

Peace

These are trying times for all Americans and for people around the world. In confronting Saddam Hussein, and others like him, we face a new kind of danger--a danger threatening the disruption of the pursuit of a life of peace, a danger placing not only our own citizens but also those of other nations under the anxious pall of terror.

War, terrorism and fighting have characterized this world's history and are clear testimony to the imperfection of the human race. In fact, human nature has a desperately evil side, which draws people into quarrels that can eventually develop into war.

Many wonder how to reconcile the teachings of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, with the horrors of war. In the early centuries of the Church, this very question arose and was addressed by one of the great church Fathers, St. Augustine. He understood that flawed human hearts sometimes pursue the path of evil, seeking to oppress and even destroy one's fellowman. Can there be times when people of good will may resist such evil? What is the role of the state in protecting its citizens from aggression, whether within its own borders or from another country?

St. Augustine understood that the state is a God-ordained institution and that its primary leader is 'God's servant...who does not bear the sword for nothing...but is an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the evildoer.'

He wrote that nations, in defense of their own people and in order to preserve the peace, may declare war in the case of a just cause and for the purpose of self-defense.

Martin Luther, the great 16th century Christian reformer, spoke of the reality of this tension in terms of two kingdoms, both under the rule of God but each ruling differently. The kingdom of the left hand is the secular kingdom ruled by kings, presidents and governors. Its guiding principles are human reason and the sword. The kingdom of the right hand is the Church, whose power lies in the forgiveness and mercy won by Christ's death and resurrection.

All people live in the kingdom of the left, whether they are or are not believers in Christ. It is here that our elected officials rule by reason and, when necessary, by the sword.

President Bush faces a great challenge when confronting a new kind of evil that no longer is neatly contained or defined by political borders. He is charged with protecting American citizens and American interests from those who would destroy the peace and terrorize.

Our President has been entrusted with the sword. He may have to use it. We pray for God's wisdom to guide him in the execution of his duty, that peace may prevail for us and for all people.

The Bible tells of a peace in Christ that gives confidence and hope for the future. It is a peace borne of His mercy and forgiveness. We pray this peace for all people everywhere and that our world may be spared the crucible of war.



The Rev. Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick, President
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Road
Kirkwood, MO 63122