

## **Wars And Rumours Of War**

Editorial from the FAITH Magazine January-February 2003

The kings of ancient Babylon built temples to their moon god in the form of stepped pyramids known as ziggurats. Like many ancient rulers they saw themselves as the 'sons of heaven', and their temples were not so much places of humble worship and prayer as declarations of their own prestige and spiritual power. They already dominated everything on earth, now they tried to reach up to the heavens, asserting their power to bring the whole cosmos under their royal sway. The inspired writers of the Bible saw in such arrogance and ambition not only a perversion of the religious instinct, but the primary cause of division and alienation within the family of man - wars, tribalism, racial conflict and communication breakdown. All of this was neatly summed up and symbolised in the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-10) or, one could say, the Ziggurat of Babylon. Ancient Babylon lies in what is now Iraq, and maybe it is not without some symbolic significance that this is where the world community now finds itself on the brink of yet another war, made all the more terrible by the awful destructive power of modern weapons. This latest threat to world peace has brought into sharp focus again the urgent need for the human race to think and act together as a single family of nations, and at the same time it has highlighted the enormous difficulties that still lie in the way of achieving that goal. One problem is that not everyone shares enthusiasm for that goal. The USA, for example, has been a reluctant and financially non-contributing presence at the table of the United Nations for decades, mostly because of its sense of independent self sufficiency as a superpower. But recent events have changed that, with America now accepting the need for a united front and collaborative solutions to the most pressing world problems of peace and security. Islam has its own dream of forming a single 'umma' – family or heartland – of humanity, but it would be constituted in exclusively Islamic terms according to the harsh sharia law of course. And whilst many mainstream Muslims would utterly reject violence as the way to achieve their dream, it is evident that there are those among them who think differently and some leading mullahs are, to say the least, ambivalent on the subject. But for many Protestant Christian groups the mere mention of the United Nations, let alone the idea of any further degree of worldwide political integration, is the very stuff of Antichrist. The notion of 'one world government' is seen as the sinister brainchild of anti-Christian Freemasonry. And it has to be said that there are extremely powerful forces at work in high places today which are seeking to build a world society without religion and especially without the Church. But it is the specifically secular and godless element in that ambition that is of the Antichrist, not the idea of global integration and co-operation as such. That is something close to the heart of Catholic Christianity. Humanist propaganda would have us believe that the rejection of religion is what allowed the great leap forward in science, technology and social development over the last hundred years or so. It is therefore assumed that the Church is against all

progress and so they routinely portray the Church as a backward social force, opposed to modernity on all levels. But far from the Church being anti-progressive she holds the key to the future of humanity. The separation of social progress from any spiritual deepening and doctrinal development has actually been the great tragedy of the modern world. This fracture in the human environment was the root cause of the bitter global wars and avoidable human disasters which so scarred the twentieth century, and it is still the cause of many of our ills today. By trying to assert ultimate control over creation independently of God, man only manages to create more oppression, division, pollution and alienation from his own happiness. The recent exclusion of the Church from the committee for drafting the constitution of the European Union and the growing pressure to exclude the Vatican from the UN itself are symptoms of the same phenomenon and will have similar if not worse results.

All of this confirms the desperate need for a new synthesis of faith and reason which will re-vindicate the authority of Christ in his Church to be the ultimate control and direction at the heart of society. Such a synthesis must have social and political implications as well as strictly theological. The Good News must extend into every sphere of life, for all of creation and every facet of human life in fact falls under the sovereignty of God.

It sometimes surprises people to discover that a vision of humanity becoming ever more closely integrated as a single family of nations is also a natural part of the Catholic world view. We have grown so used to the idea of a sharply defined - and often sharply defended - nation-state as the basic unit of society in recent centuries, that we have forgotten how that idea arose largely out of the individualistic spirit of the Protestant Reformation. The earlier medieval model of a transnational 'Christendom' was a wider and more all embracing reality that cut across many boundaries and integrated many ethnic groups, languages and cultures more or less harmoniously. What kept it united – albeit imperfectly and with many struggles – was the common doctrine, morals and spirituality of the Catholic faith. Catholic Christendom in Europe was, therefore, an early approximation to the final ideal of the Kingdom of God, in which the whole human race is united heart and mind in a common society under Christ as its King. The coming together of all men in a global village is, in any case, the natural dynamic of history. Humanity began as a single family group, and eventually as the population increases and technology progresses, it is inevitable that we should come together again on a much wider scale at the end of history. No part of the human race can any longer live in isolation from the rest, so we have already constructed some degree of international law and global institutions of shared government, however shaky and inadequate they may currently be. This has been done simply from the necessity of exercising rational and just control over modern life with its instant communication, worldwide trade and ever faster travel. The recent setting up an International Court is also a logical extension of this fact, and opposition to it from larger power blocs is wrong in principle and cannot last in practice, although it is true that there are many

questions yet to be answered about its constitution and the details of its working. The development of a single world society – a united states of the world - need not mean the establishment of some remote and overarching dictatorship. The Catholic principle of 'subsidiarity' recognises the right of regional communities to self determination and ownership of their own family culture. But the same principles of Catholic social ethics also state that we do not have an absolute right to national and ethnic attachments, any more than we have an absolute right to private property, especially if this is to the detriment of our neighbours and of the human community as a whole. National and tribal interests must be integrated into a wider commitment to the extended family of the whole human race. This will eventually need some definite centre and structure of governmental organisation at world level. Such a reality, therefore, is not in itself to be feared or despised as un-Christian, indeed in some sense it is in accord with the very goal of Christianity - the 'union of all things in heaven and earth' in Jesus Christ (cf. Ephesians 1: 1-10). But the really crucial question is what sort of society will the worldwide federated State of Man be. Will it be based on the adoration of Man by himself, asserting his mighty scientific mind and his stubborn will to take control over all life on earth? Or will it be based on submission to the Mind God made flesh and blood in Jesus Christ and the Will of God revealed by the Holy Spirit? The first way is the way of the Tower of Babel , which can only bring more division, oppression and warfare into the human family. The other way is the Way of the Gospel which brings Life. The choice before us therefore is stark and apocalyptic. We have lived with the first way, the philosophy of scientific humanism now for at least half a century, and in that time it has shown no signs of bringing peace, stability or fulfilment to humanity. The threatened war with Iraq is just the latest example of a fractured and unstable world order. And it is certainly not a fight between good and evil in simplistic terms, for there is immorality at work on all sides. There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein is a monstrous tyrant, but there are many others monstrous tyrants in the world and Western governments have few qualms about leaving them in power, especially where there is lucrative trading to be done. There is also little evidence that Iraq is directly linked to the extremist Arab terror network 'Al Qaeda'. The real danger seems to be that Iraq could blockade the Western powers from any influence in the middle East by the threat of at least equal military force, and that by doing this they could take control of precious and dwindling oil stocks, which could eventually break the whole Western economy. Zealous Muslims would also find the thought of excluding the morally decadent West from the 'umma' highly attractive, even if the figure of Saddam Hussein is not. This is indeed a serious consideration, however even if a pre-emptive strike on Iraq could be justified on the traditional principles of a just war – and that is doubtful as our Bishops have rightly pointed out – the deeper problems facing our world would not go away. Greed, cruelty and grasping at personal power are by no means the exclusive vices of the Iraqi dictator. Indeed they are almost the hallmark of Western humanism as a way of life. We have been busy building our own 'Tower of Babel' – our own culture of death based on lust, consumerism and self-adoration – which can only lead to more self destructive wars of economic conflict in the

future. Tyrants will always need resisting from time to time, and weapons of mass destruction should be dismantled wherever they are found and by whoever they are held. They are as immoral in the bunkers of the West as they are in the palaces of Baghdad . But lasting answers to world peace and security can only be addressed at the level of shared spiritual values. This is the much greater and more urgent task which will require examining our consciences, not just inspecting our military hardware. The way forward is not the way of the current secular West which is doomed in its decadence, however temporarily victorious it may prove in battle. The truth is that Western civilisation is crumbling from within. It is the meek who will inherit the earth – which means those who are docile to God's will – not the selfish and materialistic. Nor indeed is it the way of Islam, although that is in many respects more noble and spiritual. But the way of Christ is more noble still, more human and more Divine. We know that Muhammad, for example, commanded women to veil themselves so as not to provoke the lusts of men, but Christ commanded men to veil their hearts so as not to look with lust in their eyes. In this we can see a metaphor for the whole of Christianity. It is a way of grace and inner transformation, not of exterior repression, a way of personal redemption through relationship with the Saviour, a way of communion with God through the flesh and blood of the crucified and risen Lord. And this is the key to all social progress too - the Gospel of life and grace which touches the inner person and so transforms the world from within.

In the end only Christ can give the world the unity and peace it longs for. Only his Word and his Way, vindicated again as the clear and certain truth about life, love and the universe, can form the secure basis for the new global society that is coming. Declaring war on the modern king and people of Babylon will at best be a temporary respite from that task, maybe even a distraction from it, possibly plunging us into unimaginable horror. Our real crusade lies in dismantling our own Tower of Babel and rebuilding the Kingdom of God .