

The heuristic thesis of this thinksheet is that Jesus' "Good News" is only for "the desperate"--heuristic, because I'm enquiring, not declaiming. Categorically, those are not either consciously or unconsciously desperate who, in their inmost being, are open to the Love That Drives Out Despair; but surely Jesus belongs in, even is the model for, this category--then why his Cry of Dereliction ("Why have You forsaken me?")? Perhaps here our Lord is a double model: of hope, and of "Into Your hands I commit my spirit" when one is hopeless. Or should we distinguish hopelessness and despair (which is just Latin for hopelessness)? Category #2 is the hot desperate, so of course category #3 is the cool desperate. And category #4 is the unconsciously desperate. One can see these groups as four audiences in the gospels: how, variously, does Jesus address them? And how, now, are we to?

1. Desperateness is relative. Jesus despairs not of "the earth" (for he is a Jew) but of "the world" (for he is a Late-Jew): Christianity, when faithful to its Lord, is earth-affirming and world-denying; for earth is within the sphere of the Reign of God and the world "lies in the power of the Evil One." This tension was in the title of a WCC Assembly I attended (1954): "Man's Disorder and God's Design": we despair of man's (dis)order not absolutely, but relatively to God's (Ideal-Oncoming) Order. Thus Christians are the selectively desperate, and the Sermon on the Mount (till Nicaea, the most quoted scriptures in Early Christian Literature) richly displays the selectivity. Theologies through the centuries have differed in their earth/world, nature/history mix, and they continue to do so today. For the sake of ecology, "mental health," and "peace," more than I used to I'm adding to the "nature" side of the scale--without taking away from the "history" side of the scale.

2. Some desperateness is hot air leaking out of an inflated ego, personal or social. "Aft aglay" go "the best-laid plans of mice and men" partly because many a best-laid plan is not best or even good: its idealism was frustrated by reality, by God, and our mood turns downward in disappointment, despair, even--if we are not delivered--depression (=IPD disease). When we and our ways and works are desperate in this sense, the gospel is the good news of a fresh "take" on reality, a modest reassessment of our place and powers in universe-history-society. In hard-driven cultures like the present USA, W.Germany, and Japan, much pastoral counseling is with those who have fallen into this type of desperateness. (Depression = a cost of self-conceit.)

3. Nice leaders don't manipulate people into despair or engineer masses into desperateness. This statement is undeniable for the reason that I, who am making the statement, define it as reversible: nice here means polite leaders who use only positive reinforcement, as liberal religionists tend to do--in contrast to radicals, including Jesus, who sought to move people^{to} penitent desperateness vis-a-vis God (the soul-mood corresponding to one's soul-status vis-a-vis God), and who sought to move his people to nonviolent "historical" desperateness (so that, instead of seeking either violent or nonviolent political solutions, they would open their hearts, minds, lives to the Reign of Heaven, a return to theocracy corresponding, at the individual level, to a return to reality after failed flights in hot-air balloons of inflated egos). The gospel is for all who, vis-a-vis self/society, despair-with-fresh-hope--confessing the old hopes dead. The gospel is de-spairing a-spiring...A handful of other despair-manipulators and desperateness-engineers: Lenin, Billy Graham, existentialists, Human-Potential types, out-of-office politicians, blues-and-rock musicians.

4. Everybody's desperate, whether or not consciously. To this I say YES vis-a-vis mortality and NO vis-a-vis presumptuous dogmas: category #4 exists, but not everyone consciously non-desperate is unconsciously desperate. Some leaders, whether or not conscious of their dogma that all are desperate (knowing or unknowing), consciously/unconsciously inject desperateness into those they seek to influence to follow them. Compare, in literature, eisegesis rather than exegesis. Foul play!

5. Moving from category #3 to category #2 is dangerous, and leads to conversion or revolution or both. Time and again the gospel calls to this movement. But the gospel's fundamental call to all, no matter their condition vis-a-vis despair/desperateness, is to **category #1**, the Love That Drives Out Despair.