

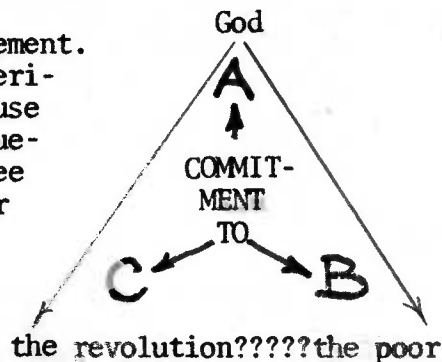
At 2.30 this morning [4Aug75] I went to the rec room and found that son Mark had just finished, with his critical pencil, "Options for Struggle: Three Documents of Christians for Socialism," a \$2 pamphlet of CRIPS [Church Research and Information Projects, Protestant Foundation at Columbia U., Box 223 Cathedral Station, NYC 10025; 1974]. At 24 he's among that sector of his generation who've not had to scrounge to keep body and soul together, and among the few of that sector who've a special burden in the life- and world-issue how to get body ("movement") and soul (*spiritual roots and inwardness*) together. ["Movement" here is vanguard joint action, so "body" is unlimited: not just a movement or all pro-human movements, but the body politic-social, i.e. humankind.] As I see it, this issue of the humane convergence-integration of resources for surviving and thriving--of earth with "heart...soul...strength...mind" [L.10.27; different order in M.12.; Mt.22.37, without "strength"; no variant translations in RSV]--is divine assignment as surely as Gen.12, is evolutionary stage, and is "historical" [in the Marxist sense] task. It's therefore the most important bucket to be a significant drop in, the most exciting and potentially ennobling human project, the task we should be daily most eager to rise and undertake with the knowledge that this very day the task, which our days are insufficient to fulfil, can be done...and done today!

But how is it to be done, today and tomorrow and till the end of "time"? The biblical answer is clear: by commitment to God, whose love is "eternal" but not temporal security, and such support as enables maturity within the precarious sphere of freedom. But concretely, politically, that answer, which touches the heart, does not touch the ground, and tempts to a false spirituality in dereliction from history and the here-and-now human struggle to survive significantly. But given a second look, that answer, in light of the character of the biblical God, implies a political intention that is both more than theory and less than ideology. That intention is (a) to further such social processes and structures as are cooperative with God's "support" in our collective and individual yearning for wholeness and striving for maturity, justice, and joy, and (b) to resist such social processes and structures as are inimical to freedom toward maturity, justice, and joy...inimical as intending the reverse ["the demonic"] or an intending the merely other ["the adiphoric"]. This brings us closer to the ground, i.e. to tactics. On the theory/praxis[strategy+tactics] model, the highest level of abstraction ["God"] must be judged both as derived from experience in, and as responsible to, "world," i.e. earth-history-human ground. We do not have "God" and then incarnation. Rather, incarnation is a way of speaking about presence and therefore consciousness as awareness and--in the case of biblical commitment--consciousness as moral, i.e. as awareness of the presence/absence of good/evil; raised to the highest power, consciousness that the trouble we cause God elicits from him, syntonically to our need of wholeness, the response called "Jesus of Nazareth."

Now, commitment to this God eliminates commitment to anything else and counter-defines hetero-commitments as idolatries. I have known some noble souls of "commitment to the poor" with no explicit theory-means of support: gentle humanists. From the time I attended communist cells in the early 1930s right down to 1975, I have never known a Marxist with "commitment to the poor." To the extent one's commitment is to the Marxist vision-ideology-program, the function of "the poor" is to embarrass and subvert capitalism by calling to the attention of capitalism's victims "the contradictions in the capitalist system," with the implicit/explicit implication that Marxism, being free of the illusions which produce the alienations which create "the poor," has the answer to the world's woes. This ideologization of "the poor" prostitutes to theory "the little ones" of Jesus, viz. those least able to effectuate the psychic-geographic-social space for "freedom." Since this prostitution is inherently violent, Marxist theory, even in the hands of its most compassionate adherents, is unable, when under pressure, to avoid grinding bodies/souls of the poor as Amos says the rich grind the faces of the poor.

In our time, certain passionate-compassionate political Christians have coopted the Marxist slogan "commitment to the poor" and converted Jesus to the slogan. The bitter irony of this is that in namen Jesu Christians confront a forked temptation to heresy against Jesus' commitment to God, viz. the twin heresies of gentle humanism and ideological socialism [the former as actual commitment to the poor, the latter as only penultimate identification with the poor]. Naturally, everybody wants to sign up Jesus for "our" team: one of the tasks of theology is, in every such instance, to prove that the signature is forged: Jesus, whom no title ancient or contemporary fits, is on no team but "the kingdom of God," whose thoughts and ways--Jesus read in his favorite book--transcend our parties with their ideologies and evade captivity (Is.55.6-11).

So we arrive at the title of this thinksheet. For clarity and shorthand, a diagram for talking about "captivity"-oppression versus freedom-liberation:



All three commitments have a pro-human, caring, complement. "A" has because it's commitment to the caring God experienced in and through the caring Church. "B" has because for it, caring is all [to use the dying words of vonHuegel, whose use however included the caring God; and see Camus' "We must be kind, for God is not"]. "C" has, or "the masses" would not hope through it. Further comments on the diagram:

1. B and C are children wandered away from A but inextricably related to, as derivative primarily from, A. To extend the parental image, Christian theology is concerned here about letters written from and to home: humanist/Christian and Marxist/Christian dialog.
2. To shift the parental image, B and C represent, respectively, the soft and hard options in domestic tensions--the yin and the yang.
3. When A deteriorates into caring-insensitive formalism in rite, role, and institution, it becomes a hardened yang [masculine] in relation to which both B and C are yin [feminine] responses. When this happens, a "Christian socialist" left develops over against "Christian democratic" parties.
4. The captivity of "Christian" to either B [identifying "Christian" and "human"] or C [identifying "Christianity" and "liberation"] incites Christian theology, as in this thinksheet, to call for liberation of A from B/C. In this call the Manichean danger lurks: will such critical theology cop out on action and thus give encouragement to those who, hiding in ambiguities and dissimulations, are of less earthly good than those are who are committed to "the poor" or "the revolution"? My answer is that Christians should accept this danger of no-saying to B and C, yes-say to cooperate with B and C wherever possible within, and in response to, commitment A, and pray for the courage and knowledge of what risks to take as action-signs of the kingdom of God.
5. Jesus as incarnate Lord models commitment A for us. So much does he take up into himself the humane action-elements of B and C that he has been read as "the man for others" [commitment B] and as revolutionary zealot [commitment C--for with him the poor are penultimate, as is true in Marxism]. These misreadings are abiding temptations for the Christian and the church.

6. The question marks between B and C point to the enigmatic relationship. Does "the revolution" turn out to be good for "the poor"? Is "the revolution" an action of, thereby giving dignity to, "the poor"? For giving "the poor" maturity-opportunity, is public capitalism [USSR, China, et al] proving superior to private mixed with private-public capitalism? [See marginal note, also.]

TITLE IMAGE: Babylonian Captivity [ended 538BC: Ezra 2]; of 14th-c. popes in France [political captivity of the church]; of the laity by the clergy [Luther's 1520 "The Babylonish Captivity of the Church"].

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON DIAGRAM NOTE 6: What do you get if you try to combine B and C? An unstable compound called "nonviolent revolution." The poignancy of the instability, for the Christian, is that this secular version of Jesus is closer to faithful to him than any other ever has been. As siblings of A, B and C are under A's liberating judgment and support: A is their middle term.