

*Cf. Mic. 6.8, which sandwiches "kindness" between justice and practicing God's presence (cf. my #783 & #988).

In #775, I laid out the landscape and inscape of biblical "kindness" or "leal-love" or "lovingkindness" (*chesedh*), a warm-hearted and tough-minded (truth-and-dignity-honoring) perpetual affirmation of the other one (God for us, we individually and collectively both for God and for each other--even, in Jesus, for "the enemy"). This thinksheet runs some troubled comments on the status of "kindness" in our present society.

1. "Kindness" no longer signals an integral constellation of attitude, a gathered perspective in which spirit-psyche-mind-body are synergistic, "integrated." Rather, it has shrivelled down, fragmented, into fellow-feeling (Fritz Kunkel's "Wiefühlung"), and the conventional and unconventional deeds thereby motivated and sanctioned. Almost all the way down to "Be kind to animals," a category not excluding us humans.

2. Brendan Behan came on stage drunk at the end of a Broadway play I saw, whose handbill titlepage had this: "I believe in kindness, and that old men and women should be kept warm in the winter and cool in the summer." The feel of the play was "Why not have compassion on the poor suffering mortal bastards?" We should, indeed! What was corrupting was precisely the reductionism: there was no truth, no bite (pay up to truth), no polar "severity" (in Paul's phrase, "knowing the kindness and severity of our God" [Ro. 11.22--same wd. as in 2.4, where God's "kindness" is unto our repentance and is, at it were, on a time-clock: this divine attitude is not infinitely unconditional, but unto judgment as the alternative to repentance]).*

3. Jn. Baptist and Jesus had more than a distaste for "smooth-silk, fine-linen" living and feeling, such as now finds expression in the upper-and-middle-class tabu against conflict. "Kindness" is fraudulently dragooned into sanctioning this anti-conflictualism, so feistiness is automatically unkind as a style and a person who see the need for & provokes a conflict is automatically smeared with the nickname "trouble-maker" (as was Elijah by Ahab). Such name-calling does not break bones as do sticks and stones, but it does, despite the doggerel, "hurt me" in several ways: (1) Its social-sanctional force may dissuade me from courageous action in the interest of truth and *real* kindness, so that I am dissolved into the soft-silk set; (2) I may disclaim the nomiker, in which case I'm psycho-imprisoned by being put in the category titled "defensive," a further hurt because faintly accusative of neurosis; (3) On the active rather than passive side, I may be hung with another psycho-interpretation, viz. "masochism" or "sadism" or even "sadosomochism"; (4) My "effectiveness" (tr.: ability to influence said set) is reduced, because I am to the hearers no longer a full human being and participant member, as I've been reduced to the category of "the sick" or "the immature" or "the unintegrated." These games would be comparatively innocent, as destroying only a few reputations and individuals, if the life-style were not projected beyond the set to condemn "Negroes" when they threatened violence in the 1950s, Vietnamese patriots when they did the same in the next decade, and now the World Council of Churches for the actions of its Committee to Combat Racism. The prophets and Jesus were killed by this set. Thus the socio-hermeneutics of degenerate "kindness" is even more serious than its psycho-hermeneutics. (On my favorite radio station, WBAI, often patronistic.)

4. Since the WWII emergence of NTL and TA and Encounter and group dynamics in general and fringe potpourris of all this such as humanistic psychology and est, certain "in" expression have instrumented this degenerate "kindness" (as well as reminding us of some difficulties and skills of communication, which is to the good). "I hear you" may be followed by "You didn't hear me," the latter often generalized into "You're a poor listener" (useful for avoiding truth, issues, therefore conflict, therefore the dignity that comes from honest mutual confrontation on issues).

Darton's great MOD.CONCORDANCE TO THE NT [Doubleday/76] is the best way to see the NT evidence: 240:3&4a; 608:2.1:b) & 2.2:.