

It's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. His "Dream" speech was on equality; his Nobel Prize speech (11 Dec 64) was on non-violence, his method of moving toward equality.

**Physical** violence, which his religion eschewed, directly disrupts public order, domestic-or-international tranquility: **political** violence, which his religion embraced, indirectly, by violating laws he justly considered unjust, occasioned physical violence & chaos-threatening massive disobedience to "the laws of the land." Jim Crow was caught in the pincers of that "in/directly." Thank God!

This Thinksheet is, as its Title's underlinings show, mainly about religion as a depressant of violence. Only mainly: religion-inspired fanaticism continues its history-long bloody trail: just now in the USA our attention is focused on rising anti-abortion violence & the trial of the Muslim World Trade Center bombers. Let's see....

1 Jesus was King's personal Lord, Gandhi was his political Model: a power threat (of chaos) to the establishment, a power (empowerment) promise to the unestablished (the neutral term for all in India other than the Raj). Gandhi & King were clever unofficial power-manipulators in fruitful confrontation with, & their people's partial relief from, official power-manipulators. Both used religion as both a violence-incentive threat & as a violence-depressant promise. "Nonviolence," meaning nonviolent resistance, was the code word for both. And both claimed Jesus as a support for their political creed.

And both were more wrong than right about Jesus, who wasn't into power manipulation but into trusting the Power of God ("the difference between a 'good cause' and faith in God, as creator and redeemer," as Brevard Childs puts it in criticizing Moltmann's "ideological bias" with its utopian "European romanticism" [410f, BIBLICAL THEOLOGY....: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE, Fortress/93]).

2 **Rhetorical moralizing** of the factors mentioned/implied in this Thinksheet's title should not obscure the underlying, nonrhetorical fact that depending on the situation, religion may be right/wrong (pro/anti-truth, pro/anti-humane) in inciting/depressing physical/political violence: "violence" is value-neutral ("swift and intense force," 1st meaning, RHD<sup>2</sup>; the other meanings have negative connotations). The NRSV of Mt.11.12 is ambivalent: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence [mg. Or "has been coming violently"], and the violent take it by force." (It's "a riddle to which we no longer have the key." [53, THE NEW ENGLISH BIBLE: COMPANION TO THE NT, A.E.Harvey, Ox/70].) NIV is positive: "forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." So Moffatt: "they are pressing into the Realm of heaven--these eager souls are storming it!" So Goodspeed: "taking the Kingdom of Heaven by storm and impetuously crowding into it." So REBmg: "has been forcing its way forward, and men of force are seizing it." The Vulg. gives the neg. slant (vb. *pator* suffer, undergo), which KJV followed; but the further a tr. from KJV, the greater the tendency to see the v.'s violence as something good. The Gk. vb. means to "apply force"; in Luke's parallel (16.16, NRSV), "everyone tries to enter it by force [mg. Or "everyone is strongly urged to enter it"]." We don't have enough context to know what Jesus meant; possibilities: (1) He's encouraged by the eagerness of his disciples, but worried about their impetuous overeagerness (my view); (2) He's observing the gathering stormclouds of opposition to his ministry. CONCLUSION: Jesus' ministry (as also King's) occasioned (not "caused") political & physical violence, which he was not surprised to find attendant upon the inbreaking of the kingdom of heaven/God. He forbade his disciples to use physical violence &, while having no program of political violence, modeled & encouraged confrontation with the authorities, secular & sacred--& so could not but be viewed by them as an insurrectionist, if not a revolutionary. In view of this conclusion, think about the assertions & implications of this Thinksheet's title.

3 Sometimes religion is an *unintentional* incentive to violence. On Cape Cod,

the most prominent radical Catholic antiabortionist reasons thus (I know from personal conversation, & otherwise): (1) The Pope says "Abortion is murder." (My saying the Pope is wrong here--overreading the commandment against murder to include the fetus, but [illogically] not a war-enemy: he's pacific, but not a pacifist--does not persuade him.) (2) Feticide is the murder of innocents. (3) Killing abortionists & their aides is not killing innocents: they're all guilty of fetal murder. The Pope's exegesis is abominable, the logic of the "abortion mill" killers is impeccable. As a depressant on this violence, Boston's Cardinal called for a moratorium on "pro-life" demonstrations in front of clinics; but NY's Cardinal said only if there's also a moratorium on "baby-killing" inside the clinics. PROBLEM: Antiabortion violence is effective: 200 clinics closed immediately after the two murders in Brookline, Mass., recently; & all across America finding a place to get an abortion is becoming more difficult. On Cape Cod, access has shrunk to 1 clinic 1 day per week. The reason the police/militia must repress "pro-life" violence is that "Violence will get you nowhere" is the reverse of the truth: government must repress where religion fails to depress, but also where religion un/wittingly incites violence.

4 In her syndicated S.F.CHRONICLE yesterday, Debra J. Saunders uses only one church, mine, to illustrate "Reverence for life is vanishing." A mother drowns her two chn., & the Rev. Donna Schaper said about Smith's sin & crime "There is a strange, cruel mercy in the act" in that "she couldn't care for her children" & didn't want to "make their lives permanently miserable." She says she was "not arguing for infanticide" but for "the plausibility of withdrawing maternal care" (& pushing the brats into a Newt orphanage?). (All qts. from D.S.) Again, the Rev. Chas. Heusner "persuaded the Browns [who subsequently suicided to save money, as they said, to "help many young people throughout the world and who, one day, may be able to help many more"] to leave their money to the church [UCC missions]." Two cheers for the 2nd Rev., 3 boos for the 1st. Two instances of religion as an *intentional* (the reverse of §3) incentive to violence, the 1st theoretical-casuistic & the 2nd direct (viz., euthanasic suicide: their encouraging pastor said they "were taking the high road to death"). Pro-lifers say (& I disagree) it's a slippery slope: a pro-death (i.e., pro-choice) church vis-a-vis abortion slippery-slopes down into euthanasia & even infanticide.

But on the + side, religion should, as pro-life (widest sense, the biosphere), help reduce excessive respect ("reverence") for human life. Officially, my church is absolutely (I'm only relatively) against war & capital punishment (which I'm for); & is for increasing human respect for nonhuman life & the global eco-support interlocking systems (which I'm for, & claim that a sustainable bio-balance requires both the reducing & the increasing). What's now called for, against the easy rhetorical absolutizing on all sides, is tough, & tough-minded, theological-&-political **nuancing**. But the theologians are too wedded to preaching (which tempts to loud-voice absolutes), & the politicians to polls (which tempt to loud-voice relatives). If the Word on this won't come from church or state, then whence? The sciences?

5 Now I've arrived at that last wd. in the Title: religion as a **depressant** on violence. E.g., in the nonviolent, internalized pacification of slaves by teaching them (1) submission, as unto God, & (2) "pie in the sky by-&-by when you die." Or in Bonhoeffer's pacifism before he joined a plot to assassinate Hitler. Or Quakers impeding (though unsuccessfully) the Am. Revolution. Instances, & many more, of religion wrongly (in my opinion) depressing violence.

But religion rightly depresses, by informing conscience (internal control) & supporting the state (external coercion), anti-human, anti-social **restraint** failures, acts in which desires burst their proper bounds. Let's get specific my usual way, viz. by biblical reference (2Cor.10.6 NRSV): "We are ready to punish every disobedience [*παράκοή* (*parakoé*)] when your obedience [*ἀκοή* (*akoé*)] hearkening] is complete." Paul's "ready" (Vulg. translit., "prompt") to use (RHD<sup>2</sup> "violence," 1st meaning) "swift and intense force" (here, neither physical nor political violence, but personal-&-communal discipline of miscreant members, in the form of demand for repentance from disobedience, otherwise ostracism). (Regular churches courts, as can be seen already in Mt., developed from direct-personal-apostolic correction.) The "punishment" (*ἐκ-δικ.* [*ek-dik.*] the re-establishment of violated order) is

anaphoric to what precedes in this chapter. Verbally, Paul punishes by "destroy[ing] arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and...tak[ing] every thought captive to obey Christ." So he "vindicates" (another tr. of the Gk. "ek-dik.") his gospel, the Good News of divine forgiveness & new life in & through the Lord Jesus Christ. His analogy is war (v.4f), "divine power to destroy strongholds...destroy...take captive...." His polemic threat of that kind of violence aims at depressing his opponents' kind of violence, viz. what he lumps as "disobedience" ("par-akoé," hearing & then rebelling against what was heard, yet claiming to be what in Protestantism is often termed "a member in good standing"--a severe problem now in the United Church of Christ, which is tolerant even of subverters of its foundations).

6 A culture's ground or root is its religion's vision/virtues/values, which it's a task of the particular religion to nurture & protect, so nurturing & protecting the culture, which reciprocates by supporting the religion. This symbiosis is normative; when it weakens, the culture becomes (as "the West" now is) moribund; when it dies, both the religion & the culture are in danger of death. So one should never be surprised that a religion acts to depress violence against itself & its twin culture: priest & king, though at other points apart, ally themselves against threats to "peace" (i.e., public tranquility) internal (prophets & other criminals) & external (foreign economic & military thrusts). For Christians, the most poignant instance is the Roman/Temple alliance that killed Jesus, who was viewed as a double threat, viz. to spiritual order (as a heretic/blasphemer) & political order (as an insurrectionist/revolutionary): politics & religion, state & church, joined to depress violence as each understood it. (British writer Ellis Peters wrote twenty mysteries in which church [an ex-Crusader, now monk] & state [the local sheriff] combine their smarts to solve crimes. PBS did a number of these for "Mystery!")

7 Media efforts to depress violence--e.g., the current PBS blitz "On Violence: A Call to Action"--have little or nothing to say about what we are learning much about in cultural anthropology, viz. the religion/culture symbiosis. But it's coming into some learned journals, & into a few solid books--e.g., CURING VIOLENCE, essays ed. by M.I. Wallace & T.H. Smith (Polebridge/94), which explores the interaction between desire & violence, & the interposition of **restraints**. The media avoid religion (as "controversial") & restraints (as "negative"), which confines them (as also academia) to interposing, between desire & violence, positive reinforcements for altruistic urges, diverting desire-energy from violence to "self-esteem"--building re-creation & creation (creativity).

Now, "depressant" (in our title) is a synonym for "restraint"--the metaphor of the first being confining by "pressing down," & of the second by "binding tight" (cp. Eng.n. "string"). Nobody wants to become (psycho-spiritually) depressed; chn. & adolescents don't want to be tied down. Our narcissist-hedonist time feels two Big Negatives here. But that does not excuse religion & culture for neglecting the depressing business of restricting-restraining violence in our hearts, homes, & streets.

8 A society can know when its restraints of violence are excessive: the people suffer from lack of freedom. And a society can know when its restraints are inadequate: the people suffer from fear of assault on persons & property. Our society today? The people are suffering from an excess of freedom (e.g., the recidivism freedom of released murderers) & a defect (insufficiency) of restraints on the disorderly. What's indicated, then, in addition to positive private-&-public motivators, is an increase in restraints on criminal/uncivil behavior. The chief impediment to implementing an adequate restraints system is **ideological individualism**, the philosophical/educational/legal-adversarial ground of our narcissist-hedonist time. E.g., ACLU has perfected the "abuse excuse" to get courts to go light on criminals, in the French mode of "To know all is to forgive all." And liberal religion blesses this the-accused-must-not-be-"victimized" attitude, as well as seeing massive groups (e.g., women) as "oppressed." Societal conditions must get worse before this ideology yields, but it began to weaken with the '94 elections.

9 Religion depresses violence by reducing unfairness by increasing one's will-

ingness to accept the reality of one's guilt instead of trying to pass it off on somebody else (so too with one's positive responsibilities). Lucy's evil intent shocks her brother, but we know Charlie will soon be scheming some sort of violence against her. The psychic & ethnic accumulation of just



grievances gets discharged, sooner or later, in some form of violence. The Christian doctrine of sin(guilt)/grace(forgiveness) through the atonement (God in Christ suffering for our sins) depresses violence by offering humanity positive relief from the burden of guilt, which one can then disown (be rid of) by owning (confessing).

10 Religion depresses violence by preaching love (whose ends are defeated by violence) & **counterviolence** (God's violence, "wrath," defeating the ends sought by human violence--Mt.10.28: "fear him"). "Amazing Grace" says of love, "grace my fears relieved," & of counterviolence, "'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear." Ecclesiastes ends (12.13f) with "Fear God, and keep his commandments....For God will bring every deed into judgment...." This wisdom teacher means to frighten us into obedience: no love, or "fear" weakened into "reverence," in the context. It's not wise not to be scared of God. But have I ever heard that note struck in a liberal-church sermon? Of course it's not on the pianoforte of secular education (the public schools & most higher education) or the media. Most American children are, by neglect, taught not to think of God; some are taught to love God; the smallest group are taught to love & fear God. But the experiential & historical order is the reverse, as shown four times in the great prayer of Tobit (chap.1): God "both punishes [so we are to fear him] and shows mercy [so we are to love him]."

11 Until it became its own worst enemy, rotting from within (as the U.S. now seems to be doing), the Roman was history's most successful empire at counterviolence. The highway system was built (as was ours, in Congress' motivation) to expedite military logistics, for the deployment of (RHD<sup>2</sup> again) "swift and intense force," which is the ideal of all para/military//police planning & action.

When Constantine took over the empire (A.D. 313), he--having become at least a political Christian, on the principle that if you can't lick 'em join 'em -- appointed a Christian tutor, Lactantius, for his son Crispus. Earlier, he'd appointed L. as a rhetor in a city--an office combining state prosecutor & spin doctor (a one-man media for government propaganda). As a pagan orator, he'd known how to use the Roman government's excellent counterviolence potential effectively to depress the people's violence potential, both private (violent crime) & public (insurrection).

But Lactantius (d. at about the time of the 1st ecumenical council, A.D.325 [Nicene Creed]) observed that pagan Rome's wrath was progressively failing to control violent crime & insurrections; & that in the Christians, God's wrath both sanctioned & subverted Rome's. As sporadic persecutions increased, Christians withstood Rome's wrath because of their greater fear of God's as well as because of their greater love of God than of the government. But the Christians wanted to believe in the **synergism** of the two wraths: "If you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the [Roman] authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore, one must be subject, not only because of [the government's] wrath but also because of [Christian] conscience [including fear lest one anger God]" (Ro.13.1-5 NRSV). By adopting Paul's synergism of the two wraths, Constantine slightly increased the empire's stability. And by appointing L. as his son's tutor, he sought dynastic consolidation of his policy.

As you might guess, our best document on the synergism was written by none other than L. himself: *De ira Dei* (Eng.tr. "A Treatise on the Anger of God," ANF 7.259-80), which Schaff (3.958) well describes: "The punitive justice of God necessarily follows from his abhorrence of evil, and is perfectly compatible with his goodness"; so live "that we may never have to face his wrath."

12 We're talking about "**restigmatizing**" teen pregnancy; should the church be trying to reterrorize vis-a-vis the wrath of God, as L. reinforced the social sanctions with cosmic threat? Can religion be a significant violence depressant without recovering the fear of God?