

GUNS HAVE MOUTHS BUT NO EARS

The Bible says your ears are the most important part of your anatomy:

"Hear the word of the Lord!"

This Thinksheet's title is a trope on something that grand lady of peace, Elise Boulding, said here on Cape Cod yesterday: "Guns have no ears." The past two days, the bullets of two Colorado "shooters" (formerly "gun persons," to replace "gunmen") have nudged the UN/NATO/USA anti-Serb bombs off of page 1. Take comfort where you can: violence is getting a bad name.

1 You do not have a friend who is all mouth. No ears, no friend. All mouth is for destroyers, for guns. The two Littleton murderers-suicides experienced their peers as earless victimizers, so felt justified & liberated in killing them. The peers (esp. the jocks & the preps) had committed sins of omission (shunning kids who were "different") & commission (taunting, ridiculing, in the ways kids can be cruel). Sinners at both front & rear of the guns. Original sin is the ultimate (& media-unheard) answer to the cries of "Why?" No ears.

2 THREE QUESTIONS: (1) What happened? (2) What's happening? (3) What should happen? The way the human mind works, no one of these questions can be "processed" in isolation from the other two. But also each question deserves primary attention with the other questions, as it were, looking on. So, e.g., there are as many answers to question #1 as there are perspectives from question #3.

3 What happened in the U.S. 1860-65? (1) Pres. Lincoln turned tyrannical (as Booth's correct "tyrant") in personally abrogating S.Carolina's right to succeed from the union (a states-right without which the Constitution could not have been ratified). OR: In firing on Ft.Sumter, S.Carolina turned rebel on an insufficient ground (as Shay had earlier, & the KLA in Kosovo later). Winners get to write history, so the latter view prevails--& so that long unpleasantness is called "The Civil War" (rather than, as some Southerners still prefer, "The War Between the States"--compare "The Revolutionary War" [rather than, as some British prefer, "The Colonial Rebellion"]).

4 Gun-wars are follow-ups on word-wars (literally, "logomachies"). Here let's

Nations not always governments

The Greeks had a word for everything, including fights over word-confusions: logomachy.

Against Dee Lobas' use of "our Christian nation," Mick Carlon's letter stated a flat-out untruth: "America is not a Christian nation."

Nations are peoples whether or not they are organized into a government. The Kurds, for example, are a nation but have no government (are not permitted to have a government).

Statistically, the United States is the most Christian nation on Earth. And wisely, we have a government designed to prevent itself from interfering with religion either by establishing (privileging) any religious organizations or by "prohibiting the free exercise of" religion. This government was designed by Christians, including Thomas Jefferson, a faithful Episcopalian.

Carlon makes too much of "God is not mentioned in the Constitu-

tion." The Constitution assumes, and builds on, the Declaration of Independence, which does speak of God.

And Carlon would do well to ponder the fact that our nation's supreme contribution to human welfare, the separation of church and state, is an invention of a Christian nation.

Finally, Carlon implies that the Christian religion is outstanding for persecution. That is a myopic illusion: We in the United States are closer to, and therefore more aware of, the downside of Christian history. The truth is that, historically, all religions' efforts at uniformity (union of church and state, of religion and power) have produced more woe than weal for humanity.

Another separation we need is the distinction between "nation" and "government."

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In titling, the editor added "always"! True, by synecdoche "nation" can (sometimes!) include government. But "we" (NATO et al) are bombing not the Serb nation but the Serb government (its buildings & infrastructure supports & military)--though increasing numbers of Serb civilians are dying as "collateral damage."

In 29 Eng. translations of Ps.1.1-2, this distinction is made: vs.1 is the nations/peoples, synonyms in Heb.-Gk.-Lat. (a few have, for the 1st wd., heathen/pagans/Gentiles; 1 has nations

instead of peoples); vs.2 has "kings" (i.e., govenments). Only 1 (CEV, Contemporary Eng. Version)) confuses the two: by adding "their" before "people," it converts "nations" to governments (eisegesis being common in this PC paraphrastic Bible, of which the Am. Bible Society should be ashamed).

5 The ease with which "we" (that 3-way we: U.S., NATO, U.N.) slid into this air war appalled the likes of Robt. McNamara with their painful experience of how limited is air-power alone, & even how counter-productive (huddling nation & government together, as Ho Chi Min had predicted). Truth is the 1st victim of war, & guns have no ears. A 3rd truth: **empire** requires occupation forces. The U.S. lost Vietnam, so have no occupation force there: we "won" S.Korea & Haiti & Bosnia, so have occupation forces there & will have in Kosovo (indefinitely!) if "we" three "win" there. The sad history of occupation forces (including Rome's in Jesus' Palestine) should give us pause against intervening in others' internal troubles (which Art.2 of the U.N. Charter forbids the U.N. to do, & which all agree "we" three are doing in Yugoslavia [none of the belligerents denying that Kosovo is a legitimate province of Yugoslavia, whose president is Milosevic]).

6 Can't we get the story straight? Impossible. We can list events straight (as in annals), but (1) slant (interpretation) enters in the very choice of which events to in-/ex-clude; & (2) the events' syntax, how they are related, is the meaning the storyteller imposes on the events. Going to the Great Southland to study before World War II, I discovered that the hero of '60-'65 was not Lincoln but Lee, who would have won (the story went) if Jefferson Davis had been able to obtain arms from abroad. The KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) is increasingly successful in getting arms from abroad: in future, how will this fact figure in the way the KLA's people (the Illyrians of Albania-Kosovo-Montenegro-Macedonia) & the Serbs tell this war-story? And will that story include an occupation--as U.S. history might have included an occupation if some European force came in, at the Confederacy's invitation, to force a cease-fire rather than (as the South intended) a victory for the Confederacy?

7 No war, including this one, was ever fought primarily for the **humanitarian motive**. "We" did nothing when Croatia "cleansed" a province of 350,000 Serbs in 1995, & the KLA (successor to a non-violent rebel alternative government) began to persecute Kosovo Serbs (leading Milosevic to believe that the KLA would try to cleanse Kosovo of Serbs, seeing the Croats had been successful). Lincoln crushed the CSA (Confederate States of America), & Milosevic is trying to crush the KLA & was approaching success when "we" intervened, energizing the KLA with fresh hope & support. M.'s response to NATO bombing has been to increase turmoil in Kosovo, alternately forcing non-Serbs to leave & to stay (with no clear cleansing policy, though that is NATO war-propaganda)...NATO corrupted the U.N. into fighting a war for NATO's survival. NATO should not survive. And the notion that governments can be controlled by bombing should not survive.

8 Long-term, governments have only limited influence on **people-flows**, the movement of human masses throughout history. Individually & in the mass, life is difficult & justice elusive. Things are not what they seem, unintended often overwhelm intended consequences, & foresight is so inferior to hindsight as to fill the latter with regrets. So, quit? Yes, if you stop reading Ps.2 after the 1st strophe (vv.1-3); no if you finish the Psalm & believe it. All the "autonomous humanisms" we've tried have failed us, said Max Stackhouse in his Harv.Div.School Tillich memorial lecture; it's time to advance toward a new "theonomous humanism" (Tillich's goal in the terms of his time & mind).

As to the proper task & scope of government, perhaps we can learn to laugh with God (vs.4 of this Psalm): laughter & faith are the two modes of **transcendence**, & both increase our appreciation for what Michael Oakeshott called the irremovability, in political life, of "ambiguity and ambivalence." In his THE POLITICS OF FAITH AND THE POLITICS OF SCEPTICISM (Yale/97), he warns us away from treating complexities as (ideological) simplicities that lead to arrogance & violence. No intellectually consistent politic can maintain order while honoring human freedom and dignity: political faith & scepticism need each other.