

War and Peace in Christian Perspective, Exemplified by the present war in Iraq

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I

The present war in the Middle East fought by the American-British Alliance against the Saddam regime in Iraq has become a deep concern to peace loving people all over the world. Christians are particularly affected, because they are believers in a divine Lord, whose title is the “Prince of Peace”. They are taught by their Master to do everything to maintain peace amongst themselves and to become bringers of peace to the people surrounding them. So many Christians are wondering whether a war like the present one, no matter what its cause may be, can be justified from a biblical point of view. The answer to this question is not unanimous, and in many countries there is a division of minds that sometimes runs right across the same churches and denominations. In the USA e.g. one of the major denominations, the Baptist Union, is split on account of this controversial issue, where only the conservative Southern Baptists are clearly in support of the politics of the Bush administration, whilst his own Methodist Church stands in opposition.

Protests against the “strike on Iraq” are voiced with strong words in passionate demonstrations. They condemn the belligerent strategy which is leading to immense damages to the attacked country and the loss of numerous human lives, especially of innocent civilians, who cannot find shelter in view of the devastating air strikes, boastingly appraised by the name “Shock and Awe”, which for the affected means fright and disgust. In this connection there are also such voices which claim that wars in any case are in conflict with the will of God, and that Christians under no circumstances can justify war as a means of politics and even actively participate in it.

But the problem cannot be solved by such sweeping statements, both with regard to this particular conflict and to military confrontations in general. Before we rush to condemn Bush and his colleagues as advocates of a ruthless policy, we should take notice of that George W. Bush regards himself as a sincere Christian believer with a born-again experience, and that he convenes his state secretaries, including Vice-president Cheney and General Powell, for regular morning prayer and Bible study. He himself has come to the persuasion that he is fighting an evil adversary not only of America but also of the worldwide democratic society in general, and more particularly of the harassed people of Israel which is threatened by extinction by her

hostile Arabic neighbours. To their warfare against the Jewish state Saddam Hussein has been lending both moral and material support. In fact he even encourages suicidal attacks of Palestinians against peaceful Israelis, paying \$ 25.000 for every person who in this way sacrificed his life. On account of this Bush in his war politics is supported not only by many U.S. citizens who after the 11th of September are scared to become victims of future Arabic attacks with weapons of mass destruction, both chemical and biological and may be finally even nuclear. He is particularly supported by the American Jewry and their pro-Zionist stance, some of whom are keeping high-ranking position in politics and economy. Thus the double question arises whether *firstly* there may be such situations when taking up arms against an aggressor is unavoidable and should be supported even by Christians, and *secondly* whether the present war in Iraq may be called a “just war”.

As Bible reading Christians, we know that since the rebellion of our first parents against their Creator and their expulsion from paradise accumulating human sin, hatred between fellow human beings and societies can lead to war, and that God even may allow such wars in order to punish human sin by its own consequences. We also know that in this present age the world is still under the influence of the power of Satan who instigates people to hatred and to set up tyrannical power structures confronting each other and causing immense fighting and suffering under tyrant oppression. Jesus has warned his disciples that until the end of this age there will be wars and rumours of war. Neither the Old or the New Testaments contain any promise that there ever will be perfect peace during this old, sinful age, until God himself will replace the present fallen order by sending the Messiah to set up visibly his Kingdom of Justice and Peace, centred around his throne on Mt. Zion. Only then wars will cease, and the nations will not learn to fight in wars and to use arms (Is 2,2-4). Jesus himself did not encourage his disciples to get engaged as warriors, because He sent them as fighters into another, much fiercer war, the war against the invisible host of wickedness, a war that can only be fought and won by spiritual weapons. But he obviously reckoned with the fact that in the earthly political realm wars sometimes might be unavoidable, and he – like John the Baptist – recognized the legitimacy of the military profession, as long as it did not engage itself in acts of injustice and plain brutality.

II

In fact, since God is reigning in history, God himself can also be engaged himself in certain wars, if their aim is to punish human arrogance and to put down the mighty from their thrones (Luke 1: 52), as indeed God did in our generation by shattering Adolf Hitler's attempt to set up a brutal world empire build on anti-Christian, racist principles. Christian theologians, therefore, have always tried to cope with the fact of unavoidable wars by asking the question whether

there could be such a thing as a “just war”. The first pre-Christian thinker who developed guidelines in this direction was the Greek philosopher **Aristoteles**. In his trail North African Church Father **Augustine** of Hippo laid down some basic criteria, which later-on where taken up and developed by other Church theologians, including the Reformers Luther and Calvin. In the chief doctrinal document of the Lutheran Church, the *Augsburg Confession*, it is stated in Article 16 that “it is legitimate for Christians to become engaged as governors and judges, to punish evildoers by the sword and to fight just wars.” They did, of course, not justify any war except those who are of defensive character. The following conditions were formulated: *Firstly*: There must be a legitimate authority to decide upon the necessity of a war. *Secondly*: There must be an evident *casus belli*, a serious cause which would justify the use of weapons as the lesser evil. *Thirdly*: The means employed must be appropriate to the good that is to be defended and not cause greater damage than the one that should be overcome or avoided by that war. In modern times this becomes especially relevant with regard to the “collateral damages” of heavy losses and sufferings in the civilian population. *Fourthly*: War should only be resorted to as *ultima ratio*, the very last means to be used after preceding attempts to settle the conflict diplomatically have failed. *Fifthly*: The war should be calculated in such a way that it could be ended in a foreseeable time. *Sixthly*: The outcome of such war should be a general situation far better than the calamity which caused the war.

Measured with this yard stick, I think that our generation has experienced several wars, which either wholly or in part could be called “justified wars”. I am thinking of the Second World War in which the Allied forces liberated several nations from Nazi Germany’s oppression and especially saved those Jews that had survived the Holocaust in Hitler’s concentration Camps. Not all means employed by the Allies were appropriate and defensible, especially not the area bombing of civil targets which had no military effects, but rather cost the lives of hundred of thousands civilian people in Hamburg, Dresden and other devastated cities. During this second World War also several Asian peoples, particularly the Koreans, were liberated from Japanese brutal conquest and ideological subjugation. When Communist North Korea invaded South Korea, again by a mandate of the U.N. mainly American troops rushed to defend their Korean friends and in this way after 4 years sacrificial fighting finally secured the liberty of South Korea and especially her Churches. If they had not done so, conditions in South Korea today would be the same as in the North, and there would be no prosperous Korean nation as a member of the community of democratic nations, and no vital church that wants to share its faith with people in other parts of the world who have not been reached by the Gospel yet. So in this way it can be maintained that Korea and also West Germany owe their peace and well being to the beneficial outcome of “justified wars”. During this period North America was a real stronghold of the free world and has made great efforts and sacrifices to prevent the imminent take-over by the

Communist bloc. Many Koreans and Germans are aware of this and feel an indebtedness to their American protectors, a fact which never should be forgotten even if the USA now give reason for criticism and doubt in the righteousness of their politics. Moreover, those who now argue that wars always are strident against the will of God and who maintain the opinion that Christians must be pacifists under all circumstances should not forget that pacifism can result in a much greater evil, giving free course to imperialistic forces that try to enforce their pernicious rule upon peace loving peoples. Perhaps the policy of appeasement with which British Prime Minister *Chamberlain* treated Hitler in 1938-39 was one reason why he could continue in his aggressive plans against other European nations and the Jewish people. So there is much reason to uphold the traditional Church's doctrine about war and peace and to be very careful not automatically to condemn any action to defend liberty as a sin against God.

III

But our question today is: How do these theological insights and principles apply to the present united strike of Americans, British and Australians against the country of Iraq with the purpose of toppling the Saddam regime? In starting to answer this question we should remind ourselves that there was and still is a persuasion shared by the majority of all nations and churches that Saddam Hussein is a brutal tyrant with a long record of evil actions. He has murdered his own brother in law to seize power; he brutally persecutes minority population groups in Iraq like the Shiites in the South and the Kurds in the north, of whom he killed many thousand peoples by chemical weapons. Because of his tyranny many dissenting and persecuted Iraqis had to flee from their home land, and it is amongst those that President Bush finds the keenest supporters of his view that the war is aimed at liberating Iraq from a brutal oppressor. I also remind you of Hussein's hatred against the state and people of Israel against whom he wants to ally all Islamic nations in a **Jihad** which he himself called the "Mother of all Battles". Saddam Hussein really started to prepare for such war by producing weapons of mass destruction, and he fired several Scudd missiles at civilian targets in Israel during the first Gulf war in 1991. If he had not been brought upon his knees he would, no doubt, have continued in his evil plans, which are of a clearly imperialistic nature. He regards himself as the restorer of the Ancient Babylonian Kingdom and has created a personality cult around himself in which he is treated as a semi-god. As a Socialist he is obviously not a specially religious man, not even a persuaded Muslim, but he tries to assume the role of a leader of all Arabic peoples by propagating the Jihad idea against Israel and the Zionists all over the world, particularly the Americans. In awareness of these facts, the majority of national leaders have been regarding his disarmament and deprivation of political power a necessary political goal.

Diversity of opinion, however, has arisen amongst the international leaders in which way this goal should be pursued and could be accomplished. There is, in addition, no unanimity with regard to the objective strength of the military power, which Saddam possesses, and how far he really has managed to produce and store weapons, which could be a real threat not only to his neighbours but also to the democratic nations in the West. Because of this uncertainty the UN decided that Saddam should be forced to allow inspectors to enter his country and control every spot where such dangerous weapons may be hidden. It was in view of the American military threat, not by his own free will, that Saddam finally consented to this demand of the UN. So under the responsible coordination of Swedish diplomat *Hans Blix* the once ejected inspectors returned to Iraq and started their controlling mission in autumn last year. Until the beginning of March this year they were, however, not able to find any dangerous potential of mass destruction at the places where they searched. I think it is quite possible that Saddam really had not been able yet to build up a potential for effective aggression. But the leaders of the nations wanted to be quite certain and to extend the inspections for another undefined period.

This was the point when the Bush administration lost its patience. They had already built up a strategic force in the Gulf region, ready to strike at any time. They wanted to induce the other international leaders to pass a resolution according to which war would be declared against Iraq if Saddam Hussein would not surrender all his weapons of mass destruction, the existence of which he tenaciously had denied and which the UN inspectors could not find. This shows that President Bush and his colleagues had already determined to go to war against Iraq independent whether Saddam could be proved to be guilty or not. Already a year before he had categorized the governments of N. Korea, Iran and Iraq, and perhaps Libya as an “axis of evil” which must be dealt with accordingly one by one. Many international leaders became concerned about Bush’s determined strategy to result to war under any circumstances. Bush failed to obtain a consensus in the UN Security Council, being opposed by so influential powers as France, Germany, Russia and China.

Warnings were also uttered by Christian Churches and Associations: The Pope strongly advised against the war, and so did the WCC, the Lutheran World Federation, the Reformed World Federation and a great number of denominations, including the majority of the NCCC of the USA, and also Bush’s own community, the Methodist Church of America. Evangelical leaders seemed not to be so certain about their attitude, some of them supporting Bush mainly on account of Saddam’s anti-Israel stance; others advocated a peaceful solution, whilst the majority seemed to remain neutral. In Germany the majority of church leaders voted against the war, although some warned against the tendency to condemn Bush as a “war monger” and “pistol waving adventurer” and pseudo-religious “fundamentalist”. They did not doubt the seriousness of Bush’s concerns to defend his people and to protect the nations against

epidemic diseases caused by biological weapons. But they do not evaluate the present threat as so dangerous that declaring war would be the ultimate means to resort to. Some also advocate a pacifist position, quoting from the WCC's Amsterdam resolution in 1948 that "wars are against the will of God".

There are also mission leaders who have a special expertise in the situation in Iraq and the entire Arabic and Islam world. They point out that Iraq under the Baath-regime is not an Islamite country. There is a substantial Christian minority of Assyrian and Chaldeic Christians especially in the North, and there has been religious freedom until now. Even the Vice-President of Saddam Asiz is a Christian. These mission leaders fear that official politics and general opinion will turn against the Christian minorities, blaming them for the wrongs and sufferings inflicted upon the Iraqi people by so called Christian nations the USA and Britain. It is not even certain that in a post-Saddam state true democracy with the guarantee of Christian liberty will be secured. These mission leaders also point out the dangerous effects of one Arab nation becoming the victim of Christian-Zionist aggression. Other Arabic and Islamic nations, even those critical against Saddam until now, will be united in solidarity and call upon a general international Jihad, a holy war against all Christian and Jews. Already now radical Muslims regard the American strike as a modern "crusade", which should be met by a relentless killing of Christians and Jews. A leading Iman, *Sheikh Abdelatif Homeim*, in his Friday sermon in a mosque waved with a Kalaschnikow gun and instigated Arabs and Muslim everywhere to surround the Americans and to kill them wherever they would meet them.

I am afraid that the Bush administration did not take into consideration these frightening side effects of their war strategy. Psychological sensibility has never been an attribute of American foreign policy. In fact one major characteristics especially of the present Bush administration is a very simplified worldview. They see history in nearly mythological categories as a constant battle between light and darkness, in which the latter often is embodied in one single person who becomes the culprit of all evil, just as it shown in many Western movies in America. States are divided up in good and bad nations or governments, and it is the moral obligation of the good nations to defeat the evil ones. Such Americans also believe, that the USA possess the potential and the techniques how to cope with the evil forces, and that the outcome will be a state in which more nations enjoy the blessings of the American way of life. Especially the two Presidents Bush's father and Bush son refer to the coming **New World Order**, which will be established after the downfall of the rascal regimes. Then even the enduring conflict between Israel and its neighbours would be resolved in a federation of liberated democratic states. Naively they believe that this is the most intense wish of all peoples who now live in autocratic states They also believe that war will be the necessary means to set them free and let them participate in the new universal order of peace and prosperity, to which

the USA must take the lead. If other nations like France and Germany do not follow them, they are regarded as representatives of a past age, to which the USA should not take too much consideration. This is why Bush did not care to secure the unanimous support by the UNO, because he regards the majority of their representatives as unenlightened. I am sure that Bush has no difficulty to reconcile this neo-conservative ideology with his conscience and his Christian profession, in spite of the Churches' overwhelming disagreement with him. And I am also inclined to believe that Bush sees no difficulty in combining his moral ideals with a plain pragmatic outlook, in which he regards his policy as justified as long as it serves America's strategic and economic interests. The oil resources of the Middle East, Kuwait and Iraq, are of extreme value to the Americans who might be faced by an energy crisis if they proceed with their present excessive expenditure of crude oil. It would be unfair to suggest that the present Iraq war is solely fought out of economic greed. But in the neo-conservative worldview there is no opposition between a humanitarian and an economic policy. We can call this a kind of Christian-materialistic syncretism.

In the eyes of the international community this policy does much to damage American and British credibility. If liberation of suppressed people can only be accomplished by such horrific air raids, hitting so many innocent people, the cynical question of a journalist is hitting the mark: "If this is liberation – what then is aggression?" So the damage accomplished so far by the strike against Iraq seems by far to surpass any benefit gained by it: Damage has been inflicted upon the authority of the UNO as a body by which international conflicts should be resolved in a peaceful way wherever possible. Damage has been caused to the unity of the world-wide Christian fellowship by the stubborn refusal of the Bush administration to heed the admonishing voices of churches of any confessional and theological position. Damage has been caused to the attempts of Christian missions to proclaim the Gospel as a religion of peace and reconciliation, superior to the Islamic religion, which always has believed and resorted to military and paramilitary wars as a means of expansion. Damage has been caused to Christian minorities living in Islamic states and who now are under the new threat of severe persecution. Damage has been caused to the hundred thousands of innocent civilians who have become the primary victims of this war, amongst them many killed or maimed children.

Consequently, if we try to apply the classical criteria for a "just war", it is hard to see that any of them has been fulfilled before the war was started unilaterally: There was not legitimate governmental authority to decide on the necessity of this war. There was no sufficient evidence that this war really had become unavoidable to prevent a greater evil planned by the attacked nation. There was too little patience to try to resolve the crisis by means of diplomacy and united international pressure. There is no guarantee that this war can be finished in a relatively short time without causing too much damage. There is no guarantee that the new political power

structures which will be set up after the war will be more beneficial to the Iraqis and their neighbour states than the coexistence with a brutal and dangerous regime. So Bush and his administration have taken an awful responsibility upon themselves, and we now only can hope that this war will come to a speedy end before it results in disaster to both sides and possibly be widened to a global confrontation of cultures.

IV

As we are evaluating this present war from a Christian perspective, we now must ask ourselves what we as Churches and individual Christians can do to act as mediators between the conflicting parties and to prevent this war to escalate beyond any control.

Our main means is to employ the power of **ardent prayer** in invoking God that He Himself may interfere and bring war and suffering to an end. We should intercede for all parties involved in this war and affected by it. We should pray for the allied forces to do everything to demonstrate that they are not fighting against the Iraqi people but for them, especially by actions of protecting the civilians and secure their supply with food and medicines. Likewise we should also intercede for the Iraqi soldiers that they might be protected from heavy losses of life, and that they should observe the international conventions of fair behaviour in war, instead of playing foul tricks against the allied troops forcing them to kill and destroy even where there is a genuine willingness to surrender. We should pray for and practically support those humanitarian agencies that try to mitigate the suffering of the civilian population and to bring effective help to the hungry and wounded ones. We could send messages of good will to the Christian churches mainly in Northern Iraq, showing that we sympathize with them and their delicate position between the conflicting parties. We should not cease to be voices of justice and compassion on behalf of those who have become the victims of a war they did not want and who cannot benefit by it. We should appeal to the conscience of Bush and his companions that they should critically evaluate their policy in the light of God's revealed word. They should become aware of that abiding peace and justice cannot be accomplished by a humanly designed "New World Order", but only by the returning Christ, the Prince of peace, in His own Kingdom.

At present a missionary broadcasting corporation called SAT 7 is sending messages of consolation from Arab Christians to afflicted other Arab Christians in the Middle East and in North Africa who anxiously are caring for their friends and relatives in the Iraq. They assure them of their prayer support and point out that their suffering will be met sympathetically by Jesus Christ Himself, who innocently has been suffering on our behalf: "*Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted*" (Hebrews 2:18). Finally we should become aware that the present conflict in the Middle East with all the

threats it contains for the rest of mankind should be understood as a deep crisis brought upon us by God Himself, the Lord of history. We are made to realize the shakiness of all human efforts to establish our earthly existence by our own design and strength. For there is no security outside that security which we have as children of a loving Father to whom we have become reconciled by the atoning sacrifice of His Son.

During the third week of March a huge evangelistic rally was conducted in Germany, called "Pro Christ". The series was once started by Billy Graham and is now continued by a gifted German youth pastor Ulrich Parzany. The preaching of the evangelist and the witnesses of his associates, including the moving choirs were telecast to 1.300 meeting places all over Europe. This time the meetings were attended by 30% more people than by a similar Pro Christ-evangelization three years ago. Many more people: 27.000 all in all responded to the call to step forward and receive Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. The Iraq war was not made a theme in the biblical messages, but it formed the background to the fact that many people now sense that their existence is in danger, and that they need to abandon their superficial style of life and their thirst for earthly pleasures. They wanted to make a new beginning in a life which will give them assurance and orientation in good and evil days, because it is rooted in the God's unfailing plan of salvation. Under such circumstances even the terrors of the present war in Iraq finally can be turned into a blessing.