Wars and Rumors of Wars

Millions around the world are thankful today that world leaders have managed to end at least two wars in the last week, one between Israel and Iran and the other between the Hutu and Tutsi populations in Rwanda. Although the US News media seldom reports on this conflict, over one million people have died in this war. And that is in a very small portion of the world. Jesus said there would be, "…wars and rumors of wars," in a first century context. But that is still true today. Much of human history can be marked by wars.

A legitimate question is, "Can war ever be justified?" Actually, God, Himself, commanded war times as His punishment on severely sinful (and unrepentant) nations. We see an example of this in Genesis 15:16 and Joshua 24:8. On a number of occasions God has used one nation to punish another, and that happened in war.

Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225 - 1274) was a brilliant Bible scholar who addressed the problem of whether or not a war can ever be just (accomplish justice). His treatise on "Just War" is a portion of his larger work entitled, *Summa Theologica* (or *Disputed Questions on Truth)*, written from 1256 - 1259. Aquinas carefully examined principles in scripture to develop his thesis which includes these major items:

1. War must be called by a proper sovereign (king, president, etc.) NOT merely by an individual.
2. It must be for a just cause (to stop evil violence, restore what was seized unjustly, etc.)
3. Combatants in a just war must have right intentions (this covers what happens both in a soldier's mind and what happens on the battlefield).
4. Qualifying conditions, such as justification of self-defense, respecting non-combatants, not targeting civilians, the good accomplished outweighs the evils of war, minimal force used to achieve just ends (and several others).

In my considered opinion, Aquinas has written a brilliant, practical treatise on biblical principles, as evidenced by the weight and respect given it for over seven hundred years! If you wish to study the work further, just do an internet search for "Just War Aquinas" and you can read both his work as well as a myriad of analyses and comments by others over the centuries.

In today's warring world, we would do well to heed the biblical principles elucidated by Aquinas as we pray for all involved in any war, personal or international.

Personally, may we all remember Jesus' words in Matthew 5:44, "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

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