

* On the French-Revolution origin of "equality": Vidler's THE CHURCH IN AN AGE OF REVOLUTION (Pelican/65).

I think so and pray and hope not. My scenario is that some small nation, heated up by rage at its inequality as state and as people, will trigger World War III, making the planet unlivable for mammals (not just us). In this case, "equality"-- which is a reality, an ideal, an illusion, and a delusion--will have proved itself to be also a terminal disease. In light of my apocalyptic prophecy, this think-sheet is a catalog of prophetic reflections ("prophetic" in all three senses: God-centered, risky, and futuric):

1. "Equality" is a mathematico-political notion underivable from Scripture* and having rather more a rhetorical than a logical history (i.e., being a "hot" word to persuade, defend, and attack, more than a "cool" word to analyze, conciliate, and build). The attempt to use the Bible to sanction it is epeexegetic at best and prostitutional at worst. Yet in the past few days, on national educational television, I have seen these use "equality" as a biblical argument: Andy Young (against Bayard Rustin, on the MacNeil-Lehrer Report) and Bill Coffin (against Edward Norman, on Bill Moyer's Journal)....This observation is prophetic-risky, because my network includes as heros both Andy (with whom I worked both in "the Movement" and on UCBHM --and as sharing conferences here and there, e.g. Green Lake) and Bill (for whose arrival and witness I thank God almost daily). I fear more the evil that good men and women unwittingly do than I do the evil that "the evil one" does. Not just because (*pace* Niebuhr) the heart and therefore history are ambiguous, but because the good are self-seduced into simplism, self-victimized by slogans, and duped into me-too-ism by competitors in caring (e.g., humanists and Marxists).

2. Violence becomes probable at the points, in interpersonal and international behavior, where one position crosses both the tabus and the hagiologs of another-- not when only the tabus or only the holy words are attacked, but precisely when both, simultaneously, are threatened. For at those points, the social fabric is endangered; and the society sends its phagocytes mindlessly against the invasion-- and, supreme instance, Jesus is crucified. Now, in my doctrine of the atonement, "Jesus saves" precisely because his spirit and resurrection defeat these mindless "conservative" forces. (I quote "conservative" because I mean it literally: the forces go violent to conserve the bio- or socio-organism against change.) To survive in institutions, I have usually limited my attack to either tabus or hagiologs, not both at the same time! But sometimes I must cry out at the intersection, and "equality" is an instance: its +/- credal force in my subculture is both tabu and hagiolog, so that most of my friends just laugh if I challenge "equality"-- or scowl if I press for analysis of this code word; and usually I stop pressing at this stage, for ostracism follows hard on the scowl. (At the J. Pierpont Morgan Museum I have just seen the originals of letters of Savonarola, who didn't know when to quit his attack on the Medicis, the inventors of banking and thus of modern "capitalism"--and got burned, literally, for his persistent analytic prophecy-ing. I'm not made of such martyr stuff.)

3. As one enters the main door of the British Museum, there's the most ancient full Bible [Codex Sinaiticus], ending with First Clement, which didn't get dropped till AD375. Now, ICl. says the root of all evil, angelic and human, is envy-jealousy. I was close enough to M.L.King,Jr. to hear him muse about the motivation of the movement, the fuel being burned in the heart of the mass (as in his anti-consumer phrase "refrigerators for Eskimos"). The political slogan "equality" is engined by both dignity and jealousy(the desire both to "get rich" and to "get the rich"). Marxists are cynical in manipulating the proletarian psyche on this, for they are ideologically materialist: Christians as Christians cannot be. Rather than cynical, Christians are apt to be duped into the opposite, viz. unpolitical idealism--as Andy Young against recognition of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia (on which see Geo.Will, OVER).My ethical, theological, and political concern here is the use of "equality" to legitimize, albeit unwittingly, jealousy and vengeance, against reason and peace.

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