

Which translates "As peace is to war, shalom is to destitution." The burdens of this thinksheet are (1) that revolutionaries and movementers (including me) are forever in danger of a simplistic Zoroastrian-Manichean (rather than biblical) engagement with what Jesus calls "the evil one" (whoever and whatever); (2) that Scripture (e.g., Is.45) should be, among Jews and Christians, more used as a corrective to this tendency; and (3) that we should be, in our lexica both religious and political, more judicious in our use of feeling-laden words.

1. Just 20 years* ago Alec Douglas-Home, a British lord, became noted for a line in a speech: "We have two sets of problems. The political ones are insoluble and the economic ones are incomprehensible." The wry saying sometimes come to mind after I've exhausted myself trying to solve the insoluble and comprehend the incomprehensible, and two hold up my arms in the struggle (as the arms of Moses): E.S. Ames with his "relative absolute" and Reinhold Niebuhr with his "impossible possibility." (*Jan/64.) The longer I'm at this sense-making task, the harder it is for me to take much that I read and hear: it sounds so ignorant-arrogant, and I feel more and more alienated from it and the institutions that permit/promote it. (Not that I didn't do my share in my time! My mood is more sad perplexity than outraged disdain.) As an Irish wit (J.P. Donleavy) put it, "I'm all for Christianity but insolence must be put down."

2. Christian magnanimity should encourage us to try to speak a good word for all God's critters, even the fallen ones. Mark Twain, who was among his contemporaries far more biblical as a feeler and far less biblical as a thinker than most of them were, time after time had a good word to say of the devil: I have no special regard for Satan, but I can at least claim that I have no prejudice against him. It may even be that I lean a little his way, on account of his not having a fair show. All religions issue Bibles against him, and say the most injurious things about him, but we never hear his side. We have none but the evidence for the prosecution, and yet we have rendered the verdict. To my mind, this is irregular. It is un-English; it is un-American; it is French. Of course, Satan has some kind of case, it goes without saying. It may be a poor one, but that is nothing; that can be said about any of us. We may not pay Satan reverence, for that would be indiscreet, but we can at least respect his talents. A person who has during all that time maintained the imposing position of spiritual head of four-fifths of the human race, and political head of the whole of it, must be granted the possession of executive abilities of the loftiest order. (Pp.161f, Janet Smith, MARK TWAIN ON THE DAMNED HUMAN RACE, 1962.) While I'm at it, why not quote also a Twain good word for Adam (p.275, MARK TWAIN'S NOTEBOOK): (We can't expect Adam, or any other human being, to be perfect, seeing that we were made) at the end of the week's work, when God was tired...Some unthinking people criticize Adam. They find fault with him because he was weak, and yielded. Oh, that is not fair, that is not right. He hadn't any experience. We have had ages and ages of experience...and just see what we are when there is any forbidden fruit around. (Wonderfully, these compassionate feelings for the source of cosmic evil (Satan) and the source of historic and historical evil (Satan) derive directly from how God feels (which is the root of Twain's theodicy; p.128)): When I think of the suffering which I see around me, and how it wrings my heart; and then remember what a drop in the ocean this is, compared with the measureless Atlantics of misery which God has to see every day, my resentment is roused against those thoughtless people who are so glib to glorify God, yet never have a word of pity for him (which recalls the line in Bill Coffin's already-famous sermon on the death of his son: "God's heart was the first to break").

God and devil strive to turn each other's thing into its opposite, and both have succeeded. Evil evolves into good, good devolves into evil. We, who can't call the shots, determine our alliances and so give, be it ever so humble, a tilt to the universe.