

"WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?"

Situation-Definition as a Factor in Connection-Making ... Elliott #1658

How, then, define the no-nuke situation? Depends on the connections you want to make.

Two events today (20Oct82) set me to thinking that whoever controls the definition of the situation frames/limits/specifies the connection-potential (i.e., the convincing or at least plausible "sense" makable in the company of those who buy into the situation-definition):

1. I read the 144p. program for the '82 gathering of Am. religion scholars (NY Hilton, 19-22Dec) and found a whole evening given to two outsiders (i.e., not religion scholars, but medics) on the medical effects of thermonuclear warfare! First, I laughed because I couldn't see any connection: my frame (i.e., sit.-def.) for the AAR/SBL gathering excluded lectures from other fields, medicine, engineering, garbage disposal, etc. Not that other fields do not impinge on religion: religion (like every other field!) claims everything as its sphere! And not that there should be no place in our gathering for interdisciplinary dialog: I'd strongly favor a dialog between medics (the Caldicotts, in this case) and theologians (e.g., one of the mythographers who've been analyzing the mythic assumptions in the no-nuke movement)...Then I realized that the program committee had defined the situation as (1) a meeting of thousands of religion scholars (2) who need together to be impacted (ugly word!) by medical horrors vis-a-vis nuke war, so urgent and utter is the threat/as to justify this bit of politicization. The movement's mentality is a mix of assumptions, myths, inferences, and projections (as is any movement's) which has whipped up true-believer fervor through gnomes (sententious bearers of the movement's "truth"--e.g., "If we don't..., nothing else will matter."). (Cf., e.g., in the Christian movement, "Jesus saves.") To one who remains unpersuaded by the rhetoric, the giving of an evening of the AAR/SBL meeting to this movement seems plain weird.

2. This afternoon a highly intelligent counselee defended a minister whose funeral service for a 16-year-old girl killed in a drunk-driving accident included no reference to the Christian faith or even to God: he'd limited himself to giving hell to her highschool fellows, warning them of the vital, moral, and legal consequences of drunk-driving. When I had complained that this performance had violated that minister's ordination, my counselee said "But all that religion stuff was implicit! After all, the funeral was in a church!" Said I, "Only implicit one generation, gone the next: as Berger and Luckmann put it, the death of the holy community soon follows amnesia of the holy sounds." Said he, "But look at the situation! A drunk-dead teener, and more to come if they don't take the warning!" Said I, "Who says that's the situation?" Said he, "The whole town!" Said I, "And God? How does God define the situation?" He laughed: "Who would presume to know?" "I would," I said, "I have it by revelation, as you have. The situation is that something so shocking has happened as to hurl us all up against both the perversity and the fragility of human life; and Somebody's death--Jesus!--speaks to the perversity with vicarious suffering and to the fragility with resurrection. Get the connection?" He: "That's awful! Taking advantage of misery to preach the gospel! Why, many of the dead girl's friend who were there are Jews. In a number of ways, such a sermon would be offensive." I: "Look at Luke 12.21f: Christians not only preaching offensive, but being offensive in publicly making the heavenly connection." (In this text, Gk. is inference, Lat. is co-touching, and Ger. of Zink is: living and preaching "my Word" brings one into situations in which it becomes clear "who you are and how it looks in God's eyes, which is what you are to speak from").