

Among Ourselves

The P-oil-itics of War or Peace the Fruits of Justice

The past few months has seen a new awakening among many people and nations, to the call for peace and the end to war and violence as the way forward for humanity. As the human race moves into a new millennium, the word peace has taken on new depths of meaning to increasing number of people. This is based on our firm belief that war and violence will never bring peace to humanity. Many who believe in God, cannot accept the fact that God wants us to bring peace to the world through the use of arms and violence and thus indirectly promoting new forms of terrorism and counter-violence. This is surely not the path for the so-called civilised nations in the world today. What is envisaged is the sufferings of hundreds and thousands of innocent persons and their families on both sides of the warring factions. What is even more frightening is the anger and hatred that will be stirred in the hearts of so many people, who deeply believe that an injustice has been done. This is not just those who are directly affected by the impending war but also those who have been made to believe that they will be the next in the line of fire. Issues related to the Holy Land and Iraq are deeply rooted in the mind of the Muslim world and see the adversaries as proponents of a sectarian religion that is out to destroy not just their religion but their way of life and cultural identities.

No one thinks of putting a bullet in the head of the father of a family who is utterly irresponsible and thus ill-treating the members of the family. If there is no

democracy and justice in the home, the answer is not to kill the father and all the innocent members of his family, as well. At the same time, it is also interesting to note that in this modern era there are so many nations, whose citizens are deprived of their basic and fundamental dignity as human persons and unable to exercise their rights to have their basic needs met. Yet, most people in the world today, can watch daily this drama of violence and dehumanising poverty right before their eyes on the television screen but remain totally numbed and indifferent to their plight and realities. Few would want to imagine that the Greed of the Few is related to the Need of the Majority.

It would therefore seem logical that we need to install an international system of justice that seeks to redress wrongs within and among nations through negotiations and judicial processes. Is this not the function of the United Nations to ensure peace through non-violent means?

On the other hand, many also believe that peace will only be the result of a new system of a "world policeman" who will eliminate the potential wrongdoings and those who do not believe in the word "democracy". Many are still convinced that the world that we have today, is close to a New World Order, that needs to be directed and governed by those who have experienced a democratic way of life. They have the freedom to choose wise leaders who will logically look after their well-being and ensure that the rest of humanity will also gradually see the new horizon of peace and stability in the world.

At the same time there are others who believe that war and violence have never settled issues of inequality and injustices, whose causes lie at the foundations of the workings of society today. Political expediency through the use of more and more sophisticated arms to make quick economic gains have not reduced the level of human sufferings and pain. It is difficult to understand why the world today with all its progress in the field of

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A Prophetic Call Against War

A Politico-Theological Study of Jeremiah 21:1-14

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The beginning of our Third Millennium has been blemished by wars and violence in Afghanistan, Israel and India. In response to the ruthless attack of terrorists in New York and Washington, DC, the United States of America with the help of other nations launched a war on Afghanistan under the guise of controlling and exterminating terrorism. Israel took courage from the 'exemplary model' of USA to defiantly and mercilessly continue a war in the West Bank on the plea of eradicating terrorism from its land. War clouds are still hovering over the border between Pakistan and India. The worst religious clashes and massacres of the last decade occurred recently in Gujarat and have again blackened the Indian image of religious tolerance and pluralism. The Pentagon is contemplating an attack on Iraq with a deployment of 250,000 troops.¹ This third millennium has been born in blood!

Wars have never brought lasting peace and harmony. They only bring devastation and keep alive hostility and hatred among inimical parties. Civilians and innocent people are often the most affected in such catastrophes. The lives and homes of innocent people are indiscriminately destroyed without sparing even children, women, old and sick people. The ravages heaped upon Jenin in the West Bank are not wholly known to the world. The thousands of victims and properties recklessly ruined in the communal violence in Gujarat have not faded from our minds.

History proves that wars do not bring permanent humanitarian and equitable solutions to problems and crises. Military action can be at best bring about some temporary relief. But the wounds caused by death of dear ones and destruction of property fester in the people in the form of hatred. Hostility and resentment constantly ignite new wars and violence. It is said that the Six Days War in Israel left a blazing residue of enmity, which continues to break out in bomb explosions and suicide killings. The bloody clashes between Hindus and Muslims, which took place at the time of the partition of India and Pakistan, continue to smoulder in the recent religious violence in Gujarat and elsewhere.

Powerful countries, militant groups and the dominant castes easily take recourse to violence and wars as the solution to political problems. The Biblical prophets may tell us one or two things relevant to our context. How did they look at wars in their land? Did they encourage or condemn wars? Did they proclaim a message palatable to their kings? What were their

alternatives to wars? In this reflection on militant violence we shall restrict ourselves to prophet Jeremiah. We shall take up a few of his passages, which deal with the threat of war by the Babylonians against Judah during the rule of King Zedekiah.

Jeremiah against War

The oracles from the time of Zedekiah are found in Jeremiah 21:1-24:10. They are considered as a separate unit.² Chapter 21 begins a new theme. The preceding periscope, 17:10-20:18 has a different theme. The new section is signaled by the opening words, "The words which came to Jeremiah from the Lord." A similar beginning is found in 7:1; 11:1; 18:1; 30:1; 34:1; 35:1. We therefore take this periscope Jer 21:1-24:10 as the basis of our study and shall relate it to passages from Jeremiah which deal with this theme.³

Context of War in Judah

The public ministry of Jeremiah is said to have been during the final years of the seventh century BCE (roughly around 610-600) and in the first two decades of the sixth century. It was the period when the Babylonian Empire was emerging as a colossal superpower in the Ancient Near East: "The king of Babylon had taken over all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the Wadi of Egypt to the River Euphrates" (2 Kings 24:7). It was indeed a great threat to Judah. Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 598-597 BCE. Jehoiakim, king of Judah who reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years (2 Kings 23:26) died during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, the successor of Jehoiakim, who reigned for just three months, was taken by King Nebuchadnezzar as a captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-12). In his place Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, was made ruler of Judah (24:17). The rule of Zedekiah, which lasted for eleven years, was also not pleasing to the Lord. "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done" (24:19). During the rule of Zedekiah, there were many desperate attempts on the part of Judah to rebel against the Babylonian overlordship. The final revolt of Zedekiah during the last two years of his reign met with the decisive and destructive invasion of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 25:1-7; 52:1-11).

Seeking God in the Crisis

Invaded by the Babylonians Jerusalem was facing a threat of destruction. All the attempts of Zedekiah to rebel against the Babylonian King had been thwarted. His revolt had boomeranged and endangered the very existence of the kingdom of Judah itself. Zedekiah was pushed to a corner and as a last resort made an attempt to know the mind and will of Yahweh in that perilous and deadly situation. Earlier he had ignored the words of the Lord coming through Jeremiah. "But neither he (Zedekiah) nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the Lord that he spoke through the prophet Jeremiah" (Jer 37:2). In the Old Testament times it was normal for kings to approach prophets for consultation and guidance when they intended to make a war or battle (1 Kings 20:13-15; 2 Kings 3; 6:24-7:20; 18:13-19:37; 2 Chr 18:3-27). But Zedekiah now approached the Lord only because his crooked and diplomatic designs had failed him. He sent Pashhur, son of Malchiah, and the priest Zephaniah, son of Maaseiah, to Jeremiah for counsel and guidance: "Please inquire of the Lord on our behalf, for King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is making war against us; perhaps the Lord will perform a wonderful deed for us, as he has often done, and will make him withdraw from us: (Jer 21:2). "Inquire of the Lord" is not merely an attempt to know whether Yahweh is reliable and faithful in this crisis. In prophetic terms, it means also seeking the Lord and urging a fresh commitment of loyalty to Yahweh (Am 5:4.6; Is 55:6).⁴

Zedekiah hoped that Yahweh would drive out the Babylonian King by 'a wonderful deed'. Yahweh's wonderful deed inevitably evoke the memory of the saving acts performed by him for the Israelites during their Exodus and conquest of the land of Canaan and during the invasion of Jerusalem by Sennacherib (2 Kings 19; Is 37). Zedekiah wanted to know whether such a wonderful deed of Yahweh would be repeated in order to save Judah from the impending danger of death and destruction by King Nebuchadnezzar.

Yahweh's Answer to War

The response of Yahweh to the inquiry of Zedekiah was decisive and resolute (Jer 21:3-10). The answer was comprised of a counsel to and judgment on Judah. The counsel was an appeal of Yahweh to Judah pleading for non-resistance and surrender to the powerful Babylonians (21:8-9). The judgment proclaimed in unequivocal terms the devastation which would befall Judah if it failed to surrender (21:4-7 = 33:4-5; 34:2-3; 38:21-23).

Zedekiah, his officers and priests thought of meeting the threatening war of the Babylonians only with resistance, retaliation and counter-attack. The counsel of the Lord was non-resistance and surrender! During the reign of Zedekiah several attempts had been made to

revolt against the over-lordship of the Babylonians (Jer 52:3; 2 Kings 24:20; 2 Chr 36:11-14). Zedekiah also counted on the support and help of Egypt (Ezek 17:15) to rebel against the Babylonians. He was also trying to conspire with the band of the kings of Edom, Moab, Tyre, Sidon and Ammon for a united resistance and attack on the invaders (Jer 27:3). Thus Zedekiah's policy had been rebellion against the King of Babylon and a refusal to hearken to the words of the Lord coming through Jeremiah. The very beginning of the reply of Yahweh to the inquiry of Zedekiah points out to the ongoing defiant rebellion and unyielding fight in which Zedekiah was engaging against the King of Babylon: "I am going to turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls..." (Jer 21:4).

This is where the decisive and resolute judgment of destruction on Judah comes: "I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and mighty arm, in anger, in fury and in great wrath" (Jer 21:5). These words of Yahweh are revelatory of his own involvement in the execution of the judgment against Judah and the very emphatic use of the first personal pronoun *ani* (I myself) bring out this intent powerfully.⁵ The rage of Yahweh is graphically brought out in three synonyms – anger, fury, wrath – showing how displeased God was with Zedekiah who did not listen to his words but went on persistently doing what was evil in God's sight. Moreover, the expression "with outstretched hand and mighty arm" which has been frequently used in the holy wars (Deut 236:89; Psl 136:12) Yahweh fought for Israel, is also employed here in this context. This particular language of the Exodus is now reversed. Jeremiah has overturned the faith tradition of Judah and he has used it against Judah itself.⁶ Yahweh was not going to fight for Judah as he did earlier, but would fight against Judah because Judah itself had become evil. This shows that why Yahweh's judgment on Judah is decisive and definite.

Surrender and Non-resistance – a Paradoxical Response?

The answer of Yahweh to the impending crisis of Judah came in the form of a repeated appeal for non-resistance and surrender to the Babylonians. This answer is intriguing and enigmatic and one is tempted to ask: How can Yahweh who is pictured in the Old Testament as the One fighting against the enemies of Israelites during the exodus, conquest of Canaan, invasion of Sennacherib and the like, now suggest non-resistance and surrender to their enemies?" Do surrender and non-resistance mean submission to evil and destructive power? Does surrender suggest slavery and loss of independence and freedom for Judah? Was Zedekiah wrong in fighting a war to save his kingdom from the

onslaughts and devastations of the Babylonians? What is the significance of this unusual answer?

A Timely Strategy

Surrender and non-resistance was the strategy advocated by Yahweh to Judah for its very survival when faced with the menace of a deadly war and destruction by the Babylonians. The Babylonian empire had then emerged as a massive and formidable power in the Near East (2 Kings 24:7). The Babylonians were sweeping over all the small kingdoms and even the great Egyptian kingdom. A small kingdom like Judah could not possibly withstand the mighty army of the Babylonians, it would end in a despicable defeat, horrible carnage and enormous destructions of lives and places. Surrender would at least guarantee survival and would avoid bloodshed, death and destruction. This was the strategy and counsel of Yahweh.

To Avoid Bloodshed, Death and Destruction

Any war or communal violence invariably leaves behind it a trail of devastation and desolation. The shattered buildings in Afghanistan, the devastated homes in Jenin, the burnt houses in Gujarat are today's 'proud monuments' of war and violence. Moreover, the traumatized lives, the paralyzed economy, the outbreak of famine, pestilence, diseases accompanied by untold miseries, aggravate the situation of the people. Innocent civilians, the poor, women, children, old and sick people, are most affected in such violence.

Yahweh whose heart always leaps at the sight of suffering, wanted Judah to escape such miseries which would be heaped on the people if it went to war against the Babylonians. The direction of Yahweh to surrender to the Babylonians would avoid such disasters: "See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. Those who stay in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but those who go out and surrender to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have their lives as a prize of war" (Jer 21:8-9). 'The way of life' for Judah would come through their surrender. Refusing to surrender was 'the way of death'.

'Those who stay in the city' (Jer 21:9) refers to those people inside the city of Jerusalem who continued to hold out against the Babylonians in rebellion and resistance through war, and thus invited death and devastation.

People's Well-being or Power of the King?

Yahweh wants life, not death, and is more anxious about the survival of his people than the independence and freedom of the State. Yahweh prefers the people's

well being to the king's stay in power. Zedekiah and his royal house were adamant in wanting to fight the war against the Babylonians in order to maintain and enjoy their power. This was at the cost of people's lives and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. "Included in the reference to 'this city' are the social ideology and policy of the throne and temple, and the power arrangements that sustain that ideology and policy... The judgment is against the arrogant temple and the self-serving monarchy."⁷ Zedekiah and the royal house were obsessed with power, and thought of war as the only option in their situation. The concern and approach of Yahweh focuses on the well being and survival of all the people in time of war crisis. What concerned Yahweh most was justice, not the power of the State or the rules. Justice in this situation was the survival and life of the people. Yahweh did not want to sacrifice the lives of the people at the altar of the power of the king or of the independence of the State. In advocating surrender and non-resistance Yahweh wanted Zedekiah to put the people's well being before his own stay in power.

We can see such power politics operative even today. When Gujarat is burning, the Chief Minister tries to stay in power and maneuvers things in his favour and for the advantage of his Government. The Central Government refuses to be shaken by the crisis and arranges for his stay in power. In spite of these clearly ambiguous and high-handed dealings, most of the coalition parties of the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre make a loud hue and cry about the situation but refuse to take any radical action because they all cling on to power. The result is unabated killing and destruction for many days, innocent people being the victims of greed for power. Obviously, the people's well being is never kept in focus. The strategy was anti-people, and so anti-God.

The Will of Yahweh and the Babylonian Power

God's ways are incomparably different and unique. Yahweh uses the Babylonian power as a way to admonish, chastise and purify Judah. Hence surrender to the Babylonian power was announced as submission to the way of Yahweh. Resistance to the Babylon meant resistance to Yahweh's will. Jeremiah's advice to surrender is not a eulogy or glorification of the Babylonians but the revelation of the will of Yahweh in a historical even.

It is I who by my great power and my outstretched arm has made the earth, with the people and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever I please. Now I have given all these lands into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him even the wild animals of the field to serve him. All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson, until the time of his own land comes... (Jer 27:5-7).

The unquestionable sovereignty and the unparalleled power of Yahweh are shown in these words. Yahweh is the author and source of everything that is and everyone who lives. Everything and everyone is from Yahweh. All belong to Yahweh and are accountable to Yahweh. ‘Animals’ here refer to every living creature other than human beings.⁸ All creation and all power are under the authority of Yahweh. So the power of the Babylonians is also under Yahweh’s sovereignty. The king of Babylon might claim authority⁷ over nations by right of conquest, but Yahweh claims the right to rule as creator.⁹ The creator is greater than a conqueror. The Creator can be a conqueror, but a conqueror cannot make himself a creator. Yahweh asked Judah to surrender because the massive Babylonian power was itself under his own authority. What matters here is not Babylonian power but the will of Yahweh. Surrendering to the Babylonians meant submitting to the will of Yahweh.

Yahweh has the power and authority over creation. In his will and plan Yahweh can dispose of any part of it to anyone he likes for any purpose of his. In this large theological vision of Jeremiah, Yahweh’s use of the Babylonian power can be understood as an agent of the Lord’s action in that particular context. Later on King Cyrus of Persia would be also presented as one chosen to fulfill the purpose of Yahweh (2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezra 1:3-6; Is 45:1-13; 48:28).

King Nebuchadnezzar is presented as Yahweh’s servant (27:6). How can this title ‘my servant’, given to Moses, David and the servant Isaiah, be properly understood in the case of Nebuchadnezzar? Several attempts have been made to understand this servant-title in this context. A servant has to carry out his master’s plans and directions. Nebuchadnezzar is viewed as the Lord’s servant because he is regarded as an instrument to fulfill the divine purpose.¹⁰ Another explanation is to see a servant as a vassal in the diplomatic meaning.¹¹ A vassal is expected to provide an army for the use of his overlord. This is the commission which King Nebuchadnezzar is asked to carry out (Jer 25:8-11). A servant and a vassal are under the control of his master and overlord. So Yahweh can dispose of Nebuchadnezzar when he does not continue to act as his servant and vassal (Jer 27:7; 239:10). The overthrow of the Babylonian power is vividly foretold in Jeremiah to fulfill his purpose at this juncture of history. Explaining the role of the King of Babylon in God’s plan, Walter Brueggemann comments thus on “until the time of his own land comes...” (27:7b):

This “until” asserts the prophetic expectation that Babylonian power is not absolute but provisional. The exile to Babylon is not for perpetuity, even though it is for a long time... This powerful “until” breaks the connection between *the destiny of Babylon* and *the will of Yahweh* which the prophet has so determinedly established. In the end, empire and Yahweh are not coterminous. As in

v.7, this “until” announces that the Babylonian Empire is an episode in God’s history of sovereignty – an important episode, but only an episode... What is ultimately serious is God’s final resolve to restore Judah to its land.¹²

Since King Nebuchadnezzar is seen as Yahweh’s choice to fulfill his divine purpose and plan, Jeremiah invited Zedekiah and the people of Judah to surrender to him. In a symbolic action, at the command of Yahweh Jeremiah made known this message not only to Zedekiah and the house of Judah but also to all other small kingdoms like Edom, Ammon, Moab, Tyre and Sidon who were also confronted by the Babylonian power. As a symbol of Judah’s surrender to the Babylonians, Jeremiah wore a yoke of straps and bars around his neck (27:1-7). The yoke of the Babylonians was seen as the yoke of Yahweh himself and it had to be accepted by Judah and others if they wanted to be saved from that deadly crisis of war. “But any nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, says the Lord, to till it and live there” (27:11). Zedekiah and the people of Judah were warned by the Lord not to listen to those who gave advice against this yoke: “You, therefore, must not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers, or your sorcerers, who are saying to you, ‘You shall not serve the king of Babylon’. For they are prophesying a lie to you, with the result that you will be removed far from your land...” (27:9-10).

Haniah, a false prophet who, with the intention of pleasing and currying favour with king Zedekiah, misinterpreted the duration of the Babylonian exile, was punished with death (Jer 28). “In the perceptual field of Jeremiah, the theological question of Yahweh’s permission and the political question of imperial capacity and durability are the same question. Jeremiah insists that *the rule of Yahweh* and *Judah’s response* to that rule are the only pertinent issues.”¹³ Hence Jeremiah saw the Babylonian power as the way and will of Yahweh. Judah was invited to discover and follow the will of Yahweh coming through the historical event of the Babylonian supremacy and rule.

Against War but for Justice

Three responses of Yahweh have been recorded in Jeremiah 21 to the inquiry of Zedekiah about the war of Nebuchadnezzar. The address to Zedekiah (3-7) talks about the fatal judgment of Yahweh on the king and Judah. The address to the people of Judah (8-10) speaks about the need of non-resistance and surrender to the Babylonian power as a hope of survival. The third response directed to the house of the king of Judah (11-14) includes the call of Yahweh to do justice and the admonition of destruction if the people failed to listen to the Lord.

The placement of the third response recorded in chapter 21 in the context of Zedekiah's inquiry, is much disputed. The section (vv. 11-14) is considered as a freestanding oracle and it does not seem to have any specific allusion to the inquiry found in vv.1-2.¹⁴ Moreover the style of this section is in poetry whereas vv.1-10 is rendered in prose. V.11 signals the beginning of a new oracle and most scholars suggest that it could be seen as part of a large unit of oracles concerning the royal house (22:11-23:8)¹⁵ It is addressed to "the house of the king of Judah" in general and not to any particular king. "House of David" in v.12 is rather formal and impersonal. Only from its juxtaposition with vv.1-10, it has a tendency of being associated with the king Zedekiah. Furthermore, no absolute and conclusive judgment is intended here in vv.11-14 as one finds it in vv.1-10. Therefore it is suggested that vv.11-14 are intentionally placed in chapter 21 through they might not have been originally articulated in the context of the inquiry of Zedekiah.

A conventional demand about the covenantal fidelity of the rulers of Judah is expressed in vv.11-14. "It is the voice of the old covenant urging a covenantal, obedient shaping of royal power and policy."¹⁶ This covenantal demand is quite vibrant throughout the section 21:11-23:8. A king who is to rule his people in the name of Yahweh is to administer justice and deliver those who are oppressed. Maintaining justice was an integral part of maintaining the covenant.¹⁷ Judah's rulers had ignored such kingly duties and had become exploiters and oppressors of their own people.¹⁸ Jeremiah graphically describes the extravagant opulence, rampant exploitation and gross injustice of king Jehoiakim (22:10-17). Therefore the wrath of Yahweh would judge such kings for their unfaithfulness and infidelity to the covenantal demands. But the kings would escape the wrath of God if they fulfilled their royal duties of rendering justice. In this context comes the clarion call of God to the house of the king of David (21:12): "Execute justice in the morning, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed..."¹⁹

It has been already observed here that vv.11-14 are intentionally placed in chapter 21 and probably not originally articulated for the context of the inquiry of Zedekiah. But their placement here is theologically significant. The intention of this placement comes out powerfully when we understand this message in the context of chapter 21:1-10. It is not merely avoidance of war, non-resistance and surrender to the Babylonian power which will save Judah but doing justice and delivering the oppressed. This will restore the monarchy. This is a positive command to the house of the king of Judah to fulfill the royal duties.

Act with justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor anyone who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the orphan and the

widow or shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey this word, then through the gates of this house shall enter kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their servants, and their people (22:3-4).

This reminder to the kings of Judah to be faithful to the covenant is well placed here. Their disloyalty to the covenantal principles had resulted in the rampant injustice and widespread oppression. Thus Judah drastically failed to live like a covenantal community and incurred punishment and judgment of the Lord, which would befall them in the form of the Babylonian invasion and destruction. The escape from such an imminent debacle and devastation would be made possible if Judah decided to act with justice and righteousness and to become again the covenantal community of the Lord. Yahweh wanted Judah to avoid war not merely by their non-resistance and surrender to the Babylonian power, but also by the very practice and living of justice, which is most characteristic of the covenantal community.

Never a War but Ever for Peace

Jeremiah has presented the mind and will of Yahweh as totally against the war option as a solution to the national crisis Judah found itself in. Isaiah, an eight century prophet, had also communicated the same mind of Yahweh (Is 7:1-9:6; 2 Kings 15:29-16:20). Yahweh advised king Ahaz through Isaiah not to join king Rezin of Aram and king Pekah of Israel in their rebellious war against the Assyrians. In the case of the Syro-Ephramite war Yahweh counseled Ahaz not to fight against king Rezin and king Pekah by seeking the allegiance of king Tiglath-pileser of Assyria. In both events king Ahaz was asked by Isaiah to trust totally in Yahweh and avoid war. The Lord who had performed so many wonders for the Israelites was also ready to reassure them with the hope of saving them (Is 9:1-6) and to deliver them, provided they followed his advice of not going to war.

In a war crisis of Judah, the response and guidance of Yahweh has been *uniquely* different. Through prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah, Yahweh refuses to advocate retaliation for military aggression, war for war. The Lord offers a strategy of avoiding war and thus escaping bloodshed, death and destruction of his people and Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians. The avoidance of war involves non-resistance and submission to the Babylonian power, as a small country like Judah could not withstand the mighty and devastating power of the Babylonians. If Judah defied the Babylonians and made war with them, it would be only death and destruction to her. Jeremiah shows it clearly that the will and purpose of Yahweh must be discovered and followed within the historical event of the growth of Babylonian power. Resisting it at this historical juncture meant resisting the will and plan of Yahweh himself.

Zedekiah and his royal retinue expected the Lord to perform 'a wonderful deed' (21:2) for them. They wanted the Lord to fight on their behalf against their enemies, as in the past, and subdue and drive away the Babylonians from the land of Judah. But Jeremiah made it clear that this time the wonderful deed of Yahweh would be experienced in a different way. He advised them to be open and to heed the different way of the Lord. The mighty power of Yahweh would be realized in the non-resistance and submission of Judah to the power of the Babylonians and thus Judah would escape death and destruction and be assured of survival. To Yahweh what was important in the war crisis was not the total independence of Judah, nor the continuation of the Judean monarchy. Yahweh was concerned about the survival and well being of his people and wanted to prevent them from being massacred and their city from being destroyed. So he gave the paradoxical but life-upholding direction to avoid war by submitting to the Babylonians. Unfortunately Zedekiah and his royal house did not heed the advice of Yahweh and continued their resistance to the Babylonian power. And so came about the downfall of Zedekiah and the Judean kingdom. The Babylonians burnt the city of Jerusalem and slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah. The eyes of Zedekiah were put out and he was taken as a prisoner to Babylon along with many people (2 Kings 25).

The life-protecting words of the Lord are quite relevant in the context of our millennium which has begun with wars and violence. Violence is no solution in time of crises. Powerful nations, militant groups and high caste people are easily tempted to this way when they want to perpetuate their hegemony and power, as was the case with king Zedekiah and his royal house. War cannot be the way. The Lord showed Judah a different and appropriate path for a time of crisis. Just, equitable and life-saving ways ought to be sought and found.

It is easy to rush with military tanks and sophisticated weapons to meet a warring party. It is difficult and painstaking to meet the other honestly at negotiating tables. However arduous, slow and challenging, making peace among the inimical parties is always life-saving for every one. In seeking such ways out, it is not the power of the rulers which is to be kept in focus, but the well being of all people. One must seek creative and life-upholding ways like dialogue, discussion, mediation, to face crises and problems, whether local or national or international. The recent crisis of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, which was solved peacefully not by guns but by dialogue and mediation, is a good example. The military aggression of Israel on the West Bank has not yet resulted in peace but has only continued to provoke more bomb explosions, suicide-killings and militant violence. Can peace be

produced from the edge of a sword or the nozzle of a gun?

In his prophetic call against wars, Jeremiah does not recommend merely avoidance of wars but also the eradication of the causes of wars. Wars and violence are also provoked by injustice, exploitation and discrimination. It is not only those who wish to maintain an unjust hegemony and power that resort to wars and violence, but also those who are unjustly discriminated against and exploited feel forced to resort to such strategies. Therefore in our scenario of exploitation and discrimination doing justice is an indispensable and moral condition to maintain peace and harmony in the world. Only justice which can bring lasting peace.

Source: VJTR, October 2002

¹ *Internal Herald Tribune*, 29 April 2002, p.1

² Cf. W.L. Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*. London: Associated University Presses, 1976; K.M. O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25*. SBLDS 94. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

³ Wars have been fought in Biblical History and Yahweh has been seen as a warrior in the Hebrew Bible. As the scope of this article is limited, we will not deal with the theologies of holy wars. For a discussion on this, cf. John A. Wood, *Perspectives on War in the Bible*, Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998; Gerard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991; Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel*, Kitchener, 1980; Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; L. Christensen Duane, *The Transformation of the War Oracle in Old Testament Prophecy*, Missoula: Scholars, 1975; Rudolph Smend, *Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation: Reflections upon Israel's Earlier History*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1970.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *A Contemporary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998, p. 189.

⁵ Peter C. Cragie, Page H. Kelley, Joel f. Drinkard, Jr., *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 1-25*, Dallas: Word Books, 1991, p. 298.

⁶ Brueggemann, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 242. The Jeremiah tradition refers to "the animals" when characterizing the way in which the creator God has turned creation over to the power of Babylon.

⁹ Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, Thomas G. Smotheres, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah 26-52*, Dallas: Word Books, 1995, p. 49-50.

¹⁰ Overholt, "King Nebuchadnezzar in the Jeremiah Tradition." *CBQ* 30 (1968) 45-46.

¹¹ Z. Zevit, "The Use of *eved* as a Diplomatic Term in Jeremiah." *JBL* 88 (1969) 74-7.

¹² Brueggemann, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁵ Cragie, Kelley & Drinkard, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-4.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

¹⁷ Cragie, Kelley & Drinkard, *op. cit.*, pp. 292.

¹⁸ R.E. Clements, *Jeremiah: Interpretation*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988, pp. 128-9.

¹⁹ "In the morning" is rendered in Hebrew by the word *lbr*. This literally means "to be morning." But I can be also understood as "each day, each morning" or even "continually." It was expected that executing justice was part of the daily royal duties of a king in Judah. Cf. Cragie, Kelley & Drinkard, *Ibid.*

Human Lives are Sacred (not American or Asian!)

Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR

Introduction

If there is any single recent world event that has influenced drastically the international political scene it is undoubtedly the destruction of the twin towers in Manhattan, USA, on 11th September 2001. It is ironic that an act of brutal terrorism should have determined international politics and theological reflection at the beginning of the new millennium, but the fact is that it has. In the aftermath of 9/11, many ethical issues have been raised in the international arena. Among them, the most significant are:

- ❖ Who was the real culprit behind the attack? If it is Osama Bin Laden and his *Al-Qaeda* movement (as the Americans have consistently upheld), should an entire nation (the poor under-developed nation of Afghanistan, to be precise) be held at ransom? Are all the Afghan civilians to be held guilty of this terrorist act? To get to the culprit (whose exact whereabouts no one is sure of!), can one bomb indiscriminately the entire nation of Afghanistan?
- ❖ What are the causes for international terrorism in the contemporary world? Should we not, at least at a time like this, reflect on the real causes and then address them, and thus guarantee the elimination of terrorism? In other words, should we be satisfied with merely treating the symptoms without tackling the causes of the sickness?
- ❖ Surely, the culprits of the attack should be sought out and brought to justice. But, does justice mean triumphalistic vengeance as we witnessed in the indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan?
- ❖ The 3000 victims of the American tragedy are innocent civilian victims. But does this fact justify the indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan and taking the lives of thousands of innocent Afghan civilians?
- ❖ There have been terrorist attacks all over the world, especially during the past few decades. How come that the September 11 attack is so unique that it deserves a violent retaliation, even before one was not sure where the real culprits were?
- ❖ The role played by the international mass media in highlighting the September 11 attack, as if there have never been terrorist attacks in the world before. The local media, totally dependent on international media (predominantly owned

and controlled by western countries), never gave such wide coverage to terrorist attacks elsewhere, even in their own home countries.

Most of these issues raised an important question? Are some lives more important than others? The way things have worked out in the aftermath of September 11, seems to imply an affirmative answer to this crucial question. As an Asian, the author has legitimate concern and fear of the recent bombing of Afghanistan may become a precedent: there is no guarantee that what the Americans did in that Central Asian country may not be repeated in his own South Asian country (Sri Lanka). If the reason given by the Americans for bombing Afghanistan indiscriminately, namely, to get the culprits of the September 11 attack “dead or alive” is held as valid, one cannot but see this as a dangerous precedence for other parts of Asia, and the rest of the world. For example, if an LTTE suicide bomber blasts an important American building with civilian casualties, it would logically follow that the Americans could bomb Sri Lanka indiscriminately to get the culprits “dead or alive.” In retrospect, it would also mean that when an LTTE suicide bomber assassinated the former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, then, India has the moral right to bomb Sri Lanka indiscriminately, to get the culprits behind that dastardly act “dead or alive”!

These bizarre examples show the consequences that one has to face in reality if one justifies the indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan just to get the culprits “dead or alive.” In other words, making the American retaliation a morally justifiable precedent has serious repercussions for the international political arena. Justifying of the American retaliation necessarily presumes a greater importance or value attributed to American civilian lives over and above non-American lives. In this essay, I wish to briefly analyse this crucial point, using traditional Catholic moral principles, official Church teachings and common sense arguments.

1. The September 11 Attack: A Barbaric Act

There is no denying that what happened in the USA on that fateful day was inhuman; one may surely call it a barbaric act. No right thinking person with an active healthy moral conscience could ever approve of it. Moreover, no reason could justify the taking away of some 3000 innocent human lives that day in New York; nor could one justify the immeasurable damage done to public property, especially, the destruction of the twin towers. The victims of this dastardly act were mostly

civilian; they could have been you or myself, had we happened to be at the twin towers that fateful day. The world can never justify this act of terrorism, this brutal killing of innocent civilians and the wanton destruction of property.

2. The Aftermath of the September 11 Attack

There have been various responses to this terrorist act. Some rejoiced saying that at last the Americans would experience first hand what it means to be a victim of terrorism. Some others, including President Bush, have insisted on retaliation by bombing Afghanistan to get Bin Laden “dead or alive” and to wipe out completely Bin Laden’s *Al-Qaeda* military bases in that country. Yet others have responded saying that this event should open the eyes of the world to combat terrorism, realistically and collectively.

However, following the lead of Pope John Paul II, one needs to ask the question: Why? Why do terrorist acts take place in the world in general, and why did this particular terrorist attack on the USA, in particular? On November 3, 2001, at a meeting of the UN’s Food and Agricultural Organization, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Secretary of State of the Holy See, read out a message of Pope John Paul II, in which he said: “Following the terrible events of 11 September, a wide debate has begun concerning justice and the urgent need to correct injustice.” The most serious of these issues, the Pope said, was the hunger that afflicted thousands of people, causing “inevitable problems to peace among nations.”¹ On the following day, while presiding at a beatification Mass in St. Peter’s square when there was a bidding prayer for peace, the Pope appealed for dialogue and justice in the world “shaken by violence” and marked by “social inequalities and injustices” which “provoke hatred, divisions and terrorism”²

Given the context of the American tragedy, one may be even more specific than the Pope by asking what the contemporary causes for international terrorism are. Has the USA itself been responsible in recent times for terrorist attacks in different parts of the world? If so, can we just isolate the September 11 attack from its total context? One of the most important facts which we just cannot ignore here is now the USA itself encouraged the chief suspect of the 9/11 attack, Osama Bin Laden and his organization, to resist the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980’s. Moreover, it is shocking but true that almost all the notorious “terror leaders” of the contemporary world have been bred and nurtured by the USA itself. President Marcos of the Philippines, General Pinochet of Chile, General Noriega of Panama, Mobutu Seso Seko of Zaire and Saddam Hussein of Iraq are the most notorious among those whom America supported in recent history to further its own vested interests. Besides this direct link with brutal dictators, the USA

also has to bear the responsibility for actively supporting them in many scattered areas of Central “America. In other words, the USA is not the innocent victim of September 11 that the international media made the world believe. It is not my wish here to justify the terrorist attack but to substantiate the age-old dictum that violence begets violence and terrorism begets terrorism.

In a special statement issued in the aftermath of the September 11 attack, Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor and Archbishop Patrick Kelly, the President and the Vice-President respectively of the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, had this to say:

Nothing can justify the taking of innocent life, and we have a solemn obligation to try to prevent such outrages in future. One essential element of this effort is to understand the causes of violence and the context out of which it springs. Everything done to overcome gross economic, social and political inequalities contributes to building up peace and avoiding war. The struggle to overcome terrorism must not deflect the international community from redressing these fundamental injustices.³

Surprisingly, neither President Bush nor the international media (80% of which is owned by the USA and her western allies) saw it this way. For them, what happened in the USA on September 11 was an isolated event, and it is “an unspeakable crime.” Similar terrorist activities in the rest of the world ((some of which are engineered by the USA) are not seen as “unspeakable crimes.” Writing just after the attack on the twin towers, one author refers to this apparent double-standard:

Ask an Arab how he responds to 20,000 or 30,000 innocent deaths and he or she will respond as decent people should, that it is an unspeakable crime. But they will ask why we did not use such words about the sanctions that have destroyed the lives of half a million children in Iraq, why we did not rage about the 17,500 civilians killed in Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon. And those basic reasons why the Middle East caught fire last September – the Israeli occupation of Arab land, the dispossession of Palestinians, the bombardments and state-sponsored executions... all these must be obscured lest they provide the smallest fractional reason for yesterday’s savagery.⁴

Instead of paying any attention to the would be causes of the attack on the twin towers, President Bush naively resorted to retaliatory rhetoric and went on to build up a coalition of nations to fight what he termed “a war against terrorism” in the international sphere. Within a month, on 8th October 2001 to be precise, this US-led coalition (mostly consisting of western nations) began the “war against terrorism” in the concrete form of indiscriminate military attacks against Afghanistan. One wonders whether by any conventional terms this could have been called “a war” at all, because a war is usually between more or less equal powers or when the weaker party has at least a minimum of technical, financial and

economic resources to defend itself. In this case, one of the parties had absolutely nothing, and in this “war” most sophisticated technology was used against a people the majority of whom could not read or write. A country whose Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 20 billion dollars every year was leading a coalition in fighting another with approximately one thousand times less GDP!⁵

In this State of the Union speech in February, instead of paying any attention to the real causes of the American tragedy, the US President told the American nation: “We have learned that up to 100,000 people have been trained as killers in the camps of Afghanistan and are now spread throughout the world.”⁶ This was an apparent justification of the US bombing, but the American journal *Newsweek* doubts about the accuracy of the President’s figures. According to CIA figures, *Al-Qaeda* militants in Afghanistan were between 15,000 and 20,000, but according to Saudi intelligence estimates this number is not more than 2000 to 3000.⁷

The crucial question is: to flush out these “thousands” of *Al-Qaeda* terrorists or even to capture their leader Osama Bin Laden “dead or alive” (even if he were really hiding in Afghanistan, a point that was not proved), can an entire nation be bombed indiscriminately, as the Americans did? This is the crux of the ethical issue that I wish to highlight in this essay.

3. Indiscriminate Bombing of a Nation

The Catholic tradition has inherited valuable moral insights with regard to war and violence, based on the experiences of past generations in the form of the well-known just war theory. This theory is not meant to justify a war, but to contain the violence that is inherent in every war within reasonable limits, and thus to make it more humane as far as possible. Traditionally, this theory has two main parts:

1. *jus ad bellum*. Before one embarks on the use of force/violence, one has to seriously consider the following criteria: there must be a just cause, a legitimate authority must declare the war, there must be a right intention in going to war, there must be a probability of success, the overall destruction expected from the use of force must be outweighed by the good to be achieved (proportionality), force may be used only after all peaceful alternatives have been seriously tried and exhausted (i.e., war must be a last resort).
2. *just in bello*. In war, the following ethical criteria hold: civilians should not be the object of direct attack (non-combatant immunity); to attain military objectives no more force should be used than necessary without disproportionate collateral damage to civilian life and property

(proportionality); even in the midst of the conflict, the aim of political and military leaders must be peace with justice, and no acts of vengeance and indiscriminate violence are permitted.

When one applies these criteria of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* to the attack of the coalition on Afghanistan, it would appear that most, if not all, the above criteria of the traditional *just war theory* were violated. The only criterion that seems to have been satisfied seems to be the existence of a just cause, namely, self-defence against attacks or the prevention of such possible future attacks.

On the basis of this “just cause” and inspired by the war-oriented rhetoric of President Bush, the US-led coalition embarked on an indiscriminate bombing spree of Afghanistan that lasted a couple of months. The declared intention of President Bush (repeated time and again) was to get the prime suspect Osama Bin Laden “alive or dead,” presuming that he was hiding in Afghanistan. With the mass media blindly supporting it, this “war on terrorists” virtually became a sort of a western “jihad” or “holy war” against Afghanistan. It was portrayed as a war that would eliminate international terrorism and President Bush went to the extent of saying that those nations which did not throw themselves behind the US-led coalition were supporters of terrorists! When the goal of a war is made to appear so absolute, any means used become justified. This is precisely what happened in the Gulf War a decade ago: the media together with the US-led coalition painted Saddam Hussein so black, such a personification of evil, that anything could go to eliminate the monster!⁸ This same history was repeated with a vengeance during the Afghanistan war. This time, the absolute evil to be eliminated was Osama Bin Laden and his *Al-Qaeda* movement.

One has to keep in mind that Afghanistan has been an unfortunate nation for the past two decades or so, due to a series of miseries. The invasion of the Soviet Union in the 1980’s, the ensuing fundamentalist Taliban activities and the consequent political instability, the terrorism of different fundamentalist Islamic militant groups, the civil war among different groups of Afghans, and last but not least, natural disasters, had already reduced this unfortunate Central Asian nation to a heap of rubble. It is one of the poorest nations in the world. Unfortunately, it was in this country that the Americans presumed Osama Bin Laden to be in hiding with his clandestine terrorist activities, especially through the *Al-Qaeda* militants organization protected by the Taliban. At the end of intense and indiscriminate American bombing, one writer had this to say:

Now, in Afghanistan, another war has essentially come to an end... Afghanistan is miserably poor, It has lost almost all of its economic infrastructure to 20 years of war. An estimated 18

million mines lurk in its soil. It is flooded with small arms and is a haven for drug trafficking. It has not had a functioning education system for more than a decade, and most of its middle class and professionals have fled. Average life expectancy is a mere 46 years... The severity and scale of destruction inflicted upon Afghanistan is enormous.⁹

The pathetic conditions in Afghanistan even before September 11 were so serious that according to the director of the Catholic aid agency *Cafod*, Julian Filochowski, the United Nations aid agencies had already warned of "widespread famine conditions" in the country. He went on to say: "So before the terrorist outrage in the United States on 11 September, some 5.5 million people were already considered by the UN to be in need of relief aid."¹⁰ The US-led military action was so detrimental to the civilian population that even *Amnesty International* based in neighbouring Pakistan urged to halt the bombing.¹¹ The Cafod director went on to describe how the ruthless US bombing had hit even some charitable aid agencies: "Meanwhile, the military action has included accidental bomb strikes on agency centers, including one used for the purpose of mine clearance, and the Red Cross warehouse in Kabul."¹²

The amount of money spent on this attack and the type of weapons used in this attack by the US-led coalition surely reached ridiculous proportions:

It is a war between high tech and ordinary weapons. The terrorists used common knives to bring down the twin towers. The damage caused was over one hundred billion dollars. It may take around five years to re-build the towers. The Americans are using arrays of high tech cruise missiles which cost around one million dollars apiece to bring down mostly mud huts and tents of insignificant value which can be quickly resurrected.¹³

Although the US President claimed that this was a war *against* terrorism, one wonders whether it was a war for terrorism. All available details indicate that rather than eliminating terrorism, terrorist tactics were used in the indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan. With this, fuel was added to more 'counter-terrorist' movement (especially in the Islamic world) in retaliation of the American bombing. The outspoken British Labour MP, George Galloway, made this point in more poignant terms when he wanted that the bombing of Afghanistan, killing thousands of civilians would create 10,000 Osama Bin Ladens and disaster for both East and West.¹⁴ One writer touches on the same point when he says:

Prior to the US bombing raids on Afghanistan, Bush had been able, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on 11 September, to bring on board the majority of Islamic States in his coalition on terrorism. However, in sympathy of Muslims for the terrorist attacks of September 11 will now, no doubt, be eclipsed by the sense of outrage at the US military action in Afghanistan – military action that ultimately

will lead to more civilian loss of life than the terrorist attacks of 11 September.¹⁵

In short, the indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan was surely more of a continuation of the spiral of violence rather than a check on it. When one considers the history of the past five decades or so, one sees that the USA has been a major contributor to this spiral of violence that has claimed thousands of innocent civilian lives. The list of nations attacked by the United States of America since the end of the Second World War is very long and disturbing: Cina (1945-46, 1950-53), Korea (1950-53), Guatemala (1954, 1967-69), Indonesia (1958) Cuba (1959-1960), the Belgian Congo (1964), Peru (1965), Laos (1964-73), Vietnam (1961-73), Cambodia (1969-1970), Grenada (1983), Libya (1986), El Salvador (1980;s) Nicaragua (1980;s), Panama (1989), Iraq (1991-1999), Bosnia (1995), Sudan (1998), Yugoslavia (1999) and now Afghanistan (2001).¹⁶ Reliable independent sources indicate that even if one considers only the very recent US attacks in other countries the number of civilian casualties that ensued is much more than the number of civilian casualties of 11 September. Thus, George Bush senior's attacks on Panama and Somalia just over 10 years ago killed more than 2000 and between 7,000 and 10,000 civilians respectively, in those countries.¹⁷ Then, during the Gulf War, according to American authorities themselves, more than 70% of the 88,500 tons of bombs dropped on Iraq and Kuwait missed their target completely, causing tens of thousands of civilian deaths.¹⁸ The sole point I am trying to highlight here is that civilian casualties anywhere have to be condemned, whether they are American or non-American, simply by the fact that all are human beings. One cannot highlight the civilian casualties only when they belong to one's own country. This would amount to another form of international apartheid. Arundhati Roy writes:

Nothing can excuse or justify an act of terrorism, whether it is committed by religious fundamentalist, private militia, people's resistance movements, or whether it's dressed up as a war of retribution by a recognized government. The bombing of Afghanistan is not revenge for New York and Washington. It is yet another act of terror against the people of the world. Each innocent person that is killed must be added to, not set off against, the grisly toll of civilians who died in New York and Washington.¹⁹

It is very strange how President Bush could continue to exercise his rhetoric of retribution at the ceremony to mark the six months of the September 11 attack, where he pledged once again to wage a campaign against the states with the potential to arm terrorists with weapons mass destruction. Surely, one need to ask whether in this contemporary so-called "civilized" society, the world should allow such bellicose language that only sharpens the divisions of the world.

4. Catholic Teachings on the Morality of Indiscriminate Bombing

That the Catholic tradition is against indiscriminate bombing of a nation should be evident when one considers the roots of the Catholic Just War doctrine. The principles of proportionality in the use of violence during a war and the principle of non-combatant immunity are precisely meant to protect the innocent civilians from violence. Bombing entire cities was a phenomenon that began in the 20th century. The eyes of the entire humanity to this horror were opened during the Second World War, especially in the bombing of entire cities and towns in Germany and the complete destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The Catholic response to this horror was clearly formulated at the Second Vatican Council when it said:

The development of armaments by modern science has immeasurably magnified the horrors and wickedness of war. Warfare conducted with these weapons can inflict immense and indiscriminate havoc which goes far beyond the bounds of legitimate defence... Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation.²⁰

The essential point in the above conciliar teaching is that even if there is a legitimate target in the midst of a civilian population, the bombing of that population for the sake of hitting that target is immoral if it causes mass-scale deaths of civilians and loss of property. The traditional just war principle of proportionality caters to protecting the civilians by stipulating that only proportionate violence could be used even in a war to achieve a military target. To put it in popular terms, I cannot use an axe to kill a mosquito which I see on my neighbour's neck! Although I have the good intention of killing the mosquito for the sake of my neighbour's welfare, such a disproportionate use of the means to kill it would not only be ridiculous but also disastrous. This is precisely what was taught by the traditional moral principle of the double-effect, i.e., when there are two effects from one action, one good and the other evil, the evil effect ensues the action has to be proportionately less than the good effect (i.e., the proportionate reason).

Moreover, the principle of double effect also insists that the good effect should not be the result of the evil effect. In other words, the traditional Catholic principle that evil means are not justified by a good end is relevant here. The Manuals of Moral Theology of the pre-Vatican II era justified an attack on a military target in the midst of a civilian population only if the harm done to the civilian population and public property could be justified by a proportionate good result. Applying this to the bombing of Afghanistan, one would say that even if there were clear evidence that the prime suspect Osama Bin

Laden was hiding in Afghanistan, still the Americans could not indiscriminately bomb that country using high-tech weapons of mass destruction, because they wanted him "dead or alive." In retrospect, we see today that even the indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan did not get Bin Laden "dead or alive," but it surely killed thousands of helpless Afghan civilians for no fault of theirs. It is in this sense that one has to conclude that the indiscriminate bombing of Afghanistan was surely immoral, by any standard of morality, and clearly according to Catholic morality.

The Church has always upheld the sanctity of human life. This is because the Church believes that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, that every human being has in him or her the breath of God. The Catholic tradition also upholds the sanctity of human life because God has embraced humanity in the incarnation of his Son, because Jesus Christ has shed his precious blood for all human beings and because all human beings are called by God to the same ultimate destiny. In other words, the Catholic belief is that human life is sacred precisely because of the dignity bestowed on it by God. As such, human life is inviolable from the womb to the tomb. That is why human life is never to be taken away by other human beings by way of abortion, homicide, genocide, euthanasia, etc. God is the supreme author of life, and it is God alone who has a right to take it; no human being or human authority can usurp this divine right over human life.

It is because of this basic respect for all human beings from the moment of its conception till its death that the Church says there should be no discrimination of human life according to human categories. The well-known "quality of life" arguments in contemporary bioethics often are a challenge to this teaching of the Church on the sanctity of all human life. Arguments which try to prove that only a certain type of living is to be regarded as really human belong to quality of life arguments. In this view, fetuses that are defective, children, who are victims of Down's Syndrome, the mentally retarded, the senile and the feeble, people in a permanent coma, etc., are categorized as less than human. The Catholic Church has been emphatically opposed to this type of arguments because they discriminate against human beings on the basis of certain human qualities. For the Church, the very fact that a person is born to the human family makes her or him a human being. Nay, the Church stands for respect of human life in all its stages, right from conception.

Conclusion

It is against the background of this long-standing Catholic tradition on respect for all human lives that one wonders whether for the American leaders only American civilian life is of utmost importance? Recent history seems to suggest that for them non-American

lives, such as those of Iraqi and Afghan civilians are not that important. Their only aim seemed to be to get the culprits “alive or dead” irrespective of what happened to the innocent Afghan civilians who had nothing directly to do with terrorism. No human morality of any kind can ever approve this sort of logic. It is precisely this point that Cardinal Murphy O’Connor and Archbishop Kelly brought out in their statement on behalf of the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, when they said in the aftermath of the September 11 attack: “Many of those most immediately guilty have already died. Now the crucial and necessary search is for the persons or groups who planned and authorized the attacks. But whole peoples must not be attacked and punished for the actions of small and unrepresentative groups.”²¹

As already mentioned in this essay, no one (including this writer) would ever be want to approve the killing of some 3000 innocent civilians on that fateful September 11 in the USA. But, is it such a unique disaster that it warrants the killing of thousands of innocent civilians in a far away country called ‘Afghanistan’? That the number of people who died of hunger on 11 September 2001 all over the world has been estimated as 24,000 people.²² As we know, hunger is a result of an unjust distribution of world’s resources that is perpetuated by unjust international and local social-political-economic structures. Are those 24,000 who die every day of hunger less human than the 5,000 civilians who dies on September 11 in New York? If not, where is our retribution for their deaths which takes place daily, not only on September 11? Against whom should retribution go in respect to those deaths? There is surely a lot of hypocrisy and double-standards in the attack against Afghan civilians. The author cannot resist the urge to raise again the question: Are American human lives more valuable than the non-American human lives? The question is odious to a Catholic imbedded in the Catholic tradition of respect for all human lives. But it is a question that keeps on lingering in the minds of people as long as hypocrisy and double standards reign supreme in the international political arena.

Source: *VJTR*, October 2002

¹ See “Vatican steps up security as war on terrorism continues,” *The Tablet*, 10 November 2001, p. 1613.

² *Ibid.*

³ Justice, Not Vengeance,” in *The Tablet*, 29 September 2001, p. 1390.

⁴ Robert Fisk, “The Wickedness and Awesome Cruelty of a Crushed and Humiliated People,” *Info on Human Development*, Vol. 27, Nos. 9-10 (Sept.-Oct. 2001) p.2.

⁵ The Attack Against Afghanistan: The Cuban Perspective,” *Social Justice*, Vol. 36, Nos. 12 [1175] (Dec. 2001), p. 16

⁶ Malcolm Beith, “Overstatements of the Union;,” *Newsweek*, 11 Feb. 2002, p.2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See my article, “Mass Media and its Effects on the ‘Just War’

Criteria in the Gulf War,” *VJTR 55/11 (Nov. 1991) pp. 639-52.*

⁹ Jun9chiro Koizumi, “Starting from Scratch... Again,” *Newsweek*, 21 January 2002, p. 11.

¹⁰ Julian Filochowski, “Keep the Aid Arteries Open,” *The Tablet*, 10 November 2001, p. 1592.

¹¹ “Pakistan Churches Urge Restraint and Dialogue,” *The Tablet*, 27 October 2001, p. 1546.

¹² Filochowski, *ibid.*, p. 1593.

¹³ Ranil Mendis, “The Bias of the Western Media,” *The Sunday Island*, 28 October 2001, p.10.

¹⁴ Elena Kurti, “Dissenter in the House,” *The Tablet*, 13 October 2001, p. 1452.

¹⁵ Baba Zadek Amin, “What is the Real Strategic Objective?” *The Sunday Times*, 4 Nov. 2001, p. 14

¹⁶ Arundhati Roy, “Brutally Smeared in Peanut Butter,” *The Island*, 4 November 2001, p. 8.

¹⁷ Third World Network Features, “The Role of the Media in the ‘War Against Terrorism’,” *Daily News*, 15 March 2002. However, according to some the number of civilian casualties in Panama was much higher, holding it to be some 8000 civilian deaths. See, for example, John Medcalf, “A World in Crisis” under “Letters” in *The Tablet*, 29 September 2001, p. 1371.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* For further statistical details on the civilian casualties in the Gulf War see my article mentioned in note 8.

¹⁹ *Loc. Cit.*

²⁰ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 80.

²¹ “Justice, not Vengeance.” See note 3.

²² This figure is taken from *The New Internationalist*, No. 340 (November 2002), as cited in *Social Justice*, Vol. 35/12 (December 2001), p. 17.

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When one is responding to enmity with love, one is using a moral force that is more powerful than physical force. Physical force can control and dominate. It does not challenge the freedom and humanity of the other(s). It cannot change hearts and transform persons. It cannot build relationships. It cannot form community. That is why physical force, used if and when necessary, can only be a temporary measure. If it is not followed up by serious peace making efforts it can even be unjust in its turn.

The power of love is unconditioned and unmeasured. It is generous. It overflows limits set by justice and reason. This overflowing increases its moral power. I think that this is what Jesus means when he says: “If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well and if any one forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile’ (Mt 5:40-41). Such a generous gesture will surprise and confound the enemy. It will also make him/her rethink the whole situation. Without such a context of love and generosity, a ‘just war’, instead of solving the problem may sow the seeds of future ‘just wars’!

Source: *VJTR*, January 2002

A Just War?

By Fr. Michael Amaladoss, SJ

We cannot really appreciate the significance of peace if we do not look at the reality of war. Wars have been going on all through history and are going on now in many places in the world. There are defensive and offensive wars. All wars are more or less destructive. They are rooted in history.

One way of looking at wars is to say that humans have an animal side to them. Wars are the manifestation of this animal nature. However, the non-animal humans is also capable of envy, hatred or vengeance shows as anger, aggression and destruction.

Religions and War

Religions have been very ambiguous about war. They have often justified it. By such justification they make war into as 'holy war'. The opponents is demonized. It is easier that way to seek the destruction of the other. Sometimes one speaks as if only Islam is warmongering. The Muslim speak about *jihad*. Originally and primarily *jihad* was a war with oneself, against one's own evil inclinations. But slowly it came to acquire wider connotations. It became a defensive war, to defend not only the Muslims, but also Islam from attack. Sometimes, strategically, offensive is the best form of defense. In any case, some scholars began justifying the use of war to spread the true faith of Islam even in the face of those seen as its enemies. This is certainly against Quranic injunctions. But in Islam religion and politics have always gone together and often religion ends up justifying political projects.

The leading myths of the Hindus are the Ramayana and Mahabharatha. Both revolve round wars that symbolize the struggle between 'good' and 'evil'. Vishnu descends to the earth (the *avatars*) to defend righteousness (*dharma*) against those opposed to it. This tradition legitimizes wars to defend *dharma*. It is no wonder that the Bhagavadgita was the favourite text of those who were struggling for independence. While Gandhi derived from it the principles of a non-violent struggle, others used it to support violent revolutions. Buddhism preaches peace. Its model emperor, Ashoka, was led to Buddhism after witnessing the horrors and destruction of a war. But contemporary Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka encourage, and even demand, the military action of the government against the Hindu north.

Christianity has supported the conquests of the Roman emperors, the crusades against the Moslems in the middle ages and the colonial enterprise in the more recent centuries. Even today Christians support

revolutionary violence, justifying it as defensive against oppressive violence. The justification come from the Old Testament, in which war was an acceptable form of advancing the interests of God's chosen people. One wonders how much of this reflects tribal culture rather than the will of God. As a matter of fact God seems to have been a moderating influence when the people are told that they should be satisfied with "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (cf. Ex 21:24), in a situation where revenge may have far exceeded the offence.

A Just War

This is the background in which the tradition of the 'just war' develops. There is a recognition that we humans are living in a situation of injustice and the restoration of justice may be necessary first step towards peace. Augustine who was keenly aware of human sin and its consequences was the first to articulate the 'just-war theory', which was developed by others later. In a situation that war cannot be avoided, certain conditions are laid down that can keep it within moral limits. Such conditions are: a just cause, declaration of war by a competent authority, an overall orientation towards ultimate peace, lack of success in using peaceful alternatives, use of violence that is proportionate to the effect that is desired (peace), and the probability of success.

It is in this context that we have to look at the teaching of Jesus. He is very conscious that he is proclaiming new principles that are a clear contrast to the old ones.

You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment'. But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment... You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evil doer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven (Mt 5:21-22, 38-39, 43-44).

The same Matthew will alter quote Jesus as saying: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Mt 10:34). Luke prefers another metaphor: "I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Lk 12:49).

We should not however jump at the 'contradiction' too quickly. As a matter of fact, Jesus himself is the victim of the sword and the fire that he brings. In Matthew Jesus continues: "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (10:38). Luke makes him say: "I have a baptism with which to be baptized,

and what stress I am under until it is completed!” (12:50). We know that by the word ‘baptism’ Jesus refers to his death (cf. Mk 10:38).

Jesus is obviously using symbolic language. But his teaching is clear. To oppose violence with violence only leads to further violence in an unending cycle. You can break this cycle of violence and move towards reconciliation and peace only by opposing love to violence. Jesus was not opposed to resistance or struggle against injustice. When he is struck on the face in front of the high priest he neither strikes back nor accepts it meekly in silence, but protests: “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” (Jn 18:23). If he had not resisted and condemned injustice, he would not have been put to death.

Loving those who love us and hating those who hate us is what every one does. “Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” says Jesus (Mt 5:46). What can bring about a real transformation in relationship is loving one’s enemies. The only example that Jesus can think of is his Father who makes the “sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (Mt 5:45). Then follows the exhortation: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). His own example will come later when he is hanging on the cross: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

When is a War Just?

What can we say about the ‘just war’ in the light of the teaching of Jesus? Unfortunately we are living in an unjust and violent world. There are people who want power and who wish to dominate others. They are ready to perpetrate any violence to achieve their ends. In such circumstance one cannot simply be passive. One has to defend oneself. Self-defense supposes that one is able to dominate and control the violent person or group. One has to take appropriate means to achieve this goal. But ends do not justify the means. The contemporary war machine is over-developed. Hence programmes of arms control, especially of weapons of mass destruction, are very much indicated. We will have to turn to means and methods of conventional war, if and when necessary, for the limited purpose of dominating and controlling a violent aggressor. Domination and control do not necessarily mean killing. There is a growing campaign across the world against the death penalty. Death is not seen and accepted as a punishment. If this is true of individual aggressors, this is true also of groups. Therefore killing the enemy should never be the direct goal even of a just war.

Such a limited use of violence must be set in the context of a sincere and earnest desire to pursue peace. There must be a recognition that peace is not going to

automatically follow a just war. Reconciliation and peace-making involve a different kind of effort and process, perhaps even different agents. Peace-making efforts must address not only the phenomena of violence, but also their underlying causes. Violence is often a reaction by people who may have undergone violence previously. There is a historical memory which may carry hurts that extend beyond generations. The violence may seem sudden and unprovoked for people who do not know history. It may be bursting into flame of a simmering fire under favourable circumstances. It may be vengeful, but not without cause.

Sometimes the violence that provokes revolutionary violence may be structural. It is hidden and taken for granted as a dimension of well-entrenched structures. People who do not sit back and analyze it may not be aware of it. Such structures may be supported by economic, political and social ideologies and systems. The violent reaction is only a symptom of a deep social malaise. But it may shake us into an awareness of reality as it is. It may make us see things in a new way. It may provoke deep analysis and reflection. Many revolutions, violent and non-violent, in the 20th century have brought about political changes. Dictators have been overthrown and democracy has been restored. But a change of political masters does nothing to change economic and social structures of oppression. The Philippines has had two non-violent revolutions recently that changed political masters. But they have not been followed up by economic and social transformation. The absence of military conflict and the functioning of majoritarian democracy does not necessarily lead to real peace.

In deciding the justice or injustice of a situation we normally depend on legal systems. Unfortunately, laws are made by people, usually the dominant groups in a particular situation, whether national or international. Therefore what is legal need not necessarily be moral. Even legal systems are known to be abused in their favour or simply ignored by powerful nations or groups, for whom might is often right. Therefore the justice of a situation has to be carefully discerned.

‘Just wars’ normally happen between nations. But what I have been saying here about the ‘just war’ is applicable proportionately also to ‘wars’ between individuals and groups. Even when murderous violence is absent one can ‘kill’ by one’s words, looks, gestures, attitudes and behaviour. In these cases too, only non-violent love can lead to justice, reconciliation, peace and community.

Peace and Justice

There can be no peace without justice – real, full justice. But justice is not peace. Peace transcends justice.

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We are including some statements from different Church organizations on the impending attack of the US and Great Britain on Iraq.

**Statement On Iraq By The President Of The US
Conference Of Catholic Bishops**

As our nation and world face grave choices about war, peace, security and justice, this is a time for renewed prayer, continued moral reflection, and active and faithful citizenship. This is a time to reaffirm and raise again the serious ethical questions and concerns our Conference has expressed in a letter to President Bush last September and in a major statement of the full body of bishops last November.

We have no illusions about the behavior and intentions of, or dangers posed by, the Iraqi government. Once again, we renew our calls for the Iraqi leadership clearly to abandon efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction and to meet its obligations to destroy such weapons. We join with Pope John Paul II in insisting that Iraq make concrete commitments to meet the legitimate demands of the international community and to avoid war. The Iraqi regime has to recognize that it has not to date responded adequately to these demands and that it must act immediately and effectively to meet them, both to avoid armed conflict and to prove that it intends to change its ways.

We join with Pope John Paul in the conviction that war is not inevitable and that war is always a defeat for humanity. This is not a matter of ends, but means. Our bishops' conference continues to question the moral legitimacy of any preemptive, unilateral use of military force to overthrow the government of Iraq. To permit preemptive or preventive uses of military force to overthrow threatening or hostile regimes would create deeply troubling moral and legal precedents. Based on the facts that are known, it is difficult to justify resort to war against Iraq, lacking clear and adequate evidence of an imminent attack of a grave nature or Iraq's involvement in the terrorist attacks of September 11. With the Holy See and many religious leaders throughout the world, we believe that resort to war would not meet the strict conditions in Catholic teaching for the use of military force.

In our judgment, resort to war in this case should have broad international support. As crucial decisions draw near, we join the Holy See in once again urging all leaders to step back from the brink of war and to continue to work through the United Nations to contain, deter and disarm Iraq. We hope and pray that leaders in Iraq, the United Nations and in our own land will hear and heed the persistent pleas of Pope John Paul II to take concrete steps to avoid war and build peace based on respect for international law and for all human life.

If the decision to use military force is taken, the moral and legal constraints on the conduct of war must be observed. This is expected of every civilized nation. It surely is expected of ours. We are threatened by regimes and terrorists who ignore traditional norms governing the use of force; all the more reason that we must uphold and

reinforce them through our own actions. Any implied or express threats to defend against Iraq's weapons of mass destruction by using our own weapons of mass destruction would be clearly unjustified. The use of antipersonnel landmines, cluster bombs and other weapons that cannot distinguish between soldiers and civilians, or between times of war and times of peace, should also be avoided. In all our actions in war, including assessments of whether collateral damage is proportionate, we must value the lives and livelihood of Iraqi civilians as we would the lives and livelihood of our own families and our own citizens.

If there is armed conflict, we must be prepared for all of its implications and its aftermath. An already long-suffering Iraqi population could face terrible new burdens, and a region already full of conflict and refugees could see more conflict and many more refugees, with ethnic and religious minorities particularly vulnerable. A post-war Iraq would require a long-term commitment to reconstruction, humanitarian and refugee assistance, and establishment of a stable, democratic government at a time when the U.S. federal budget is overwhelmed by increased defense spending and the costs of war.

As pastors and teachers, we understand that there are no easy answers. People of good will may differ on how traditional norms apply in this situation. The gravity of the threat and whether force would be preemptive are matters of debate, as are the potential consequences of using or failing to use military force. We urge Catholics, especially lay men and women who are called to be leaven in society, to continue to think deeply about the choices we face, to review carefully the teaching of our Church and to speak out strongly in accord with their conscience. Our hearts and prayers go out especially to those who may bear the burden of these terrible choices — the men and women of our armed forces and their families, the people of Iraq, and the leaders of our nation and world who face momentous decisions of life and death, of war and peace.

At times like these, we turn to the Lord and ask for wisdom and courage. We Christians are called to be sentinels of peace, the Holy Father reminds us. We join with him in urging Catholics to dedicate fasting on Ash Wednesday for the conversion of hearts and the long-range vision of just decisions to resolve disputes with adequate and peaceful means. In the days ahead, our community of faith is called to reflection and discernment, dialogue and action, and especially to prayer and worship. As we approach the Lenten season, let us pray and fast that our nation and world will find effective ways short of war to secure justice, increase security and promote genuine peace for all of God's people.

Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory

President

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

February 26, 2003

Caritas Japan issued the attached statement on Iraq to the prime minister and the minister for foreign affairs of Japan on 27 February. The Japanese Government has decided to cooperate with the US and the UK government which have been showing aggressive military intentions against Iraq. We are very concerned that the recent behaviour of the Japanese Government, particularly in the Security Council, may contribute to strengthen an atmosphere of violence and conflict already existing in the world. This attitude of our government prompted us to issue this statement to Japanese government.

Mr. Junichiro Koizumi
Prime Minister
Government of Japan

Ms. Yoriko Kawaguchi
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Government of Japan

Dear Mr. Koizumi and Ms. Kawaguchi,

As a Catholic humanitarian aid agency, Caritas Japan has been in operation all over the world for emergency relief services and grass roots development projects based on the ideal of "Human Development" through our partnership network of Caritas Internationalis including Iraq. We have deep concern over the current Iraq crisis and the direction of discussions in the United Nations Security Council, and particularly the attitude of Japanese government. We are strongly against the use of military force to resolve any conflict among nations. Reflecting upon the memories and experiences of World War II, Japan has a crucial role to keep the peace in the Asian and Pacific region as based on its pacifist constitution, particularly on Article 9 which renounces war.

In recent years, Japanese Non-governmental Organisations have made enormous efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in the developing countries. The Japanese Government, however, has decided to take a step towards the opposite direction, leaving peace behind.

In Iraq, there are a great number of hardships already existing such as poverty, human rights violations against women and children, and refugees. When the war against Iraq breaks out, estimated victims of the war may include vulnerable people as well as the entire Iraqi civilian population.

Every person in the global society has the right for life and human dignity. We urge the Japanese Government to take immediate diplomatic action towards avoidance of the possible Iraqi war, not to tolerate any violence and to promote dialogue for peace. We urge the Japanese Government to listen to the voice of people longing for peace and take appropriate and immediate action as a political and economical leader in Asia.

In our prayer for peace and reconciliation,

Archbishop Leo Jun Ikenaga
President, Caritas Japan
27 February, 2003

Statement On Iraq By The Catholic Bishops' Conference Of England And Wales

1. War is a route from which there is no return. The need to avoid war is a cornerstone of Christian teaching. The UK and the USA are currently preparing to send their armed forces into war. If there is war, as well as military casualties on both sides thousands of Iraqi civilians will die. It is our moral responsibility to avoid this war unless, in the face of a grave and imminent threat, there is no other possible means to achieve the just end of disarming Iraq.

2. Military action can only be a last resort. We recognise United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441 as the legitimate expression of the international community's collective determination to disarm Iraq. At the same time we strongly urge the international community to pursue alternatives to war before it is too late.

3. Sanctions have not worked. They have imposed a decade of misery on ordinary people whilst allowing an exploitative regime to sustain itself in power. It is time to find a policy that offers Iraq a positive incentive to comply with the demands of the Security Council. In return for genuine disarmament, monitored and verified by the United Nations, the lifting of comprehensive sanctions, and the reintegration of Iraq into the international community, is the route which must now be explored.

4. Grief for those killed and wounded in war will be the more agonising if their loss results from an armed conflict that could have been avoided without compromise to the common good. We pray that both sides step back from the brink of war. Along with our fellow bishops in other countries we ask our Catholic community and all people of faith to join us in this prayer.

A Call for a Peaceful Solution to the Iraqi Crisis

Caritas Internationalis urges the international community to give absolute priority to finding a diplomatic and political solution to the Iraqi crisis to avoid a major humanitarian disaster. The use of military force in Iraq could bring incalculable costs to a civilian population that has suffered so much from war, repression, and debilitating economic sanctions.

Caritas Internationalis expresses its full solidarity with the “Confrérie de la Charité” (Caritas-Iraq), the local Church authorities, and all the people of Iraq. The latter will be seriously affected by any military operation, especially at a time when they are already suffering from the sanctions regime imposed and enforced by the United Nations Security Council. We thus associate ourselves with the appeals put forward in recent months by religious and civil society leaders throughout the world who convincingly argue for a diplomatic solution to the current crisis.

We invite all persons of good will to join their voices with those who reject the current descent into a spiral of violence, and to pray and to take active steps to avoid a catastrophe. Several members of our Confederation—particularly those in countries that might participate in military action - are making efforts to raise the awareness about the consequences of war with the public and governments in their countries. They are urging their leaders to take all possible steps to work for peace and avoid resorting to violence.

An Already Dire Humanitarian Situation

In a reference to Iraq in 1998, Pope John Paul II said, *“The weak and the innocent cannot pay for mistakes for which they are not responsible. I therefore pray that this country will regain its dignity, experience normal development, and thus be in a position to re-establish fruitful relations with other peoples, within the framework of international law and world solidarity.”*

This statement is as true today as it was then.

Caritas Internationalis has never ceased appealing to the international community to suspend sanctions and end the economic blockade. A delegation of Caritas Internationalis visited Iraq from 21 to 26 October 2002 and saw first hand how the sanctions imposed on Iraq since the end of the Gulf War have proven to be ineffective, cruel, and dangerous.

Sanctions are ineffective because the regime - which is the official target - is unaffected by them. They are cruel because it is the poor and vulnerable persons in the country who feel the brunt of their effects (hunger, malnutrition, disease, and a dramatic increase in child mortality). Finally, sanctions are dangerous because they have contributed greatly to damaging the structure of Iraqi society, and given rise to strong feelings of resentment towards Western powers.

The Consequences of War

Already seriously weakened, the Iraqi people would pay an exorbitant price in the event of an attack. A conflict would inevitably lead to the deaths of thousands of people, and even greater numbers would be displaced or become refugees. In Iraq today, between 14 and 16 million persons (two thirds of the population) are entirely dependent on food rations distributed under the UN Oil-for-Food-Programme, purchased through the sale of Iraqi oil. In the event of a conflict and the inevitable destruction of communication and transport infrastructures, the whole system could be paralysed within a few hours. Likewise, as happened in the conflict of 1990-91, the water and sewage systems would be rapidly paralysed due to a lack of electricity, and polluted water could cause major outbreaks of disease and lead to epidemics.

Article 54, Paragraph 2, of Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 prohibits attacks upon “objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”. In the case of Iraq, this would include ports, roads, railways and power lines, thus, impeding the civilian population to have access to food and water, and consequently, contravening also Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Article 54, Paragraph 3b states that “in no event shall actions against these objects be taken which may be expected to leave the civilian population with such inadequate food or water as to cause its starvation or force its movement”. It is thus hard to see how a war could be waged against Iraq without violating international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights.

Caritas Internationalis Says No to War

Caritas Internationalis bases its analysis on the values of justice and peace that form a key basis of the social teachings of the Church. It is Caritas Internationalis’ firm belief that an attack on Iraq would not fulfil the moral criteria that might ultimately justify the use of military force, as they are laid down in the texts of the Catholic Church (in particular the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n° 2309)

In his address to diplomats accredited to the Vatican on 13 January of this year, Pope John Paul II emphatically said, *“No to war.”* He added, *“War cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of ensuring the common good, except as the very last option, and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations.”* Caritas Internationalis joins his call to prevent any war.

One should only resort to war when all other means have been clearly shown to be impractical or ineffective. The United States Catholic Bishops’ Conference is also

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science and medicine, information and technology using our intellectual capabilities can still justify the use of violence to settle human and social differences. Is there, therefore, a lack of commitment to dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation as the way forward for the human race? Yes, it is true that there is a lack of commitment because we do not see any other way but the way of war and violence to protect ourselves from enemies who threaten our very way of life. In a divided world of rich and poor, races and religions, we still have to re-discover the common source of humanity rooted in the sacred and the divine, the transcendental and the supreme.

Unfortunately, in this context of violence and counter-violence, many religions actively preach the "New Testament" Gospel of love and forgiveness but at the same time, live the "Old Testament" axiom of "An eye for an eye, A tooth for a tooth". Revenge and retaliation becomes a way of life that has been acceptable, all in the name of global peace and democracy and the right to self-determination by the use of force.

It is therefore prophetic that one of the voices that is heard loud and clear in the divided world today, is that of our Holy Father, John Paul II in his invitation to intense prayer for World Peace. He recently made a renewed appeal for prayer and fasting for peace in the world, especially in the Holy Land and Iraq. He reiterated an announcement he made a week earlier, designating Ash Wednesday as a day of prayer and fasting to avert

war and violence. "This year we will undertake the penitential journey toward Easter with a greater commitment to prayer and fasting for peace, challenged by the growing threat of war," the Pope said. "Peace, in fact, is a gift of God to be invoked with humble and insistent trust," he stressed. "Without surrendering before difficulties, it is also necessary to seek and go down every possible avenue to avoid war, which always brings mourning and grave consequences for all," he said.

While delivering his message, the Holy Father explained that Lent is a time oriented to conversion of heart, "during which the faithful are invited to look with greater intensity at Christ, who prepares himself to fulfil the supreme sacrifice of the cross." John Paul II emphasised the importance of fasting, including interior fasting, a penitential practice with which "the Christian prepares himself to follow Christ," which "helps to understand better the difficulties and sufferings of so many of our brothers oppressed by hunger, poverty and war," and moves one to acts of solidarity. The Pope's insistence on prayer and fasting is in keeping with the multiple meetings that he and his aides are holding to avoid the outbreak of war against Iraq, and to bring the Holy Land conflict to an end.

We pray that during this period of Lent, our communities grow in our awareness that it is by returning to the essentials of our faith, that we can truly be proponents of peace today.

Br. Anthony Rogers, FSC
Executive Secretary

From the Directors of British Overseas Aid Agencies

"The UK is preparing for a possible war against Iraq. It is hard to see how a war could be waged without violating international humanitarian law and increasing suffering among the civilian population.

In peace or war the Iraqi Government bears prime responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. But that responsibility is shared. With Iraq's economy undermined by war and sanctions, up to 16 million people more than two thirds of the population - are dependent on a fragile food rationing system set up by the international community. Malnutrition, especially among women and children, is widespread. Any military action targeting Iraq's ports, roads and railways would cause major disruption to the food distribution system.

A recent visit to Iraq by aid agencies, as well as the experience of those working on the ground, confirmed that the water and sanitation system is on the verge of collapse. Clean water supplies, as well as the sewage system, depend on electricity. If power lines and power stations are targeted, sewage will not be pumped away and clean water will not be available. Inevitably, disease will sweep through a population whose child mortality rates have already doubled in the last decade.

Article 54 of Additional Protocol 1 of the Geneva Conventions prohibits attacks upon "objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population". In the particular circumstances of Iraq, this would include ports, roads, railways and power lines. The Conventions state that "in no event shall actions against these objects be taken which may be expected to leave the civilian population with such inadequate food or water as to cause its starvation or force its movement".

We urge all parties to weigh the far-reaching consequences of any military action in terms of civilian lives and livelihoods.

Julian Filochowski, Director, CAFOD
Daleep Mukarji, Director, Christian Aid
Mike Aaronson, Director General, Save the Children "

Salil Shetty, Director, ActionAid
Barbara Stocking, Director, Oxfam GB

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Br. Anthony Rogers, FSC
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concerned that war against Iraq could have unpredictable consequences not only for Iraq but for peace and stability elsewhere in the Middle East. In their Statement on Iraq from 13 November 2002, the Bishops said, *"The use of force might provoke the very kind of attacks that it is intended to prevent, could impose terrible new burdens on an already long-suffering civilian population, and could lead to wider conflict and instability in the region. War against Iraq could also detract from the responsibility to help build a just and stable order in Afghanistan and could undermine broader efforts to stop terrorism."*

Our wish for the Iraqi people is that they have the same freedoms and peace enjoyed by people in democracies throughout the world. However, our purpose in this position

paper is principally humanitarian, not political, because as we are part of the Church and therefore aim to be 'experts in humanity' (Pope John Paul II), we deal first and foremost with the human person.

Caritas Internationalis appeals to world leaders and decision-makers to take all possible steps to actively promote a political solution. We reaffirm our support for all persons and all groups who are engaged in the building of peace, and in promoting justice, reconciliation, and development. Through prayer, advocacy, campaigning, and our humanitarian actions, we also commit ourselves unequivocally to pursuing this aim.

Caritas Internationalis
Vatican City
21 January 2003