

## ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS

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Every American's emotions are churning over the RKE (the criminal acts of a black man, the possibly criminal acts of four white male police, & subsequent criminal acts leading to 57 deaths, hundreds injured, & ca.3/4 billion \$ property damage). Interpretations are little more than mirrors of the interpreters' agenda, & you can throw me in with all the others: I'm going to try to make something of the RKE, something confirmative of my way of seeing America & humanity & history & God. If I'm upfront about what I'm up to, I have more chance of at least a modicum of objectivity. Even a better chance if I (1) apply my suspicions of others' interpretations to my own, (2) fore-repent of selfish elements that will creep into my interpretation, & (3) bear in mind that solidarity with the oppressed has a claim on me prior to the intellectual distancing which is the precondition of interpretation. Like the Holocaust, the RKE is such an abyss & thicket of evil that the very act of trying to "explain" it tempts the Spirit. As Pres. Bush put it: if our response is not what it should be, "God will get us."

1 While I was writing the above, the phone rang: somebody wanted to know what I thought M.L.King Jr. would say about "the Los Angeles mess." Without hesitation, I said, "I can assure you that whatever he would say, it would be free of the spirit of vengeance & would include an appeal against the spirit of vengeance --which then would at least implicitly condemn the post-trial hooliganistic mayhem." (Two very different Kings, M.L. Jr. & Rodney, with two radically different opportunity backgrounds.) Said I, "Justice is vital, but only compassion transcends differences."

2 Yesterday I heard a preacher soften "vengeance" in Is.61.2 to "reconciliation," an excessive softening. His authority was IB (Interpreter's Bible) *in loco* Exegesis, in which J.Muilenburg supports G.E.Mendenhall, who adduces Ugaritic instances of np ("NQM") meaning not "vengeance" but "rescue" or "requite" (but Exposition of H.S.Coffin retains "vengeance" as the meaning: "grace is God's constant attitude toward men; v. is an occasional judgment necessary to remove obstacles to this grace"). NOTE: You don't get your choice of the root's meaning in Ugaritic. The word faces both ways. Those who benefit from God's "day of vengeance" experience it as "rescue," the others as "requital" in the negative sense of making repayment, suffering retaliation.....Claus Westermann (ISAIAH 40-66 [Westm./69], p.367) points to "the original meaning of 'revenge' before Israel became a state: 'the restoration of wholeness.'" While he does not draw the + & - implications, I must: wholeness, shalom, is reestablished not just by **healing** brokenness, fragmentariness, but by **destroying** the fracturing powers--sin, death, chthonic influences, the elements (evil principalities), however one may speak of them (add "oppression," "structural evil," "greed," "lust," "obsessions," "addictions," "the culture of contentment" [Galbraith's latest phrase & title, now on the NEW YORK TIMES bestseller list]).

3 No, I've not been wandering off into an irrelevant word-study. I've arrived at one of my points in this Thinksheet: In biblical perspective, it's impossible to exclude the Rodney King Event from God's "vengeance" if it significantly disturbs "the culture of contentment" which, says Galbraith, excludes from the White House anyone who fails to satisfy the contented (anxious though they may be), for they are the ones who vote, & vote against change toward a juster society. Since God's vengeance destroys complacency in the interest of getting private & public action toward a juster society, it's a grace-driven judgment: in Is.61.2, "a year is assigned to the work of grace, but the space of a day to the work of vengeance" (F.Delitzsch, ISAIAH, vol.1 [T&TClark/1894], p.397). Geo. Bush is not much shakes as a theologian, but his gut reaction to the Los Angeles explosion--"God will get us"--is biblical; & it's even more important to be biblical in the gut than in the mind.

ODDITY: So many who claim to be social-change theologians do not believe in the divine vengeance & thus cut themselves off from a theological-motivational dimension for social change!

4 In both Testaments, the Bible condemns the vindictive spirit, the vengeful mind-set that the English word "vengeance" suggests. It's from the Latin root we transliterate as "vindicate," which reproduces the sound-root & points to the meaning-root. This Latin root gives us the two verbs "avenge" (RHD: "inflicting punishment as an act of retributive justice or as a vindication of propriety") & "re-venge" (RHD: "...to retaliate for real or fancied wrongs").

Note, now, the pertinence of "revenge" to the post-trial chaos in Los Angeles. The core rioters (excluding the penumbra who were going along for the ride) were destructively raging against a real or fancied wrong, viz. the almost complete exoneration of the four white police who beat up a black criminal, Rodney King. If the trial was fair, as I believe, the wrong was only fancied; but either way, the malicious behavior was real. How then could malicious behavior be an instance of divine vengeance? No problem: "Human anger serves only to praise you" (Ps.76.10 NRSV).

5 "Avengeing is mine, says the Lord; when you do it, it's revenge, & I forbid it" (paraphrase of Deut.32.35; "vengeance is mine, and recompense" [NRSV]; but TANAKH rejects the implication that vengeance is not ours, and translates "To be My vengeance"). This Song of Moses concludes with the vengeance theme under the purity sanction: God takes vengeance to "cleanse the land of His people." Note the words (vv.35-43): "vengeance and recompense....day of disaster...destiny rushes upon them....vindicate...revenge....I deal death....judgment, vengeance....avenge...wreak vengeance...." Sounds like a downer, but its purpose is upbeat: it's supposed to make you happy, like the martyrs under the altar in anticipation (Rev.6.10). To get with it, you need the running start of "the day of the Lord" (Is.2.12, 13.6; Joel 2.1ff) & "the day of vengeance" (Is.34.8, 63.4; Jer.46.10).

6 TANAKH's Is.61.2 has "**vindication**" (as has NAB). God & society must be vindicated against their offenders, who in the process suffer pain (physical, material, social, mental, spiritual). Society in Los Angeles has been vindicated (1) in the return of wholeness in the sense of public tranquility (howsoever temporary, howsoever polluted with injustice), (2) in Rodney King's pain (whether more just or more unjust), & (3) in the pains of almost 12,000 rioters now undergoing judicial process. What of the pains so far suffered by the L.A.P.D.--the forced-resigned chief, the fired beater, the three awaiting L.A.P.D. decisions on their cases? What of the legal-process pains of the four policemen? What of the pains of Korean shopowners & 20,000 others whose property was destroyed or damaged? How much of all this is victim pain, pain of innocent participants or innocent bystanders? Sorting out all these pains, culpable & innocent, is one aspect of "doing justice" within the theological-moral sphere of vindication. In all the emotional heat & confusion, "a right judgment in all things" will be hard to come by. As hard as a snap judgment is easy--& I've heard-seen-read such a heap of snap judgments, morally-ethically-politically-theologically irresponsible!

7 Can we manage to substitute "vindication" for "vengeance" in Bible translation, theology, teaching, preaching? Sorry, it fails because (1) it doesn't have the force of the biblical idea & (2) it faces only one way, viz. toward benefits to the offended. Though it can be argued that "vengeance" faces only the other way, viz. pains to the offenders, the biblical weight can stand this imbalance better than it can the other.....I went through a stack of Hebrew lexicons & English translations, & "avenge, take vengeance" is almost the exclusive translation. NRSV retains it from RSV; REV retains it from NEB. TEV has "save his people, and defeat their enemies." Jn.L.McKenzie has "a year of grace and a day of deliverance." Knox, translating from Vulgate *ultio* ("vengeance, punishment"), has "the day when he, our God, will give us redress" (my Rome/47 Vulgate refers the word to Lev.25.10; Is.34.8, 63.4; & Mt.5.5).

8 In L.4.19, Jesus leaves off the "vengeance" line. Why? Note v.21: "This passage has come true today, as you heard it being read." But the great assize, the day of wrath (of judgment, of vengeance), in which Jesus believes, was not

yet. The fact that the Gospeler seems to be quoting from memory need not trouble us except to warn us against reading too strictly, too literally; Jesus did not disagree with Jn. Baptist as to the imminence of the end-time. The present social arrangements were fragile, the social fabric delicate (as the RKE witnesses to us), the new (messianic) age was at the door, indeed across the threshold & (in Jesus' presence) in that synagogue, its full presence awaiting only the fulfilment of that righteousness which Jesus was calling for, the righteousness not of complacent obedience to written torah but of a yearning obedient to torah as written both on the scrolls & in the heart, an obedience implicitly excluding revenge as action but also as heart-revenge, revengeful feelings in the heart, which are opposite of אָהַב ("AHV," neighbor-love [Lev.19.18: "Do not take revenge on anyone or continue to hate him, but love your neighbor"]) & even enemy-love [Mt.5.44; L.6.27,35]).

9 But aren't revengeful feelings **natural**? Of course they are, that's what's wrong with them. If it's natural, it's bad: that's the rule in morals (as the rule in ecology is the opposite: if it's natural, it's good). Jesus tells Jimmy Carter it's bad having lust in his heart, & JC (Jimmy Carter), believing in original sin, agrees with JC (Jesus Christ). The material base of human existence is natural, the spiritual base is unnatural. My playfulness about "natural" scorns the solemnity with which our narcissistic, spiritually degenerate culture uses the word. (Eg, the pro-condoms-in-schools argument that sexual intercourse is "natural" & "they'll do it anyway"--to which my response is that natural sex is evil, an enemy of human sex, ie sex that honors the whole person & sees the big picture.)

10 "But don't I have a right to my own feelings?" No, only to the good ones. You have your feelings & are accountable for culling out the ones you don't have a right to. The races do not have a right to the prejudicial feelings they have against each other; those white cops didn't have a right to their "natural" racism against Rodney King & other blacks, especially black men. The existence of racist feelings has no evidential force for their continuation as influencers of behavior or even as emotional entities. Under what circumstance would these feelings be self-evidencing? This, their ineradicability. But since we know that these feelings are eradicable, & the feelings are evil (as destructive of human values at both ends), those who fail to root them out of their hearts are culpable, guilty, accountable; for they are morally-ethically-socially-spiritually responsible for the eradication....I didn't say the eradication is easy. It takes sweat & grace. Grace is always available; sweat is available on call, on the heart's call to the mind & life.

11 The white cops hadn't had enough antiracist training (in home, church, school, police academy & continuing ed): "the system" is to blame, along with them. Further, they'd had feedback training for racism--in the cycle of abusing, & being abused by, black men. (It was "all the fault of" nobody, but some blame falls on black men who taught those cops to expect the worst from Rodney King. Nothing about the RKE is more fascinating, to ethicists specially in social psychology, than the rich stew of faults & blames calling for repentance toward the improvement or replacement of "the system.")....Rodney King & the rioters hadn't enough training, & too much feedback-training. Everybody could claim some virtue, & nobody was innocent. Everybody was blameworthy, & everybody is worthy of respectful treatment "under God" & face-to-face with the egalitarian law.

12 IRONY: Those I've heard most abused, least respectfully treated, are the only ones possibly innocent, viz the jury! Consider:

(1) Tony Lewis's column today asks "would the jury have convicted those policemen" if it'd been a white beaten by four blacks? I reply: Probably not, if it'd been a jury of the blacks' peers, ie. a black jury (or almost: 10 blacks, 1 hispanic, 1 sinic--to transpose from the actual jury, which had 10 whites, 1 hispanic, 1 sinic). My point: In a racially polarized society, the legal requirement of "a jury of ones peers" should exclude, should it not, those who aren't one's racial peers? No, but you can see the illogic I'm attacking, viz. that there should have been blacks on the jury. Do you really think that the cops would have got off if there'd been even one black on the jury? I strongly doubt it. One black would have made it almost certain that the white cops wouldn't have gotten a fair trial.

(2) Why? Wouldn't a black or blacks have been fair-minded enough to render honest judgment? Maybe fair-minded enough, but courageous enough? Improbable (*pari passu* for whites)....My question: Has multiculturalism (Afrocentric curricula, Native American romanticism, bilingualism, etc.) so sanctified American diversity that jurisprudential unity has become unworkable? Almost. The culture of rights-entitlements-hyphenism ("American," instead of just "American") has hypertrophied, is now doing more harm than good to our life together as "one nation under God."

(3) What did the jury know that we don't? I don't know all, but I do know that they saw the whole tape rather than only what we saw on the tube--edited for maximal eyeball-grabbing gut effect. The public right to know is what columnists should be pressing for, instead of only popping off like Tony Lewis, (with whom I seldom disagree): "Racism is what happened: clear, simple, brutal....Racism linked to fear and revenge." Racism, yes, maybe even brutal; but "clear" & "simple"? "Simple" racism would have beaten the other blacks in the car; but they put their hands up & were respectfully handcuffed. King refused to leave the car; & when dragged out, attacked the police, who were frightened for a physical reason (among others): black face & hands hard to see come at you in the dark (Tony is right about both words, "fear and revenge.").

(4) Why did it take the jury eight days (after seven weeks of trial)? Surely they can't be accused of peremptoriness! For one thing, they had to consider not only what happened visibly on the full tape, but also what did not happen. For instance:

(1) Even though they didn't know in the dark whether King was armed, the cops didn't fire on him when he attacked them. Israeli & South Africans would have, wouldn't they? And a black man evading arrest is very apt to have a knife, isn't he? Credit the cops with courage & compassion; yes, with good training. And don't load all the blame on Chief Gates for his military style: his predecessor, seeing the tape, said the police behavior was "normal."

(2) Trained to break bones, they restrained themselves on the ground that that would have been excessive force, force beyond need, the need being to inflict pain but not injury. The civil-rights federal case (which, to avoid double jeopardy, must find grounds other than those adduced in the past trial) may allege the infliction of excessive pain: it cannot claim that pain-infliction as such is police brutality, even though prosecution may try to make the case that any infliction of pain is torture, which our jurisprudential system rules out. (Amnesty International says most countries use official torture; but if torture is defined to include all official infliction of physical pain, all countries do in the process of restraint. Painless police work would work no better than our painless public schools are working.)

(3) Trained to avoid blows to the head, they did so. Defense claimed that the black eye was not from a baton but from King's hitting the pavement when he was dragged out of the car. (No facial scars. A handsome man, as we saw when he made his televised plea for peace, "to work this thing out together.")

(4) King did not obey the command to spread-eagle (ie, extending arms wide & spreading the legs while one is prostrate). Defense claimed that the beating would have ceased immediately had the criminal obeyed. One officer appears to be reaching for handcuffs, the next step after criminal or suspect is prostrate. Since the point of the beating was to convince the criminal to lie prostrate for handcuffing, the beating could be considered excessive only if it continued after the criminal lay prostrate. The police showed mercy in ceasing the beating even though the criminal never obeyed the spread-eagle command; they handcuffed him when they felt it safe to do so. In the prostrate position, the suspect or criminal is not body-cocked for any action. King--6'3", 250 lbs.--was rightly viewed as too dangerous to approach until he had been beaten into submission. It's established that the beating was not excessive vis-a-vis the spread-eagle command, but was it excessive vis-a-vis submission to handcuffing? Ie, might he have been safely handcuffed after fewer blows? Difficult to call, but the police apparently judged not; or were they giving him some extra licks just to make sure? or for vengeance? The jury thought not.

(5) Unfairness to the jury was instant in the case of the mayor. Later, when accused of encouraging rioting by his attack on the jury, Bradley apologized. But he was not alone in his snap judgment. All over the country many prominent persons, including some clergy, said the jury was prejudiced, racist, unfair. This behavior was in violation of an essential of civil society, viz. public acceptance of jury verdicts. Why wasn't there a decent withholding of judgment for, say, 24 hours? Why this irresponsible haste? In some cases, because mouth-indiscipline; in others, because of the desire to appease or ingratiate. Aren't you glad you weren't on that jury?

(6) Attackers falsely accused the jury of saying that the accused police were innocent. Why falsely? Because the jury limited itself to saying that the accused were "not guilty," meaning not guilty "as charged," ie. of what they were charged with. Well, what was that? I've seen-heard almost no discussion of that. The charges were, as always, legally technical. Prosecution possibly could have improved the wording in the sense of having a better chance of getting conviction, but the court--judge & jury--were limited to processing the charges *as worded*. Instead of attacking the jury, complainants of the verdict should have attacked prosecution....Ignorance is a factor in the public rage, expressed with violence of mouth & hand, against the verdict. School "Civics" should do a better job of teaching the Anglo-American jurisprudential process, the one the children will be up against throughout their lives (barring a violent revolution, which might establish a different system). The Anglo-American system, rooted in Anglo-Saxon law, is not perfect, but it's "the law of the land," & ignorance of it is no excuse. It's the negative half of public order, as our Founding Documents are the positive half. By persuasion or compulsion, preferably the former (by education), the citizenry--I repeat, barring a violent revolution, which is highly improbable--will submit to it. King, & the attackers of the verdict, were unsubmitive....A contrary force here is **enclavism**, the multiculturalist doctrine that as American peoples (blacks, Native Americans, etc.) have a right to their own "life-styles," they should have a right to their own jurisprudential systems. Part of the price of multicultural affirmation is that it's getting harder to convince nonAnglos to submit to Anglo law, the law of the land. Unless we back off from multicultural arrogance, more & more force will be needed to coerce nonAnglos into submission. The King video's gut question is this: Is it ever right for white men to beat a black man into submission? How you answer that question reveals which side of the law you are on. A legal aspect of the present crisis of America is that tens of millions of Americans are outside the law here: they believe it's never right for white men to beat a black man into submission. None of those millions should have been allowed by defense in the jury-selection process: their minds are pre-closed against the accused & thus also against the Anglo-American presumption of innocence (note "Anglo-American," not Anglo: this presumption does not exist in British law) & against the conjoint principle of reasonable doubt (since these pre-closed minds have no doubt of the four policemen's guilt).

I hate to admit it, but Bush said it well: "We must respect the process of law, whether or not we agree with the outcome." Those who popped off against the jury were disrespecting the process of law & are guilty of contributing to the spirit of lawlessness in the land. Seeing-hearing-reading them, I cannot rule out vengeance as at least one of their motives, the desire for revenge against the jury.

13 See how revenge pervades the RKE! Almost 4 cs. ago, Francis Bacon hit it right: "Revenge...is a wild justice which, the more man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out." King wanted revenge against the police (with their history of disrespect for, & brutality against, black men); the police wanted revenge against King (who forced them to chase him at 115mpf, then refused to get out of the car, then attacked them, then refused to spread-eagle [& allegedly looked on them disdainfully, & laughed at a police helicopter]); the core of the rioters violently revenged themselves against a society that could hand down such a verdict; the mayor & many other prominent figures in American life expressed revengeful feelings against the jury; doubtless some on the jury had revengeful feelings against King in particular & black men in general.



14 In my photo-experimental days, I made some series of shots of the same scene using different colored filters, to study the rendition-differences. Why does this Thinksheet use the revenge-filter on the RKE? Because I am a biblical person, & the Bible is sour on it, insisting that it spoils all relationships, including the one with God. Is it the only biblical filter we should look through in viewing the RKE? Of course not. Put on the love filter, & what do you see? Some blacks getting a white man to the hospital just in time, some others blacks defending a Korean store against looting,.... ....With the revenge filter on, am I not in danger of seeing revenge where it isn't? Of course, & the same for any other filter, including love. But revenge masquerades itself as righteousness, as caring, as public-spiritedness; it puts on itself the most self-congratulatory face it can sell the constituency & receive back mirrorlike as self-esteem, self-satisfaction, self-contentment, pride. I'm trying to rip off those masks, surely a biblical-prophetic task, a task of the contrarian, an essential functionary in every healthy society sacred & secular.

15 Because of its high emotive charge, "vengeance" blows many people's minds, ie their reason. Is there no good to be said of it? Well, we can speak of a psychological good, viz that's it's action, nonaction leading only to depression, self-destruction. If there is, & there is, such a thing as justified anger, righteous indignation, there must be such a things as the justified, righteous discharge thereof. Vengeance may be right in its target while being wrong in its spirit. The biblical model here is God, (1) whose vengeance is at the service of his love, & (2) who accepts victimization, supremely in the Cross, to lance the boil of human vengeance. Hear THE ENCY. OF THE JEW. RELIGION, p.397: "V. is regarded as a Divine prerogative and is part of the system of Divine retribution whereby human injustice is corrected by Divine justice." With the exception of the ancient Cities of Refuge, *lex talionis* (the claim to the right of personal retaliation) is denied, as is even the right to bear a grudge: it's wrong to say "As you refused me yesterday, so I refuse you today"; but it's also wrong to say "Though you refused me a favor, I shall not do likewise" (Talmud: Yoma 23a). Only Jesus specifically preaches love of enemies, but many talmudic passages come close to it. Further, the Bible praises those who suppress (not "repress"! ) their natural desire to act out their wrath & vindictiveness. One of the most glorious books in all human literature ends with Joseph forgiving his brothers on the ground that while they meant evil against him, "I can't put myself in the place of God....God turned it [your evil plot] into good" (Gn.50.19-20; in the same book, 34.30 & 49.5-7, Jacob condemns an instance of revenge).

16 Believe it: God means the RKE for good, is able to turn inner-city wrath (which, as the riots showed, is multiracial) to his praise (which translates horizontally as attention, in government-private colabor, to our inner-cities, which have been invisible (except for voter-manipulation) to power, both monetary & political. Yes, race & class polarize & paralyze; but power can begin by repenting of the sin of dividing to conquer, the politics of division. All of us can confess complicity in the race-&-class mess & in what Pres. Carter called our nation's spiritual "malaise" (a word he was stupidly laughed at for), & self-blame is the only hopeful way to begin the process of helping the inner cities deliver themselves from hopelessness.

17 As the first ¶ of this Thinksheet warns, explainers of the RKE should proceed with dread. Why? Because to explain an event of mythic dimensions--I mentioned the Holocaust as another such event--is a rational process apt to abstract some elements & weave them into an antimyth to which the proper holistic counter is "You explain, but you don't understand!" Gov. Pete Wilson expressed the danger thus: "To explain is not to excuse." The polarity of **accusing/excusing** derails reason. Eg, a reader who accuses the jury will think I'm excusing them, which I'm not. I'm agnostic at both ends: I don't know whether the police used excessive violence (but I do know that one of them thought so), & I don't know whether the jury did right (but I do know their exoneration was not total). I am appalled, & frightened for America, that reason has had so little to do with what

I've heard-seen-read. A lot of left-of-center clergy yammer about "justice & peace," but the rational content of their utterances reaching me to date on the RKE is embarrassingly small. They are more in solidarity with "system"-bashers than in love with fact-reason-truth. There's a cohort problem here: Many of these clergy, & many in other fields, are '60s system-bashers now come to power without having divested themselves of the alienated, anti-institutional feelings of their younger days. The System, the American way of power, needs (as both Jefferson & Madison insisted) a self-criticism incorporating (1) suspicion of power & (2) readiness for radical challenge not only of incumbents but of the official processes & governmental structures wielding power on behalf of the people & under the people's eye. But the People also need self-criticism against (1) unfairly bashing the system & thus unwittingly fostering anarchy, & (2) shortsightedly supporting candidates who self-servingly coddle voters instead of rubbing the public nose in distressing realities (eg, the inner cities) otherwise left invisible. On paper, the system is the world's best: on the hoof, it's no better than the people, & that's not good enough for "justice & peace." On a grid, reason & truth are both for & against the system & both for & against the people; & mature prophetic religion would advocate & participate in all four actions. The practical-political problem here is that public support goes not to the balanced pleader but to the partisan, whose rhetoric is less demanding on the public mind, which the partisan cajoles into joining (which is easy & neat) instead of thinking (which is tough & messy).

18 **Victim-thinking** & the ideal-principle of equality before the law are antonyms because the former is emotion-engined (including feelings of vengeance) while the latter (on the statues of Justice with her scales) is blindfolded, blind to possibly prejudicial differences among individuals. (IRONY: The ideal of equality militates against the principle of equality before the law. The former drips with pro-victim thinking & produces legislation--eg, forced busing & affirmative action--coercing people by categories; the latter insists on the equality of the individual face-to-face with the law-in-action, ie the police & the courts. I'm not being partisan here: I'm only pointing to a painful internal contradiction that has developed in the American criminal-&-civil codes in the past  $\frac{1}{4}$  c. It's an ideological gulf, & on both sides the self-righteousness stinks.)

"Entitlements" are legal powers deriving from political arguments based on "rights" & powered by moral arguments based on "victimhood." Observe the parallel inflations: with consciousness-raising (a.k.a. sensitization), rights expand (to include children, fetuses, animals, whatnot); as rights expand, so does the "awareness" of former real/imagined rights-violations, an awareness that expands (1) the number of "victims" (approaching the universal victimhood of the citizenry) & thus of "entitlements." The psychiatric term for this compassion-hypertrophy is "hypersensitivity." The disease has now progressed to the point where most voters feel victimized & at least inwardly are shouting (with the 1976 film "Network") "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" The jury verdict was a spark in dry inner-city tinder, & the residents (well aware, of course, of their victimhood, which in many ways is real enough, including an unconfessed level, viz self-victimization) shouted inwardly & outwardly "I'm mad as hell & I'm not going to take it anymore!" Not to worry about an irreparable tear in the social fabric as these two shouts collide: the suburban victims vote, the inner-city victims don't. I've been in voter-registration drives, but they're tougher now: the inner-city victims have by & large given up hope, ie given up on the system. This surrender as effectively reduces their political power as their destruction of their neighborhoods reduces their social & economic power. Since they are their own worst enemies, the rest of Americans need pay little attention to them--except in nightmares, in which inner-city anguish rudely intrudes without invitation.

Conclusion: Victim-thinking is a deadend. Come on, responsibility-thinking! Blacks moving upward, especially into academia, move from the former to the latter. That's one of the many hopeful things about the present American scene.

19 Have I wandered away from my forte, biblical theology? Don't you believe it. What's the Bible have to say about victims? The Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek-Latin

stem from the ancient Hebrew-Israelite animal-sacrifice systems. In the NT, **Jesus** is our victim (the atonement), victimized by our sins, & through the resurrection the victor, our victor over "sin, death, & the devil"--so we need no longer, should no longer, see ourselves as victims but now as "more than conquerors" (Ro.8.37). Theologians of the black church are trying to expand the old black preaching of victory-thinking from the afterlife (where it was good, but judged irrelevant, especially by young black males) to the present life: how does our victorhood in Christ speak to our ghetto life? James Cone is suggesting equal time, here, for Martin King & Malcolm X.

One aspect of the Bible's ancient sacrificial system was the **scapegoat**, which has become a metaphor for buck-passing, for refusing to take responsibility for what's wrong, for blaming others. But Jesus, though victim, spreads blame & grace liberally over the landscape. No partisan blame-the-victim-or-oppressor for him. Rene Girard (p.viii in Jas. G. Williams' **THE BIBLE, VIOLENCE, AND THE SACRED** [HarperSanFrancisco/91]) makes a whole partisan christology of this fact: "What God demands ["in the Gospels"] is not a sacrifice of his Son, not a perfect scapegoat, but the unconditional refusal of scapegoating, even if the price must be death." And JGW, p.240, sees Jesus as innocent victim as freeing America, through Jn. Winthrop, to be "a city set on a hill."

Conclusion: Clear thinking toward a fairer (both senses, justice & beauty) America asks that we repent of "conservative" victim-blaming & "liberal" oppressor-blaming. The former is willfully blind & unavoidably cruel, the latter is naive & unavoidably unjust both in overaccusing the haves & in (by refusing to accuse) excusing the have-nots. (Add the inane mutual blaming of Republicans & Democrats for Watts II, the post-verdict rioting.) Such repentance will not be easy; ideology repents only when, as in Gorbachev's USSR, its base collapses. In the USA, there is as yet no undeniable ideological collapse, though the quadrupling of the national debt under the conservative-Republican White House seems close to it.

20 **Television** (including its use of personal camcorder tape such as of the King beating) intensifies the lust for revenge, for "giving them a taste of their own medicine," for "getting back at them." As Jon. Alter says, it's oxygen to the fires of rioting. But its images are subject to the law of diminishing returns. An Indiana candidate, with federal-law protection, is showing mangled fetuses in his ad; but the public's getting used to full-color mangled-fetus photos, partly from Operation Rescue's thrusting them in its face. The more the jury looked at the King tape (in three speeds), the more they were able to disengage their guts & engage their brains. On the tube & in the bijous there's so much violence & gore; but the industry continues to escalate the mayhem, knowing the public would get bored with any level at which the escalation would stop. Inner-city L.A. was used to seeing police beat people up: what was new was that the rest of the nation, & the world, saw King beaten up--so the longterm effect will be that the general public will be less shocked at police-inflicted pain & more willing to accept its necessity. ....Ironical reversal: L.A.P.D. Chief Daryl Gates,\* I think, was slow to respond to the rioting partly because he wanted the public to have a taste of the chaos when the police are not (as he put it) "pro-active." The curl of his lip said that he took the anarchy as confirmation of his now-rejected policing style, based on respect by fear (the new chief's style is based on respect by friendship, which I hope works better--but both are needed). \* "Anything is provocative!"

The law of love: increasing returns. The law of inurement: decreasing returns, because shock reported shocks less with each repetition. The law of getting respect: it can't be given (say, by convincing against racism) but must be earned (by personal-&-group achievements) & can be lost (by bad personal-&-group behavior--eg, Willie Horton, Rodney King, & the fact that 65% of American blacks now being born are bastards).

But television is the eye of God as well as the human eye, extended: now we can see, & know, & suffer, more of what God has always seen-known-suffered. I am sad but hopeful: the chapter before Is.61.1-3 is on the great transformation we are invited, even commanded, to participate in, under guidance of the Mediator, who (again, 61.1-3) has good news for all sinners & sufferers.