

SOLIDARITY FEVER

"Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it **without even thinking.**"
--Rom.12.2 THE MESSAGE

With so much +/- tax-cerebra-
tion now going on in America,
you (with Hagar) can under-
stand that "the king" would
prefer that you let him do
the thinking for you.

This Thinksheet asks
that you think about what
"out there" wants you not to
think.

HAGAR THE HORRIBLE

by Chris Browne



1 Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Rom.12.2 catches the underlying truth that human beings, living with their fellows, live with the fellow-**assumptions** of their culture or subculture. Necessarily so: we'd never get anything done if we took nothing for granted. When something we took for granted proves to be not so or not good, that ass-umption has made an ass of us.

So that makes three mental things we need: (1) unthinking (so we can think about only what needs thinking); (2) work-thinking (to get the job/task done); (3) **critical** thinking (am I / are we correct/optimal in our thinking/feelings/attitudes?).

The "world" (aion/saeculum, cultural surround/environment) wants us, says Paul (again, Rom.12.2), to be "conformed" to it "without even thinking [of the 3rd type]".

2 Because critical thinking is dangerous both to the thinker & to his/her culture or subculture, its **rare**, with crucifixion/persecution in prospect. For inevitably it leads to an antagonism between what-is & what-should-be (but is, by faith, "not yet"). Those are safe from this danger who turn over their awareness/attention to others (entertainers, advertisers, self-promoting leaders, ideologs, institutions). The cost of this safety? They make no progress, & help no others to make progress, in spiritual formation, intellectual formation, cultural formation toward the goals explicit & implicit in the Lord's Prayer.

3 This Thinksheet's title names something that, while a value, is also a monster-creator of the mass mind by destroying critical thinking (the gulag, the concentration camp, campus politically-correct speech-codes, the mafia, etc.). A value it expresses is the formation of a collective mind (the early labor movement's "Solidarity Forever!" & Lech Walensa's "Solidarnost" movement in 1980s Poland). The difference? The mass mind is to en/force conformity, the collective mind is to achieve freedom from en/forced conforming (i.e., oppression). When a collective mind cools, it takes on at least some of the characteristics of the mass mind; deviancy increases, & various psychological & social constraints are applied to keep the troops loyal & orderly. Cultural anthropologist Lionel Tiger detailed some of this in his MEN IN GROUPS, & there's no essential difference here between religious & political movements/institutions. Nor is there any behavioral difference, in the use of sanctions (per-/dis-suasives), between "left" & "right" leaders: the farther out they are, the more narrow-minded, & the more they discourage their followers from (critical, contrarian) thinking.

Not only when a collective mind cools, but also when it so succeeds that continued critical thinking strikes the leaders as subversive, the movement/institution becomes progressively more blind to alternative proposals/options--& the more blind the more arrogant--& the more arrogant the more unkind/cruel to dissidents. (Long ago, partly by power of critical thought, I helped a movement succeed; but when I continued my critical thinking, the leader asked me to leave, saying "You are not of our mind." Thank God that at that stage of the movement's hardening, I wasn't.)

4 A half-century ago this week, "the [black-liberation] Movement" peaked in the "I have a dream" oration. How heady we were about a dream that wasn't going to die (& hasn't)! A now-great (Jewish) journalist, David Broder was present & (as he says in yesterday's WASH.POST) was surprised at the presence of so many white clergy (as some of us know, largely because of the work of Bob Spike). "Black and

White Together!" was real, solidarity was real in spirit & bodies (including, it had been, with "bodies on the line"). "Joshua fit the battle of Jerico, / AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBELIN' DOWN!" This anti-walls spirit (which in this Thinksheet's title I call "solidarity fever") was then (1) generalized into a one-size-fits all moralism (viz., that walls [divisions] are bad) & (2) theologized into the doctrine of SALVATION BY SOLIDARITY, with ritual banners titled SOLIDARITY! TOLERANCE! DIVERSITY! MULTICULTURALISM! PLURALISM! (A neat fit indeed with the philosophical movement called "post-modernism.")

As a biblical theologian, I've been deeply concerned about the cafeteria raids these anti-wall* movements have made on Scripture. Because of the (third) women's movement, the Bible's multitudes of pronouns for God were ejected (along with some, by the most radical all, the Bible's personal titles for God [which are all masculine]). Because of the post-Holocaust/Shoah Be Kind to Jews movement, the wall between Judaism & Christianity (which the Jews erected to eject Christians, though Jesus had broken down the wall between Jews & Gentiles only to form the Church [Eph.2.14]) was broken down to let Jews be saved without Jesus. Because of the gay movement, the Bible's consistent condemnation of homosex-action was so neutralized (by biblical scholars prostituting their skills to the Zeitgeist) that the U.S. Episcopal Church could ordain a gay as bishop without a peep from the silenced Bible. Because of the ecumenical church movement, denominational distinctives were rubbed off for public purposes (though the distinctives still have some intramural life). Because of the secular-ecumenical religion movement, the general public is happy to hear that all religions are true & should be given equal standing in academe & the media.

Further, this anti-wall solidarity-fever nails you as a "fundamentalist" if you put in a word for the integrity of Scripture & canonical hermeneutics. The world is "bent" (to use G.M.Hopkins' word in his most famous poem), but the Holy Spirit in & through Scripture hovers over it for its straightening: this I believe, & pray for a revived respect for the Bible in & beyond the churches.

5 In the current web "Sightings," Martin Marty remarks an effect of academe's solidarity against taking religion seriously: the general religion-ignorance in the American populace. Noting, in the papers hitting his doorstep one recent morning, many religion-stories, he rebukes public educators for failure to provide the public with the tools (knowledge & interpretive skills) for understanding the place/function of religion in (all aspects of) life. I add this: The secularistic mind-set, now reinforced by post-modernism, is that religion is irrelevant; religions are equally true (since religion itself is a form of false-consciousness); among the religions, Christianity has an especially bad record & is especially dangerous. (Classics exposing this anti-religious bias are Buckley's GOD AND MAN AT YALE and Neuhaus' THE NAKED PUBLIC SQUARE.)

6 Paralleling, among America's opinion-makers, this anti-religion bias is a twin prejudice: against (1) while males in history & the present, & (2) Western civilization (though beyond these twins there's TOLERANCE! DIVERSITY! MULTICULTURALISM! PLURALISM!). The same anti-"West" prejudice exists in most general ed in the Muslim world: what's wrong with the world is mainly Christianity, Western civ, & the white man. The Christian response? Anything we say can be (is being) used against us! Can we work/witness in counter-solidarity? Or is the gospel better represented by scattered voices/missions (as it's always spread)?

7 Google gave me ^{of listings} 87pp on "Solidarity"--so it's prominent in the "Zeitgeist" (on which Google gave me 82pp [Teoma, 16pp]: "the characteristic thought or feeling of a particular time; spirit of the age"; Britannica dates it 1884: "the general intellectual, moral and cultural climate of an era"). Social psychologists speak of the Zeitgeist's motivational underpinnings of ideas (such as, right now, solidarity), the situational as well as dispositional variables (more important than "reasons") fostering particular beliefs; in a phrase, "motivational social cognition." A Zeitgeist's dominant mood/idea is generally accepted as beyond good & evil (as Hamlet's "There is nothing bad but thinking makes it so"). Unless it is the Lord's Prayer, I would compare any Zeitgeist--in this Thinksheet, especially solidarity--to a computer virus, to be subjected to Christian critical consciousness/witness/action.