

ANARCHY & TYRANNY AS SOUL-&-SOCIETY CONDITIONS

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Whenever a West/Arab confabulation flares up, I'm asked "Why are Arabs so violent?" My first impulse is to try to weaken any antiarabism in the questioner's heart. But then I have to say something like "Different peoples have different fuse-lengths, & Arabs are short-fuse--even shorter than Americans, who are short-fuse in comparison with, say, Tibetans." Then I have to confess perplexity as to whether there's any moral content to fuse-length: I lean, but only lean, toward there isn't. Then I say something like this: "Jesus was killed, Mohammed killed: the latter was the only military-general founder of any of the world's great religions, & he models Arab dreaming of the military option. Then--in my mind, if not also on the questioner's lips--comes the question "Haven't Chrsitians, despite our Founder's nonviolence, been as violent as the Muslims?" In spirit, or in volume? In volume I can't say; we've been more successful at empire than have the Muslims, & "nonviolent empire" is an oxymoron. But whereas the Quran is pro-sword, the NT is anti-sword (except the eschatological divine sword); so in spirit we Christians, except for aberrant exceptional situations, have had a knotty conscience about coercion & destruction--for in the spirit of our Lord we prefer persuasion.... This Thinksheet started when somebody after church Sunday asked me, yes, "Why are the Arabs so violent?" Saddam was the context, of course; but I must go beyond that....

1 Compassionate intelligence directs us to take **appropriate action** in every decisional situation. Hitler's grab of Poland & Saddam's grab of Kuwait failed both criteria: the grabs lacked compassion & proved out to have been unintelligent, as did the Samurais' Pearl-Harbor dream become action. We know now that it was unintelligent for our ambassador in Baghdad to tell Saddam we'd not interfere in his relations with Kuwait: we should've rattled the sword in his face. Now we're rattling the sword in his face & trying to decide, in the instance of his refusal to withdraw from Kuwait, whether to use it. Bush is, I think rightly, escalating so as to have the offensive option, in the hope that this louder sword-rattling will turn Saddam's dream of keeping Kuwait into a nightmare, so the pain will be in Saddam's head instead of in millions of people's lives.

Against the psywar of Bush & the UN is the rising pro-peace sentiment in the U.S. It's a comfort & hope for Saddam as he watches CNN & listens to his sycophants, as the same sentiment in America before 9 Sept 39 (the blitzkrieg into Poland) was a comfort & false hope for Hitler, the false hope that he could count on our peace movement to keep us out of the war.

I remember with shame American churches' participation in "America First" peace propaganda, & now I feel shame again that so many leaders in my own UCC are anti-war instead of being pro-appropriate-action. One reason is that this denomination is self-seduced by its self-definition as "a justice and peace church" (as though justice were in captivity to peace, an illusion Christianity is vulnerable to, as Islam is vulnerable to the illusion that justice is in captivity to war against any nonIslamic government, eg Israel's, in any territory ever under a Muslim flag).

2 There is, I think, a broader significance than one denomination's ecclesiarchs' efforts to tell Washington what to do about Saddam--so I'll not apologize for presenting the UCC evidence. Our national church office, en masse, signed this ad for the WASHINGTON POST: "Mr. President, do not go to war with Iraq. We as clergy of the United Church of Christ call on you to work through the United Nations and with other nations for a just and peaceful resolution of this crisis." There's the justice-&-peace self-seduction, including a tacit rejection of Bush's work, "through the United Nations and with other nations, for a just resolution of this crisis: the ad is against justice unless it can be obtained peacefully! A UCC executive (S. Garry Oniki, Office for Church in Society) asks (in his Dec/90 mailer), "Can we stop the U.S. from going to war with Iraq and work to create a more Just Peace way of dealing with Iraq's unacceptable aggression? Almost two thousand clergy of the UCC have just placed a full-page ad in the Washington Post making this witness, working at the difficult task of affecting national climate and policy." This month, his instrumentality is

sending two reps to Iraq to "seek a just resolution" peacefully, & they could be well received: Saddam clearly wants peace & believes his addition of the "lost province" of Kuwait is just. At the present time, he has both Kuwait & peace (ie, no war).

Obviously I'm not among the "almost two thousand [UCC] clergy" supporting the ad. Nor is Hal Cooper, whose letter to his people here on Cape Cod (W. Yarmouth Congregational Church UCC, Dec/90) explains his refusal to sign: "I don't believe that Saddam Husein can be allowed to confiscate another nation as he has done with Kuwait....there yet may be times when the use of force is necessary for the management of situations which could be worse without its use....I request that each of you in some way convey your support to those people representing us so far from home. We often forgot our people during Vietnam, sometimes even disowning them, at least I did. We have paid a price for that hostility to people who represented all of us. Let's not do that again."

3 I think you can believe it with me: The past five years have seen more anarchy/tyranny changes around the globe than any previous five years in our planet's history. Often during this period I've thought of something of Tom Paine I read when I was a teen: "I have sworn eternal hatred of every tyranny over the minds of men." Understandably he accused of tyrannous mentality those who said his pamphleteering amounted to anarchy. Both were extremists, he pushing an excess of freedom & his opponents an excess of order. Our British civil war was shaping up, to determine how much power east-Atlantic Britain would have over west-Atlantic Britain (called "the Colonies"). Answer: None. (Our second Civil War was over how much power Washington would have over the seceded states. Answer: Much. In both civil wars, freedom was the central issue. In the first, my ancestors were for it; in the second, against it, against the freedom of states to secede from the Union, & for the Federal order. Yet soon it was clear that the ex-Confederate states had more freedom, in neighbor-&-world context, after having been forced to submit to Washington's tyranny [Jn. Wilkes Booth's "Sic semper tyrannis!"]: freedom sometimes deep-correlates with tyranny, as order with anarchy.)

4 Just how complicated are the existential relations of the terms in this Thinksheet's title I want to suggest by two exempla of the importance of the **character factor**.

EXEMPLUM #1, leChambon under the Nazis, as profoundly documented by the 1990 PBS "Weapons of the Spirit." Taking in Jews fleeing from Hitler, this small Protestant town in southern France quickly doubled its population. Such was the inner moral-spiritual character of the citizens, remembering the 16th-c. Roman Catholic holocaust against them, that they hid the Jews, some by blending them into their own families, with no discussion of whether it was right or whether it was dangerous. It couldn't have been more dangerous, yet Hitler got to kill not even one of those Jews--though he did get the town's spiritual leader André Trokme & his two fellow-clergy. The Nazis were baffled. Why didn't the resistance collapse, why weren't the Jews coughed up, when the clergy of the town's church were taken? Because the order preserving the people's solidarity was inner, spiritual; & their outer, political anarchy was a strategic advantage. The documentary greatly pleased goodwife Loree, for in college she'd written a paper on "Christian Anarchy," in which she'd argued that government exists as a compensation for the people's character-inadequacy: the more inner discipline, the less need for outer coercion (Wm. Penn's "Men will serve God or tyrants").

EXEMPLUM #2, the U.S.S.R. today, actually the whole of eastern Europe, which has been a moral-spiritual exoskeleton since WWI (the U.S.S.R.) & WWII (the rest of eastern Europe, including east Germany). Democracy is the cry, but do the peoples have the character, the inner substance & self-discipline, democracy requires? Vitaly Korotich, editor of the U.S.S.R.'s magazine "Ogonyok," doubts it: The communist "system never built a morality. It destroyed religion and put no morality in its place. It started from hatred and social egoism. It destroyed the workers,...the peasants and the villages....[&] the intellectuals....It is terrible when...believe in nothing." Stalin's antimorality of other-blaming must end: "everybody must accept responsibility for himself." We must "pay for liberty. We must have our own repentance." The west Germans were lucky: they had democracy "imposed" on them.*....Are America's present character-building efforts sufficient for the survival of democracy?