

## ANALYTIC DIMENSIONS OF THE PERSIAN GULF CRISIS

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A few days ago, I asked a clergy group "What are you saying to your folk about the Persian Gulf Crisis?" All were worried, thoughtful, nondogmatic, open to prayerful listening. So was I, but I was also programmatic, as were a few of them: we had let Washington know what we'd concluded. What I'd concluded, #2460, was available to them, & I had to explain it was other than what the national & state staffs of my denomination had concluded, which was "no war."....A few days after that meeting, somebody handed me David Paul Henry's "A Christian Response to the Persian Gulf Crisis," saying "This is the paper for you to reply to." I'm guessing that "the Rev. DPH, PhD" is a pastor & his paper is what he's saying to his folk. If so, it's a model: a pastor's well-thought-out position, better thought out than that of many other mainline pastors I've read & heard, & worth commenting on both because it's well thought out & because its conclusions are typical of the breed, the mainline pastor facing the Gulf (& the attendant gulfs). But you don't have to read his paper: I'll be clear as to what he's saying, & fair with him, & responsive to the person who asked for my comments on the paper.

1 The paper is guilty of **self-flattery**, as "A Christian's Response to the Persian Gulf Crisis" would not be. The title turned me off before I read the first sentence: he's telling me, before I've read his paper, that his response is "Christian"! I can't know, ahead of reading it, that it's Christian. Even after I've read it, I can't know that: I can only know that I'll conclude that it is or isn't Christian. I'm not quibbling, I'm pointing to a blindness of "the righteous," the believers, especially of the clergy, viz the inauthentic presumption of truth conveyed by the mere use of the religion's label--"Buddhist," "Jewish," "Christian," whatever. Two other ways to avoid the whiff of arrogance in titling this: "One Christian's Response of the PGC," & "A Pastor's Struggle over the PGC."

2 In spite of the Bible's many instances of interpersonal political confrontation--eg Moses/Pharaoh, David/Saul, Jesus/Pilate--DPH has nothing to say about the Saddam/Bush face-down.\* According to this analytic dimension, the **psychodynamic-kinetic**, two bucks are antlers-interlocked to determine which one will win the power to impregnate the future of the Middle East. A **sociodynamic-kinetic** analysis would see it as a conflictual tale of two cities which will determine which will have more power in the Middle East, Washington or Baghdad. Our buck is Bush & our city is Washington. I'm rooting for our buck & our city as less vicious, though perhaps not less stupid, than their buck & their city.

The strengths of these analytic dimensions are (1) that they're not impeded by false idealism breeding irrelevant doctrinaire "solutions," & (2) that they are dogma-free to make use of what we've been learning in the disciplines between psychology & sociology. The weaknesses are those of the struggle model: though the city is more & other than a jungle, Sarg in Hill St. Blues concluded his morning talk to the police with "And remember! It's a jungle out there!"

\*According to RHD<sup>2</sup>, this phrase, with this meaning, came into use "1930-35," ie in the case of Hitler, who won the face-down with Chamberlain & from that falsely concluded that Britain would permit Germany's seizure of Poland. Saddam won the face-down with the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad, & concluded he could get away with the seizure of Kuwait. Now we have church organizations, & pastors like DPH, weakening Bush in his efforts to face down Saddam. Deluded, they imagine they're weighing in on the side of peace! On the contrary, I'm a peacemaker by asking Washington to threaten Jan.16 nuclear attack.

3 One would expect a biblical leader to preach trust in God (for revelation & empowerment), but DPH preaches trust in law: his primary analytic dimension is **legal-political**. His strict-constructionism would make tyrants of Lincoln (vis-a-vis the Civil War) & FDR (vis-a-vis WWII) &, by anticipation, Bush if he fails to get Congress' consent to attack Iraq. But consider: (1) Congress is ambivalent, hoping both to & not to be asked (for reasons I need not spell out); (2) Congress would never agree

to a nuclear attack; so if that is what he escalates his threat to before Jan.15, he cannot ask Congress; (3) Postwar Arabs/American relations will be somewhat easier to restore if Congress has not supported "the president's war."....Politicized religion? It is unfair so to tab the mainline churches out of hand, as the current R.DIGEST does, accusing us of trading in spirituality for politics. We are into spirituality, too. And evangelism. But what feeds the misimpression is the fact that so often so many church officials go public with political opinions that seem to the public to have little connection with what the public thinks the churches should be promoting. (There's no comfort for us when the religious-political right falls on its public face, as in Pat Robertson's embarrassing presidential campaign.)

4 Only the U.S. has the military clout to carry out the U.N. directive to force Saddam out of Kuwait. That fact DPH never faces. Instead, in his first ¶ he calls for "the removal of the U.S. from command and predominant presence in Operation Desert Shield." Yet in the same sentence he supports "the U.N. as a legitimate authority to direct a course of action in response to Iraq's aggression"! The fact he refuses to face sets these two calls in mutual contradiction. The other nonsense in this first ¶ appears in his fourth ¶'s admission: the U.N.'s Jan.15 permission to Operation Desert Shield to go-ahead: if Bush + our allies in ODS attack, it will be a U.N. war (whether or not the U.S. Congress declares war). DPH's handling of the **military** analytic dimension is weak & flimsy, yet he professes to have taken it into his calculus & conclusions & preachments. But this defect is endemic among the self-called "peace-makers" yesterday & today. Our author hopes "peace committees" will use his paper. They'll love it. (A "peace committee" is no more apt to treat facts honorably than a "war committee" would be. In both cases, the conclusion is announced in the title before the committee meets!)

5 Our author handles the **ethical** analytic dimension not by direct derivation from Scripture, as one would expect of a Baptist, but by the present fashionable peace-movement reliance on "just-war theory." The cause should be "just"--but in whose eyes? All participants in all wars have considered their cause just. Ditto for "last resort": Saddam took Kuwait because he felt it was the last resort, he having tried every other way to right what he considered Kuwait's wrongs against Iraq; & of course the U.N. Jan.15 deadline is the last resort in the U.N.'s eyes. As for "a proper authority," what warrior has not had it? Hitler did. DPH states the fourth principle thus: "war should only be waged by peacemakers," "in a manner that keeps the ultimate goal of justice and peace in view." Agreed, but that would not rule out a smart-nuclear-bomb attack on military objectives, to minimize death & injury to the military & civilians (the type of first strike I think "indicated").

DPH says war against Iraq would be just, for Iraq has committed injustice "as determined by impartial standards of justice," & the situation "must be remedied at all costs." I balk at "impartial" & "all." Then he pulls the purity sanction: "the U.S. should not serve as the enforcement agent of U.N. policy," for we're embattled over the constitutional question of war powers, we've been unwilling to subject ourselves to international discipline, & we "cannot be considered a dispassionate or impartial agent of justice on the international scene." Another internal contradiction: he wants action against Iraq, & can't come up with any nation (1) pure enough & (2) militarily able to do the job. Again he's thought himself into immobility, caught in his own trap of unclear & unfair reasoning. "U.S. opposition to aggression, occupation, and oppression is not consistent." So? Was any nation ever? Instead of using the ideal to motivate to action, he uses it to cancel reality. He's unethical as well as unreal in complaining that the dirty U.S. must not do something clean! And of course we "have trouble distinguishing between international justice and self-interest." Some nation doesn't?....A just, fair, peaceful "desired outcome"? He implies it's not in place. It is. It's freedom--for Kuwait & everybody else--from Saddam....DPH recommends "long-term international isolation of Iraq": manifoldly impracticable. Impeaching Bush if he attacks sans Congress: impossible. "Withholding tax payments" until the war ends: ineffectual. Prayer "to pull back from the brink." Remembering we're Kingdom citizens first, & Bush & Saddam are both sinners: true enough.

6 No **religious** or **theological** analysis in this preacher's paper. One reference to Jesus, but only in connection with pacifism, which he rejects.