

Table Talk

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THE VIETNAM PREDICAMENT Part Two

SPEECH

To summarize the situation in South Vietnam, an "absurd" parallel might be drawn: Let us imagine the United States was subjugated in 1966 and managed by 1974 to drive the invaders from its shores by virtue of internal guerrilla resistance, secret aid from friendly countries, and dogged perseverance. As so often happens, victory brings, not peace, but internal dissent, in this case between the industrial interests of the East and the agrarian interests in the West. To prevent civil war, an international conference of 14 great powers arbitrarily divides our prostrate nation along the Mississippi River, calling everything east of the river "East United States" and everything west of it, "West United States." To placate both factions it was agreed that a national election would be held in two years on a winner-take-all basis, the election to be controlled by the great nations themselves. When election time comes, one of the great powers, let us say Japan, refuses to participate, seeing the Western faction which it favors, is hopelessly outnumbered. Instead Japan helps to set up a petty dictatorship in West United States, pouring millions of dollars into its army and economy. One dictatorship succeeds another, they have no following among the populace and they fall with regularity. Armed resistance to this government grows in the countryside until they control all but a few cities. Arms and military personnel are smuggled in from East United States, where a fanatical government hopes to unite East and West under their own rule and convert them to their strange Eastern ways. The people of the East think of themselves, not as Easterners, but as Americans, and they are willing to help their fellow Americans in the West to
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Senator Wayne Morse will speak at the Forum in Harrisburg on Sunday, February 10th at 3 P.M. His topic-- "Vietnam." Further information can be secured from Prof. Wilken.

VIETNAM: Shibboleth for American Christianity?

Vietnam has become the shibboleth of American foreign policy; the world is beginning to judge this nation on the basis of its predicament in South-east Asia. At the same time, Vietnam has become a test for American Christians. Is this a war which protects the "national interest"--like World War II, or even Korea? Does involvement in Vietnam signify American political responsibility for the welfare of the world? (See the State of the Union Message of January 12, 1966). Or does Vietnam represent the predicament of a nation whose blessings on all levels of existence have become its own curse? The answers to these questions are legion, posed by men who represent anything from dedicated love of mankind to sick minds entering the tough arena of world politics. But whatever the answers, an academic community--and I assume this includes professional Christians--must approach the issue in terms of reasonable argumentation based upon solid evidence, and strive for a settlement which will result in the establishment of peaceful human relations.

It is my opinion that neither reasonable arguments based upon solid evidence nor a forceful communication of a desire to establish peaceful human relations have been presented by the Administration--despite the recent diplomatic search for peace. For this reason, I think the following issues need to be raised, investigated and possibly resolved reasonably
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PREDICAMENT (Cont'd from page 1)

fight the puppets of Japan. The Japanese counter this force at first by vast quantities of military equipment but when they seem unable to persuade Americans to fight Americans send "military advisers" in constantly increasing numbers. When this advice proves inadequate they throw in their entire sea, land and air arsenal, bombing, devastating, destroying and killing indiscriminately in East and West alike. The Japanese now see themselves as protecting their vital interests, they are fighting for survival. If West United States falls to the industrial East it could bring about the industrialization of the entire North American Continent. So the Japanese would be doing nothing that had not been done before, all of it with the purpose of protecting their vital interests.

Now substitute the names of North Vietnam for East United States, South Vietnam for West United States, the United States of America for Japan and communism for industrialization and you have some idea of the "situation" in Vietnam. In this predicament the war cannot be won.

Coming back to reality, four "problem areas" preclude victory in the present position. 1. The Viet Cong have control of the jungle and countryside. They maintain a tight grip over vast areas of South Vietnam even within 20 miles of the capital. Against guerrilla tactics in these areas, bombing is notoriously ineffective. The people in the hamlets are being forced to support the V-C. in their jungle operation. Without constant U.S. protection the people cannot be extricated from the V-C. For years the Viet Cong have been the symbol of the people's protection from the coercion of the central government in Saigon. This image, along with the employment of terrorism among the villages, has provided supplies and shelter for the Viet Cong.

In controlling the countryside the V-C. are using guerrilla strategy gained from 20 years of fighting the Japanese, the French, themselves, and the Americans. A decisive battle is excluded in this "diplomacy." Hit and run tactics (cont'd on page 3)

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SHIBBOLETH (cont'd from page 1)

1). A long-range policy concerning relations with China and the various governments in Asia. Why is it that both long-range military, as well as diplomatic policies were avoided, when such policies were made for Europe? Do Americans care more about Europeans, their intellectual "grandfathers", than they do about Asians? Or is it the intension of the government to involve itself in the problems of other nations only when the government of such a nation asks it to? Is this really the case in Vietnam? Why then the suggestion that involvement in Vietnam serves the "national interest", or that it is based upon the "moral obligation" to create democratic governments around the globe?

2). A balance between political and military objectives in Vietnam. Why is it that the Pentagon cannot do better than to react to the military maneuvers of North Vietnam, thus "escalating" the war? Could not a military blockade, similar to that of Cuba, have been imposed long before it became necessary to debate the number of soldiers required to match the forces of the other side? Or is it the position of the Administration not to use the threat of full military might against aggression? Why then the moral argument against a political position that has made no effort to take the moral issues seriously, as seems to be the case in Hanoi?

3). Finally after the arguments have been presented and fully communicated to the world and its political representatives, Christians still face the question of whether war is able to provide the solution to the human problems existing in Vietnam-- and elsewhere. (See the Policy statement (cont'd on page 3))

PREDICAMENT (Cont'd from page 2)

demoralize armies and government and this is the case in South Vietnam. By maintaining domination in the jungle the V-C. and their North Vietnamese allies can carry on a long contest, perhaps lasting generations. To an American with his propensity for quick action and immediate results a war lasting 40 years is unthinkable; for an Oriental it is commonplace.

2. The war is an American War, not a Vietnamese contention. The casualty figures were 1 American to 4 Vietnamese two years ago. In November they were 1 to 2. The average Vietnamese doesn't feel the issues as "his war." After 25 years of fighting the people are exhausted. Freedom and Democracy mean little, and all the people desire is a peaceful night's sleep. "85% of the people just don't believe this is their war." Though we see great issues involved, the populace does not. Government for these people has always been oppressive whether their own or a foreign one. The Saigon government and the United States have not made the war vital as a struggle for peace to the peasants. Thus without the masses' support, the war cannot be won. The U.S. is identified as an outsider, Westerners, and associated with colonialism. The needs of the peasants are not being met and therein lies the strength and appeal of the Communists.

Above all the great bulk of the people are suffering from the aerial bombings and destruction of villages. While trying to flush out V-C. infiltrates in the villages, we are alienating the people who cannot understand why their homes and lands are being dissipated. They blame the U.S. for this and our presence in the villages is now rejected. Again a blind trap for us-- we must bomb to destroy the V-C supplies but we lose the people in doing so! (In addition the number of refugees streaming into the cities is increasing, creating new social and economic problems which the U.S. must meet). There is indeed a certain amount of "gobbledy- (cont'd next col.)

SHIBBOLETH (cont'd from page 2)

and message of the National Council of Churches, New York Times, December 4, 1965.) This is the issue squarely presented in the parable of the good Samaritan, which indicates both the predicament and the glory of the Judeo-Christian way of life: it is the question of whether or not someone will "go and do likewise", namely care for him who lies on the road because he was victimized by his fellow men. Perhaps the President of the United States has to reach a different solution to how he must act than a Seminarian or a soldier. But we can expect at least a reasonable justification for any action. Unfortunately, a great majority of Americans have not justified their actions or feelings through reasonable argument. When on January 2, 1966, veterans of World War II and Korea marched for peace in Vietnam in Gettysburg, local citizens charged them with "atheism" and "communism" (contrary to investigated evidence). When soldiers died in Vietnam, their families received telephone calls from fellow citizens expressing pleasure for this death in battle, and adding that it was the wage of sin against the peace of God. This is the predicament; and this is the shibboleth for American Christians.

Eric W. Gritsch

PREDICAMENT (Cont'd from col. 1)

gook" when Secretary Musk says, "We deplore the use of violence in the settlement of international disputes." Now, you don't have to be a Tillich or a Bultman to figure out that people who deplore bombing in the settlement of disputes don't deplore violence. Such is the predicament!

3. The South Vietnamese army despite their generally brave service is incapable of winning a military victory. They lack the men, the equipment, the leadership, and the fortitude. The desertion rate among the army has been almost 1,000 men a month. Despite press censorship, returning Americans have complained bitterly (cont'd on page 4)

PREDICAMENT (cont'd from page 3)

of South Vietnamese soldiers fleeing the field in the face of a sustained V-C attack. The Saigon government with American support can hold the city areas, but the army is ineffective in the rural sectors. This inability to hold the country points to the fact that the U.S. is committed indefinitely to remaining in South Vietnam. The communists are too intransigent, too insidious, and too intent on victory at our expense to negotiate or withdraw. This is not to deny the validity of our commitment but it is to say we are deadlocked in a struggle of interminable duration.

4. Asian communism and communists are not going to be pounded into submission. As our own resolve and commitment tightened in the face of an apparent communist victory, so now the same is true of the North Vietnamese. Our escalation of the war has only caused the communists to escalate from their side--in such a situation the sky is the limit and endless war the result. The fact remains that Washington, most of the military and the American people do not comprehend "Communist dedication." One does not like to play the role of Cassandra, but most Americans are too caught up in the illusion of U.S. invincibility. We are too infatuated with the rhetoric of our own propaganda and rationalism to see what starkly confronts us. We think with all our ICBM's and atom bombs, nothing can thwart us. Such thinking is enormously dangerous as the French learned in 1939 and again in 1954. In the words of a marine defender, at the "slaughterpit" of Plei Me--when he saw a single Red soldier, brandishing grenades and screaming, barge a whole squad of Vietnamese riflemen--"Damn, give me men that well disciplined and I'll capture this whole country."

5. The uncertainty of the Saigon government makes victory prodigious. The ultimate decision in South Vietnam will be political not military. This means establishing a stable effective government--one especially capable of winning the support of the people. The (cont'd next Col.)

government in Saigon under Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky is conservative, military, and not representative of the people. Prior to the present government, there have been 19 government changes in four years. This caused confusion and quarreling among the political and military leaders. The inconsistency of the present regime is apparent and rumor of the generals' quitting have increased. The political situation is complicated by the action of the Buddhists who have toppled a number of governments and whose leadership in key positions is "pro-left." Thich Tri Quang the principal monk is presently remaining quiet, but the possibility of other Buddhists taking to the streets remains a problem to winning the war. There are Catholics and Buddhists who hate each other more than they hate the Viet Cong. In such a situation the people can hardly fight let alone win a war.

(Thus with the V-C in control of the jungle and people, the U.S. fighting almost singlehandedly, the South Vietnam army and government incapable of maintaining a military or political victory and escalation growing every day, triumph in the war is inconceivable. In South Vietnam the U.S. is in a trap. Too many Americans don't know what's happening there. Intelligent analysis is needed, not harangues or calls for "victory at any cost". The war is getting bigger, involving more and more casualties with a certainty of intensification. The long range inference of the stalemate points to no "peace on earth, good will toward men." This is going to be a long, frustrating, and dirty war. Resignation and preparation for a hard conflict are prerequisites. Secondly, there will be a steady, continuous escalation, for the Asian communists, with their disregard for human life will be willing to sustain larger casualties than we are. American losses will increase with little material gain. Thirdly, in light of the continued build up on both sides, will and patience are needed in prosecuting the war. Giving in either to the vociferous peace demonstrators or the rising military fever of those who demand quick, forceful solution must be retained. Fourthly the North (cont'd on page 5)

PREDICAMENT (Cont'd from page 4)

Vietnamese show little signs of giving in to U.S. military pressure. She remains adamant against negotiations, and the air strikes designed to bring this about have had the opposite effect. Lastly, there appears a war which will demoralize and dehumanize the individual, the soldiers, the civilian, and the nation. The best we can hope for is to get out as soon as possible with some sort of compromise which will "save face" for both sides and guarantee neutralization for South Vietnam. Meanwhile the vicious circle of escalation and reaction goes on. We cannot subdue and permanently hold the country, under present circumstances. The Viet Cong cannot challenge our military power effectively, but can continue terrorist activities waiting and hoping for things to break. Thus we are deadlocked.

The war becomes a test of our resolution. We know the consequences of withdrawal. If we pull out, they will pull in. The problem is we don't know the results of continuing--these results may be a higher price in men and materials, in smashed lives and broken will (nationally and individually) than is worth paying. The test is: are Americans ready to continue for 5-10-25 years? If we are, then we must "gird our loins" and for generations to come bear it without recriminations. This may be the price and the brutal reality.

A new war of stalemate, attrition, and dehumanization begins. The new war is an American setting fire to a hut because it "looks like" a Vietcong (cont'd next col.)

headquarters while the innocent people living in it stand at his side wailing in desperation. It is being a party to the "unspeakable torture" of an enemy soldier. The new war is "being there and knowing that you can't win", but remaining in the face of it--in hope and courage. What ultimate effect does this participation have on the spiritual, psychological, and personal life of the individual soldier. No one is able to tell now. Its permanent significance may be shattering. Before we answer too glibly, one might be reminded of a soldier in Korea I knew, who told the story of coming upon a wounded infantryman and asking "where are we?" The answer perhaps sums up the human situation in South Vietnam and ultimately in the world. The infantryman, pointing to another soldier, said, "He's dead, I'm wounded, and you're lost."

To this province what is the church to say? What word of proclamation is to be addressed by the "church in the world?" To the people here and in the villages, to the soldiers and the refugees, how is the church to minister in this predicament? To give an answer here might be presumptuous. But the questions are worth pondering. Perhaps, hopefully, like the war in South Vietnam itself, there is a resolution.

Stan deCamp