

This meditation today [1Dec78] converges the self-slaughter of Jim Jones' followers with:

1. The hero/fool problem in historical hermeneutics. I'm a hero for going to work this Tue. when doctor said I should be in bed, but I would have been a fool if the medical threat of dire consequences had been fulfilled. Yesterday, I helped some Jews work through Jonestown /Masada--the latter, the 1st-c. self-slaughter of almost as many as killed themselves at Jonestown, but the Masadans clearly heroes in Jewish legend and Israeli civil religion. My modest conclusion: To foreclose the possibility that the Jonestownians were heroes is historically naive (no matter how quickly and thoroughly our psycho-oriented culture tries to dispose of Jonestown with pop-psych and technical psychopathological lingo). The alacrity with which I am rejected when making this statement only confirms the mindless and ideological Tendenz with which even religious leaders fall for psycho-hermeneutics as adequate response to horror--what happened also to Hannah Arendt when she insisted that Eichmann was not sick but only "banally" evil, in the same vein as your average bureaucrat (in which case the government or corporation is, functionally, the Rev. Jim Jones).

2. Peter's willingness to kill for Jesus is, psychodynamically, not different from the fanatic's willingness also to be killed or to self-kill for the leader. The spirit of Qumran, Masada, the Upper Room, and Jonestown is, sociodynamically, one spirit. To the extent that I am a Christian, I am sick in the Christian way rather than in some other way--if the category of sickness is used to explain dedicated Christianity (as indeed it has been, and continues to be, by some who have a need to reject Christianity--as the media interpretations of Jonesville show the Am. public need to coop the most important psycho-event for Americans since the death of King--to coopt Jonesville for the going Am. self-image, thus evading "it can happen here" as well as foregoing spiritual [e.g., biblical-theological] interpretations).

3. Thank God they did themselves in elsewhere instead of bloodying California and thus the USA! A function of government, in preserving the public tranquility, is to "handle" crazies ["crazy" here defined as someone whose leadership potential is "a clear and present danger" to the public tranquility]. Instances of success: Amos, Jesus. Of failure: George III of England, Mohammed, Hitler. Thank God the government did not have to repress, in California (where else?), a fanatical outbreak of Jonesism (for he had the spellbinding and peoplebinding potential of "The Kingfish," and far superior to Sen. Joe McCarthy--and half Americans still living can remember the early-1950s nationwide paranoia, sociodynamically identical to Jones town's paranoia). The veil between sanity and "in-sanity" is of the same thinness as the veil between sanity and sanctity--some say it is the same veil, but I divide the divine and the demonic along the rift of what I do/don't find acceptable behavior.

4. Ro.-pagan rejection of speech denigrating the dead was sanctioned by the superstitious belief that the ghosts, if insulted, would get you. Jews and Christians have a better sanction: God's love models generosity toward all, even [Jesus] "the enemy." In light of biblical prophetic religion, the Jonestownians did almost everything right: (1) They formed a community 'round dedication to "the Kingdom of God," and paid up to solidarity-for-praise-and-social-change with all they had; (2) They modeled action/reflection (engaged as they had been in virtually all the social issues and "action" in S.F. before the move to Gyana); (3) They did not disperse when "the world" became [as they saw/felt it] overthreatening, but catacombed themselves into a conventicle of vanguard witness [Qumran, Christian monasticism, current liberation-theology cells]; (4) They responded to their leader as God-sent [as in Judaism] and even God-arrived [as in Christianity; Jim Jones both as the Second Coming of Jesus and as the in-

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carnation of Lenin (an even more powerful psycho-archetype than Marx!)); (5) To assure survival, there was a system of communal promise-reward, threat-punishment sanctions that was highly effective for a strangers-in-a-strange-land, colony-of-heaven-in-hell, minority-psychology community (no matter how we may pick at the particulars of the systems--something we do on peril of hypocrisy if we Jews and Christians peruse our histories for how our spiritual ancestors handled heresy and schism, including the politicization of sex among us).

5. The Rev. Jim Jones' theological education was standard-brand, ATS-approved. In his early pastoral years, he was your ideal liberal social-action type, not neglecting church-internal community-building and fence-mending. He "trained the troops" to community-action in elections, housing, defense of "the poor." Uncomfortable though the thought, he was one of us, a brother of mine in vision and action. He taught his folk to "deny self" and be, like Bonhoeffer's Jesus, "people for others," consumed by intra- and extra-communal agape-love. "Doing theology," we need now ask, in good biblical-prophetic style, *What have we liberal Protestants and "liberation theologians" been doing wrong in and beyond theological education?* It's a tough question, so tough that Jews have not yet been able to come to asking it about the Holocaust (and is not Jonestown a kind of American-liberal-Protestant Holocaust, albeit the analogy is easy to parry)? [NB: Watch how Jewish thinkers handle Jonestown, for current Jewish "doing theology." One Jewish thinker, already, has told me he's reworking the chillun of Israel in the Guyana-like wilderness with Moses. In "doing theology" on Jonestown, Jews have their long tradition of viewing the origin of Christianity as Jews gone crazy (resurrection of Jesus) much as now "spokesmen" for Christianity are explaining Jonesville as Christians gone crazy. Also, rabbis go crazy when anybody says "Sun Moon," but that's another story, though to me the soul-soldness of Moonies to Moon is not less fanatical than the soul-soldness of Jonesies to Jones.] [NB on that NB: 19 cs. ago, Apollonius of Tyana taught that both Jews and Christians were crazies: Jerusalem was the only city he refused to visit.]

6. A serious American-Imperium angle: Rep. Ryan is both wrong and dead (or, if one is of the "civil religion" point of view, a hero-martyr). In Jonestown, energy was slowly shifting from promise/rewards to threats/punishments, a doom-foretelling shift because inherently destabilizing in a community in need of hyperstability. In short, Jonestown would soon have collapsed of its own weight if Rep. Ryan had not triggered the mass suicide by acting arrogantly in the old 1812 tradition that Washington DC is to protect "American citizen anywhere." We insulted the Guyanese government, instead of entrusting to it the fate of Americans who were not dragged to Guyana but chose to go there.

7. Christianity is an unstable and therefore potentially destabilizing historical reality in that the primordial fanaticism of Resurrection-Pentecost actually does from time to time and place to place surface in crusades, missionary explosions, communal experiments, me-too identifications with the latest consciousness-raising "movements," and "charismatic" outbursts--in short, neo-fanaticisms relieving somewhat the guilt that we have tamed, domesticated, cribbed-cabined-confined into "safe" parameters "the Spirit." This is a central dynamism in "the West"'s expansion (eco-politically, and to a lesser extent religiously) over and dominance of [as "capitalism" and "communism"] the globe. I'm both proud and ashamed that we Christians are the only people ever to have come close to "winning the world." A psycho-form of this is "ego-strength" psychotherapy as the polar of ego-denial (in the Synoptics, the stronger term for "deny" [11x in NT, only 1x in OT; the weaker, 32x in NT, only 6x in OT: heavy NT emphasis on decision for Jesus against ego, or reverse]): cults (and all religions beginning with a named founder begin as cults) demand ego-weakness, turning over to the Leader one's will [though in Christianity, not one's self, which is to be strengthened]).

SUGGESTION: "Jonestown" is first-rate to "case method" in integration seminars.