

A strange silence: Where isn't there a resounding Christian voice protesting the Iraq war?

From the Editors in the [December 28, 2004](#) issue

After the U.S. military began its assault on insurgents in Fallujah, we received an email from a reader asking, “And where are the churches?” The writer’s assumption was that churches should be rising up with moral outrage at the destruction of an Iraqi city and the forced evacuation of its citizens.

Indeed, where are the churches? Why isn’t there a resounding Christian voice protesting this war as it did the Vietnam war? The times are very different from the 1960s. There is not the same culture of protest that was honed by the civil rights movement. There is no military draft to stoke the fires of protest. There is also a hopeless sense that those in power are not listening to critical voices.

An additional problem: it’s hard to know what to say constructively. The U.S. can’t walk away from Iraq, leaving chaos behind and opening the door to a wider civil war. The best option— internationalizing the peacekeeping and rebuilding efforts—is unlikely to happen. The rest of the world is not in a mood to clean up the mess created by the U.S.

At times like these the church must rely on what it does best. It must turn to three fundamental weapons in its spiritual arsenal: truth-telling, repenting and praying.

As with all wars, the truth must be told about this war. What really is going on? (See [Peter Dula’s on-the-ground perspective](#) in this issue.) How many are being killed? The mainstream media largely accepts the administration’s claims about the number of insurgents being killed, whereas independent reporters say that the government often counts civilian deaths in its figures for “insurgent” deaths. The administration seems to be living in a bubble of imagined progress in Iraq; that bubble needs to be burst.

Truth-telling should be motivated not by a “gotcha” mentality, but by a desire to know what is going on—and to encourage repentance where needed. Repentance doesn’t just mean feeling sorry for one’s sins. It entails a readiness to change course and a willingness to make amends.

Finally, the church must cultivate the habit of prayer, praying for the victims of war, for the leaders who engineered this war and now prosecute it, for ourselves and our children—for all who will have to live with the war and its effects for years to come. Such prayer begins with Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem: “If only you knew the things that make for peace.”

Prayer is not about pulling divine strings to help clean up the messes humans create. Prayer is a declaration that the God of Jesus Christ is sovereign, not Mars (the god of war). Prayer acknowledges that, though God is not a controlling God, in some ultimate sense God is in control.

A strategic blunder on the scale of the preemptive war against Iraq will probably not be resolved by more strategic decisions. Einstein once observed that problems cannot be solved by using the same kind of thinking that created them. Another dimension is needed.

For that dimension, in this Advent season, we wait, living in repentance and prayer and seeking to tell the truth.