

In intergroup as in interpersonal relations, the insult factor (as I'm calling it for this thinksheet) is the dignity factor seen from the underside. My aim here is to bring this powerful psychosocial -/+ force into captivity to Christ (2Cor.10.5), i.e., to set this in Christian relation-proportion to other factors--aware that "Christian" here means by inference rather than by principle or proposition: I deny the possibility of honorable Christian living on the basis of principles or propositions.

1. Christian "boasting" (2Cor.10-12) is about God ("not of human deeds, lest anyone have cause to boast"--Eph.2.9). Not different from Judaism: Jeremiah's speech for God ("Anybody who wants to boast should boast about knowing and understanding Me"--9.24) gets quoted in the Bible's longest wrestling about boasting (2Cor.10.17: "As the scripture says, 'Whoever wants to boast must boast about what the Lord has done.'"). Since dignity is thus theocentric, insult is experienced primarily as insulting God, not one's self or one's own (group, sex, race, nation). MY POINT: With this biblical orientation, insult can never be experienced as egocentric: "I" and "mine" cannot be perceived by me (however others may view the situation) as directed primarily at me. Some good examples are (1) the biblical Psalms and (2) American spirituals (black and white). My dignity, at its depth, has nothing to do with how I'm treated by other human beings: they can "get to me" only to the extent I permit them to....The Jesus of the Gospels models all this.

2. One's occupational angle inclines one to describe the insult-situation most advantageously to one's "thing": (1) If your thing is social change, you will with Saul Alinsky see the insult as environmental (social causation) and will strive to increase the oppressed's sense of insult--Latin Am. "base communities" being another instance; (2) If your thing is medical, you will give heavy weight to genetic and invasive (microorganismic) factors--comparably, nutritionists and exercisers; (3) If your thing is helping individuals take responsibility for their own living and responding (e.g., Logotherapy, Cognitive Therapy, Psychosynthesis, Judaism, Christianity), attentionality-intentionality (the will) will be the primary focus. Of course there's truth in all these angles--otherwise there'd not be occupations subtending them.

3. Insult-taking (a chosen response to insult-giving) and insult-imagining (a misperception or a neurosis) are complexly related to "the nation's #1 mental disorder," viz., depression. A text on psychopharmacology does not even mention the will: the "causative factors" are only "environmental" and "genetic (biological predisposition)." Much better is the simple, helpful DEPRESSION AND ITS TREATMENT, J.H.Greist & J.W.Jefferson (Am. Psychiatric Press/84). ...One way to relieve insult-feelings is to shoot a high emotional charge into them, converting them to outrage, which is psychokinetic, moving one to action against "the cause" of "down" feelings one now "understands" as from insult. A clear psychomotor process. ...All I'm attempting to display here is (1) that "insult" is a complex constellation of psychosocial factors and (2) that the process, being well-known, can be (a) intervened into and (b) manipulated for understanding, therapy, or power. All ideologs "know" the insult-situation and what's to be done about it toward dignity and identity. Knowing that "the pale cast of thought" is an enemy of "the native hue of resolution" moving one toward action.

OVER

4. I believe in a healthy balance of word (thought, reflection) and deed. I perceive, along much of the present American Christian spectrum, an imbalance: deed folks incline toward considering word folks as antique, out-of-it, irrelevant to the point of obscurantist; and word folks see deed folks as unfaithful to the Word and so, in the soon if not now analysis, irrelevant. Most Christians are in the valley between these two mutually-insulting camps. While the devil smiles at both mountains, I frown on both--and so am not bothered by an excess of friends. (In typing, I unintentionally left the "r" out of "friends"--unwittingly revealing another truth.)

5. Several recent events prompt this thinksheet: (1) The "need" of many commentators to insult Goetz, "the subway vigilante"; (2) The demos pro-Tutu anti-Botha (largely because Am. blacks perceive Botha as an insult to blacks everywhere), in an effort to insult effectively the apartheid policy of S.Africa; (3) efforts to insult the Reagan adm. for insensitivity to "the poor"; and Adm. efforts to insult (4) the USSR in its peace initiatives and (5) pro-Soviet Latin Am. governments' efforts on behalf of the Hispanic-traditionally-manipulated underclass. In the past five years, the art of political insult has been brought to a new level of sophistication, if not effectiveness. This battle is being fought not at the biblical-theological level, but at the Renaissance-Enlightenment level: that is my particular burden. I see the battle as one remove from the God-creation-Savior reality, and therefore occurring in a sphere as unreal as the tilting, by the Man of laMancha, at windmills. It's a sad scene, signifying not nothing but little. Like the-ten pins bowled over by the chthonic reality of Hitler....Others may say I'm merely caught in my paradigm: today I received, from an aggressive atheist, a beautiful letter agreeing with me on "almost everything" except "your man-and-god trivia." But more and more I believe in the biblical way of seeing and living in the world: the biblical God is God, the Lord of heaven-earth, time-eternity. Now, for more than ½ c., I have held to this central conviction, with which I intend to live out the rest of my life, "speaking the truth (as much of it as I can manage) in love (as much of it as I can manage)."

6. The gospel of Jesus Christ is an enemy of the egalitarian gospel of nondiscrimination: that's increasingly clear to me. E.g., it's undeniable that the outstanding group of drunk drivers is teen males --who, accordingly, should be discriminated against, since alcohol + testosterone is a lethal mix. But what wrath I called down upon my pate when I proposed that girls be licensed to drive six years before boys! I was accused of cynicism, inhumanity, and insanity! Likewise, when I propose the proportional instead of the numerical franchise (e.g., in S.Africa, 1 black vote = 1/5th 1 nonblack vote). Proposals, howsoever rational, that violate the egalitarian gospel of nondiscrimination elicit high emotional, highly irrational responses. How sad that my best Christian friends, instead of standing against this nonsense and evil, are outstanding supporters thereof! Every issue-oriented group cries "Dignity!"--and most also "Equality!" So gay caucuses insult denominational assemblies into promoting the hiring of bisexual pastors, a ludicrous anomaly--but who, in a liberal church assembly, could win the day by proposing discrimination against any group of humans? Sadly, what is happening, against this idolatrous nonsense, is an effective alliance between common sense and the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is only for all penitents (instead of being for everybody).

7. We were able to move from feudalism to nationalism because of, lit., in Lat., "in-sult," attack-into fortresses. I trust God to help us progress through the process of mutual insult. I'm not "nice."