

Jesus' Destabilizing Effects

1. As our Lord had a profoundly destabilizing effect on his time and on history, I'm irritated by Christian theologians who use him for stabilizing effect--in our world, in which so much that is stable is unjust and so much that is striving to be born, and is thus destabilizing, is just. The thinksheet just before this is a five-page open letter to one such: John Howard Yoder, THE POLITICS OF JESUS (Eerdmans/72). This thinksheet is about another: George R. Edwards, JESUS AND THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE (Harper/72--on which I did an extensive review in 1973). Naturally, my irritation is even greater when such theologians take pokes at me--as both of these do in these books.
2. Jesus and the other half-hundred messianic figures of the time had the opposite of a coolant effect on the bubbling pot that overflowed, AD66-70, in a flawed and failed insurrection based [as was the South's cause in the American Civil War] on a people's right to self-determination. The Romans the Jews, then we Northerners those Southerners, denied that right successfully; and the universal amnesty by Pres. Johnson the First, 24Dec1868, referred to the uprising as "the late insurrection or rebellion." Jesus' agitprop's success and failure were both multifaceted. He was a disappointment in that he was heard to promise more than he managed to deliver. The fact that he may have been, I think was, frying other fish does not remove him from political historiography, secular mode. "Jesus and the politics of violence" is a gnarled and multifaceted theme, and clever scholars can--and do--make of it whatever preachment they choose. I choose to see him not as one in charge, with a plan up his sleeve (Anselm, Yoder, Edwards), but as agnus Dei, God as immolated victim with little understanding of what was happening to him but with an impregnable trust in the divine presence and action and with an indefeasible love for creation, even including his enemies--so awesome a trust-and-love as to be nothing less than the Shekinah on a shit pile. His was the good-faith innocence of truth, not the bad-faith innocence of power and planning. As for his making sense out of what was happening to him, he sifted his heritage for clues, discovered some embers and fanned them to flame [e.g., Jeremiah's tears and Second Isaiah's "servant"], a flame I believe shall never die, a flame of trust and love in spite of absurdity and beyond understanding. So say I, fie on your zealot Jesus and your pacifist Jesus and your Jesus qualified and reduced by any adjective! As he escaped through the nets of ancient titles, "Immanu-el" cannot be captured and impressed into the service of our ideologies.
3. Edwards is an Establishment thinker whose book competently lays out the issue in such wise as to load the result and deprive liberation theologians of "Jesus." Since liberation theologians are sifting their heritage for clues to bring heat [strength] and light [motivation] to "the poor" today, Edwards-type thinking deprives "the poor" of Jesus, who himself radically identified with "the poor." Here, then, is a question of faithfulness to more than fact, as well as to fact.
4. Tom Oden's TAG [Harper/76] may help us understand how this can be. Play it on the prophets and Jesus, and they come out each to "tag" himself as judge-wanting-rigor[truth-justice] and dissenter-wanting-change--therefore, tending, as in Jesus' case, to be [Yoder.105] "executed accused of insurrection." Folks of other genes and calls have trouble understanding this, understanding us who are of this "tag." Israel's prophets [including Jesus] hungered for truth and love (in that order), and did not want power and wealth, which they saw as corrupting except when theocentric. But they did not romanticize weakness--were, indeed, closer to R. May's POWER AND INNOCENCE [Norton/72] thesis, that [to adapt from Lord Acton on power] weakness corrupts and impotence corrupts absolutely--as Nietzsche and Fromm understood before May, whose attack on the psychological rejection of power as pseudo-innocent and as "inviting its own murder" would lead, were we to accept the effete pacifist Jesus, to another [after Schweitzer] "psychiatric study of Jesus."
5. Resurrection as insurrection, or perhaps "and" more than "as," is the next way I want this thinksheet to approach "Jesus' destabilizing effects." What occasions

my coming at this approach is a comment Edwards makes [p.12] in his section on "Christians for Violence" [pp.8-13], which is almost entirely an attack on me, with correct passing reference to Shaull, Torres, and Melville: he disallows my connecting, on Greek base, re-/in-surrection. Now, I don't mind folks telling me to go to hell, but I do mind their questioning my Sprachgefühl, for my speech-feeling is superior to my morals. I therefore adduce the following considerations:

(1) In this word-association I am not, as charged, "echoing" Hugh Schonfield in his execrable THE PASSOVER PLOT. I first studied this association in 1938, decades before 1966, which saw the first edition of PLOT. Even if I were in error, I'd prefer that the error be original with me, rather than a case of "echo."

(2) The word-association is epexegetic to my argument--indeed, does not even appear in the argument's extended form, which apparently Edwards is not aware of ["VIOLENCE: No Resort or Last Resort or...?" United Ministries in Higher Education/67], as he quotes only a brief and somewhat distorted magazine article [so distorted that my title, without my permission, was changed from "No Effective Alternative to Violence" to the same without the word "effective"!].

(3) The argument in my article [to which the word-association is elucidative, not--as Edwards implies--substantive] is that violence is, biblically, a component in liberation: in Israel's paradigmatic birth-event, the Exodus, God escalates the violence through ten plagues to the destruction of Pharaoh's army; and "In Christianity, what parallels the Exodus Event is Jesus' Resurrection--parallels it not only in cultic significance but as a divine violent intervention (an 'uprising' [*anastasis*])." Edwards conveniently overpasses this violence factor, and so has need to purify "resurrection" [*anastasis*] of all taint of violence. This he does in wooden-headed fashion, by using one lexicon on the noun, without (a) ascertaining that the verbs on the same stem can have precisely my meaning, (b) showing any gut-feeling for "the Christ-Event" as insurrectional in the eyes of the authorities, (c) studying the visceral cluster of words on this root and stem. He accuses me of being a tyro in my "use of the New Testament," then illustrates that in his handling of this case, tyro he himself is! The performance one would expect of a second-year-Greek student!

.... Limiting the reff. to Yonge, we get (1) *anistamai*, "rebel" (p.442), "uprise" (p.522); and *aniste mi*, "excite to rebellion" (p.443). A-G (p.69) gives for the latter "rise up or rebel against someone *Mark 3:26*" [Vulg. meaning here "join in an insurrection"], [J.B.Phillips] "lead a rebellion."

.... The phrase developed in a 1942 conversation with John Knox, whose literary assistant I was at the time. We meant to include the violence component in its many facets.

(4) The simplest truth of the science of communication is that encoding and decoding are not a simple reversal: what is "heard" differs from what is "meant" to such an extent that the "meander" has responsibility for encoding in such wise as to forbend against vagrant, especially canceling, meanings. The very extensive early Christian use of words whose roots and stems were reverberant with violence must somehow be explained, given the option of other diction; and I explain in terms of their experience of God's violence, in Jesus' resurrection, against death and "the principalities and powers," and their anticipation of God's soon violent inbreaking of his Rule ["Kingdom"]. [Elsewhere I've amassed the lexical evidence on this.] The Passion of our Lord and the martyrdom of so many of his followers witnesses that the authorities got the message, even though modern pacifists like Edwards don't.

5. Through various ploys, Edwards seeks to discredit me as a NT scholar--then reveals, unwittingly, why: he'd like to be able to push my notions on violence over onto another base, viz. [p.13] "the usual dogmas of political revolution." Neat, unjust, inept. He'd like to be free to use his pacifist cookie-cutter on the NT materials, without irritation from the likes of me. Thus he prostitutes his scholarship to figment a safe-for-the-Establishment Jesus, and makes the Establishment's use of "violence" as a taboo-control term, aiding and abetting the culture-Christian and robbing "the wretched of the earth" of Jesus the Judge-Dissident.

Some discrediting has been going on, however. History discredits false prophets. On p.10, Edwards correctly represents me as saying that in the late '60s, threat/violence was necessary "to strike Congress and American business with the fears of chaos," and ten days before his death LBJ confirmed this: We'd not gotten the C/R legislation "unless Congress felt it was sitting on a dynamite keg." Edwards dogmatically asserts that such "is not going to turn the tide"--but it did.

"uprising" (Anastasis), + Resurrection (NT Greek roots)

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