

## **Security, Terrorism, and Peacemakers**

Ever since U.S. President George W. Bush announced his government's willingness to extend the war of terrorism to an invasion of Iraq, questions have been raised. In the area of political and moral concerns, there is hardly a more agonizing question facing the world today than the question of war and peace.

In Canada and the United States protest demonstrations have taken place. Churches and church agencies distributed petitions to sign. The Most Rev. Terrence E. Finlay, Archbishop of Toronto, urged in a pastoral letter to overcome divisions within the church for the sake of peace. He said, "Wholeness in the Church must lead to wholeness in the world." Canadian church leaders associated with the Canadian Council of Churches signed a letter pleading for peace, It was, however, not signed by the Christian Reformed Church.

Some CRC leaders wonder why their church has been so notably silent on the threat of war against. How can CRC members witness to peacemaking and prevent a war in our terrorized and militarized world? To stimulate the discussion on war and peace and spur the CRC to action, an invitation was sent to come to London on January 3 and 4 to the Security, Terrorism, and Peacemaker Conference and join in a conversation on The Christian Reformed Church and Speaking Out on War. None of the approximate one hundred who accepted the invitation were official representatives for the denomination. They represented themselves. Some of the topics discussed were Iraq, terrorism, U.S. national security strategy, Canadian foreign policy, CRC statements regarding war and the use of force, and speaking out against war. The last session was devoted to a discussion on "what the CRC and CRC members can do." Some of the proposals were: Equipping and encouraging pastors for leading a peace-making church, educating and mobilizing CRC congregations for peace, Church/ agencies engaging Iraqi civil society & churches, and strategies for broader CRC participation in ecumenical and interfaith coalitions and dialogue. In response, a few CRC churches and individual members wrote letters to Canada's Prime Minister, as well as collected signatures on petitions.

### **Why Not?**

As I reflect on this conference, I wonder why a conversation on peace and war now? It seems people do not usually become galvanized, morally or politically, by foreign policy in general, but by particular issues, in this case the possibility of war against Iraq. And why the focus on the U.S.? Why the selective moral indignation? Why are there no protests against the brutal war fought by the Russians in Chechnya, the decades long occupation of Tibet by the Chinese, and the war against the Southern Sudanese waged by the Islam North, to name a few hot spots? I also wonder how anyone can expect Christians to come to a unified position on war and peace when they differ so sharply in their attitude toward war? When the topic of war is up for discussion, what results is almost virtually every possible position on war and peace is brought to the fore. Some Christians consider war as a necessary evil; others are absolute pacifists, outlawing all war. As history demonstrates, it is difficult to formulate the Christian position on war. The majority of

Anabaptists have taken a nonresistance or pacifist stance. The majority of Christians, however, claim that certain wars are just.

Should the Church speak out against the possibility of war against Iraq? In their *Disarm Iraq: A Statement for Religious Leaders in the United States and United Kingdom*, American and British church leaders, including Rev. Peter Borgdorff, Executive Director of Ministries of the CRC, urge President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair to pursue alternative means to disarm Iraq. They argue that war with Iraq would be illegal, unwise, and immoral. I believe Dr. Cecil DeBoer's comment made in the 1950s is still applicable. He said, "No believer denies that the gospel is relevant to the problems and difficulties of our times, and that this relevance must be acted upon. What seems to be neglected is the fact that the thing to be proclaimed and acted upon is precisely the gospel and not this or that bright clergyman's exposition of social and political phenomena."

Furthermore, denominations do not have the institutional competence to make pronouncements on justice of a particular war effort. They do not possess inside information to decide whether an armed conflict with Iraq satisfies just war conditions. All the information whether Saddam Hussein has stockpiled weapons of mass destruction comes from the UN, the U.S., other governments, and the media. This makes it difficult for church leaders to assess whether Saddam should be left alone. The institutional church, entrusted with the mysteries of the Gospel and the sacraments, has no business in evaluating a war effort. If an evaluation or protest must be made, it needs to be made in the capacity as citizens and not in the capacity of institutional church members.

Since many accuse the U.S. of "warmongering," we should ask whether the demonic Saddam Hussein will likely yield to sweet reason. In the light of his disastrous policies, we must refuse the notion that wickedness can be simply talked away. Have we forgotten his use of nerve gas to kill thousands of Kurdish villagers, his invasion of Iran and Kuwait? What he will do about disarmament will depend on his concern for his own personal safety and interests. Of all people, Christians should have a realistic assessment of human nature. We live in a fallen world. The fallenness of man in a fallen world leads Helmut Thielicke to say that unless basic human untrustworthiness can be dealt with, treaties and agreements are of doubtful value. To understand the dynamics of hatred and strife, not only between individuals, but even between nations, we must keep in mind the enduring and demoralizing impact of original sin on the world and its affairs.

### **Who Decides?**

Wars do not just happen. It is people who decide to go to war. The question is: Who has the authority to wage war? George W. Bush? The U.S. with a sufficient number of allies? The United Nations?

To trust the United Nations to handle large scale security questions would be a mistake. Why assign a moral veto over U.S. military action to the Security Council with a repressive Chinese government as one of its members? Furthermore, the UN failed to disarm a dangerous Iraq and uphold international law in the 1990s. As James Skillen put it: "The UN, with its present structure, has not kept, cannot keep the peace or give order to the post-Cold-War and post 9/11 world."

According to Scripture, the government has the awesome duty to decide upon war and not private citizens. To declare war is distinctly a matter, which belongs to the government's jurisdiction. It is a duly elected government's task both to determine when a war is justifiable and to wage warfare when the pursuit of justice and freedom demands it. It has the specific task to restrain evil by force, of which the power of the sword is the symbol (cf. Rom. 13: 1-6; Belgic Confession, Art. 36). The state exists by divine permission precisely to preserve and protect life with the right to punish evil. In other words, the state has the right to defend itself against evil aggression. Just prior to World War II the 1939 Synod of CRC declared that "...he who denies the right and the duty of the government to wage war on just occasions is not in harmony but in conflict with the Word of God. His conscience is seriously in error."... "Since the government is responsible for the safety of its subjects, the power of the sword not only involves the police but also military power."

### **Government's Call**

In summary, although political interest groups, political parties, think tanks etc. may have their input in the discussion on war and peace, the burden of the decision to go to war lies with the government. It has the primary task of setting a state's foreign and defense policies. And in the light of the fact that the U.S. is the only remaining superpower I agree with George Weigel's argument, "The United States has a unique responsibility for leadership in the war against terrorism and the struggle for world order; that is not a statement of hubris but of empirical fact. That responsibility may have to be exercised unilaterally on occasion." (Moral Clarity in a Time of War, *First Things*, Jan.2003)

Can military action against Iraq be classified as a "just war"? In the historic "just war" tradition, armed force is not inherently suspect morally. The "just war" doctrine has a long tradition. The church father Augustine justified a limited use of war in certain cases and circumstances. He believed that war could be fought to secure justice and reestablish peace. It must be conducted under the direction of the ruler. It may not be grounded in revenge. It must be characterized by an attitude of love for the enemy. It asserts in principle that we may be morally obligated to rely on force. As the American Jesuit John Courtney Murray observed, "Lest a free field be granted to brutal violence and lack of conscience." Keeping with the "just war" tradition, the 1982 CRC Synod stated in its *Guidelines for Justifiable Warfare*: "A just war, as traditionally understood and endorsed by the Christian church, is a war the object of which is not utterly to destroy but effectually to deter the lawless; the concrete aim of a just war is not the annihilation but the overpowering of the enemy state and the consequent assignment to it of its rightful place in the family of nations." According to the "just war" doctrine, a legitimate government is under strict moral obligation to defend the security of those for whom it has assumed responsibility. It recognizes that there are circumstances in which the first and foremost obligation in the face of evil is to stop it.

Because of Saddam Hussein's record of aggression and the lack of effective internal political control in Iraq to stop the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, no compromise is possible. His regime is a manifestation of evil that caused decades of brutal oppression in Iraq, threatens international justice, particularly in the Middle East, but in the United States as well, as seen by the events of 11 September, 2001. In other words,

if Saddam Hussein were to prepare to launch missiles, the U.S. would certainly be warranted in firing in self-defence. But why wait like "sitting ducks" for a surprise attack? Why then not a preemptive strike? For many years Saddam Hussein has held international law in contempt. This is not a time for appeasement. Charles Colson argues that in the run up to World War II, had the allies had the weapons, a preemptive strike against the Nazis would have been justified before they overran Poland. He notes, "In hindsight the answer is clear, as it was to the Christian pastors who were executed for conspiring to kill Hitler." I agree. (I wish there had been a preemptive strike against Hitler. It would have saved my family and millions of other families untold grief, hardship, and suffering.) I believe a preemptive strike against Iraq is justified. The world will be much better off without Saddam Hussein and all the evil he represents.

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