

## WHEN WAR SEEMS INEVITABLE by David Kendall

War **does** seem inevitable. Of course that statement reflects a peculiar perspective that is, in some ways, narrow and parochial. I say that because there has been the equivalent of war for who knows how long—at least some form of guerilla warfare—somewhere in the world. (It is worth reflecting on the fact that war elsewhere, which **we** experience like low-grade static or background noise, troubles us only a little, if at all. As would-be global Christians, how out of sync we often are with the ache of God’s heart!).

It surprises me that so many good church folk simply **assume** the rightness—even the righteousness—of a war against Iraq. I heard someone say, “that people on the left tend to pray for divine guidance (if they pray at all about the situation), while people on the right pray that God will show those on the left that those on the right are indeed right!” This kind of stung a bit, as I recalled the most recent prayers I had heard. The point here is not whether war is right but that so many of us find it easy to draw that conclusion without anguish. However we answer the question, it seems to me that we will be wrong in the absence of real, even profound, anguish. So to help me anguish a bit more than I am naturally inclined to do, I have been considering five things:

1. Just war theory, which was first proposed by St. Augustine. His original proposal included two requirements. The first requirement was **proper authority**. As he put it, "The natural order . . . requires that the authority and deliberation for undertaking war be under the control of a leader." By leader, Augustine meant the one whom God had entrusted with the responsibility of governance. In his time, this was the emperor. Later, it would be kings and princes. Today, it’s our elected leadership. These people are answerable to God for the welfare of their states in a way that no private citizen is.

The second requirement was **proper cause**. The reasons for which we go to war are as important as who authorizes the action. He specifically ruled out such causes as the desire to harm, revenge, and lust for domination as justifications for war.

Augustine’s requirements were later expanded to include two others. The third consideration of just war theory is a **reasonable chance of success**. Even if you have a good reason to attack, you cannot simply send people out to die. Human life is too precious, too sacred to waste. The final requirement is one of **proportionality**. In waging a war, authorities must make sure that the harm caused by their response to aggression does not exceed the harm caused by the aggression itself. Annihilating the enemy in response to an attack on one of your cities is an example of disproportion. (This summary of just war theory comes from a recent “Breakpoint” Commentary, Charles Colson).

2. The sobering prospect of so-called “collateral damage”—a designation spawned in hell, I believe. Innocent people are always killed in war or wounded and scarred for life. A holy people should never demean such persons by treating them as incidental and their pain as “beside the point” (as the term “collateral” suggests). I’m imagining how I would deal with the prospect of **my** folk living close to the bull’s eye. The golden rule suggests such imagining. (In truth, there are some of **my** folk living there—brothers and sisters in Christ!)

3. War may be inevitable, but it always falls short of God’s yearnings for his world. War hardly ever settles things; it almost always gouges out deep reservoirs of bitterness and hatred in human hearts and in a culture’s psyche that promise a heinous harvest at some later time. Even if “just,” war makes peace on terms, some of which surely gladden the heart of Satan. For example, a war-wrought victory always leads some to believe that “might makes right,” which is not the way of Jesus.

4. When war hangs in the air, it's a good time to look within for signs of malice and rage. "Just" war legitimizes action toward others that would be wrong under other circumstances. But once in a fighting mood, you're in a fighting mood. I wonder if, in time of war, people "on the same side" are more disagreeable and hostile toward one another. Once up, the dander mightily resists going down. Regardless, followers of Jesus, eager to bear the fruit of the Spirit, should take greater care to tend the soil of their hearts.

5. War's awesome demonstrations of power can beguile us into idolizing worldly stratagems and minimizing the power of prayer. Worldly weaponry would storm the stage, seize control of the drama, and play Messiah. But Messiah has already come, and he has taught us to pray, and in praying to expect God to act. I am not suggesting that enough of the "right kind" of praying would "solve" the problems that lead to war. I am suggesting that when war becomes the solution, the lure of worldly power would seduce us from the prayer closet. The so-called real world demands practical and sure action that **we** have the power to take, not seeking first the kingdom, waiting on the Lord, and self-sacrificing obedience to his voice.

When war hangs heavy in the air, are our prayers exhausted on **ourselves** and **our** protection (including that of our soldiers) or do they ascend and expand to kingdom proportions—that somehow kingdom reality would be manifest, revealing the paltry and pathetic character of all worldly power and pointing to a better way and a better day?

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