

THE LIBERATOR'S OPPRESSION IS THE NEUROTIC NEED TO HAVE SOMEBODY TO SAVE

AN AMERICAN CHARACTERISTIC IN CHURCH AND STATE

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As Craigville Theological Colloquy X (on "Theological Standards for Ministry in the United Church of Christ") began yesterday in the 1872 "Tabernacle," an historical site for remembering "the good old campmeeting days" that swept our country throughout the last century (beginning in 1801 in KY), it came to me that as the present Craigville Conference Center grew out of that old campmeeting whose meetingplace is still central to our village, Houghton College (mine) grew out of a campmeeting whose tabernacle is still in existence, every one of its concrete foundation posts saying "GLORY" on all four of its vertical sides.

These two tabernacles, & hundreds of others still dotting America, are memorials of our **salvationist** ancestors. Folks needed saving, & up went the tabernacles as centers where, on annual pilgrimage, folks could come & "get saved."

Toqueville commented on the American salvationistic characteristic (what didn't he comment on about us?) in both state & church. I limit this Thinksheet to a less-than-praiseworthy aspect of it, viz the neurotic drive to identify somebody who needs saving & thus can serve as an attack-release target for the drive. My procedure will be to adduce instances without trying to detail all the baleful consequences. I leave out also all the good--the good intentions & results--that has come to our country & the world through the outworking of this American characteristic: that is a story far more often told than the story I have to tell now.

1 America (here meaning the U. S. of A.) began as a project of group self-liberation from 17th & 18th cs. British (as we felt-saw it) oppression. The Pilgrims & the Revolutionaries succeeded. Then the South sought to deliver itself from the North, & failed, Old Dixie to this day still blowing in the wind to signal that the smart of felt-perceived oppression has not even yet been entirely assuaged.

2 The Civil War (south-of-the-[Mason-Dixon]border, "the War Between the States") was increasingly, as the anguish of it increased year by year, understood in the North as the inevitable violent expression of the **abolition** movement that took its rise among mid-Atlantic Quakers in the late 18th century & New-England Yankees in the early 19th century. Some folks, viz blacks, needed saving from other folks, viz their owners.

3 Abolitionism next developed as **prohibitionism**: some folks needed saving from other folks who were selling them (as variously called) Demon Rum, Jn. Barley-corn. The movement now is expressing itself as salvation from other drugs, increasingly including nicotine.

4 Next it was **women** who needed to be saved from men & felt-perceived "androcentric" institutions, expressions of the "patriarchal" ethos. As the movement matures & rots, as all living things rot after maturity, one cannot but feel for the many women who are straining under the movement's self-inflicted oppressive need to "keep up the pressure," a stress one feels also in the black movement, just now in Ben Chavis' efforts to revive the NAACP (even entailing an awkward & dubious alliance with the Mandela faction of black South African liberationism). One force in both movements is neurotic, viz the centrifugal force of the enclavistic spirit making it harder for women to live with men & easier for black students to demand their own self-segregated dormitories.

5 Since there's always somebody in need of some sort of saving, neurotic liberationism will never have any shortage of material to work on & for. But there's a distinct American way of going about it, a way largely immune to Marxist liberationism (such as in "**liberation theologies**").

6 Clinton's salvationistic campaign promises remind me of Holden Caulfield's desire (in Salinger's novel) to save children, to be THE CATCHER IN THE RYE. HC couldn't actually do much, but it felt good to be wanting to. Lebanon. Somalia. Bosnia. Palestine-Israel. Haiti. **Gays**, an issue now tearing up American liberal churches, including the UCC....And, oh, **the poor**!