



The Solidarity of the Shaken



by

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An address given at a service called "Remembrance is not Enough" held on November 10th 2018 at Mill Hill Chapel in City Square, Leeds.

On the anniversary of the centenary of the end of World War I the Commission joined with the Leeds Pax Christi group to hold a service that not only commemorated all those who died in that terrible conflict but also called for us all to re-dedicate ourselves to our Christian responsibility to be peacemakers.

This is one of an occasional series of publications by the Commission to help us all reflect on our own calling to work for Justice and Peace in today's world.

The Diocese of Leeds Justice & Peace Commission working with the Leeds Pax Christi Group



was succeeded by all the various lesser evils
of ordinary liberal democracy.
But, just then, the sense of being-released,
after so many years of nightmare,
was nothing short of miraculous!
It was a little moment of eternity, breaking into history.

As a Christian theologian,
I'm naturally inclined to put it in theological terms:
I've seen the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

But I'm also interested in other ways of looking at the event.

Václav Havel himself spoke of it as a triumph of
"solidarita otřšených"
"solidarity of the shaken" ...
Charter 77 was, in a sense, a *pre-political* solidarity movement.
It included people of every different sort of political persuasion:
liberals, reform communists, nationalists, social democrats, conservatives, anarchists ...
It was open to people of every different religious faith, and none ...
Its members were all Czech or Slovak.
But the *only* other thing they all had in common,
was a certain basic "shaken" concern for truth-seeking –
and therefore a demand for freedom of speech.
In a situation where the regime attempted to suppress
any form of open politics,
it was a pre-political movement
in the sense that it was calling for
the very possibility of politics.
It was a solidarity movement, united purely and simply
by its participants' "shakeness" in that sense:
their being 'shaken' into thoughtful insurgency

Our solidarity project – building links between
church-related peace activists from Western Europe
and church-related human rights activists in organisations like Charter 77 –
was itself, absolutely, an example of "solidarity of the shaken".
Our Western-European political agenda was quite different from theirs.
But what both sides had in common was just a certain shared "shakeness".

The concept of "solidarity of the shaken" is actually Czech in origin.
It was first developed by the philosopher Jan Patočka,
the co-founder of Charter 77, with Václav Havel.
Patočka died after being detained
by the Czech security police in 1977.
But shortly before his death he'd written a work called

Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History.

And this concludes with a discussion of “solidarity of the shaken”

Patočka, in fact, situates this discussion

in the context of the Armistice following the First World War,
a hundred years ago.

Why *wasn't* the First World War the war to end all wars

that some people at the time so urgently hoped it would be?

Because – Patočka basically suggests – although many people

were indeed deeply, deeply “shaken” by the War,

there were no adequate organisations

capable of translating that “shakeness”

into international grassroots campaigning “solidarity” ...

I've seen the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

I've seen a great victory of the “solidarity of the shaken”.

Short-lived, it's true.

But, for a moment, all-transfiguring ...

“Solidarity of the shaken”:

this is the most difficult of any form of solidarity

actually to organize, and render durable.

Much more difficult than solidarity on the basis of

shared ethnicity, shared social class, shared culture.

Perhaps “solidarity of the shaken” can only ever flare up for brief moments.

Yet, surely, it's the most valuable solidarity of all!

And here's another way to think about it...

Just now we heard some ferocious words from the book of *Amos*. (Amos 5 18:24)

The original core of this book is approximately 2,870 years old.

Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord!

says Amos.

'The day of the Lord': a vindication of the Hebrew God YHWH.

This was conventionally imagined in terms of a great military victory.

But Amos envisages the vindication of YHWH quite differently:

It is darkness, not light:

as if someone fled from a lion,

and was met by a bear;

or went into a house and rested a hand against the wall,

and was bitten by a snake.

YHWH is the God of truth,

even truth that we, absolutely, don't want to acknowledge.

And then YHWH speaks directly, through the prophet:

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

In other words: don't think you can get round me by flattery!

What do gods want?

In those days everyone knew:

what gods want is, simply, to be worshipped, flatteringly,
in the most beautiful ritual fashion possible.

But the God of Amos says no!

What *this* God wants is something quite different:

Let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

The book of *Amos* is full of the most furious, sarcastic, terrifying denunciations
of the rich and powerful, the ruling class, within Israel.

It's also, in a sense, the oldest book in the Bible.

There are fragmentary parts of other books that may well be older.

And the text of *Amos* has itself no doubt evolved

during the process of its being copied and transmitted.

But there's good reason to suppose that most of it is original.

Its poetic quality is consistently brilliant.

And the prophet also makes a number of predictions,

regarding imminent disasters for the people of Israel,

explicitly time-limited to the reign of King Jeroboam II,

not one of which actually came true.

(As the author of the *Second Book of Kings* in fact drily remarks!)

A couple of generations later, there did indeed occur

a catastrophic invasion by the Assyrians.

But *Amos* makes no reference to the Assyrian Empire,

which in his day didn't yet pose any obvious threat.

So: why did his followers preserve and treasure his words?

Why did they ignore his complete mis-reading of the future?

The answer surely is: they did so because of
the explosive originality of his vision of God.

Before Amos, there's very little evidence that the religion of the Hebrews
was seriously any different in kind

from the religion of the surrounding peoples.

What do gods want?

Before Amos, there's no evidence that the Hebrews, generally, had a different answer to that question from the peoples around them. Everyone knew: what gods want is to be beautifully flattered!

But the God of Amos says no!

And this poses a tremendous problem, which remains to this day unresolved.

I've seen the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

I've glimpsed, at least, the beginning of a resolution to this age-old problem, beginning with *Amos* ...

Thus, the book of *Amos* poses a tremendous problem by virtue of its character as an earthquake-fault.

It represents a vision of God with such radical *shaking-power*! The prophet is shaken – to the core – by the demands of 'justice and righteousness'.

But how, then, are we to organize forms of religious *solidarity* that don't betray that *shakeness*, to which Amos bears witness?

How are we actually to organize "solidarity of the shaken"?

Amos himself gives no answer.

He simply represents God refusing to accept the worship by means of which, above all, his people enacted their solidarity with one another.

"Take away your sacrifices", he says, "take away your hymns".

This God will accept nothing short of "solidarity of the shaken": solidarity founded, purely and simply, on a shared open-minded love of truth, and on nothing else liable to compromise that love.

The problem is: what the God of Amos demands is 'justice and righteousness' as a purely *infinite* ideal, forbidding complacency, but offering no *finite* actual programme round which to rally.

Much of the Hebrew Bible consists of the campaign literature of a revolutionary movement, in effect seeking to resolve the resultant problem.

This movement had, at its heart, a very simple finite demand: namely, that the people of Israel should only ever worship one God. It took five or six centuries for the movement to achieve its goal of stamping out the worship of other gods, alongside YHWH, within Hebrew society.

To the extent that its activists also still envisaged YHWH their God
in the same way that Amos had,
then what they stood for was indeed “solidarity of the shaken”.

And after the “YHWH alone” movement had triumphed,
it was followed by a series of evangelistic projects:
solidarity in trying to convert as many new people as possible
to the tradition inaugurated by the Hebrew prophets:
Jewish evangelism, Christian evangelism, Muslim evangelism ...

To the extent that Jewish, Christian, Muslim evangelists
have still envisaged their God in the same way as Amos did,
then this too has been “solidarity of the shaken”.

But, of course, the problem still remains.
Human nature being what it is,
the “YHWH alone” movement was always liable to lapse
into mere fanaticism or religious power-politics, “solidarity of the orthodox”;
Jewish, Christian, Muslim evangelism has always been liable to lapse
into mere fanaticism or religious power-politics –
likewise, “solidarity of the orthodox”.
And “solidarity of the shaken” then, immediately, dissolves ...

But, look: in our age there’s emerged another possibility!

There’s emerged another possibility of seeking actually to organize
“solidarity of the shaken”.
This event, in which we’re participating today, represents that new possibility.

I’m talking about an alliance between traditional religion, on the one hand,
and, on the other hand, what one might call “*public conscience movements*”.
That’s to say: political (or pre-political) movements dedicated,
not to gaining governmental power,
but – liberated from the necessary compromises of party politics –
precisely, in “shaken” fashion, to prodding at the public conscience.

Historically, the first such movement was
the campaign for the abolition of slavery,
beginning in the later 18th century.

But, from the 1960s especially, there’s been a great proliferation of them:
peace movements,
green movements,
feminist movements,
human rights movements,
all sorts.

Charter 77 was a classic example.
(That its leader ended up head of state was pure accident!)

I've seen the coming of the kingdom of heaven.
I've glimpsed, I think, at least the beginning
of a resolution to the problem of how to build
"solidarity of the shaken".

Public conscience movements are, by nature, ephemeral.
They still do need friendly inter-action – it seems to me – with traditional religion,
so as to put down roots, draw strength from deep cultural memory.
But, in general, they represent the nearest thing there's ever been
to the possibility of true organised "solidarity of the shaken".

Jesus said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

So we, today, might say,

Blessed are the shaken, and blessed those
who seek to enact
"solidarity of the shaken".

I've seen the coming of the kingdom of heaven.

 **Diocese of Leeds: Justice & Peace Commission**
Working to bring about God's reign of Justice and Peace



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