

Occasion: *I need to do some thinking about why I felt **uneasy** when I read this 5.3 letter of mine in the CAPE COD TIMES. Could be of some help to you, too: other people's uneasiness is sometimes more helpful than their confident assertions.*

1 When I've got mine, I don't want to be troubled by those who want to get theirs. ("I" here is collective: in speaking for myself, I'm speaking for my species distributively.) I (collective for "we Americans") want **quiet** in the Near East (& everywhere else), for unquiet cannot promise to get me anything I want as much as I want quiet. From this self-interested observation, I generalize that in the Near East today, "unquiet benefits nobody--not us, not the Israelis, not the Palestinians."

That assertion conveniently & deliberately--but perhaps not justly--overlooks all those who see quiet as the death of their hope, & conflict (terrorism, chaos, war) as means necessary to keep hope alive. They are committed to keeping up the pressure against "the peace process," which can proceed only by compromises unacceptable to them. They believe in conflict as potentially destructive (of the State of Israel & of Israel-accepting Palestinian patsies) & creative (of the geographical & political space for the emergence of the State of Palestine).

'Quiet' policy may create environment for peace to emerge

While I seldom disagree with Sean Gonsalves, I must protest his tilting against Israel vis-a-vis the Oslo Accords.

Yes, Reinhold Niebuhr taught that justice is improbable as an emergent of negotiations between unequal powers, but he also taught that the most that can be expected, under the conditions of history (including original sin), is an approximation of justice.

Yes, no true peace without justice. But that familiar bromide

assumes the possibility of a mutually acceptable definition of justice -- a condition unavailable in the present Palestinian/Israeli imbroglio.

Why? Because, from the Israeli standpoint, justice demands that the PLO revoke its charter's commitment to driving the Jews into the sea, abolishing Israel as a nation. That revocation is in the Oslo Accords, and the PLO has not acted on it -- and is in no position to complain that Israel has not lived up to some other condi-

tion in the Accords.

Our government's policy is quiet. Peace is a immodest hope, because justice is an impossible dream. But quiet is achievable and desirable, since unquiet benefits nobody -- not us, not the Israelis, not the Palestinians.

Under chosen or imposed quiet, the region will have time to develop those human networks that themselves become arguments for peace, and even for justice.

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2 Now notice that my rhetoric shift from negative (unquiet good for nobody) to positive (quiet potentially good for everybody): reread, please, the last ¶. My moral problem with my rhetoric is that it is self-serving under the banner of altruism. My defense is that my altruistic expectation rests even more on rational-historical consideration than on what I think's good for me & America. But the doubt continues to gnaw, as always when I believe (esp. when I argue myself into believing) that what's in it for me is best, at least in the long run, for everybody else.

3 The doubt's esp. strong when I'm arguing (against my genes, which are contrarian, pro-conflictual) for "peace & quiet." My personal history of taking unpopular stands, even espousing "lost" causes, reveals that I lean toward **hope through conflict**. I'm all for what the Lord's prayer says about bread & forgiveness, but I'm genetically more drawn to the conflictual petitions which envelop those two: (1) that God's rule will be victorious over rivals, & (2) that we'll be delivered from the evil (one).

4 And so, when I hear the word "conflict," I feel more its positive-creative than its negative-destructive connotation. To balance, I need to listen hard to those whose reaction is the reverse--such as my friend Chas. R. McCullough in his excellent RESOLVING CONFLICT WITH JUSTICE AND PEACE (Pilgrim/91).

5 Not just my genes: I grew up under a brilliant jurist-father, a compassionate man who reveled in intellectual, esp. legal, combat. He taught me to analyze situations for their **truth-&-justice** content. No truth, no hope of justice: therefore, be an enemy of the lie, of truth distorted by (self-) "interest," & of truth that's not "the whole truth," & of truth adulterated instead of "nothing but the truth."

Further, he taught me that I am the first person I should apply the hermeneutics

of **suspicion** to: self-examination should start with examining one's own motives, as I'm trying to do in §§ 1 - 3 of this Thinksheet.

6 The two legs on which you are to walk through (analyze) a conflictual situation are **truth** (the substance to be gotten at) & **love** (the motive of kindness, eagerness to believe the best while "rejoicing in the truth" [1Cor.13]).

Let's see how this worked out in the letter, which included these words the newspaper edited out. Insert them in your mind, please, just before the last two printed ¶s:

A religious analysis reveals the problem. The Qur'an forbids allowing any non-Muslim government where there ever has been a Muslim government. Muslim fundamentalists would scream "Blasphemy!" if the PLO were to sign the revocation accord. And Jewish fundamentalists demand that the Israeli government affirm God's gift of Canaan-Palestine to the Jews in perpetuity. Within the respective governments, these two religious impediments limit the formation and execution of policy.

What then? What approximation of justice is possible?

Not peace. No true peace without justice. Not peace and quiet. Only quiet.

7 Quick I am to defend editors' right, even duty, to delete! As friend Mel Hartzler says, "Verbose is gross, concise is nice." But what that editor deleted increased my unease: without the elided material, the religious analysis concluding **stasis** (viz. that the Palestinian/Israeli standoff is, doctrinally, an irresolvable opposition between two religions whose right wings are too politically powerful to bypass), I'm left looking like two things I'm not: (1) an antiPalestinian & (2) a quietist. AntiPalestinian: The shortened letter gives no reason for Palestinian intransigent determination to see the end of Israel as a nation state. Quietist: Instead of the realist that I am, my readers may suspect me of having a philosophical preferential option for peace & quiet, & not the activist I've more often been accused of being.

8 The humorous but tragic exclamations in this Thinksheet's first line shockingly bespeak the **adversarial** atmosphere in which we're now living. One form it takes is "road rage," the temporary insanity of vehicle drivers who inflate a small affront into a highly dangerous territorial struggle. In term's of the Thinksheet's second line, its title, the road enraged falls clearly into the "destructive conflict" category.

But not all destructive conflict is insane & evil. We Americans remember Sam Adams & Patrick Henry as fighters set upon destroying Britain's military-political control of the Colonies. Again, not all creative conflict is good: Lenin long schemed to incite in Russia a conflict to create a Marxist state, & in 1917 he succeeded--but shouldn't have. By the title "Conflict, Creative or Destructive" I'm not presenting a simple good/bad set of alternatives, still less a philosophical position. As a realist, I'm not *theoretically* either for or against conflict-violence-war-revolution. A realist is a situationalist: "It all depends on the situation," we realists say. I believe in conflict resolution (which the McCullough book is excellent on) but also in conflict creation (being a trouble-maker, as in my attack on THE NEW CENTURY HYMNAL).

9 Take, again, the Lord's Prayer. I see it as realist. One could see it as an all-depends-on-God call to quietism--as the first modern English-speaking missionary was rebuked & rejected with the words "When God wants to convert the heathen, he'll do it in his own way." Or as a call to activism, a call to arms: God wants us to engage "the principalities & powers" (Eph.6.12; next v., "Therefore take up the whole armor of God"), "resist the powers of evil" (UCC Statement of Faith)....An excess/defect analysis finds all three positions flawed. Consider just the excesses. Realism runs to unprincipledness, e.g. Pres. Clinton. Quietism runs to world-irresponsible withdrawal. And activism runs to an it-all-depends-on-us, God-has-no-other-hands-than-ours, trustless & graceless & flexless & ideology-obsessed arrogance.

10 Realism is free to consider & accept the human **hunger for conflict**. Like other hungers, it comes in various sizes. Those in whom the hunger is low are in danger of feeling self-righteous when they look at high-conflict-hunger neighbors. Again, we differ as to what conflict-areas feed our conflict hunger. I only glance at the sports section of newspapers, my eye caught only by mountain peaks such as Tiger Woods & that \$70-million-dollar, ten-year contract Rick Pitino wangled out of the Celtics (having

been persuaded by my Craigville neighbor Dave Gavitt, who had the czar job, got fired, yet is gracious enough to continue to care about what happens to the Celtics).

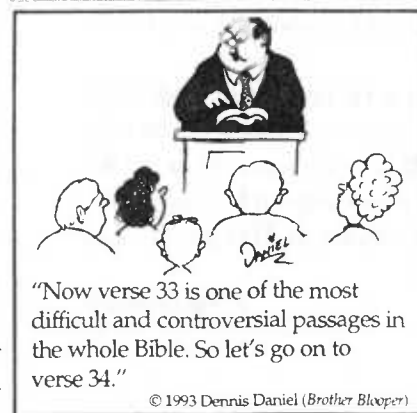
My hunger appetite is greater for intellectual combat-competition. Today Garry Kasparov lost his chess match to IBM's chess computer--after only 19 moves! Now, folks, *that's* exciting!

11 1.30.98: It's now more than seven months since I started this Thinksheet. How stand things now in Palestine/Israel? No change; not even mentioned in Clinton's '98 1'17" State of the Union, even though Netanyahu/Arafat were so recently in the White House. Of course Israel found inadequate Arafat's letter-to-Clinton acceptance of the existence of Israel: it's the fourth time (by my count) that he's accepted, but the PLO has never confirmed in writing--but Israel's intransigence will continue till the state's existence is conceded by the PLO or successor body. My conclusion (as in my printed letter &, in §6 above, my "religious analysis"): stasis, "quiet," which is livable by Israel but not so by the PLO, which will continue surreptitiously to encourage terrorism.

12 Should our government press the PLO to violate the Qur'anic prohibition (§6 above) which an editor dropped from my letter? (Did Clinton press on Arafat this time the formal PLO recognition of Israel's existence as a sine qua non of peace?) I've never seen or heard this recommended in the American media, which have an "established unbelief" policy (to use Geo.Marsden's phrase for Am. higher education). Besides the religious hesitance to take sides in this politico-religious conflict, there's the complicating fact that Israel's right wing makes the same claim for Judaism: no land once Jewish should ever be under nonJewish government (the position of the Maccabean revolt, 168 BCE/BC, & most messianic movements through AD 135 CE).

But to ideologize conflict-**avoidance** in religion is certain, sooner or later, to be in the disinterest of both justice & peace, sin being any ideology continued far enough in a straight line. Only temporarily can Brother Bloop get away with skipping verse 33. We contrarians expect "more light and truth to break forth from God's holy Word" (to use Pastor Robinson's 1620 phrase) through "the most difficult and controversial passages" (or whole facts about the Bible, such as its consistently masculine pronouns for God [a fact the liberal church refuses to address, cavalierly waiving it aside while remarking something about "cultural differences"]).

13 Seven months ago I remarked on Clinton's realism, which "runs to unprincipledness" (§9 above), a word meaning without moral scruples (which seems more true today) or without operational skills (which seems less true today). In the second sense, we've probably never had a more principled president. He holds steadily to the principle of keen intelligent benevolence within the limits of getting & holding power, & he's a profile in courage & cleverness on both fronts. In spite of what seems a sporadic problem with his zipper, he has the people's spectacular support (80% at this writing): the people sense his intelligent benevolence for them beyond party-politics, which he manipulates in the service of his master principle. His character is real & realistic, firm, narrow. Bob Dole's "It's character, stupid" got him nowhere in conflict with Bill Clinton, who's both moral & immoral, depending on which point of view you're looking from (& I look from both). To church each Sunday he carries his Bible, which is both a moral & an immoral book, depending on which point of view you're looking from....Now please reread §9. In the Oval Room, would you personally prefer a realist, a quietist, or an activist? Which, now, would be best for America & the world?



"Now verse 33 is one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the whole Bible. So let's go on to verse 34."

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14 Here's a parable on this Thinksheet's first two lines. Last autumn, a pair of mute (or royal white) swans landed on Lake Elizabeth, the "great pond" visible in winter from the catwalk in our home's greenhouse. They said "In your faces!" to the pair already resident, the pair whose '97 cygnets had already departed. The residents said "Outa our faces!" & attacked, driving the interlopers into the north end, where they remained through the season. Now it's midwinter. Each day our hamlet watches our resident pair placidly swimming & plunging their long necks downward for underwater vegetation. Soon we'll see only one: the other will be sitting on the eggs, mother & father alternating--maleheadship only after the cygnets have hatched. Faithful marriage for life. Conflict only territorial. Is any conflict *not* territorial?

15 The question closing §14 is worth thinking about because so much conflict is indeed territorial. Clinton is a territorial animal possessive of the Oval Room. Most Palestinians openly, and most Israeli covertly, are territorial animals claiming all the territory the Romans named "Palestine." Squabbling tribes in former Yugoslavia, in Africa, in India, in China, in Canada, in the U.S.A.--& wherenot?--are willing to fight to gain or hold territory they claim as their own. As peoples increasingly impinge on one another (the global will to control population being weak), conflicts over territorial "rights" will increase--water rights, fishing rights, hunting rights, mining rights, et al.

16 But we need to put on the table other types of conflict:

(1) Francis Bacon (d.1626), father of modern science, in Essay 34 spoke against marriage as an impediment to enterprise conflict: "He that hath wife or children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises, either of virtue or of mischief."

(2) All planetary life exhibits predation conflict: "Big fleas have little fleas upon their backs to bite 'em; & little fleas have littler fleas & so on infinitum." The condition is temporary (e.g., Is.11.6), & even now humanity has the capacity to limit predation, as have some other creatures (this 1.14.98 AP photo-release is of the world's largest breed of tiger *not* making a meal of its owner).

.....Clinton was a Rhodes scholar, but I've heard Cecil Rhodes bad-mouthed since the recent CBS:TV series on him. His life illustrates all three of the above-mentioned types of conflict. He had a world-class hunger for territory, & acquired 1/3rd of Africa; he was an embodiment of enterprise, jumping all hurdles; & he ate competitors for breakfast, lunch, & dinner. Androgens run wild (but not toward women). Admire, be appalled, & condemn.

(3) In the past 1/3rd c., esp. in our country, gender conflict has intensified. Think of it in light of the above types of conflict. It's **territorial**: men & women no longer have clear culture-assigned territory-roles. It's **enterprise**: both sexes are engaged in many of the same "great enterprises." And it's **predation**: just think of the ways the sexes are eating each other!.....What was that about Cecil Rhodes?



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