



Can there be a 'just war' in the current age?

Andrew Harrison

IN A RECENT submission to the British House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee inquiry into the War on Terrorism, the General Synod of the Church of England's House of Bishops argues that preventative unilateral action by the US and UK Governments against Saddam Hussein's Iraqi régime would not be acceptable.¹ Further, the fifty-two bishops declare that such preventative action would fall outside the Christian criteria for a 'just war' since, in their view, the legitimate authority for declaring war in this case can only be the United Nations whose resolutions Iraq has violated.²

How does the church determine whether a war is 'just' or not? The criteria for a 'just war' were outlined by church philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. He in turn drew on the writings of Augustine from the fifth century. The bishops mention both these men and draw on their beliefs in their report. Aquinas enunciated the following criteria for a 'just war':

- such a war must be authorised by a legitimate authority, a sovereign
- there must be a just cause; those attacked must deserve it because of some fault
- those waging such a war must do so in order to enhance "good", with "rightful intention".

Over the centuries since Aquinas laid out these three key principles, two others have been added, namely, that war should only be waged as a last resort, and that it should not be waged unless there are reasonable grounds for success.

So what do the Holy Scriptures, *our* guide, say? Can any war in the modern age be justified or be termed 'just'? Is the position of the churches on this issue of war Scripturally based?

First of all, it should be noted that the phrase 'just war' does not occur in the Bible. There is, of course, much written of fighting and warfare in the Old Testament. Yahweh fought for the chil-

dren of Israel on many occasions, especially when they were faithful and led by men or women of great faith. By its very nature everything that the Lord God does is justified or righteous; righteousness stems from God Himself.

In the New Testament the passages that mention warfare and fighting primarily refer to spiritual warfare. For example, in 1 Timothy 6:12 we are told to "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life". And then in 2 Corinthians 10:3,4 Paul writes: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds . . .)". So the disciple of Christ is to be engaged in constant spiritual warfare.

But do the teachings of Christ preclude fighting and waging war in this age by the believer? Indeed they do. When the Lord Jesus Christ was being arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, one of his disciples took out his sword and cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants. Jesus condemned this action, saying: "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Mt. 26:52). When he was being questioned by Pilate he said: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants

1. House of Bishops (2002), *Evaluating the Threat of Military Action Against Iraq: A submission by the House of Bishops to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee's ongoing inquiry into the War on Terrorism*, Church of England. See <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/papers/Bishopssubmission.doc>.
2. It is interesting to note that the church leaders ascribe authority to the United Nations, an organisation that expresses the collective will of all nations of the world. Will this organisation or one of its successors lead the nations against Jerusalem, legitimising the war when God "will gather all nations against Jerusalem" (Zech. 14:2)?

fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (Jno. 18:36). If there ever was a just cause it was that of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was condemned to death even though he had done nothing wrong. But he told his disciples not to try to save him from his enemies, those who "fought against [him] without a cause" (Ps. 109:3), by resorting to violence.

So, we are to turn the other cheek, to go an extra mile, to give away one of our coats if we have two, to love our enemies. Nowhere is warfare or fighting deemed acceptable; indeed, Roman soldiers who became disciples were told to "Do violence to no man" (Lk. 3:14). As citizens

of a Kingdom "not of this world" the disciple of the anointed King of that Kingdom cannot participate in warfare being carried out by the kingdoms of men.

So the unavoidable conclusion is that there can be no 'just wars' in the current age. God has not sanctioned wars fought by the kingdoms of men against each other, even though He "ruleth in the kingdom of men" (Dan. 4:17). The disciples of Christ await the day of the Lord when the Lord Jesus Christ will lead the saints in bringing salvation to God's people and will exercise God's righteous judgements on the kingdoms of men, which will be destroyed and God's Kingdom established.



Correspondence

Comments on articles appearing in the magazine are always welcome, and should be addressed to the editor in whose section the article appears.

Ezekiel's visions of the Millennium

The size of the temple

I am writing to comment on Brother Geoff Cave's articles in the above series under the headings "The sanctuary precincts" (Feb. 2002, p. 63) and "The temple" (Mar. 2002, p. 96), in particular regarding the size of the temple.

The wall

In Ezekiel 40:2 we are told that the prophet was given a vision of a structure "which was as the frame of a city". In verse 3 we read that the hand of Yahweh "brought [him] thither", that is, to this structure which was "as the frame of a city". Then a man appeared and "stood in the gate". He had "a measuring reed" in his hand which, being six cubits long, we assume would have been ten-to-twelve feet long (v. 5). The first feature the prophet's attention is focused on is "a wall on the outside of the house round about" (v. 5). We conclude that the prophet was at a gate in the wall of the city-like structure, which is now described as "the house". He is then taken to the east gate (v. 6), which Brother Cave depicts in his article (Fig. 1, Feb. 2002, p. 63).

The Hebrew for wall in verse 5 is *chowmah*, and the only other place where it occurs in Ezek-

iel's record of the temple is in 42:20. Here the prophet is again at the east gate, for we read in verse 15: "Now when he had made an end of measuring the inner house, he brought me forth toward the gate whose prospect is toward the east, and measured it round about". "It" here surely refers to the house. Even if we say "it" applies to the gate, the measurement given, which is in reeds (reeds is in the original Hebrew), establishes the size of the house. He measured the four sides "with the measuring reed" and each side was 500 reeds (vv. 16-19).

Then we read in verse 20: "He measured it [that is, the house] by the four sides: *it had a wall round about*, five hundred . . . long, and five hundred broad, to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place". The AV has "reeds" in italics between "five hundred" and "long", and, though "reeds" is not in the original, it is implicit from verses 16-19 that this is the unit of measurement. This is the conclusion that Brother Henry Sulley comes to in his book *The Temple of Ezekiel's Prophecy*, and I believe we should give careful consideration to this book, not only to the details of the temple but also to his excellent exposition of Scripture, which in itself should cause us to pay attention to his words.

Cubits or reeds?

In Figure 3 of his February article (p. 64), Brother Cave shows the cumulative total of the measure