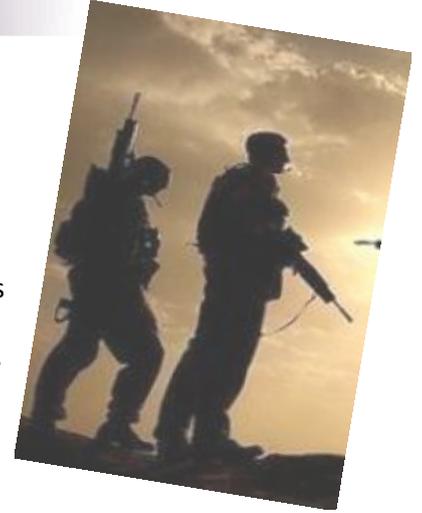


JUST WAR?

In the last issue of this Newsletter, Carol Williams recalled the vital task which organizations like ICF face. It is constantly to explore 'how we might apply the truths and principles of Christianity to the social, economic and industrial systems of the world.' The ensuing article and a book review were devoted to the World War I chaplain Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy. He was described as 'almost foolishly' committed to the principles of the Gospel and his were of the most down-to-earth kind: 'Live with the men. Go everywhere they go ... Pray with them sometimes, but pray for them always'. There are equally demanding Christian principles which concern the higher issues of peace and war which originate from Augustine of Hippo in the fourth century and Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth.



This tradition starts by recognizing that killing or injuring other people is *prima facie* wrong and bad in itself, but that in war it is not always the worst thing. The task has been to establish why and under what limiting conditions war could be regarded as tolerable. The cumulative product of this work is what we now know as the Just War tradition. It sets out a range of tests – criteria – that must be satisfied if war is to be morally justified. They fall into two groups. One, often referred to by the Latin phrase *jus ad bellum*, concerns the morality of going to war at all. The other, referred to as *jus in bello*, concerns the morality of what is done within war – how it is waged.

There are six criteria under *jus ad bellum*:

Just Cause: We must have a proper reason for going to war, such as protecting the innocent, or restoring rights wrongfully denied, or re-establishing just order.

Proportionate Cause: Besides being just, our cause must be weighty enough to warrant this massive step, with all its certain or likely evils.

Right Intention: Our aim must be to create a better, more just and more lasting subsequent peace than there would have otherwise been.

Right Authority: The decision to go to war must be made by someone with proper authority to undertake so grave a step. Complex questions arise about how far and in what circumstances international authority may be required.

Reasonable Prospect of Success: We must see a reasonable chance of succeeding in our just aim, and not take up arms and sacrifice lives if the likely result is simply death and suffering without making things any better.

Last Resort. We must not take up arms unless we have tried, or have good grounds for ruling out as likely to be ineffective, every other way of adequately securing our just aim.

There are two criteria under *jus in bello* :-

Discrimination. This means that in our conduct of the war we must not deliberately attack the innocent.

Proportionality. This means that we must not take action in which the incidental harm done is an unreasonably heavy price to incur for the likely military benefit.

The nature of this tradition – open, and based upon practical reason and humanity-wide values, not scriptural or institutional authority – means that it is in no way an exclusively Christian property. Nothing in it need be repugnant to Muslims or Jews or those of other faiths, or indeed to non-believers. The High-Level Panel set up by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan to review threats, challenges and change in world security, in its report of December 2004, put forward guidelines to govern legitimate recourse to force which closely followed the Just War criteria. And President Obama, in his acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize, returned to the same source when he said:

'Make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason. Over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers and clerics and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. The concept of a "just war" emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when certain conditions were met: if it is waged as a last resort or in self-defense; if the force used is proportional; and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence.'

Let us hope that he, and the nation he leads, can in future live up to this tradition, not least in Afghanistan.

Hugh Beach.

Author's Note. In preparing this article I have drawn heavily on the book: Charles Guthrie and Michael Quinlan, 'Just War: the just war tradition: ethics in modern warfare.' Bloomsbury, London, 2007.

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