

## ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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What's "the great new fact of our time"? The phrase is from  $\frac{1}{2}$  c. ago & referred to *le bombe atomique*. Today's parallel: re-surgent tribalism in the wake of collapsed empires (British, French, Russian, [in a different sense] South African, &--earlier--German). In this Thinksheet I view the religions in tribal light, in hope of some new handles on problems old & new.

1 Gorbachev's current column deeply rues (1) the replacement of empires with regressive tribalism (or nationalism, which is tribalism writ large), & (2) the Cold War, which used up resources that could have been better used for the good of the world. "The roots of humanity's troubles lie very deep [in tribal prides & fears & hatreds]....What is needed are changes in consciousness, in relations between people, between nations, and in their attitudes toward nature."

2 What religions have sustained & now inflame the old tribalism-nationalisms? All of them! Naturally, for religion is the taproot of culture, & every tribe-nation is a culture (subculture, if viewed in wider context). Religion is pro-community (ascetic deviants excepted) but also xenophobic (a few saints & philosophers excepted). No news here: religion is both good & bad for people. (The silly Enlightenment notion was that religion's so bad for people that its elimination is indicated, as its good is more than offset by its bad--as though religion were optional rather than integral to humanity. This false assumption unlies much secular-humanist thought.)

Now to the classification:

(1) **Tribal** religion is self-contained within the tribe, has no trans-tribal vision. Eg, Fuegian & early Japanese-Shinto.

(2) **Tribal-universal**. Jewish, on which see below.

(3) **Metatribal**. "Transtribal" stays within Latin but insufficiently conveys the idea of change, of transformation. (Eg, "transAtlantic" means no more than beyond the Atlantic.) Buddhism, Christianity, Islam....Buddhism is more than protestant Hinduism, it's Hinduism (a grounded, Indus-valley, tribal religion) so transformed & transcended that it could merge with non-Subcontinent cultures & even virtually die out in the Subcontinent....Christianity became itself only with the influx, even predominance, of non-Jews who fundamentally surrendered their tribalisms to the nontribal, universal faith. But Hellenistic Judaism, a highly modified tribalism, was the bridge....Islam, Arab in its first big-bang explosion, was inherently metatribal in (1) centering in the Quran, the product of mystical experience, & (2) interpreting the Bible (OT & NT), whose culture is almost entirely Jewish (non-Arab), in light of one mystic's understanding.

As Martin Luther King Day is a good annual invitation to think more deeply about race relations, Yom Hashoa (Holocaust-Remembrance Day) is so for religion relations, especially across the Judaism-Jews - Christianity-Christians divide. This year, & in light of the above religions-classification, I have these thoughts:

1 Asked which people (tribe) has made the greatest contribution to humanity, I would unhesitatingly respond "The Jews." Yes, because of Jesus. But their contribution even without Jesus has been so enormous, what other tribe (in my mind) could compete?

2 The glory & woes of the Jews are from their interposition (class #2) between tribal (which the observant are) & metatribal (which the nonobservant, secular are). As tribal, these are indigestible in, unassimilable into, non-Jewish cultures, which resent their separatism. As transtribal, able to function well in other cultures (Babylonian, European, American, Japanese, et al), their success is resented. Both roots of antisemitism (ie, antijudaism) are distressingly healthy. Unfortunately, Yom Hashoas are more apt to increase than to diminish antisemitism.

3 While the wider community should join the Jews in Yom Hashoas, the annual observance should be called "interfaith" only if it includes the name of Jesus, whose spirit stands utterly over against the Holocaust. If Jesus is to be left out, call it "A Community Remembrance."

4 Yom Hashoas should be structured with integrity. So far, I've never seen one so. Always there's an inauthentic mix of pronouns, "we" being sometimes Jews & sometimes non-Jews & sometimes both, with yarmulkas enjoyed by all. One way to avoid this is to have the service Jewish, with non-Jews as participant-observers but not oral participants. The other way is to watch those pronouns & pronominal adjectives!

In a Yom Hashoa "interfaith" program yesterday, I read "our" holy days (the Jewish, listed), "our" six million dead (not the non-Jewish equivalent), "we were silent" (inclusive of the Jews, who here are to repent with the non-Jews?), "never again can I be silent...remain aloof" (who's "I"?).

Also, this "interfaith" celebration contained only Jewish "Reading Selections" & "Choral Selections." Throw in a couple of Christians who betray their faith by not speaking it, & the non-"interfaith" character of the proceedings was even more glaring. RHD dates "interfaith" 1965-70, something "between persons belonging to different religions: *an interfaith service*"--the implication being that they will present the perspective of their different religions on a level playing field, fairly. That "interface observance" was tilted almost 90% to Jewish witness, with Christians in a patronizing rather than equal-participant role. I cannot believe that this is beneficial to relations between our two religions, any more than in the case of any other patronism.

5 For the sake of the martyred & of humanity, we must not forget the Holocaust. The question is how most appropriately to remember it. We have some great art to help us, & the annual observance helps pop it up regularly--for example, the Jewish Historical Project's hour film "Lodz Ghetto" (+ 1992 Sequel). But so far we have little etiological analysis: why internally & externally did it happen? Externally: What psychosocial & political factors in Germany made it possible? Internally: What was there about (a) Judaism [if anything] & (b) European Jews [if anything] that made the Jews an easy target for the Nazis? Of course the point of such etiological analysis is not just historical understanding, it's also prophylaxis: what can Germans, Jews, & others do to protect against repetition in Germany and anywhere else? Mere emotional-mindless remembrance is no help & may even be a hindrance.

6 And speaking of hindrance: Stressing the uniqueness of the Holocaust militates against etiological analysis. Analysis proceeds by comparison: insisting Hashoa is incomparable blocks thought, shunts the emotions around reason, almost as though asking "why?" were antisemitic! Here Elie Wiesel, great artist, great human being, is our worst enemy. If we're going to learn anything from Hashoa, it's going to be because we have the courage to think honestly about it. I continue to run into people who resent my trying to think about it at all. This is distressing spiritually because of the Jewish heritage of biblical-prophetic hard thinking but also because of Jews' brilliant intellectual contribution to the philosophy of history.

7 As a type #3 religion, Christianity sees no logical need for types #1 & #2. I see a cultural need: without Jews to remind us Christians of our historical roots, our religion would drift upward into a cloudy gnosticism like New Age. But I'm not surprised at supercession (the doctrine that Christianity absolutely replaces, supplants, transcends Judaism) in & beyond the NT. When the Jerusalem head of Dead Sea Scrolls research, said--after 30 years in his post!--that Judaism should have died about the time the Qumran community did, I was only mildly surprised. On its side, Judaism sees Christianity as unnecessary in the sense that Jewish values are what they'd have been had Jesus never been born. We two siblings have a testy & mysterious relationship requiring prayer & mutual love without hope of intellectual reconciliation within history.

8 In rereading Otto Pflieger's THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF CHRIST: ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGION (Wms. & Norgate/05), I became more aware of German philosophical idealism as an intellectual root of Nazism. As a tribalism, Judaism is abhorrent to him: he proclaims (168) "the deliverance of the Christian idea [162: "the ideal of sacred love"] from the rigid fetters of Judaism," a deliverance "only possible at the price of its investiture in the fluent forms of myths and rituals."