INDEPENDENCE { - = + } FREEDOM ---------- ELLIOTT #2170

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*This thinksheet is a reflection on breakfast this morning, in our home, with the Rev. Una Mathews, immediate ex-moderator of the Congregational Union of Guyana, S.America. I had said to her: "As a Christian and a First World citizen, I cannot go around recommending imperialism even though, occasionally & temporarily, empire seems to me the best, most human, way to go. And as a thinker, I observe that 'independence' (ie, the political independence of peoples, each people from all other peoples) and 'freedom' (ie, the humanly optimal ecopolitical arrangements) are existentially non-concomitant: how they are related is not a given, but up for grabs. Now, in terms of 'freedom,' was your country's gaining 'independence' in 1966 a Good Idea?" Here we go, folks:*

**1. UM, almost word-for-word: "We Christians must be critical of any human claim to 'independence,' but all of us Guyanese were for it--one way and another--in 1966. Independence was not a mistake: the road we took, viz, into ideological socialism, was a mistake. I had hoped we would choose the best from all systems; but instead our new leaders went all the way to ideological socialism though joining the non-aligned group as they promised prior to their coming to power." The conversation continued a discussion which began at lunch in our home yesterday after Una had preached in the Craigville Tabernacle--the 14 of us including the Craigville director, conciliar & denominational execs, theologians, Hospice & hospital chaplains & execs.; all Christians of deep caring about freedom.**

**2. Let's have a look at possible independence/freedom relationships:**

**The BENEVOLENT IMPERIALIST position is that a people or nation pulling out of the empire or commonwealth will experience a net loss of freedom not just in a transition period but permanently. The stern measures the independent government must use to consolidate its power, instead of yielding thereafter, will be rationalized as permanently necessary no matter what the founding constitution may say about civil liberties & human rights & economic entitlements. As the world's main existing model of stern government is Marxist, a contemplated independent regime would be from the start, or become, Marxist....Modern history forbids a facile setting aside of the benevolent-imperialist argument. To take our immediate example, Guyana: Since withdrawal from the British colonial rule in 1966, the nation has less of prosperity & liberty (less of what Americans have in the Bill of Rights) and more of ecopolitical corruptions, interracial tensions, international troubles (esp. from Marxist illusions about capital & trade), educational impoverishment (esp. from the seizure & atheistic revisionizing of the public schools, all of which had been church schools), agricultural mismanagement (largely from Marxist overmanagement), & inflation.**

**The ROMANTIC REVOLUTIONARY position is that "independence" & "freedom" are synonyms: get your independence as a nation & you're automatically free! This simple equation tempts the neophyte power to tyranny under the banner of freedom (a la Orwellian Newspeak, ANIMAL FARM's dictator being only "more equal"). South Africa is an internal parallel: This view says overthrow the Botha regime & the country would have freedom!**

**The REALISTIC DEVELOPMENTAL position views freedom not as doomed by independence (as the benevolent imperialist claims) or as assured by independence (as the romantic revolutionary claims) but as a developmental possibility & task after independence. A Declaration of Independence (as our 1776) just may lead to more freedom (as our Bill of Rights, 1789, based on our Constitution, 1787). No guarantees.**

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3. But especially since WWII, reason has had little to do with the birth of independent-free nation-states out of old empires & commonwealths. The least mental, yet "headiest" of the three independence/freedom relationships, that of identity (the romantic revolutionary position) has prevailed. Thus my adjective, here: "independent-free." Almost without exception, the churches have blessed this political surge (as they had blessed prior political surges, such as empire-building!). True critical consciousness would not indiscriminately sprinkle holy water on these birthings. (The aspects of the analogy are worth exploring: abortion? continence? bastardy? teen pregnancy?) It would ask some tough questions about...

...motivations. (1) Granted corrupt (as well as other) motives in the empire-builders & -maintainers, what weeds of corruption are sown among the wheat of revolution? (2) How much of the revolutionary energy derives from exonomous models? Eg, how pertinent is the Cuba model to the Nicaraguan situation? Or to post-imperial Guyana, whose first president imposed on his bloodless revolution the "Revolution Square" of bloody Marxist revolutions (at enormous cost, diverting money needed for public utilities)? (3) Is the "Independence!" cry actually an expression of Stoic-hubris autarcheia (self-sufficiency--as Guyana's first president foolishly cut off foreign trade, forbidding, eg, the import of wheat to force the people to switch to native rice)? (4) In biblical light, are the revolutionary motives purer than the motives of those favoring the status quo? (5) Is the revolutionary upsurge more adolescent than mature? And how does this developmental analogy make the status quo look? (6) For this particular revolution, is the net prospect for the human spirit, for spirituality in the broad cultural sense, + or -? (7) Is independence necessary for a people's "dignity"?

...viability. In the first sentence of this section, I used two hyphenates, viz, "independent-free" & "nation-states." There remains to deal with the second: would every "nation" be viable as a "state"? My purpose here does not require going into the social locations of the various definitions of these two words. Lincoln's use of "this nation, under God" was (though not exhaustively) geographical; he headed the "nation"'s government & insisted on its right & duty to coerce, where necessary, the "states" to remain in the "United States." Lebanon contains many "nations" which the French Empire kept relatively peaceful in one "state"--but the notion that that imperial "state" would be viable as an independent "state" was doomed from the start. Lebanon has some options, but maintaining both independence & the old imperial boundaries is not one of them; yet every "free" regime has tried to! Again: would a "free" South Africa be viable? Of that, a parting guest of ours yesterday said, "They want their freedom & they're going to get it." Well, who are "they" & what is "freedom" & "get" in that snarled & snarling situation? Our guest was innocent enough to claim to know!

...the Christian witness in pre-revolutionary situations. One oft-heard argument for Tutu's media-grabbing has been that "comes the revolution," the black youth who take over will remember that some Christian leaders were on their side all along. A nice though not nobel calculation, but what has it to do with the content (as distinguished from the intent) of the Christian witness? A faithful political theology will include, but not be captive to, the rhetoric of (Bonhoeffer) "from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled--in short, from the perspective of those who suffer." (DB was an unwitting phrase-maker for the slogan-hungry that came after him--some of whom developed a whole theology out of his "religionless Christianity," others out of his "from below"; neither taking with critical seriousness his situation.)