

IS "JUSTICE AND PEACE" CULTURE- TRANSCENDENT? SPECIFIC?

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Almost a score of years before "the struggle for justice and peace" became a phrase in the UCC Statement of Faith, the two words were drawing close to each other in ecumenical circles thinking & praying toward a WW2 peace that would differ in this regard from the WW1 peace *without* justice. I recall the phrases--"peace with justice," "a just peace," Jn. Foster Dulles' "a just and durable peace" (when he was president of the National Council of Churches & a drafter, with some other ecumenically minded church leaders, of what became the Charter of the United Nations).

The phrase-making was culture-specific, viz American liberal Protestant, with some participation of Catholics & Jews. Hundreds of millions were longing for the reality, for peace & justice to kiss each other. My reference is to the history of the phrase-making that began $\frac{1}{2}$ c. ago in liberal Protestantism, where it still has strength....This Thinksheet inquires:

... Given that "justice and peace" was/is culture-specific, are its two elements so also? is "justice" culture-specific? is "peace"? If so in either case, what wandering from reality has occurred / is occurring from treating "justice" &/or "peace" as culture-transcendent, ie as universal concepts? how have we become aware of the wandering? and how do we make course-corrections?

1 **Multiculturalism**, beginning $\frac{1}{4}$ c. ago with the black-power movement, has heightened our consciousness that the American way of government is culture-specific, a product of now-dead rich white English adult males. Vis-a-vis this heritage, I reject the genetic fallacy, viz that we shouldn't let American political life today rest on so narrow, opinionated, & prejudiced a base. Rather, I believe this base should be formed in the souls of all of America's children of whatever ethnicity. I am, in this regard, an antimulticulturalist.

Paradox: While our founding documents---the Declar. of Indep., the Const., the Federalist Papers, the Bill of Rights---**excluded**, in their composition, women, the poor, blacks, & Amerinds, in their outworking they structured the world's most **inclusive** society. Instead of wasting energy resenting that narrow, exclusive base, those then excluded should work with us then included toward a more-equal-opportunity social reality living out the inclusive implications of our founding documents, as Martin Luther King Jr. preached we should.

2 The rhetoric of each succeeding Martin Luther King Day fascinates me. That now-dead black adult male is being transformed into a multiculturalist! What's involved? The **power** factor. King believed in citizen power, the equal-access power of every citizen regardless of race, sex, religion, or class. He opposed all privileged forms of power, white or black. Specifically, he stood against Stokeley Carmichael's black power (& disliked "black," an old slurword against Negroes). He was especially worried that racial or ethnic power would claim, as power easily does, privilege. His fears have been realized in the emergence of "multiculturalism" as a social condition in which subgroups--blacks, women, hispanics, homos, et al--achieve privileged legal powers whether or not supported by social sanctions. This definition, though perhaps not just this wording, will soon be in the dictionaries.

3 What's in the dictionaries now? Take RHD2: (1) "Multicultural," "...several different cultures or cultural elements" (beginning 1940-45); (2) "Multiculturalism," "...the preservation of different cultures or cultural indentities within a unified society, as a state or nation" (1960-65).

4 The hyphenate "-centric" became common first in academese, eg "Afrocentric curriculum." By retrojection, we have our way of government as Anglocentric & our general culture as Eurocentric. The Anglocentrism is mandatory (as the processes & structures of governing), the Eurocentrism is pervasive, & the Afrocentrism (& other racial, ethnic, gender, sexual-preference, & class centrisms) is voluntary. Eg, black dorms are an instance of voluntary resegregation. The more the voluntary enclaves live unto themselves, the more culture-specific become "justice and peace" for them, & the more culture--specific seem "justice and peace" in

Anglocentric (eg, the courts) & Eurocentric (eg, the media) life. Irony: the more withdrawn an enclave, the more its "justice and peace" will be enclave-specific but the less aware of this specificity the enclave will be.

This irony derives from the psychology of attention & is independent of the power factor in enclavism. An old-boy network of CEOs (1) know what they mean by "justice and peace" & (2) believe their definitions should be universally accepted (ie, should be understood as culture-transcendent). In the interest of equity, the laws lean against a businessmen's club because power-decisions in the club exclude women from power (& blacks, if the club has been white). But "minorities" (women, blacks, et al), whom the laws have tended to see as powerless, may exclude the powerful--ie whites, especially white males.

The more withdrawn, self-segregated a minority enclave, the more it sees itself as discriminated against, suppressed, repressed, oppressed, victimized, "marginalized." Here two pathologies deepen: (1) self-pity taking the form of self-pride ("self-esteem") & aggressive self-assertion, & (2) resentment against "them," especially white males, who with decreasing justification are thought to have all the power.

5 The above analysis has long been in my mind, so of course I was delighted when I ran across a book confirming it. Shelby Steele, a black professor at San José State U., in THE CONTENT OF OUR CHARACTER: A NEW VISION OF RACE IN AMERICA (St.Martin's Press/90), details the tragic resegregation now in process under the push of many pressures. The original (1958-) civil rights movement cut the cord between race & power: race, said King & others, should be no advantage or disadvantage to anyone. But after the civil-rights legislation of 1964-65, some blacks, experiencing the rage almost all blacks had repressed during segregation, moved to retie the severed cord between power & (the white) race, this time tying the power end to the black race. I practiced "solidarity with the victims" to the extent of campaigning for special privileges for blacks (eg, I tried to persuade church organizations to pay James-Forman-style "reparations") & even special laws in their favor (especially the original form of "affirmative action"). Give me A for goodwill & D for foresight: "reparations" was a bust that wasted millions of \$ on enterprises blacks were unprepared to undertake, & "affirmative action" deteriorated into quotas & reverse discrimination, both feeding an ugly nonblack backlash further fragmenting American life.

The black movement of the '60s was about justice as equality of opportunity: the black-power movement of the '70s was about power, & justice only as an opening to achieve power, with equality a muted or even denied theme.

How achieve this power? Chiefly by pressing for race-based "entitlements." This loosed the floodwaters of what Steele calls "the politics of difference." Cries for "rights" & "entitlements" became strident in the land--feminists, Hispanics, Asians, Amerinds, Eskimos, gays, lesbians, the disabled, & other self-defined "minorities." What did these cries have in common? Each group emphasized some quality making them different from **white males** & fought for power based on that quality under the flag & moral force of "victimization."

6 To cast Steele's argument in the terms of this Thinksheet's title, the great cultural divide beginning with black power shifted the base of rights & entitlements from America's founding documents to the definition of "justice and peace" derivative from each group's self-defined victimization (earlier called "oppression," with "liberation" as its antonym). Observing the baleful effects on each group & on the society as a whole, I'm increasingly though reluctantly convinced that the base-shift was pathological & that our social health will return to the extent that we make it back to the founding-documents (esp. the Declar. of Indep. & the Bill of Rights) as base. This means back to our citizen identity & away from what Steele calls our "grievance identities." Steele doesn't use the expression, but it's a paradigm shift.

7 I decided to call this a paradigm shift while reflecting on **political correctness**. Why do certain words trigger attack of the PC guards from whatever tower or barracks considers itself under attack? An immunological analogy may help: the

the guards are the white corpuscles attacking the alien invaders. Eg, to the feminist paradigm, masculine terms for God ("Father," "King," "Lord," "Son of God," "he-his-him") are alien invaders from the patriarchy paradigm (read as "oppressive male patriarchy"). The bete noir (black beast) of a radical black radio call-in show speaks not of America but of "white racist America." And we all could recognize, in the old days, communist newspeak with its pejorative adjectives. As for the in-group disciplinary action of political correctness, deviance is failure to (1) document your group's grievance, (2) testify to the ongoing specific alienation, & (3) support the group's integrity-sovereignty.

8 All these little sovereignities over against the sovereignty of the United States of America! Historical analogy: Calhoun lost his chance for the Presidency when President Andrew Jackson discovered that C. was the anonymous author of a pamphlet supporting the nullification principle (that any state has the right to annul any federal action it disagrees with--the principle that made the Civil War, 31 years later, inevitable). America today has been balkanized by grievance-identity factions. It's tough on liberal churches like the UCC: the factions are tearing us up. (Not the fundamentalist churches: they are a grievance-identity faction all by themselves.) Since the gospel calls Christians more to acceptance of responsibilities than to affirmation of rights, more to love than to anger, churches, while not denying conflicts within them arising both externally & internally, should be agents of healing & wholeness rather than battlegrounds with partisan flags flying. One action toward this end is honest & competently led group Bible study....not Bible study that (1) merely confirms the secular status quo or (2) prostitutes Scripture to some ideology, eg liberationism.

9 Is **nonviolence** culture-specific or culture-transcendent?

In radical pacifists, culture-transcendent. An elaborate example is Walter Wink's trilogy of the "principalities" (NRSV, "rulers") & "powers" (Ro.8.38), the last being ENGAGING THE POWERS: DISCERNMENT AND RESISTANCE IN A WORLD OF DOMINATION (Fortress/92). Violence is inherent in domination; domination is wrong, so violence is wrong & wars are bad.

In relative pacifists such as Gandhi & King, nonviolence is situation-specific, wars of survival being justified. I am a relative pacifist in that I restrict violence to last resort & reject my-country-right-or-wrong chauvinism. This letter, published 9 Sept 92 just before the presidential election, puts the case as starkly, as simply, as I can. Of course the concept of "good war" is comparative-relative: a war better comparatively, relative to the situation, than no war. Some feel, though I do not, that the present "ethnic cleansing," rape, & gratuitous destruction in Bosnia justifies military intervention from beyond the old Yugoslavia.

10 "Justice and peace" should not be smoothly merged into justiceandpeace. I am committed to justice, but have only a relative preference for peace as nonwar-nonviolence. The preference, however, is strong, for a spiral of violence such as now in Bosnia drills deep into the human abyss, releasing the demons of dark memories to create a whole new round of dark memories to make ethnic peace more difficult.

11 Again, my peace preference makes me loath to support the initiation of violence; but it's only a preference rather than a conviction: **counterviolence** seems to me necessary to public order (as Wink reluctantly admits). If your baby bites, "check around to find another biting baby, and they'll fast cure each other." The quotation is not from an inhuman monster but from that gentle, deeply loving pediatrician Barry Brazelton. Of course he says you shouldn't arrange to have your baby bitten till you've tried everything else. The Dept. of Justice has Community Relations (Conflict Resolution) Services, but that's for troubles in later life. In between stages, kids will watch to see that the jello is equally divided. Love forever searches for common ground by talking, sharing, mediating, conciliating, even litigating--but at the end of the line, coercion, punishment, counter-violence (in the sense that the crime is direct or indirect violence against society).

Counterviolence has a biological base, the body's immune systems. When

any of these fail, as in HIV/AIDS & CFIDS, the body is in deep trouble. The social body is in deep trouble when its immunological defenses fail--home, church, school, community, jurisprudence (laws, courts, execution of sentences, rehabilitation), politics (the processes of selecting & monitoring office-holders), the military. Think through the ordinary & extraordinary forms of counterviolence appropriate to each of these lines of defense. Where, right now, do you see these forms failing? succeeding? First in our country, then elsewhere.

12 This Thinksheet's question can be otherwise put: Are "justice & peace" only social constructs (thus, only culture-specific), or are they expressions of (1) a cosmic order inclusive of human nature (thus, cosmological-transcendent) and/or (2) the divine nature & will (thus, theological-transcendent)? The West's medieval synthesis of humanity, cosmology, & theology could not separate these components into individual-society, nature, & grace. The unified dialectical field then exploded into counter-claimants for humanity (the Renaissance), grace (the Reformation), & nature (the Enlightenment, including the assignment of nature to empirical science). Our postmodern talk of "justice & peace" must (1) recognize & even respect this fragmentation & (2) strive to reintegrate the three components into a **new synthesis**. Eg, what have we learned of humanity-in-nature? That we are altruistic (Ashley Montague), aggressive (Konrad Lorenz ON AGGRESSION, 1966), & (as other animals) territorial (Robt. Ardrey THE TERRITORIAL IMPERATIVE, 1966). Walter Wink's modernization of Jesus to proclaim nonviolence supports Montague but suppresses Lorenz, Ardrey, & a host of researchers-philosophers since 1966.

Wartime service not worth debate

Like everything else, wars come in two kinds, good and bad.

World War II was a good war, and I believe Clinton would have fought in it.

Vietnam was a bad war, and I hope Bush would not have fought in it.

Or to put it the other way around --

Bush fought in a good war.

Clinton didn't fight in a bad war.

Which one was patriotic?

Both.

Which one made the right decision?

Both.

Let's wash this item from the debate.

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