

## "THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF KINDNESS"

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1/2 century ago yesterday was my first sermon as pastor of Morton (IL) Community Church (a 10½-year pastorate). My diary notes my intention to reach my peoples' hearts more than their heads: "not 'sound-doctrine' emphasis." I haven't changed (on this!): a good title for my first sermon of the new century--to which this Thinksheet may be notes.

1 Three evenings ago I concluded a dinnerparty in our home thus: "As we break, I feel the need to say something pious: 'With deeds of love and kindness / the heavenly kingdom comes'--two lines from the hymn 'Lead on, O King eternal.'" In age we eight Christians ranged from 21 to 82, an equal number of men & women & of eight occupations. The hours flew by as we spoke, all of us, of matters light & heavy, personal & societal, past-present-future. Kindness got in through Ann Landers' promotion of this Martin Luther King III project:

**Dear Ann Landers:** I want to thank you for believing in the power of young people to change the world. Your column last year helped inspire more than 2 million students and 17,000 educators to participate in the Do Something Kindness & Justice Challenge in honor of the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday.

Through the Challenge, young people learn the values taught by my father -- responsibility, compassion, nonviolence and moral courage. And they put these values into practice by performing Acts of Kindness (helping others) and Justice (standing up for what is right) in their homes, schools and neighborhoods.

This year, I hope every young person in America will participate and help carry my father's legacy into the new century. For two weeks, starting on the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday (Jan. 17), students in grades K-12 can write down the Acts of Kindness and Justice they perform, and post their acts on the Internet. Each school that performs 1,000 Acts or more will receive special recognition.

Teachers can register and obtain all materials for the 2000 Challenge on the Internet at [www.dosomething.org](http://www.dosomething.org) or by writing to Do Some-



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thing, 423 W. 55th St., 8th Fl., New York, N.Y. 10019. Educators will receive a free guide with grade-appropriate curriculum that includes daily activities, instructions for posting Acts on the Internet and incentives to encourage participation.

By taking action to improve our communities and nation, we will help make my father's dream a reality. Sincerely -- Martin Luther King III

**Dear Martin Luther King III:** Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to tell my readers, especially teachers, about the Kindness & Justice Challenge.

By participating in the Challenge during the two weeks between Jan. 17 and Jan. 28, students learn respect, responsibility, compassion, nonviolence, generosity and moral courage. Students and teachers can post their Acts on the Internet, keep track of their community-building efforts, and share stories with stu-

dents nationwide. All participating students receive a certificate signed by Martin Luther King III, and trophies are awarded to top performing students in each state. Outstanding students, educators and schools are also eligible to win prizes.

Do Something's mission is to inspire young people to believe in their power to create positive change, and give them the tools to take action. I urge all educators to sign up for the Kindness & Justice Challenge today. You CAN make a difference.

2 My enthusiasm for this "Challenge" springs, I think, mainly from its **balance**, the synergism of kindness ("helping others") & justice ("speaking up for what is right"). In persons, movements, societies, this balance is rare because the two emotive constellations are disparate: the various Jungian personality-types analyses separate kindness-oriented (perceptive-appreciative) humans from justice-oriented (critical-judgmental) humans. But some of us, by genetic &/or emotional-spiritual formation, are both highly appreciative & highly judgmental. We (I am one of these) confuse our publics. (Long ago somebody asked me "How can you be so kind in person & so cruel in print?")

3 In our present soft culture I'm praised for being appreciative & blamed for being (oh, dirty word!) judgmental. But "standing up for what is right" is the justice action expressive of one's judgment--one's judgmentalism!--as to what is right (i.e., for what in one's judgment is right). And (of course) I'm especially irritated by kind folks who appreciate the hell out of everything & express their right/wrong judgments on little or nothing. I'm (?) unkind enough to give you a specific instance:

At the Parliament of the World's Religions last month, a CAPE COD TIMES columnist, Lawrence Brown, met a Buddhist nun who told him it was her fault that when she was a small child, her grandfather raped her: it was her judgmental (!) karma from having done something simply awful in a former incarnation. Now, we all know small children's tendency to feel guilty when anything goes wrong: they somehow caused (e.g.) their parents' divorce or a parent's death. Add radical sexism to this: males' abuse of females is females' fault (there being, for each case, a stock culture-acceptable elucidation of the female guilt). Face to face with this horrendous self-inflicted injustice supporting a long-ago victimization, did Brown "stand up for what is right"? No, he was just too kind to do that. It's an old axiom: Evil thrives when the good are silent.

4 Face-to-face with this cultural (pro-kindness, "nonjudgmental") pathology, **theodicy** is tough: the biblical God cannot pass this test of pure, nonconfrontational kindness. He's "severe" (truth & justice being of his character, & consequently judgment being of his action) as well as "kind" (Ro.11.22)....In Brown's extensive report in today's TIMES, not one word of judgmental confrontation in the interest of truth & justice.\* At world-religions' gatherings, amicability is the supreme virtue. And Hinduism parades itself (despite the behavior of its adherents) as the supremely amicable religion (the religion Brown has slipped on over his Western formation)....\*Though he did suggest that karma might be otherwise construed. And he's humble enough to confess to having "no confidence at all that I did the right thing" in not witnessing in defense of women (as, e.g., an evangelical Christian would have). Quietism: "She would be going her way and I mine," & she'd "found her peace." Not surprising that Brown, in his Parliament report, is snide about Christian missionaries & slippery in his idiosyncratic redefining of religious terms (e.g., "Karma is life understood as spiritual opportunity" & "God doesn't require our worship"--idiosyncratic, though [ironically] he condemns Western individualism as he praises "the indigenous view," in which individual identity has not emerged from group & nature).

5 The current phenomenon I'm addressing is **kindness religion**, religion as kindness. We were bathed in it in the 1960s. In '61 I was at the B'way premier of Paddy Chayefsky's "Gideon" & read these words of pure kindness on the cover of Playbill: "My Creed: I believe in kindness & that old men & women should be kept cool in the summer & warm in the winter." Some white kids were turning East, imagining (in their ignorance of the East) that the East was more kind & less violent than the West. Lawrence Brown got deep into New Age (after his turn-off from the West) & then segued into Hinduism--as he explains in his BODHI BEAUTIFUL: How to be a Hindu in America (India: Bhavan/99)--which, similarly to Chayefsky (but not secularly) concludes (before it appendices) thus: "The Two Commandments of God are: LOOK FOR ME and BE KIND."

6 Please refer back to §1: "with deeds of love and mercy," I may have said correctly: mercy is the kind attitude/act when you're tempted to unkindness. Note the power note: "King...kingdom." The first word appears in all stanzas & the second in one--but all have disappeared in the UCC's THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL--as have "cross," "crown," "march," "conquest," "battle," "might," "swords"--the graduating student who wrote this for his seminary commencement in 1887 would be astonished at this bowdlerizing elimination of the masculine & military metaphors, for his "battle song" is of "deeds of love and mercy," not "swords' loud clashing" & "roll of stirring drums." The left-fundamentalistic literalism looks not to the hymn's mood but only to the naughty presence of proscribed (to-be-censored) words. God & man (males) both suffer from gender feminism's lexicon of suspicion, of prohibited words.

7 The biblical God's "kindness" is in the context of his power, the two together giving the believer peace. Is.54.10 (on which Karl Barth, 12.27.59, preached a sermon to prisoners): "The mountains shall depart,...but my kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, says the LORD, who has mercy on you." And hear this, on transfiguration power (THE BOOK OF ENGLISH COLLECTS, 56): "Mercifully grant that we, being delivered from the disquietude of this world, may...behold the King in his beauty...." And see Ps.119.165. & this: "When you have found Jesus, all storms subside" (Albert Schweitzer, FAITH, 1998).

8 Camus had it upside-down: "We must be kind, for God is not." Look again, Brother C.!