

The thesis of this thinksheet is that insult, which to adolescents is unthinkable, is, in mature politics, a logical calculus submitting each instance of alleged insult to a battery of questions with the aim of deciding strategy and tactics. Eg, (1) Is this instance of alleged insult only alleged, or are we really being insulted (a) deliberately or (b) only situationally (as adjunctive to other political realities)? (2) If the insult is real, is it (a) or (b)? (3) If either, should the insult be swallowed or reacted to politically (ie, openly)? (4) On a scale of open responses in each case, what would be the certain/possible cost(s) of each response? (5) In each instance, are the certain/possible costs, on analysis, excessive (returning us then to swallowing)? For this considered swallowing, I've devised the phrase that forms the title of this thinksheet....A few heureses on the theme:

1. The person who can't hold jobs because the chip on the shoulder rejects the very notion of an acceptable level of insult is, we say, immature and needs to learn to "swallow pride." But the cost of swallowing is stress, distress, possibly disease; and probably also, finally, a self-canceling hostility. So, reasons the adolescent, why do any swallowing? Adolescent nations go through the same thinking-process and then uncork in the General Assembly of the UN. No, I'm not taking sides, for or against swallowing. In my time I've done my share of swallowing and spitting, neither always appropriately, as the event revealed! Individuals and groups should decide situationally, not emotionally or ideologically: that's my point. Not all uncorking-spitting in the UN is adolescent; indeed, sometimes it's adolescent fear that prevents proper uncorking-spitting.

2. The last sentences of the immediately prior thinksheet are this: "Maximize the human by choosing, in each instance, the best level of social control. In much of the world (today), that would be empire, not nationhood." I consider "national sovereignty" only one possible politic in this precarious world, and sometimes a pernicious politic--as "state sovereignty" was in S.Carolina's 1861 firing on Fort Sumter. Compare also "individual sovereignty" as involving insult as unthinkable: That was my stupid position on the gradeschool playground, so the big guys could easily "get my goat" and I often went home bloody. I was a little guy with unlimited courage and limited intelligence, or at least common sense. The situation, I think (but am not sure), of S.Africa's blacks today; but not the situation (as I believed, and the event proved) of America's blacks in the 1950s-1960s: they were right in rejecting, as acceptable, any and all levels of insult! The calculus was with US blacks and is (I'm convinced) against S.Africa's blacks--but I have against me most Christian ecclesiarchs at home and abroad (who knows whether I have with or against me most Christians?). Don't get hung up by my instancing of S.Africa! Or by any other focusing of mine on any other "trouble spot" of our anguished world today. Please try to attend to my thesis: think about the thinksheet's title.

3. Choice of words advances/impedes communication. If I say "empire," who is with me? But if I say "World Federalism," I can count on some good folks I've known since Gary Davis devised the phrase. Gary did/does not use the phrase "a UN with teeth," but that's what he meant/means. Me, for me, a toothful UN is more scary than the present world chaos. A muddled, bloodied world-situation is better for human freedom and the human spirit than is excessive political neatness. But how can I be, in any situation, for "empire," since empire always entails excessive political neatness? Does it? In comparison with what? In Lebanon today, the verb "to disappear" has been expanded to include "to BE disappeared": 100,000 have been kidnapped, by maurading bands, parties, and families, across the Muslim/Christian line. One Muslim woman put it this way last week (May/86): "When there are no courts to give justice, no police, grief turns to hatred--and how do you contain 10,000 hatreds? Or 100,000?" Was Lebanon, were the Lebanese, better off under the French Empire?

4. Various sayings point to the crucial importance of setting the terms of discourse. Augustine & Luther said something like "Whoever gets to write the hymns gets to determine the theology." Wm.F. Buckley, Jr., got to set the term for his recent 2-hour "Firing Line" debate between two triads of heavies on the subject of "Privatization in America Today." In this thinksheet, the subject-and-tone-setting phrase is "the acceptable level of...." Acc. to my memory (I doubt that anybody has researched the phrase's history yet), it arose for various functions during World War II: "an acceptable level of casualties" (and became ugly-cynical in Vietnam). But I've encountered it in medicine (...of antibodies, eg), in management (...of efficiency, eg), in tongue-in-cheek journalism (...of corruption), in commerce (...of production), in education (...of dropouts). The last relates to "an acceptable level of discipline" in the public schools, a level that dropped drastically beginning in the late 1960s under pressures from educationists starry-eyed about human nature and from public consciousness-raising against corporal punishment as "child abuse" v. "the rights of the child"--ironically resulting in, from classroom chaos, a radical rise in near-illiterate graduates. Ideas, under the control of words and phrases, have consequences--sometimes good, sometimes pernicious, sometimes ambiguous.

4. Another way to put it is that such phrases have both heuristic and hermeneutic power. Heuristic: They signal what you're to look for; hermeneutic: They suggest the meaning of what you've found when you've found it. So we do well to give our souls some critical distance from such phrases and not easily suspend our disbelief. Some readers will, eg, find this thinksheet's title doubly distasteful: (1) "The acceptable level of..." has the connotation of callousness, esp. in military context; and (2) "Insult" is a fightin' word that, instead of encouraging the analytic mood I'm inviting my readers to, blows the mind: "I don't accept insults to myself or anybody else!" The challenge is to deal critically with all the feelings and ideas my phrase stirs up: I've crafted the phrase to represent the mindbody complexity we face when we hear/see "S. Africa," "women," "the Middle East," "the evil empire," "capitalism/communism," et al. Let's go for a brief looks at a few of these....

5. "Women." Feminism of the radical sort holds that any level of insult to women is unacceptable, even including childbearing (a phenomenon counselors are beginning to face and name "bodyhate"). My first encounter with this was in 1964, in Betty Friedan's intro to THE FEMININE MYSTIQUE, 1st published that year: she finds to be an unacceptable insult the fact that she dropped out of her PhD program because of her husband (who was insulting whom? why? and where was freedom/responsibility here?). But if movements didn't have their lunatic fringes, they wouldn't be movements: the fringes "test" the powers and limits in the sense that the exception "proves" (ie, "tests") the rule. My opinion: Feminism's gains are slightly greater, for women, than its losses; but I can't be sure. Note the range of questions for critical thinking on "insult": actual or imagined? intended/unintended? personal/group? atmospheric or structural? from power or weakness? the best word to describe the combo of objective/subjective factors?

6. "The Middle East." The Ottoman Empire treated the Arabs insultingly, the British Empire (thanks largely to Lawrence of Arabia?) less so. Jews built up insult-rage during the British Occupation of Palestine (1917-47), Jewish terrorism (Stern Gang, Irgun, et al) finally effecting what the British concluded was an unacceptable level of casualties. At various times by various groups, the UN presence has been viewed as un/acceptable. Arab terrorist groups (PLO et al) find, as unacceptable insult, the existence of the State of Israel--a hard fact facing ME, "peace-making."

7. Where put Jesus vis-a-vis this insult factor? And see #1928.