

CASE NEWS

NEW COLLEGE UNSW | SUMMER 2002



PHOTOGRAPHER | AIMEE BEACH

INSIDE CASE

Trevor Cairney unveils the new Centre for Apologetic Scholarship and Education.

...

Craig Gay's New College Lectures

...

Philosopher William Lane Craig on time and eternity

...

C.S. Lewis in the 21st Century at Oxbridge 2002

...

Join the CASE network

ISSN 1447-7858



PHOTOGRAPHER | DAMIR SAGOLJ • REUTERS

JUST WAR OR JUST AGGRESSION? Christian thinking on war and justice

ANDREW CAMERON

Since September 2002, over 30,000 U.S. academics (including some 14,000 faculty) have signed an open letter condemning any U.S. invasion of Iraq.¹ Here in Australia, a number of leading Australian politicians and military officials, including a former Governor-General, three former Prime Ministers and two Defence Force Chiefs, have published another letter saying it would be a "failure of the duty of government" to commit Australian forces to a United States military offensive against Iraq.² Concerns have been expressed across the political spectrum, with some

conservative analysts offering very reserved judgments about Bush administration foreign policy since September 11th 2001.³

Christian theological ethics either overlap with, or influence outright, the arguments against war found in these documents. My purpose here is to outline this ethical position. While I do not intend to offer a specific appraisal of the arguments for and against war with Iraq, I will offer some remarks about how this Christian heritage assists the current debate.

In the Bible, two themes emerge which seem hard to reconcile. The first is seen when Jesus says "love

your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Can loving one's enemies involve acts of war against them? The apostle Paul adds, "Never take revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God" (Romans 12:19). But the second theme emerges in the same text, where the same author's endorsement of government gives (cont'd p.6)



Andrew Cameron lectures in ethics and philosophy at Moore Theological College, Sydney, and is currently completing a Ph.D. in ethics with King's College London.

profound theological backing to every ruler since Rome: “there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” Such a ruler is “God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (Romans 13:1-4).

The tension is clear. Jesus’ words seem to apply more readily to interpersonal relationships than to the actions of rulers. Indeed, the Bible even records instances where war is vindicated. Wars of extermination occurred during the period of ancient Israel’s theocratic rule; and even outside of Israel, some wars took place under God’s providence (such as Babylon’s victory over Judah in Daniel 1). God has a “time” or “season” for all things, even war, according to Ecclesiastes 3:8.

Although these instances of war have been used to justify ‘Holy Wars’, crusades and pogroms, a vast historic consensus among Christian people holds the overall ‘shape’ of the Bible to exclude ‘holy war’ from within

and that God had historically endorsed *some* war complicated their decision.

Christian reflection upon war and its conduct began well prior to Christendom. Tertullian (2nd century) noticed that Jesus had commanded Peter to sheath his sword since those who draw it will die by it (Matthew 26:52). In doing so, the Lord “unbelted every soldier”,⁴ and Tertullian envisaged the “immediate abandonment”⁵ of military service by Christians, whether or not warfare was previously allowed.

But Tertullian’s writings often seem like a conclusion in search of an argument, and Augustine (4th-5th century) is generally considered to be the more nuanced commentator on the Bible’s teaching. Explicitly addressing the tension faced by Christian rulers, he finds that personal vengeance is precluded but the good of *others* sometimes necessitates war. Hence the goal of warfare is for nations to enjoy peacefully the mutual bond of justice.⁶ Far from unbelted

“the salvation of the commonwealth”!⁷ Augustine is therefore thought to be the founder of ‘just war’ theory, the principles of which crystallised around two categories (and which I will slightly amplify):⁸

Justness of war (*Jus ad bellum*):

1. Is the cause just? (This requires a theory about what ‘justice’ is and who it is for.)
2. Is the intention to restore a just peace between friend and foe? (Some actions can do irreparable damage to the prospect of peace.)
3. Is the action a last resort? (Have negotiations and every other resort been properly tried but have failed?)
4. Is the action instigated by the highest governmental authority? (In our situation, does the United Nations have claim to this authority?)
5. Is there a reasonable hope of success? (This precludes wars of principle, where people hold out against hopeless odds.)

Augustine would deeply sympathise with

the provenance of valid Christian endeavour. Nonetheless, the history of Christendom saw professedly Christian rulers struggling to understand whether to “leave room for the wrath of God” or to “bring punishment”,

every soldier, the Lord’s kindly instruction to soldiers means that no “army composed of soldiers such as the doctrine of Christ requires them to be” is “adverse to the State’s well-being;” such an army would rather be

Justness in war (*Jus in bello*):

6. Is the action proportional to the offence?
7. Is non-combatant immunity respected?

The advent of ‘total war’—a by-product of our capacity for industrial mass destruction—has made these last principles most problematic, so seeming to make just war theory obsolete. But this theorising was not naively intended merely to license or guide warfare. Augustine sought rather to *limit, restrain* and *quickly finish* the melancholy task of war (thereby challenging, in our context, the easy presumption of total war). Replying to those who advocate that “the wise man... will wage just wars”, he points out that no war is ever ‘just’:

Surely, however, if he remembers that he is a human being, he will be much readier to deplore the fact that he is under the necessity of waging even just wars. For if they were not just, he would not have to wage them, and so there would then be no wars for a wise man to engage in. For it is the iniquity of the opposing side that



PHOTOGRAPHER | GORAN TOMASEVIC • REUTERS

imposes upon the wise man the duty of waging wars; and every man certainly ought to deplore this iniquity...⁹

Augustine would deeply sympathise with the moral confusion of, say, Vietnam. John Maclear quotes General William Westmoreland, Commander-in-Chief in Vietnam, as claiming “categorically that never in the history of warfare...has more attention been given to the avoidance of civilian casualties”. But hardly any of the veterans Maclear interviewed support this claim. For one captain, there was “a great willingness to react” to every Vietnamese “with force”.¹⁰

But if just war principles seem to make more sense when applied pre-industrially, they also seem to apply most easily to nation-states. However, the changing nature of government and authority in the twenty-first century complicates the problem. In the recent terror attacks, the aggressors have been religious splinter groups and not

complex. The former scenario clarifies the position of the nation-state in defending its territory; in the latter scenario, it is less clear what is being defended and against whom.

United States foreign policy has further complicated the place of the nation-state. A recent Bush Administration report to Congress, entitled “The National Security Strategy of the United States”, is based on the promotion of “freedom across the globe”, with the U.S. actively working “to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world.”¹² This novel blend of freedoms, where moral and social ethics equate to economic and trade freedoms, is born of America’s Christian heritage and of its economic success. The policy seems to extend America’s reach far outside its nation-state boundaries. Former US Vice President Al Gore sees here “an emerging national strategy that not only celebrates American strengths, but appears to be glorifying the



PHOTOGRAPHER | WILLIAM PHILPOTT • REUTERS

nature of governments which operate without justice. A major theme in the *City of God* is of rulers such as those of Rome, who become *dominandi libido dominatur*, ‘mastered by’ their own ‘lust for mastery’.¹⁵ Augustine causes us to wonder, then, about American moves toward free-trade freedom and its emerging doctrines of ‘pre-emption’. He also causes us to wonder if American enforcement of free trade, which makes nation states secondary to the free flow of goods and capital, has created the very conditions under which it has become

the moral confusion of, say, Vietnam.

political bodies. Can such groups enter into negotiations? With whom do they negotiate, and who has the authority to instigate military action against them?

In Australia, there is currently some conflict over approaches to defence spending because of this very issue. Do we continue with the ‘Defence of Australia’ policy, which focuses on navy and air defence of Australia’s north; or do we focus on equipping forces to cope with what military academic Alan Dupont has described as “asymmetric contexts in which there is no clear-cut distinction between soldiers and civilians and between organised violence, terror, crime and war”?¹¹ Of course, the issues involved are

notion of dominance.”¹³ Owen Harries analyses recent U.S. foreign policy shifts as a strange convergence between American ‘exceptionalism’, which conceives of America as a special place on a mission to enlighten the world, with ‘realism’, a doctrine with ancient roots where states will inevitably seek to establish regional or global hegemonies. (Foreign policy ‘realism’ can be traced back to Thucydides, finds an apogee of sorts in Nietzsche, and has a strong modern apologist in John Mearsheimer.)

Augustine knows of such ‘realism’:

It was a pertinent and true answer which was made to Alexander the Great by a pirate whom he had seized. When the king asked him what he meant by infesting the sea, the pirate defiantly replied: “The same as you do when you infest the whole world; but because I do it with a little ship I am called a robber, and because you do it with a great fleet, you are called an emperor.”¹⁴

The point is, of course, about the ‘real’

subject to amorphous, borderless terrorist aggressors. Is America being mastered by its lust for mastery? As many critics have pointed out, people were willing to give their lives for the nation-state, but who will make such a sacrifice for a state where ‘justice’ is devoted to the needs of the market?

Some of this is as yet too extreme. In our circumstance, the United Nations is indeed the closest thing we have to nations peacefully enjoying the mutual bond of justice, and as a signatory to its charters, the U.S. has continued to remain a nation-state governed by a justice greater than itself. For the moment, the threat of war has receded, precisely because of the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1441 and its acceptance by Iraq,¹⁶ and because of the Bush government’s continued cooperation with this international process. The “failure of the duty of government” of which the former Prime Ministers warned concerned war *in the absence of* “a specific United Nations Security Council resolution” (although a resolution pursuant to 1441 would be required for war).



Nevertheless, in a conversation about Saddam with Czech President Havel, Bush warned ominously that “he’s going to disarm, one way or the other.”¹⁷ This threat could have various motives and conclusions. To borrow from Gore’s challenge to Bush prior to Resolution 1441, the President must not “abandon what we have thought was America’s mission in the world—a world in which nations are guided by a common ethic codified in the form of international law if we want to survive.”

Christian thinking on government and

just war has led the 46th Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney 2002 to acknowledge the complexity and confidentiality of the issues involved, but also to call for continuing diplomatic negotiation at the U.N. level. Synod also called on “all Christians to pray to Almighty God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace...graciously to bring real and lasting peace to the Middle East and to the world”.¹⁸

Biblical teaching has helped shape the way we think about war and can help reshape it.

With Augustine, Christians approach this

precarious situation respecting the role of government, yet as free-speech ‘auditors’ who continually call leaders to beware of the pride implicit in so-called ‘realism’. ‘Just war’, though at one level an oxymoron, nonetheless still offers leaders a vision of a world beyond war, where war is quick and careful and always for the purpose of the mutual bonds of peace, not for mere aggression. The choice before America (and Australia) at this time remains what it has always been for all nations at all times: whether it will become a band of robbers, or stand for something more. ©

END NOTES

1 “An Open Letter From The [U.S.] Academic Community Opposing A U.S. Invasion Of Iraq”, www.noattackiraq.org.

2 The letter was published in Australian newspapers on 26 September 2002 and is reproduced by the Evatt Foundation at evatt.labor.net.au/news/116.html.

3 cf. Francis Fukuyama, “Has History Restarted Since September 11?” Nineteenth Annual John Bonython Lecture, Centre for Independent Studies (8 Aug 2002) at www.cis.org.au/Events/JBL/JBL02.htm; and Owen Harries, “Understanding America,” Lecture to the Centre for Independent Studies (3rd April 2002) at www.cis.org.au/Events/CISlectures/2002/Harries030402.htm.

4 Tertullian, *On Idolatry* ch.XIX in A. Roberts and Donaldson, J. (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol.III (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.; repr. 1993), p. 73. Available at www.ccel.org/cdrom/ccel/fathers2/anf03/anf0307.htm#P815_331177.

5 Tertullian, *De corona* ch. XI. In Roberts, A. and Donaldson, J. (eds), *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol.III (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.; repr. 1993), p. 100. Available at www.ccel.org/cdrom/ccel/fathers2/anf03/anf0310.htm#P1089_449041.

6 Augustine, *Ep. ad Marcellinus* (letter 138) §14. In Schaff, P. (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Father* series I vol. I (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.; repr. 1988), p. 485. Available at www.ccel.org/cdrom/ccel/fathers2/npnf101/npnf1032.htm#P5256_2406196.

7 *Ibid.*, §15 p. 486.

8 Thomas Aquinas attempted to build upon Augustine and systematise the

theory of just war. See *Summa Theologica*, 2a2æ.40.a1.sc & c. (Benziger Brothers, New York, 1947, 1359-1363. Available at www.ccel.org/cdrom/ccel/a/aquinas/summa/ss/ss040.htm#SSQ40A1THEP1).

9 Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, tr. R.W. Dyson, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought* edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 929 (XIX.7).

10 John Maclear, *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War* (London: Thames Methuen, 1981), p. 215.

11 Cited in Deborah Snow, “An argument of force”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, News Review, 16-17 Nov 2002, p. 33.

12 George W. Bush, Introduction to *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (September 2002). Available at www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf.

13 Speech to the Commonwealth Club of California, 23 September 2002. Available at www.commonwealthclub.org/archive/02/02-09gore-speech.html.

14 Augustine, *City of God* p. 148 (IV.4).

15 Augustine, *City of God* pp. 3 & 632 (I.pref. & XIV.28).

16 The resolution is dated November 8th 2002 (available at daccess-ods.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N02/682/26/PDF/N0268226.pdf?OpenElement) and as at November 20th, the U.N. Secretary General understands the Iraqi government to have agreed to its stipulations.

17 November 20th 2002; see www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/11/20021120-1.html.

18 For the synod motion, see www.anglicanmediasydney.asn.au/nmr/2002_034.htm.

JOIN THE CASE NETWORK

- Would you like to continue to receive the CASE newsletter?
- Would you like to be invited to forums, lectures and study opportunities?
- Would you like to network with other academics, students and graduates who are considering their intellectual work from a Christian perspective?
- Would you like to keep up-to-date with our publishing and internet ventures?

If so, please contact the College with your details.

The easiest way to do this is by email:

case@newcollege.unsw.edu.au

Or ring (61 2) 9381 1999

Or fax (61 2) 9381 1909

Or write to:

CASE

New College

University of New South Wales

Sydney NSW 2052 Australia

