

Bishops were quiet during debates over war

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

A weekly column, especially one composed two to three weeks in advance, isn't an apt vehicle for commentary on still-developing events.

I am especially aware of that limitation in these days after the outbreak of war in the Persian Gulf. By the time this piece appears at the end of January or in early February, crucial circumstances will undoubtedly have changed.

The war may have already ended, or it may painfully obvious by now that we are in for a long and bloody conflict that will endanger the stability of the region for many years to come.

I may have missed something of consequence in the days and weeks before the strike against Iraq, but it didn't seem as if

our religious leaders were unusually vigorous or visible in efforts to turn President Bush away from the path to war.

The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church — the president's own denomination — spoke directly with Mr. Bush at the White House, and he deserves credit for that.

To be sure, our own Catholic bishops issued two excellent letters on the crisis during their general meeting in Washington, D.C., in mid-November: one written by Archbishop Roger Mahony of Los Angeles to Secretary of State James Baker, and the other written by Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, on behalf of the entire conference.

No aggressive follow-up to those letters

was made, however, especially during the dramatic and widely viewed debates in the Congress of the United States just a week before the attack was launched.

What side were the bishops on during the recent Congressional debates? Did they support the Hamilton-Gephardt Resolution in the House of Representatives and the Mitchell-Nunn Resolution in the Senate to give economic sanctions more time to work, or did they support the Solarz-Michel Resolution in the House and the Dole-Warner Resolution in the Senate, authorizing the use of force in accordance with United Nations Resolution 678?

The letters, after all, had counselled restraint. They reminded our government officials that the Catholic moral tradition, "while the use of force is not ruled out absolutely, there is a clear presumption



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against war."

The bishops were, in fact, deeply concerned about possible violations of key moral principles and criteria in the doctrine of the just war.

According to Archbishop Pilarczyk's letter to President Bush, "moving beyond the deployment of military forces in an effort to deter Iraqi aggression to the undertaking of offensive military action could well violate these criteria, especially the principles of proportionality and last resort.

"Our concern," the letter continued, "is that the pressures to use military force could grow as the pursuit of non-violent options almost inevitably becomes difficult, complex and slow. We urge our government and our allies to continue to pursue the course of peaceful pressure and not resort to war."

These lines and other like them in the letters by Archbishops Pilarczyk and Mahony were to be repeated in different form by various members of Congress in subsequent debates over the aforementioned resolutions.

It is difficult to resist the conclusion, therefore, that Archbishops Pilarczyk and Mahony, and all the bishops who endorsed their letters, would have voted for the Hamilton-Gephardt or Mitchell-Nunn resolutions had they been members of either house of Congress.

But during those historic debates, the voices of the bishops in support of those resolutions seemed relatively quiet.

Meanwhile, the bishops' standard allies on the abortion issue, under the banner of pro-life, voted down the line against Mitchell-Nunn and Hamilton-Gephardt and for the resolutions authorizing war: Congressman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), author of the Hyde Amendment to ban the use of federal funds for abortion; Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), author of the Hatch Amendment to ban abortions at the federal level; Sen. Jesse Helms (R-North Carolina), whose recent re-election one national right-to-life leader called the most significant victory of the right-to-life movement in the fall elections; and on and on.

Our Catholic moral tradition has much to say about the dignity of human life at every stage of development. A consistent-ethic-of-life approach, endorsed by the bishops' conference — it is not just Cardinal Bernardin's idea — requires us to raise our voice and cast our votes against both abortion and war.

Where were those votes in the house of Congress? Where were those voices in the house of bishops?

Daniel tells meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream

By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

All of the wise men, magicians, astrologers and wizards from Babylon stood in the throne room of King Nebuchadnezzar and waited. Even though it was the middle of the night, it was not unusual for them to be summoned to the palace at this hour.

Only one explanation for this hastily convened meeting existed. The king had a dream and wanted it interpreted immediately.

Each one of those present was certain that he would be the one to satisfy King Nebuchadnezzar's challenge. And when he did, the king would honor this person with a reward.

"Tell us your dream, O great King Nebuchadnezzar," they all called to him at once. "We are anxious to relieve your distress."

King Nebuchadnezzar didn't utter a single word until everyone was silent. "I have decided that whoever can both tell me my dream and interpret it will be allowed to live here at the palace."

"But, dear King Nebuchadnezzar, you cannot be serious! Not one of us can do as you ask. If you will only tell us your dream, someone will be able to explain it," the magician said.



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The king raised a hand for silence. "You didn't let me finish. If you cannot tell me what my dream means, I will have your bodies cut into pieces and all of your property destroyed!"

"Only the gods might be able to do as you have commanded," one of the astrologers protested. "And I do not see them living here among us!"

"Get out, all of you!" King Nebuchadnezzar ordered. "An issue will be decreed throughout Babylon. If someone does not come forth to explain my dream, all of you supposed wise men will be executed!"

As soon as they were outside the palace, one of them said to the others, "What's to be done? Can we somehow find out what this dream was?"

"I spoke to one of the king's aides," an astrologer said. "The truth of the matter is that King Nebuchadnezzar was so disturbed about his dream that when he awoke, he forgot it!"

"I have an idea," one of the wizards told the others. "There is a man named Daniel

living in Babylon. He was one of the Israelites brought here when Jerusalem was destroyed. He is known to be able to interpret dreams and visions."

When Daniel heard the news, he prayed to God to reveal King Nebuchadnezzar's dream to him. The next day he headed for the palace to see the king.

"Well? Are you able to both tell me my dream and explain it?" King Nebuchadnezzar asked Daniel.

"No," Daniel shook his head. "But my God has revealed to me the mystery. Here is what he told me: 'You dreamed of an enormous statue, splendid in appearance. The head of this statue was pure gold, its chest and arms were silver and its belly and thighs bronze. The legs were made of iron, but the feet were a mixture of iron and clay.'

"While you stood marveling over this grand statue, a rock came from nowhere. It struck the statue on its feet and destroyed them. The rest of the statue began to break up until all that was left were crumbs. A mighty wind came up and swept even these mere crumbs away. Meanwhile, the rock that had struck this statue grew into a mountain so huge that it completely filled the world."

"Yes! That's it!" King Nebuchadnezzar cried. "Now what does all this mean?"

"You are the great kingdom represented by the head of gold," Daniel began. "But someday, after you, other inferior kingdoms will rise to power. None will last. The last kingdom will be a divided one."

"In the time of that divided kingdom, God will set up a new kingdom. This kingdom will be so glorious that it will fill the whole world. And it will abide forever."

Scripture reference: Daniel, Chapter 2.
Meditation: Jesus Christ began the new kingdom.

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