

WHAT IS A SHOAH-HOLOCAUST INTERFAITH REMEMBRANCE?

MORNING-AFTER REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENCING ONE

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I might've titled this Thinksheet "What's Happening to Shoa-Holocaust?" Obviously, it's modulating into something it wasn't. For one thing, it's become a Day (like M.L. King, Jr. Day), "Destruction Day" (or however else you may want to translate Yom Ha-Shoa, Holocaust Commemoration Day). I regularly participate in whatever gatherings the community provides from year to year, but what am I participating in with Jews & Christians (the meaning of "interfaith," in this context)? A secular memorial, such as America's "Memorial Day Exercises" have become? Since it's at least quasiliturgical, it's more than that. But is it worship? I think it should be; but in my experience of it, it seems less than that....For this Thinksheet, I'm assuming it should be worship, & I'm using that as the criterion for looking at what happened here on Cape Cod last night.

1 What are the **requirements** for any joint worship of God by Jews & Christians?

(1) That it be worship **of God**, ie theocentric. In our biblical heritage, this means praise & prayer.

(2) That its participants read/hear **Scripture**.

(3) That it include any other essentials in Jewish worship (eg, the **Shema**) & Christian worship (in namen Jesu, "in Jesus' name"--that the word "**Jesus**" occur).

(4) That the worship be **enveloped** by divine reference (invocation/benediction).

(5) That Christians & Jews be **visible** to each other both in their unity (being together in the service) & in their diversity (as, separately, Jews & Christians).

(6) That the service leaders be identified by **name** & representation the first time each leads (in print, or orally).

2 How many of these requirements were met? Let's run a commentary, seriatim:

(1) Not met. The center was shoa, not God. What was printed as "Invocation" did not address God: God was not "invoked." There was no praise of God except in the Kaddish. There was no prayer except in a Litany, the Kaddish, & the Benediction (not called "Benediction").

(2) Met only in a scattering of texts. No Scripture Reading as such.

(3) No Shema or "Jesus." Couldn't it be a loving thing for Christians to suppress the name of Jesus in worship so as not to give offense? No, it could only be a sentimental thing. Real love includes honor, & for Christians to leave "Jesus" (the word) out of worship dishonors the Name &, in the case of clergy, violates ordination vows. But it would also dishonor the Name of Jesus if one were to be falsely "inclusive," trapping nonChristians into honoring his name. Eg, in interfaith worship, it would be improper at both ends--Christian piety, & nonChristian freedom--to pray "In Jesus' Name, Amen" (meaning "We pray in Jesus' Name"). The appropriate form is "I pray in Jesus' Name" (meaning "Each, please, bless God in your own way").

(4) Not in "Invocation," but in benediction.

(5) Riotously not met! Some would argue it shouldn't be met, that there should be two-way visual assimilation: Christians & Jews should be visually indistinguishable. But to achieve this, participants should be so instructed: no crosses, no yarmulkas, no fedoras: Possible on the Christian side, for "no crosses" would not violate conscience. Impossible on the Jewish side.

Well, wouldn't cross-wearing violate some Christian consciences? Almost none. Besides, there are alternatives, such as the "Jesus" pin or even "Jesus" button.

Weren't any Christians visible Christian? Only two as far as I saw: the Roman Catholic preacher for the occasion, who was in clericals (& no yarmulka); & I, with pectoral cross (& no yarmulka).

Were all the Jews visible as Jews? Apparently none of the women: no yarmulkas (I leave it to the Jews as to whether the males-only yarmulka is sexist). And some Jewish men did not wear the yarmulka: did they perceive the occasion as not worship?

As for the Christian men who wore the yarmulka, what were they trying to prove? Ersatz reverse assimilation? Identification **as** devalued as identification **with**.

(6) Not met. Visually read, the only Christian male leader was the priest--which was not the case. The other Christian males wore yarmulkas. Confusion!

3 What about **preaching**? Why didn't I include that in §1, as one of the requirements for any joint worship of God by Jews & Christians? I didn't include it because though I think it's desirable, I think it's unnecessary. If it occurs, it should:

(1) Be, as should all Jewish & Christian sermons, **theocentric**, ie argued from-in-for God & lifting up the issue-appropriate aspect of God (Creator or Sustainer-Preserver-Protector or Lord-Sovereign or Savior-Redeemer-Deliverer or Covenantor or Promiser or Companion-Guide or Fulfiller-Consummator or Judge or Forgiver or Healer or Reconciler or Father [Father-Mother, Parent] or Shepherd or King-Sovereign or Recompenser [Rewarder/Punisher]). One liturgical model for this is the collect, whose address includes the divine aspect relevant to the collect's theme.

(2) Be **priestly**, aiming to improve divine/human communication.

(3) Be **prophetic**, expressive of the divine call to re-"turn" (Hebrew for "repent") from wandering away & forgetting God. Torque on what is to what should-shall be, the Kingdom-Reign-Rule of God "on earth as it is in heaven."

(4) Be **prayerful**, bathed in the spirit of prayer. (Some Jews & Christians, including me, think it appropriate to pray, somewhere in the service, the Kaddish / Lord's Prayer, both [they being, in origin, somehow related].)

(5) Be **praiseful**, psalmic, eager to lead the people in adoration & providing them with incentives thereto ("Lift up your hearts!").

(6) Be **actional**, specific about what can/should be done individually/collectively.

4 How many of these requirements were met? Seriatim commentary:

(1) Not met. It was a secular moral peptalk, apparently not intended to be a sermon (unless that's the way this priest preaches in his church!). Instead of being theocentric, it was elpidicentric (centered on hope). There's a rhetorical device (cryptoconcatenism) that aims to create in the hearer's heart-mind what the speaker (a) never mentions & (b) wants the hearer to feel/reflect on/remember. But that device was not in use in the peptalk.

The speaker is (CCT next day, today, p.3) "a member of Facing History and Ourselves, a Brookline-based nonprofit educational organization that provides speakers and curriculum on the Holocaust." Since the organization's name does not include facing God, I presume it's secular--& have no objection to that, but clergy are ordained to other business than giving secular moral peptalks. Are all the members of the same stamp? I hope not. The standard-brand Holocaust speech gets, & should get, declining attention. It requires no piety, no courage, & little vitality. In the long run (how long a run?), it just might do more harm than good. (Atop all that, he was a poor speaker, so rapid-fire in his bursts that he was very difficult to listen to.)...What God-metaphor was his working from? Compassion, maybe. Hard to tell, if any. Certainly none by direct reference. Indeed, I heard no direct divine reference.

(2) Not met. Implicit? Only by the fact of his clericals.

(3) Not met except implicitly. I quote CCT again: The speaker "said the theme of the Holocaust--hatred, indifference and the use of institutional power against the powerless--continues today in racism, in military despotism, and in the reluctance of people to speak out against injustice." All to the good, but godless: all his incentives could be used by God-evading humanists, as all his goals. It's what you leave out that wrecks you, & he left the Center out (result: not a bagel, but a Holocaust doughnut). But if the purpose of the meeting was only (as was said in the [sic] "invocation") "to remind ourselves what can happen when bigotry, indifference or hatred reign," the speaker did that reminding. But the invoker added an indirect reference to God's will: the meeting also aimed (CCT) "to remind the community 'of a world where we are aware of the oneness of mankind, a world as it was intended to be when it was first created.'" (Redeeming features, in this vein, were the presence & participation of Shoa survivors & children of survivors, & of an American vet who helped liberate a death camp; & the use of some writings of Holocaust victims & survivors; & some "righteous gentile" stories. Distressing, however, was the absence of "Christians" from the printed list of categories of Shoa victims.)

(4) Not met. Instead, be Stoic-mode thoughtful. "The more you learn of the darkness, the more you have reason to hope." That, God help us, is "the deepest understanding of the Holocaust"!

(5) & (6) Not met.