

IS PALESTINIANISM RACIST?

SITUATION: As I write, the world conference against racism is convening in Durban, S.Africa. The U.S. has there no top-level representative: we failed to get the powers that be to elide the **Zionism-is-racist** passages in the pre-convention materials.

TAKE: This Thinksheet (1) comments on my take on the present Mideast agony & (2) tries to face afresh the supercessionist issue.

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1 I can hear Korzybski (#3077.5)! He would say there's no hair & skin on either side of either "is." The two isms are abstractions, & racism is unexcelled among pejorative generalizations for high subjective-emotive force & low objective-cognitive content.

2 Let's put nation as the mid-term between people & land. Is every people a nation? No. E.g., the Kurds are a people but have no political structures (across the five primary lands where they live as native foreigners) such as nations have. Again, between the years 70 & 1948 the Jews were a people but not a nation--some of them forming a nation in Palestine in the latter year with U.N. permission. Before 1947 (the end of the British Protectorate), were the Palestinian people a nation? A quasi-nation, with some self-rule under British imperial sovereignty.

3 The ideal? A people self-constituted as a nation on its own land, free from fear of invasion or isolation. This ideal burned brightly in the late-19th-c. founders of Zionism, which dreamed of literalizing Passover's "Next year in Jerusalem." It was a nationalist people-nation-land dream, & all that kept it from being fully realized after 1947 was the awkward fact of **other people** in the promised land. The other people, freed by terrorist Jews (Irgund, Stern Gang) from the British overlordship, hoped that their people-nation-land dream would come to full flower; which could have happened except for the awkward fact of that **other people**, the Jews now militarily dominant in Palestine (as they've been ever since).

4 We Christians cannot, historically, disengage ourselves from the **other people** factor: biblically, Canaan is said to have been God-given to the Hebrews in spite of the awkward fact that that land was already inhabited by **other people** (as in 1958, in the penthouse of the governor of the port of Haifi, I reminded him & his wife after she'd said "All the land is now ours as it was our ancestors!"). (The Bible records also two later awkward **other-people** occasions, viz. the return from Egypt & the return from Babylon.) And in the 6th c. AD/CE, we were the **other people** when the Arabs swept over Palestine (whose population at the time was mainly Christian; now it's ca.4% Christian).

Nor can we Christians dissociate ourselves from the contemporary land-struggle in Palestine (or the Balkans or anywhere else on our small planet, which is in effect getting smaller as the tonnage of human flesh gets larger).

5 But I must dissociate myself from "Bible prophecy" Christian thinking vis-a-vis the land politics of Palestine. Every night by flashlight Loree & I walk 1½ miles along the ocean & around the pond, & I recharge the batteries when the light dims; but humanity has no charger that can empower us to see the future brightly (only "dimly," 1Cor.13.12 NRSV; mg, "Gk in a riddle"). But while I have no itching ears for apocalyptic details, I do have the eschatological confidence that the Lord of nature & the Lord of history, including the future, is One Lord whose victory we see in the living-dying-rising of our Lord Jesus Christ. But the Darbyite-dispensationalist notion that the Jews must return to Palestine as a prelude to the End Times--well, I consider such straight-line literalism not only wrong-headed but also, in its political & spiritual effects, pernicious.

6 When two peoples claim one land, each for the flourishing of its own nation, the name of the game is not racism but **nationalism**. When the Jews (Jacob) & Arabs (Esau) struggled inside their mother Rebekah, the LORD said to her (Gn.25.

23 NRSV) "Two nations [not races] are in your womb, / and two peoples [not races] born of you shall be divided...." Ethnicity, both positive (as pride) & negative (as prejudice), is a factor in both Zionist & Palestinian nationalism (ethnicity being Gk. for "peoplehood"). But neither nationalism is more "racist" than the other; & the Durban convention powers that be should have condemned neither or both, instead of only "Jacob."

7 Let's allow (though many anthropologists don't) some meaning to race. The Semities include (historically) Assyrians, Babylonians, Arameans, Jews, Arabs, many other peoples. Ethnic +/- claims, especially of Lebensraum ("living room" for a people to flourish as a nation), have caused jostlings among them for millenia. The same for the Sinic peoples (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, many other peoples). Land is a zero-sum resource, & struggle for it (with all the generalizations pertaining thereto) will not only continue but increase till the end of history. "American exceptionalism" cannot make us an exception to this reality, the primary cause of social violence. On one level, the on-the-ground level, it's natural; on another, it's evil. If we call it a natural evil, we have a theodic problem on our hands. But if we call it only natural, we have on our hands the problem of why today Milosevic, on criminal charges, faced an international court he denies jurisdiction to. **Justice** is elusive ("other people" always & everywhere are short of it, but so also may be those they call their "occupiers-oppressors"), & the idealistic demand for it may worsen a people's lot (true of the Palestinians since 1948). But as God's answers to prayer may take unanticipated forms, so with "justice," which in Palestine may take the form of two-peoples, one-nation/land, rather than two nations/lands. Not soon, but (I think) inevitable.

8 People(s) / nation(s) / land(s) / **covenant**. Today I read a letter in which a very sick person says "Where is God?" Does not Palestine, a very sick land, cause us to ask this question? But for the remainder of this Thinksheet, I want to have this question underneath the Jew/Christian supercessionism issue: are Christians inheritors of the covenant the Jews (their prophets said) were unfaithful to? That's supercessionism (as in the NT's Epistle to the Hebrews, [probably] Gal.6.16, Mt.5.17 [Jesus fulfills Torah], etc.), embarrassed when confronted with the reality that the Jews as a *landless* people (after AD70CE, as after 586BC/BCE) continued in spiritual productivity & diaspora vitality.

Antisupercessionism is the reverse: The Jews since Moses have lived, un/faithfully (both), under YHWH's covenant with them ("Old Covenant[Testament]"); Christians live under a "New Covenant[Testament]." Two parallel divine covenants/peoples--not one covenant, a second people (Gentiles) replacing the first people (Jews). CAUTION: "OT" & "NT" are, in origin, supercessionistic: from the Epistle to the Hebrews. Or one covenant shared by two peoples/religions.

9 A fourth way to view covenant vis-a-vis Jews/Christians is what I may call **interim replacement** (Ro.9-11). God's covenant is with the Jews, who will return to it after the Gentiles have been fully "grafted into" the Jewish tree (11:17,19,23,24). In the interim (meanwhile), Christians should preach the gospel to the Jews ("first": Ro.1.16) in anticipation of the time when Jews, moved to jealousy (11.11: "salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous"), return to their covenant, now including the gospel. God's election of the Jews is "irrevocable" (11.29), so (vs.26) "all Israel will be saved." Paul's explanation of the "mystery" that in his experience most Jews rejected the gospel? The previous verse: "a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until*the full number of the Gentiles has come in." Nothing in the NT, or since, trumps this, Paul's take on the "mystery."

Veritas in medio stat: Paul's "truth" is "in the middle" between permanent supercessionism (the Jews permanently, as Jews though not as convertible individuals, cut out of the covenant) & two salvation-tracks (Jewish & Christian, no need for Jews ever to convert). 1 covenant, 3 entries (Jews, Christians, then Jews again). "All [human beings] are under the power of sin" (Ro.3.9) & need God's grace through the Cross. Notice, finally, that Paul is not ungenerous toward, does not blame, unresponsive Jews: graciously, he attributes their "hardening" to the working out of the divine plan for the full-working of the covenant.