THESE COLORS DON'T RUN

The day after "the Attacks" (as I think the disintegration of the Twin Towers & the destruction of a Pentagon section will be called), a street vendor in lower Manhattan was seen wearing an A-frame with this inscription, while his arms each cradled a supply of hand-size American flags. As he walked through thick dust, he message was double. (1) QUALITY: The colors of his flag would not run when rained on; & (2) DEFIANCE: His country would not run away, would not refuse to face & defeat this new enemy.

This Thinksheet, following on #3082 ("What shall we tell the children?"), suggests some things this Christian, I, consider worth pondering, in addition to what I think the children should be told.

1 America's technological self-seduction has been exposed. We thought a few Tomahawk missiles fired from the sea in 1998 would fix bin Laden. It amused & angered him, strengthened his elongating hand in Araby, gave him the taunt that Americans are cowards who won't fight on land but only from the safety of the sea. Those missiles were arrows shot from an upgraded "bow" in which holy writ told us not to trust (NRSV): "not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. But you have saved us from our foes, and have put to confusion those who hate us" (Ps.44.6-7). And techno-surveillance cannot replace face-to-face spying.

2 Just think of the technological humiliation! While the President is pushing "Star Wars" hardware, more sophisticated than any weaponry to date, the enemy accomplished massive destruction inside the continental U.S. with the third oldest weapon in history: rock, then club, then knife. Matter & mass are no match for mind & imagination.

3 U.S. intelligence apparently was not aware that bin Laden had "cells" (spy-&-destroy groups) here. It seems his cancer of West-hate has metastacized Westward. And now it appears that his West-hate is even more virulent than his Jew-hate. He hates us not primarily because of our successes but because of our corruptions, which he sees as in techno-communications metastasis Eastward: Hollywood --rap (spewing for profit, not spewing out, garish violations of the Decalog)--MTV--television-&-computer porn. Let's face it: a suction hose has been inserted down into our moral sewer, & the shit is being sprayed around the world. Will we, now, now after four days ago, get the message? We are beginning to get legislation against "hate speech": will we do the same about shit speech? (BIG PROBLEM: I'm against hate-speech legislation, as in violation of the First Amendment; so how could I favor s.-s. legislation?)

4 Or do Arab/Muslim countries fear our democracy even more than our corruptions? And can a nation have democracy without the socially accepted insanities historically associated with it? (And who gets to say which insanities are socially unaccaptable, which acceptable? And which behaviors are insane?)

5 Probably with America's amicable religious situation in mind, Voltaire (PHILOSOPHICAL DICTIONARY [1764], "Tolerance") said "If you have two religions in your land, the two will cut each other's throats; but if you have thirty religions, they will dwell in peace." For radical (or "fundamentalist") Islam, there are in the world only two religions--theirs, & the "infidels." Qur'anic literalists are, in their culture-struggle (Kulturkampf), never far from "jihad" as physical warfare & the physical warrior's leg-up in Paradise. We probably know already, in rough outline, the military history of the 21st century. Further: Only in Islamic nations is there an absolute ban on the promotion of other religions.

6 IRONY: A new application of the Arabic saying "My brother & I will fight our cousins; our cousins & we will fight the stranger": we Americans are no longer strangers but cousins, & the stranger we must fight is the radical Arab. Four days ago, we many became one--as our national motto has it, *E pluribus, unum.*

7 In the two-hour PBS special last night, Bill Moyers called "despicable" the

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3083

idea that God is using the terrorists to punish America (for its God-amnesia, its immorality, etc.). When Jeremiah said that about the Babylonian destruction of the temple (a far more serious catastrophe [+ invasion & occupation] than America experienced four days ago), they threw him into a dry well. Later Jews considered crazy or worse any Jew whose response to the Holocaust was "There must be something wrong with us." Well, do you think God's judgment speaks to "9.11.01," & if so, how? In his Washington Cathedral sermon yesterday, Billy Graham called the 9.11.01 attacks "demonic": does God use demons to punish saints/sinners?

And however one construes "9.11.01" vis-a-vis God's judgment, cannot one view it as a national & personal call to repentance & faith? Americans have become even more individualized (not individuated!) than in the past & need to be told that people were not really against Jesus, they were just for themselves, so he died.

To become unaware of sin correlates with becoming unaware of God, & vice versa. When his dying aunt pleded with Thoreau to "turn to God" & stop fighting Him, he replied "I wasn't aware we had quarreled." "I wasn't aware."

8 The fragility of "things made with hands" (opposite of Heb.9.11, a verse a gematrist pointed out to me vis-a-vis "9.11."01): no esoskeletal building could survive a missile 10x the tonnage of Hitler's 1940 buzz-bombs on London, which were only two-ton (the four planes just four days ago, fully loaded as they were, were ten-ton [to be precise, 198,000 lbs.]). They were Molotov cocktails hurled at maximum speed. What steel didn't melt, twisted, popping rivets & breaking welds--the structural steel in the Towers, in the interest of human health, not being sprayed (as all recent steel-skeletal structures before) with a thick coating of asbestos.

(Post-&-beam all-wood are more fire-resistant than all-steel-frame structures.)

9 And just the day before, Americans were most worried about sharks! Now (a commonly heard plaint) "Everybody's in shock [followed by fear, followed by anger], nobody feels safe." Paranoia hit & the country shut down: "nobody can reach anybody," a communications breakdown analogous to our headphone-set hyper-individualization & cocooning. Suddenly "how vulnerable we are!"

9 Diving 20' off the Rushford (NY) dam, I took so long to reach the surface that upon surfacing, I gasped for air. Tragedy, personal or corporate, is like that. The deeper, the greater the need to make sense: sense-making is to the mind what oxygen is to the lungs. Page one of today's CAPE COD TIMES, after reporting that an 89-year-old Cape Codder said "This is a fight between God and the Devil," refers (without awareness of the oxymoron) to a "sermon that cast the senseless tragedy in religious terms." (Had you noticed the nonsensicality of calling crimes "senseless" & courageous criminals "cowards"?)

10 It's JUDO: the weak (as David using Goliath's sword to decapitate the giant) have turned the strong's power (the commercial jet) as a weapon against the strong. While I'm at it, what else in the Bible strikes you now as possibly speaking to the Attacks? The Tower of Babel (Gn.11.1-9)? The rich fool (L.12.13-21)?

11 SICKNESS: The American economy cannot be healthy unless the people are unhealthy, comsumerish spenders & entertainment junkies (billions on sports, $600 billion on gambling [more than on groceries]). Is bin Laden a divine wake-up call, having wrought upon us not mass destruction but mass disruption?.....Titanic II? We are not an "unsinkable" society. No knife- or greed-shield, but a missile shield?

12 GREAT SAYINGS to bring comfort, insight, challenge. Eg, (1) Victor Hugo, end of "Les Miserables": "God is just. Only man is, sometimes, unjust." (2) This Pope (mass, on the Attacks): "For those who believe in God, evil and death do not have the last word."

13 Former Israeli president Netanyahu is right about this being a wider war, "a war [of radical Islam] to reverse the triumph of the West." A CAPE COD TIMES columnist, Lawrence Brown, says the terrorists should have asked "What would Muhammad do?" But that's the problem: they doubtless did. The Prophet, ejected from his hometown, raised an army, returned, then beat the hell out of his former neighbors, then took over the city. Jesus was killed (that's one model): Muhammad killed (that's another).