

Two impossible things before & after breakfast:

JUSTIFICATION (SELF-SALVATION)

BY HUMAN BEINGS

JUSTICE (SELF-GOVERNMENT)

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The Bible's radical negativity about the human potential for self-salvation (individual & collective) & self-government is **protection** against false dreams & **incentive** to the true dream.

1. Madison's realism about our human potential for evil & chaos was matched by Churchill's quoted-ad-nauseam "Democracy is the worst form of government except all the others." Niebuhr's impossible possibility. The paradox: Hope is born (**can do**) once it's surrendered (**can't do** without "higher power" help, as in AA's first of Twelve Steps). The Bible's **can't do** (without God) outlives & outlasts the Enlightenment's **can do** (without God).

2. There's an **interlock** here between self & society. If we have faith that we can save ourselves (eg by pumping up self-esteem, as now in public-school weekend seminars around the country), we have faith also that we can, without God, govern ourselves. The reverse: We believe we need God's **grace** (in "justification by faith"), **guidance** (in our personal & interpersonal living), & **governance** (theocracy in handling power).

3. But can't we have justification without "the struggle for justice & peace"? No, that would betray the gospel. Well, can't we have the latter without the former? No, that would wind us up with self-enthraling, society-oppressing ideology, the systemic violence of a romantic idealism reality will not sustain, God will not allow (Genesis 11 & all that). As the perfectionism of self-salvation leads to self-righteous arrogance & intolerance & thus to oppression, so the utopianism of ideology (capitalism, socialism, communism, et al) leads to dystopia as anarchy, then oppression.

4. Take Jesus' gnome "You will know them by their fruits" because good trees can't bear bad fruit, & vice versa (Mt.7:17-20 [L.6:43fa]; cf.M.12:33): the organic integrity of source & results, roots & produce, acts & consequences. So are we good or bad? Good, say almost all the ancient & modern pagans. Bad, says the Bible; flawed by sin, so all our works are flawed & we can't redeem ourselves by striving for perfection & cannot create a just society by dreams & schemes of good government. Thank God our situation is this bad, or we'd have no God to thank, ie we'd forget about God, our primary relationship in time & eternity....Call it "original sin" or whatnot, the nub idea here is relational: Life is (Buber) "meeting," & the primal & final meeting is with God. This being so, the primal sin is going it on your own without consideration of God (Genesis 3), as the essence of divorce is going it alone (in thinking, acting, planning) without your spouse. In a culture in which "sin" has primarily a moralistic-legalistic connotation, this fundamental biblical fact is hard to communicate even to church- & synagogue folk....In this God-amnesiac society, things going right make me nervous, things going wrong comfort me & give me hope. No wonder some pagans called the early Christians "haters of the human race" (*odium humanorum*). But of course another part of me rejoices when anything goes right: we Christians are known also as lovers of the human race. And a third part of me worries when an affluent society insulates the comfortable against judgment, cushions against or delays divine vengeance-punishment: "In America, the race is on between decadence and vitality" (Alistair Cooke).

5. Will nations moving out of the horrors of state capitalism move into the horrors of private capitalism? While a market economy releases creativity for both productivity & capitalization, it relativizes to the bottom line both human good & the good of the earth (as single-party government relativizes all to the good of the party). "What happens when a [false] dream dies?" "Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun, / Or does it explode [into a new false dream]?" Or does the experience of oppression & deliverance therefrom protect against further false dreaming & provide incentive to the true dream expressed in the Lord's Prayer's central petition "Your rule come"? To live this Prayer is to be delivered from the evil of false dreams, God-amnesiac hopes.