

Justice Outlook

Victory in the Gulf?

by
Roy A. Clouser

HADDONFIELD, N.J.—Summer parades and other extravaganzas have duly celebrated America's (and its allies') war victory in the Persian Gulf. New York City's ticker-tape parade was reportedly the biggest one ever. And yet, something about all this celebration hasn't seemed right.

At first, it was hard to put my finger on just what was bothering me. It was not the high-blown estimates of its geopolitical significance or the fact that the West's oil interests were overly strong. No, in the final analysis, my unease is over the *interpretation* of the war's significance for the United States, as voiced by the administration and the press. What I find deeply disturbing is the way military victory is being *equated* with national pride and worth.

We should remind ourselves that from the start, the pride that Americans took in their country was not based on military might, and it need not be now. Military force certainly wasn't what made the U.S. the envy of Europe and the rest of the world in the 19th century. No, the cause of that admiration was America's vision of a just society. It was our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, our mobile society in which people of all backgrounds and religious faiths could enjoy equal standing before the law and be free to pursue their dreams.

Are we now, as Americans, shifting in our sense of worth from pride in achieving a more just society to pride in being the biggest military power on earth? Are we beginning to believe that without military supremacy we cannot "hold our heads up in the world"?

Christians, especially, should be disturbed if this shift is occurring. Of course we need to be able to defend our country. But the day may come when we may not be as militarily powerful in relation to the rest of the world as we now are. We may not be the greatest economic power either. Will we then be losers? It seems to me that if we allow ourselves to be lured into thinking that way, we will already have lost—lost sight of the most

valuable national characteristic our country has or could have. The proper goal of government is not the pursuit of world dominance, but the goal of ever greater justice for *all* citizens. Only in pursuing that goal will we be able to build on the heritage that has made, and can make, our country great. □

[Dr. Clouser is Professor of Philosophy at Trenton State University, New Jersey. Late this fall, Notre Dame University Press will publish his book *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories.*]