

Child's prayer: "Dear God, I know all about where babies come from. But where are they before that? Please answer all my questions. I always think of you."

My response: "Dear child, the fact that you "always think of" God is the answer to "all" your "questions."

--p.127 of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT

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A THUMBNAIL HISTORY OF RACE IN THE U.S.A.

In the immediately previous Thinksheet, I tried to lay out the biblical perspective on "God, Race, & America Today." That title suggests the order in which Christians are to address all pressing personal & societal problems: God first, for which I praised, & sought to guide, the child (above). Of course whether or not always thinking of God is indeed the answer to all your questions, depends on what deity you are addressing: we become like whom/what we love; & if we love ("always think of") any god/dess other than the biblical God of love & justice, we shall not be motivated to address, with full biblical-theological warrant, that snarl of puzzles & problems we signal with the word "race."....Mainly, this Thinksheet thinks about the story of "race" in American history. Depending on what I'm trying to get at, I tell that story from various angles. This time,....

1 Some (whites, browns, yellows) of us Americans were sucked here from there, wherever "there" was seeming less desirable; some (reds) were found here by northern Europeans (though some southern Europeans settled sparsely in some deep-southern areas of what was to become the present U.S.A.); and some (blacks) were dragged here from west Africa.

The sucked did not lose the dignity of initiative: they came because they wanted to. Before they were moved onto reservations, the found had the dignity of place: they were blooming where they were planted (their religions said) by the Great Spirit. The dragged lost both dignities, the dignity of self-determination & the dignity of their people/land bond; they lost the dignity of family integrity (being sold as individuals), & retained only the dignity of their persons & their prayers.

2 Not because of color (white) but because of history (not to mention other possible factors), the northern Europeans, especially the Anglos (British), obtained & have retained cultural, financial, & political supremacy--in which senses they are the most successful of the sucked (though now the other sucked are advancing--the browns in population & the yellows in power-through-education). Among the three sucked groups, coherences are increasing: they reached these shores by their initiative, & that fact gives them an attitudinal leg-up over the found & the dragged.

"Race" plays some part in relations among the sucked, but it is not so intransigent a factor as it is between the sucked and both the found & the dragged.

3 Christian missionaries set up hundreds of schools among the found (Indians, or Indamers, or Amerinds, or Native Americans). But they were heartsick to find that while many children of the found acquired the knowledge & skills to "make it" off the reservations, the white (northern European) world refused them employment. Hundreds of these rejects faded back onto the reservations, which they infested with their bitterness. Besides, insidious whites took advantage of the reds' low tolerance for alcohol, which until quite recently suppressed entrepreneurial efforts on the reservations. This drained away the red motivation to get up to (white) speed. (My experiment with the Mandan Indians showed that in groups, they speak as much as do whites--provided only that whites count to 13 between deciding to say something & saying it. But even if Indians were motivated to get up to white speed, should they? Maybe white speed is too fast; maybe there's wisdom in the Amerind maxim that if the body moves too fast, it'll leave the soul behind.)

4 Christian missionaries set up hundreds of schools among the dragged (the blacks), especially after 1865--500--some by the [Congregational] American Missionary Association alone. Beginning with the civil rights legislation of 1964-5 & subsequent affirmative-action laws, African-Americans have had increasing opportunities to get up to speed; & some of them, called now the black middle-class, have done so (the tragic side-effect being a talent/ambition/energy drain from what's now euphemistically called "the inner city"). Among the sucked, the Jewish masses, being high-drive & book-oriented, easily got up to speed: some, eg Chas. Murray, are wondering

whether blacks can ever get up to speed; & increasing numbers of blacks are asking why blacks should even want to get up to (white) speed: shouldn't blacks solve their own problems on their own terms & develop their own culture (the view of the Nation of Islam leader, who hopes for a demo of a million black men in our nation's capital this coming Monday)?

5 So what's the **future** of race in the U.S.A.? Short-run, self-segregation; revival of pre-Topeka (1954) "separate but equal" schools, with better efforts toward "equal"; separate housing (despite gov't. efforts at "integrated housing"); the development of parallel organizations/institutions ("parallel lines never meet"). Long-run, meltingpot, if the self-segregation is not so radical that race-mixed marriage seldom occurs. The very long run: Derrick Bell (black law-scholar, in *FACES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL: THE PERMANENCE OF RACISM* [Basic Books/92]) says "We shall overcome" can do little good: only white fear of status-quo breakdown--the point of view I got fired for more than $\frac{1}{4}$ century ago. "Blacks know from hard experience that white racism will not yield except under great pressure" (9, in J. Metz Rollins' chap. in *THE WHITE PROBLEM* [1960]; all of us who contributed chapters agreed on that; I alone advocated increased black violence, especially before Congress began to legislate an open society--our aim being, as Metz put it [same p.] "not an integrated, but an open society." I have always opposed coercive efforts--such as court-enjoined school busing--to integrate the races; & such efforts have proved disastrous. **IRONY**: Black violence threatening anarchy was healing, effectually pressuring, when in duet with King's nonviolence, for equal-political-opportunity legislation: court violence ["injunctions"] has been wounding, further segregating urban society [for one thing, by unwittingly fostering "white flight"]).

6 This Thinksheet's intro says I tell the story of race in the U.S.A. "from various angles," "depending what I'm trying to get at"--which here is my **hope** (1) that the advantaged will listen up harder, more honestly-intelligently-compassionately, to the underadvantaged (of whatever color); (2) that the underadvantaged will be both persistent in their pressuring "the system" & realistic, knowing that their best hope is to "beat the system" from within (violence now being counterproductive).