

Today (18Mar87) I read two highly religiopolitical works on S.Africa, radically different though of the same religion, Christianity, a conflate faith that accordingly produces radically different versions of itself as well as offspring radically different from one another. The situation is even more complex (& rich!): conflate was also the religion out of which Christianity sprang, a religion of a few constants (God, the people, the mission) & many variables (religious institutions, relation to "the land," types of religious experience, national/personal hope, "church"/state theory & praxis, forms of piety, attitudes toward other religions-cultures-devotees). In this Thinksheet I'm not choosing sides on "S.Africa" Christianity; rather, I'm cautioning against all exclusive claims to represent Christianity: while it's true that "you" (singular & plural) get nowhere without a point of view, it's false to claim that only your point of view is Christian. The best you can do, if you're informed & honest, is to define, develop, & defend the best vision & view you are able to arrive at "under God," "in the Spirit," without claiming that Christians differing from your vision & view are out of the will of God, resisting the Spirit-- though of course you'll promote your vision & view as the most relevant. The moral correlations are clear: (1) The EXCLUSIVE claim correlates with arrogance, misrepresentation, vituperation, & disfellowship; (2) The AFFIRMATIVE claim (affirming one's position without denouncing the positions and persons of Christians differing from oneself) correlates with certitude instead of certainty, humility instead of pride, fairmindedness instead of specious argumentation, & the <sup>^</sup>will pray-&-stay together instead of splitting).

1. Roughly, our Christian Bible displays the conflateness of our faith. Linguistically, it's Hebrew (OT) & Greek (NT). Psychosociologically, it's PEOPLE-oriented OT & PERSON-oriented NT: the OT is the story of a people (Hebrew-Israelite-Jewish, tribal in the anthropological sense, ethnic), the NT is the story of a movement gathering individuals by conversion. (Yesyesyes IknowIknowIknow: My generalizations are "rough" indeed, needing many qualifications. Eg, the OT materials reveal a conflate faith formed by the high impact of persons, God-inspired leaders, on a historic people of shadowy patriarchal origin; and the NT materials reveal a people selfconscious of their social reality as inclusive of, but more than, an evangelistic campaign, a missionary movement gathering the lost one by one. But my rough distinction holds, as I'll exhibit in the two contrasting books I'm about to tell you about.)

2. But first, "occasional" definitions (ie, for the "occasion" of this Thinksheet): "NT Christianity" = personal transformation (evangelism-devotion-lifestyle) as political action toward social transformation; "OT Christianity" = Christian inspired-and-led community organization toward public pressures (strikes, boycotts, the seizure of "media opportunities," formal & informal confrontation of the authorities in church & state, sanctions, divestment, withdrawal, global oratory in both senses of "global") toward social transformation. NB: Both "Christianities" are politically conscious and intend both personal & social transformation (ie, Christian life & a just society). The divergences are on means, not ends. But the extremes of each are betrayals: (1) Extreme NT Christianity is apolitical, aiming only to get "souls" to heaven; (2) Extreme OT Christianity is only humanistic, caring about the gospel only as a means to a more humane society. Each of the two books (below) is tinged with extremism, but it wouldn't be fair to call either extremist.

3. The OT-Christian book is written by a colored (not black) S.African adult male: Allan A. Boesak, pres. of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches & chaplain at the U. of the West. Cape: COMFORT AND PROTEST: REFLECTIONS ON THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN OF PATMOS (Westm./87; which I read in extensive precise, pp.26-31, Apr/87 SOJOURNERS). Hereafter, "Boesak." The NT-Christian book is written by a (presumably) white S.African adult

OVER

male: Chas. K. Robertson, highly successful businessman, financier, lecturer in economics, a Christian committed to evangelism and eco-political action toward improved living conditions (esp. housing) and (p.100) "preparing people to live in a changed and totally non-racial land": **THE SPIRITUAL AWAKENING OF SOUTH AFRICA: THE MIRACLE OF LITTLE WAVES** (Christian Publishing Services, Tulsa, OKLA/86; my copy sent to me from S.Africa as a gift of an actor & journalist, Scalk W. Schoombie, along with, & following, much other material on S.African news that our U.S. media don't pick up). Hereafter, "Robertson."

4. Robertson is an anthology of personal conversions resulting in (1) deliverances from prejudices (of whites against blacks & vice versa) and (2) direct action, individually and by ad hoc organization, for (a) evangelism, (b) direct action to meet local & wider basic human needs, (c) action toward interchurch reconciliation, and (d) participation in the political processes toward a juster society. The wind of the Spirit is blowing, and Christians of Robertson's type of dedication are (as in his subtitle) "little waves" of blessing & change--in contrast, to extend the figure to Boesak, to a typhoon of "the oppressed"...which leads me to sketch the contrasts:

	Robertson	Boesak
What is GOD doing?	saving the lost & moving them to act in charity & toward a juster society	liberating "the oppressed" from apartheid, so a juster society can emerge
What's the opposition?*	Satan: "God moves & Satan tries to counterattack." (91,96, "the power of evil" 99)	"the principalities and powers," Pretoria as the dragon of Rev.12
Who here are God's children?	Christians open to God's guidance	"the oppressed," primarily the black majority
How is the change to come?	by preaching and living the gospel prayerfully	by pressuring for one-person-one-vote
The change will be...	gradual, by the spread of conversion-compassion-reconciliation: an eschatological scenario	sudden, in the collapse of apartheid under united-front pressure from "the oppressed": an apocalyptic scenario
What weaponry?	"prayer & love" (94)	confrontation & sanctions

\*R.'s analysis is (like that of King in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," which prohibits Christians from projecting evil only onto others while holding oneself exempt from judgment) both more extensive & more profound, less rhetorical, but no less political, than B.'s.

5. Boesak, with unconscious hypocrisy, accuses some Afrikaans theologians of perverting Scripture to support apartheid; but he himself does precisely that in this book, which is the Revelation of John politicized in support of various forms of violent opposition to the dragon (Rev.12), viz Pretoria, including the romanticizing of violent black youth as heroes & (some of them) martyrs. Yet, though Revelation is (militantly!) quietist; vis-a-vis the Roman Empire, it's homiletically (though not exegetically) appropriate to "see" present evils in the biblical imagery of ancient evils. B. doesn't want (R.'s words!) "a totally non-racial land" more than R. does, but he's convinced (1) it won't come about R.'s way and (2) it will come about B.'s way. Me, I'm not convinced it will come about at all, but I pray & hope it will.

6. "The Christian witness in S.Africa" is neither B.'s nor R.'s but both, in what I may call a pincer movement of the Spirit against whatever stands in the way of a juster society. Recent newsclips I have from S.A. indicate a maturing & converging of Christians on this understanding.