

Book Reviews

The Price of Peace: Just War in the Twenty-First Century

By Charles Reed and David Ryall

Reviewed by Group Captain Ian Shields

In the Spring 2009 issue of *Airpower Review* I considered *The Past as Prologue* (now on the Chief of the Air Staff's reading List for 2009); as with that book this volume is a collection of essays based on a conference. While *The Past as Prologue* has immediate and obvious appeal for Airpower practitioners, a book asking how the Just War theory, most commonly associated with the thirteenth century writings of Thomas Aquinas, might be applicable to contemporary conflict is less obviously required reading. And yet moral accountability must remain at the heart of why and how we resort to conflict to resolve problems, for without such a moral approach the sacrifice of which we, the Services, may be called to give is meaningless. Therefore I suggest that moral and ethical dimensions continue to play their part, and the Just War theory remains an excellent starting point for such considerations.

Let me say here what this book is not: it is not an explanation of the Just war theory itself. Indeed, any reader of the book will benefit from an understanding of the Just War theory and even of their application; for such an introduction (and well worth a read in its own right) is the very short tome *Just War: The Just War Tradition – Ethics in Modern Warfare* by Charles Guthrie and Michael Quinlan

(London: Bloomsbury, 2007). But what *The Price of Peace* does represent is a collection of pieces by some of the leading clerical and academic thinkers from both sides of the Atlantic that examine the ethical and moral dimensions of contemporary conflict using the Just War theory as a basis – and produce some challenging and thought-provoking conclusions.

In order to judge the strengths and weaknesses of this book – and it has both – it is important to place it in context. Its origins lie in a symposium held in March 2005 on 'Just War in the Twenty-First Century' and it is the timing that is critical to an appreciation of this book's limitations: the symposium was strongly influenced by the 2003 Gulf War and the arguments raging at the time about its justness. And sadly, for me, the first section – "A Framework for Ethical Decision Making: State and Civil Society-Based Approaches" – nearly led me to abandoning the book in total, due to its overtly religious, and sometimes pacifist (not the same thing), themes. However, the remaining two-thirds of the book more than makes up for this slightly disappointing beginning. The second of the five sections, comprising four essays, considers how to respond to contemporary threats in a just manner. These extremely timely, profound and

thought-provoking essays, which in Just War terms corresponds to *jus ad bellum*, explore how we should deal with humanitarian interventions, respond to terrorism, tackle rogue regimes, and balance moral with legal stands. They are followed by a section on Fighting Wars Justly (or *jus in bello* in Just War parlance), with two more apposite pieces on the ethics of effects-based warfare, and on the just conduct of war against radical Islamic terror and insurgencies. Given advances in technology that increasingly blur traditional moral boundaries - one wonders how Aquinas would have addressed the ethical questions of fighting a war when one side is not experiencing combat or being placed in any danger - this is highly relevant, particularly to Airpower practitioners.

The fourth part examines what Michael Walzer identified as a new strand: just actions after war, or *jus post bellum*, actions in places such as East Timor once the fighting had finished. While there is not yet universal acceptance that this is really an element of the Just War theory, the three chapters in Securing Peace Justly, more than hold their own. For those who have now reached p. 275 the good news is that the four short pieces, almost *op eds*, that form the fifth and concluding section are all *tour de forces* and deserve close attention. As with the opening section, they alternate between American and British viewpoints, but there is a balance with all the views that I found lacking in the first part.

This book is not just for those interested in ethics or the nuances of the Just War theory, but offers a fascinating insight into some

of the complexities that we face with contemporary warfare. As Airpower practitioners we face ethical challenges unlike those of our naval and military colleagues, and are at the forefront of the employment of new technology, technology that is changing the conduct of war faster than ever. As such, we should keep ourselves abreast of issues such as ethics, for without this understanding we lose the moral high ground so vital to our contemporary challenges. This book will prepare all of us better for the challenges we face today and in the future, and I unhesitatingly recommend it.

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