

6. Jesus doesn't (102) "appeal to the rights or needs of the other party or even to the interests of society in general....(111) Four primary concepts in modern socio-logical thinking were absent from his teaching--social institutions as the objects of moral criticism and control; society itself or groups in society as entities, fabrics or systems; social principles as regulative laws of mutual relationship; the social motive as an external stimulus to action."

1. Forty years ago this winter I had a debate with a Hindu who claimed his cult superior to mine because "we know vastly more about the life of Rama-krishna than we do about the life of Jesus." Among my arguments was that our ignorance of Jesus "in the flesh" was by divine revelation, just as the errors in the Bible are divine revelation. But of course I have "itching ears" to know as much as I can about my Lord's earthly "steps," halachah; and while I can't know much (the records being so skimpy and layered), I can know more than I can live.

2. By "revelation" here I mean a range of interpretive options sufficient for "Christianity," for the existence and promotion of Christian life and faith and for confrontation with the other faiths (life-options). But the range is perplexingly wide, opening to the temptation to make Jesus in the image of our current crusade--nonviolent, violent, apolitical-moral, apolitical-mystical, or what have you. This thinksheet is especially concerned with using Jesus to promote "liberation" in general, or as a "liberationist" in a particular movement. The eisegetic "exegesis" consists in "showing" that Jesus had the particular sensitivities the particular movement has, and suffered those woes the particular movement ("the oppressed") suffers because of the particular insensitivities the movement is consciousness-raising about.

3. Theology is always not only after-the-fact [i.e., an explication of Christian existence] but also after-the-philosophy [i.e., a cooptation of some currently "going" way of seeing the world--in current liberation theologies, Marxism]. A particular theology will soon falter both because Christian existence changes and because the "going" philosophy it piggybacks on falters or at least comes on hard times--as is true now of both capitalism and communism. Some theologians are agile enough to see the next horse riding up to be prepared to jump into the saddle, or at least (to change the metaphor to Pony Express) to get a fresh horse in time to be "with it." The history of this type of adventitious theology is dismal, Don Juan, not just temporal but ephemeral. [Richard Neuhaus is only 38, yet yawns at the passing theological parade in his own experience: 19Feb75 THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY, "A Pilgrim Piece of Time and Space"--in which he says, e.g., that "In almost all cases, liberation theology is perilously dependent upon Marxist constructions of reality which inevitably end in tediously talmudic revisionisms aimed at rescuing 'true' Marxism from the evidence of history."]

4. Dr. E. E. Carr, after being a Methodist missionary among the Mormons of Utah [!] toward the close of the last century, founded America's first Communist daily paper and much later, with long white beard in his 80s, was my regular tennis partner more than 1/3rd c. ago for three years. For seven weeks sitting at Lenin's left in the 1911 Marxist Stuttgart Conference, he failed to persuade Lenin that theism and Marxism could join hands--as they now have in "Marxist/Christian Dialog" and "liberation theologies." Carr died at 90 on his knees in prayer, with his Strauss-Rauschenbusch-socialist Jesus and his passionate love for humankind and his hope for the soon-come "Kingdom of God." Died a few months after the first chain reaction (1943) eight blocks from his apartment. Said he'd be back, and a quarter century later I should look for a young person of his convictions....well, I know quite a few....not enough....Anyway, Carr was right about Jesus: no way can quietists of any brand get rid of our Lord's indignation over injustice, compassion on the poor and oppressed, action for God's "kingdom, and uprightness before him" (Mt.6.33Gdspd)....

5....Yet time and again I turn back to the best admonitory book against making Jesus in our image--personal, denominational, class, race, sex, movement: Henry J. Cadbury's THE PERIL OF MODERNIZING JESUS (Mac/37, first printing, which I got soon after it came out), esp. chap.5 ("Limitations of Jesus' Social Teaching"). Jesus (119) "seems to the philanthropists a stumbling block and to the sociologists foolishness" because of his exclusive focus on the individual doer.