

KING JESUS & A DEFECT* IN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION: the question of violence

(Pp are in Robt.Sherman's KING, PRIEST, AND PROPHET [T.&T.Clark/04].)

Under the Brit.Empire, Hong Kong residents had economic & civil but not political liberties: in the interest of societal stability, Britain monopolized physical force/coercion/violence. The model was the Ro.Empire, whose citizens could travel unarmed, appeal to higher authority when abused by lower (Ac.16.37-40) or when in danger of being so abused (Ac.22.22-29; 25.11-12), & expect gov't. intervention when gov't. feared for the citizen (Ac.23.10). (Palestine had that stability until Jewish terrorists drove the Brits out in 1947.)

The Ro.Empire decayed & the succeeding Christian governments failed to protect themselves against being overrun by the Muslim Empire: by the end of the 8th c., Christendom had become about 90% overrun. How explain the Christian military weakness? Jesus was killed: for Christians, violence is ambiguous. Muhammad killed: for Muslims, violence against "infidels" (non-Muslims) is an unambiguous good. Ideological antiviolence is common in Christian thought--as in attacks on me by J.H.Yoder in THE POLITICS OF JESUS & by G.R.Edwards in JESUS AND THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE. Christian theologians touch lightly, if at all, on force/coercion/violence/power, which do not appear in the indexes of (e.g.) D.Bloesch's GOD THE ALMIGHTY or THE LAST THINGS--nor in R.Sherman's KING, PRIEST, AND PROPHET (though "powers & principalities" are mentioned 3x)--nor even in the LCC edition of Calvin's INSTITUTES (though of course "power" is extensive).

Darby's "dispensational" motivation was to provide neat historical-period slots for all the biblical materials (something D.Bloesch accomplishes more sophisticatedly in his 7-vol. systemat). Here, I'm interested only in a period-distribution of violence:

THE INCARNATION

While Jesus had & exercised force-power over nature & demons/disease, & in prophetic-symbolic action (predicting the temple's destruction) overturned the tables of the money-changers, & had but did not exercise powers (of self-provision & self-protection & self-promotion) he told the devil he would not exercise, he believed that his mission from the Father excluded violence against people & resistance to the violence of people. Since God's kingdom was to come as gift, Jesus refused arms (Mt.26.51-54): arms are for achieving, not receiving. 143: "the kingdom Christ proclaims...displays none of the characteristics typically associated with worldly kingdoms. Indeed, it turns such characteristics upside down," reversing Saul's kind of kingdom, which came into existence by concession through Samuel (1Sam.8), to which Christ is the "closing bracket" (144fn, quoting N.T.Wright, JESUS AND THE VICTORY OF God, 96-98 + 9 references).

Jesus' non-violence was mission-specific, not ideological or pragmatic-calculating. Just because of his enormous image-authority, he gets used by those (e.g., Ghandi & King) whose non-violence is strategic with ideological rhetoric.

THE RESURRECTION

Jesus explained that his role did not include violence, which belongs to God--who (Ro.1.4) with "great power" violated death's power over the dead Jesus. In Luke's 2 vols. (Gospel & Acts) that Spirit-power is controlling for life & death.

THE END-TIME STAGES:

STAGE #1:

At an unexpected time, Jesus will return "to judge the living & the dead" (as the liturgical phrase has it): as successor to Prophet Jesus (who persuades), Judge Jesus coerces in the interest of shalom-stability. His in-time mission excluded violence: his end-time role includes it. Various OT texts support this expectation--e.g., Ps.110, "crucial proof-text to the early Church in understanding Jesus' status as Lord and King" (117-118). 1Cor.15.24: Christ "destroys" all opposition....STAGE #2: Jesus turns the kingdom back to the Father, "so that God may be all in all" (vs.28). (See also Jesus' coercive behavior in Rev.) So (as in the Lord's Prayer) the kingdom comes "on earth."....STAGE #3: In geo-evolution, the Creator destroys our planet, & Dante's "the Love that moves the world" loves us elsewhere.

* Defect only in the sense of absence from the NT--in contrast to OT & Qurlan--of any direct guidance as to how the devotees are to use force/coercion/violence when it comes into their hands--a situation the NT does not anticipate.

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