appointment. The fact that he's Jewish is, thank God, no longer a significant impediment. What's wrong is that he's not female Jewish (formerly a.k.a. "Jewess") or black Jewish. As a WM (while male), he's out in the quotaless wilderness: educationally he's unassimilable, a victim of double reverse discrimination....In many ways the present American society is doing what it can to hold back white males so as to give members of other cohorts opportunities to become assimilated into "the System," whose jobs are zero sum for most purposes.

The Aug/Sept/90 SOJOURNERS issue, "What's Wrong With Integration?," does not complain of this injustice. Rather, Jim Wallis & co. are attacking, as inadequate & counterrevolutionary, the very idea of integration-assimilation. If the system is (some degree of) hell, nobody should want to be integrated into hell. And that the System is more or less hell is a premise, in most cases the premise, of revolutionary publications, of which SOJOURNERS in an evangelical instance.

Now, "Some people are never satisfied" is applicable to every Christian taking the Lord's Prayer seriously: "YOUR kingdom come [replacing ours, our System]...." But "between the times," between now and the Reign-Rule-Kingdom of God, we're to use our intelligence both compassionately & fairly. Under that criterion, let's look further at this issue of SOJOURNERS....

1 Now 1/3rd c. old, the Movement (King Jr. et al, including some big chunks of my time, entirely unregretted), continues as a dream undead, unexploded, &--if the underlying aim was integration-assimilation--largely unfulfilled. The morning the Homestead Act took effect, some men rode-drove faster-harder & soon had staked the prize acreage: **freedom breeds inequality**, God having given human beings vastly different degrees of energy & smarts (intelligence, savvy). The civil-rights legislation of 1964-8 opened our society to high-energy/high-smarts blacks, so we now have a black middle-class as insensitive to the black lower/under classes as has always been true in the case of our white middle-class vis-a-vis the white lower/under classes. Nothing's new here, nothing new was to be expected--so why complain? (What I'm saying about blacks applies, only less dramatically, to other nonwhite cohorts in American society.)

2 Behind "Why complain?" is the question "What complain against?" Predictably, our SOJOURNERS issue answers, the System. The System opened to black greed, creating the black middle-class & leaving the black masses worse off than before. The System--so the accusation goes--failed to transform itself into an **egalitarian** society. But the accusation is pathetically naive. We know (1) what it takes to create an egalitarian society (viz, the virtual elimination of freedom) & (2) that the Second (ie, communist) World has exploded trying. (Lorraine Hansberry's question "What happens when a dream dies?" has been answered: "...or does it explode?")

3 To what extent, if at all, in black/white relations, is the USA experience a model for the Republic of **South Africa**? (1) Our integration woes, the failure of integration as goal, suggest that integration won't work in the RSA. In neither nation does the minority--blacks here, whites there--want to integrate into the majority culture. (2) In African-America's present efforts to define & structure the optimal separation (voluntary "apartheid," to use the Afrikaans' word), the RSA's black majority may find some guidance--true of the white minority, should a black government come to power. (3) As they work to create black institutions appropriate to the total black situation in the USA, American blacks are protected, by one-person-one-vote, from leaders who would urge them to seize control of the country. RSA blacks are not free from the cajolings of such aspirers (who hope to come to power through one-person-one-vote or revolution). (4) Marxism never got far among African-Americans, never fared well: can it among RSA blacks (Mandela the socialist having addressed a Communist Party rally of 40,000 in Soweto)? (5) In either country--sad to say--a nonracial, "colorblind" (MLKing Jr) society is a utopian dream & may even be undesirable (is so, if one follows the logic of the blacks in this issue of

SOJOURNERS). (6) USA blacks are rapidly developing prophets, internal critics preaching that African-Americans (1) are themselves responsible for many of their woes & (2) have it in their power, & therefore responsibility, to shape up for worthy participation in the pluralistic democracy of enclaves that America is fast becoming. So far, this self-accusative breast-beating seems hardly to have begun in the RSA (Tutu, eg, excusing adulterer Boesak: "There are worst sins"). (7) Ominously, RSA blacks are beginning to repeat the African-American experience of upward-mobility brain-drain, a black middle-class developing at the expense of all the blacks who've not found ceiling-holes to crawl up through. Are the few forerunners, or only escapees--in the USA? in the RSA? (8) In any country, holes in the ceiling of involuntary apartheid have an antirevolutionary effect: many escape upward who, with their high energy & ability, were potential revolutionaries. In the USA, this released enough pressure to stem the black threat to the System. This will probably be true also in the RSA in spite of the reverse black/white %. (9) What happened in the USA is happening in the RSA: the laws are becoming more fair fast enough to ward off massive violence against the System. (10) In both countries the argument is fierce as to whether the European mind/culture/law/politics/economics/police/military (=, if you please, "the System") can maintain itself against (here) cultural pluralism & (there) the black African mind/culture/politics. Besides, in the RSA, whites are a diminishing minority; in the USA, a diminishing majority (to enter minority status ca.2010?). (11) Salman Rushdie's THE SATANIC VERSES is about the Anglicanization of two men of India: integration's price, viz some alienation from one's mother-culture, may not be too great a price to pay. In both the USA & the RSA the flow of blacks into integration (Euramericanization for African-Americans, Europeanization for RSA blacks) is swelling. It's not the kingdom of God, but in my opinion it's better than the alternatives. (12) In both countries, we Europeans imposed on the natives (Amerinds in the USA, Hotentots in the RSA) our way of life, & aren't about to surrender our dominance. As to blacks, however, the RSA history is more moral than our USA history: blacks drifted southward through Hotentot territory, then multitudes of them came for white-created jobs; but almost all the blacks in the USA are descendants of blacks we dragged here, a both-ends shame almost impossible to recover from.

4 A personal parable on the question that forms this Thinksheet's title. We're sort of glad to have a black family living directly across the street from us. Why only "sort of"? Only because their lifestyle is noisier than that of the rest of us on the street: we all are careful not to disturb one another with unnecessary noises & unnecessarily loud noises. Before "they" moved in, we could have a quiet meal on our porches & enjoy birdsongs & rustling leaves. We're all glad to have them "integrate" the street, & also that they can't afford to buy the house. Some (not I) have tried to quiet them down, to get them to conform to our decibel-level; but is that "oppression"? I have good relations with them--lending them garden tools (they always promptly return), inviting them to worship, taking them vegetables from our garden, & flowers from our garden when they moved in; & I'm sheepishly glad they can't afford to buy the place....Rising black voices, as in this SOJOURNERS, are rightly claiming for blacks the ethnic space we enjoyed on our street before the black family moved in. (If three or four black families with their boom boxes & loud talking-laughing-shouting moved in, I'd be dreaming of joining "white flight.") Once I had a bad conscience about this attitude of mine. I'm thankful that some black thinkers are now (albeit indirectly) giving me permission to feel as I do. I like my way of life & want to preserve it against intrusions by other ways of life. But this territoriality must be severely restricted, in my opinion, to one's immediate area of residence--should not, eg, include one's golf club! God sets limits to my territory (Ac.17:26, transposed from ethnic to personal reference)....Am I for "open housing"? Of course I am, actively: I believe in freedom & diversity. How can I reconcile this with my desire for my own ethnic space? It can't be reconciled. I live in the contradiction. Living this & many other contradictions is good for damage control: I do less damage than if I were to resolve the contradiction in either direction.

5 What if, instead of being lower-class black, our neighbors were "post-black" (ie,

integrated (into white society, like Bill Cosby's Huxtable family?). No problem, they'd want peace & quiet just as we do! The whole street would be as King Jr wanted them to be, viz colorblind. The problem is more class than race, of course: some scholars are now denying the existence of "race" as an objective entity....I object to the pejorative term "post-black." Nobody with childhood memories is ever entirely "post" the maternal-paternal culture. Integrated black neighbors, as bicultural, would add to the street's human riches. They might or might not continue to practice their ethnicity (negritude) in a black church or other black institution, not losing touch--we all would hope--with the black community at all its socioeconomic levels.

6 STAGES: (1) 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court decides on "separate but equal"; (2) 23 June 53, the NAACP rejects that apartheid & strikes forth for integration, a doctrine (3) the Court (the next year) agreed with, saying in "Brown" that separate cannot be equal; (4), now, 36 years later, a consensus is emerging (witness this SO-JOURNERS) that what's needed is a **better version of separate but equal**, the vast difference from the first version being that the separating, the apartheid of minorities in their enclaves, should be entirely their own doing, not from any social or legal pressures of the general society. "Apartheid is just if you like it that way, if that's the way you choose to live," is the way I put it to begin #2408 ("Justice for Blacks: Should They Choose Apartheid?").....One may put the STAGES in coercion terms:

(1) Forced separation (Jim Crow, apartheid), which doesn't work; (2) Forced integration (busing, affirmative action), which works only to the extent that it furthers assimilation of a few; (3) Freedom in the form of equal access to the general societal opportunities + noninterference with an ethnic group's formation of its own institutions amenable to the laws of the land.

7 Those laws should include (1) equal access, not superior access (quotas, affirmative action) or inferior access (eg, "Whites Only" hiring), and (2) English as the official language (so no bilingual education). For these convictions, Linda Chavez was censored by the president of the U. of N.Colo. from giving the commencement address this spring: she didn't fit the "Hispanic" stereotype, it was discovered after she was invited. Students demonstrating against her called her a traitor to her cohort, her social category, "the revolution," & a dupe integrated-assimilated into "the System." But if schools are so assimilated to popular anti-intellectualism & (no contradiction!) bookish revolutionism, where shall we look in our society for free speech, the free mind, the person of courageous integrity, the self-directed citizen who tries to be a God-directed human being? Unless, in our enclavizing, we allow for & honor the enclave-independent thinker-speaker-doer, our pluralism will become a network of polarizations parallel with Beirut & Northern Ireland. So this § is two cheers for the authentic **individual** against all classes & masses.

8 **Democratic socialism** is now the most heard phrase among liberals for what should come next East & West, North & South. Time will tell whether its more than what it is on the surface, viz an oxymoron. Democracy lets people decide, but when did they ever decide to "do the right thing" by everybody? So socialism states what everybody needs & uses power to try to see that everybody gets it. Gorby is still saying "To each according to one's need," & Boris Yeltsin has changed the last word in the old communist slogan to "output." The certain road to economic stagnation & misery is to guarantee everyone employment, housing, food, clothing: the certain road to political collapse is for a government to fail to use its power on the side of forces furthering the meeting of these basic human needs. Let not the softheaded lead us down the first road, nor the hardhearted down the second. (Most of what I read is by the former, so I'm madder at them.)

9 In the present fluid majority/minorities situation, esp. white/black, debaters nuance the lexicon to locate themselves: community/individual, de- re- segregation, integration, assimilation, transformation, revolution, freedom/justice, race/ethnicity/class/power, identity, solidarity, vision, morality, ideology, risk/safetynet, capital, motivation, conflict/cooperation, cognitive/emotive dissonances, competing values, ambivalence, culture-specific / common-cultural, self-determination to self-governance to self-respect (=democracy), new models for the black church (self-in-community-in-society), self-segregation for spiritual autonomy, spiritual-moral vision as black cultural birthright sacrificed to individualism, need for black spiritual renaissance.