

A Stupid, Unjust and Criminal War: Iraq 2001-2007, by Andrew Greeley, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007, pages xvi 215, £11.99, \$19, €14.99, ¥1,828, ISBN: 0-978-1570757327.

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Andrew M. Greeley is an octogenarian Irish-American Roman Catholic priest, sociologist, journalist and novelist. *A Stupid, Unjust and Criminal War: Iraq 2001-2007* consists of a selection of homiletic writings that formed a newspaper column. Taken from the *Chicago Sun-Times*, there are 122 short sermon-like articles in total (approximately 650-700 words each), from the years 2001-2007, written as the events unfolded. Each article/sermon has a title (a short sound-bite headline), and all are simply presented chronologically. The only chapter-like divisions in the book are groupings into years: 2001, 2002 ... ending with 2007 (between 9 and 25 articles/sermons selected from each year). There is a strong journalistic style to his comments, which are often reacting to news stories in the media, however, the amount of theology and explicit Christian preaching within these writings is surprisingly high and well-informed. Greeley knows and understands the Just War Theory; he also knows the Bible

Greeley sets out his credentials in the introduction, which also contains a sound outline of the Roman Catholic-derived, Just War Theory, and how some Americans see the War on Terrorism as a Just War. Greeley's aims and objective are simple: a constant criticism and denunciation of the invasion and war against Iraq following on from 9/11. His objective is achieved through a combination of Christian preaching and socio-political analysis. Unlike many politicians, Greeley does not appear to have concealed motives, a hidden agenda or undisclosed and clandestine connections that mask his real intentions. His writing is honest—rare in the field of society and politics. In the early examples of these columns he challenges the common belief in America in late 2001 and into 2002 that this was a Holy War. On 16 December 2001 he reminded his readers that “Christmas is a major anti-death festival ... Al-Qaeda can't get us because, finally, it can't take away the life that Christmas reflects for us.” (pp. 13, 15). A common theme of Greeley's throughout this work is the paradoxical contradiction, as he sees it, inherent in the question, how do you morally justify a war against terror if you fight terrorism with terrorism? As the years draw on he comments more and more on the political

quagmire that the 9/11 wars appear to have descended into. Furthermore the central Biblical and ecclesial framework that any criticism must be couched in begins to become marginalized. However, Greeley consistently reminds his readers that it is for heaven to judge, not us—God in Christ judges, not those of strong politicized opinions. Perhaps the question that gets lost as the years of column writing move on and the war on terror drags out, is have we won? Have we defeated terrorism? Can terrorism, this side of the eschaton, be defeated? Greeley comments, “How many terrorists did we get, I wonder.” (p. 51.) Greeley towards the end of his stint on this column for the *Chicago Sun-Times* focuses on the number of, and reasons for, American deaths: “God forgive us for the war, especially those who voted for it” (p. 193.), “...if we remain silent, the very stones will cry out” (p. 215; referring to Luke 19:40).

Greeley’s stance is explicit from the title: “a stupid, unjust and criminal war,” however, he supported and championed the war in Afghanistan. He writes, “I am not an ideological pacifist. I supported the Afghan war and lament only that the administration became too involved in Iraq to finish it.” (p. xiii.). How should America have responded to 9/11? Is it ever just to kill others? How do we perceive the will of God in these tortuously difficult situations? Greeley does not consider such questions in his support for the Afghan war, while speaking against the invasion of Iraq, or even how all becomes marginalized by Jesus’s injunction to turn the other cheek.

So, what has Greeley’s book got to do with theology generally, what has it to inform Evangelicalism specifically? This is a book that should be dipped into by Christians as to the dangers of war, and the chaos that ensues from war, how aims soon fragment into objectives that even the most idealistic of exponents soon have no control over, and how rare the justification for violent revenge ever is. Above all it should serve as a salutary reminder of the eschatological demand by Jesus that we should be reconciled *at all costs*. Ethics are not relative (certainly not relative to the transitory demands of a secular government), a Christocentric categorical imperative asserts that there are moral absolutes issuing from and relating to the economic Trinity, which the New Testament specifically attests to. Any consideration of the war on terror must therefore be from the eschatological context of Jesus’ sayings: the reality we all will face in judgement (Matthew 5:21-26) the return of the Landlord to the vineyard to settle accounts (Mark 12 and Luke 20) and weigh, sift (Luke

22:31), all according to his righteous judgement (Luke 12:58), the perils of judging others (Matthew 7:1-2; Luke 6:37; John 8:15-16), the dangers of religious practice when we are estranged, irreconciled, from our neighbour in worship (Mark 5:23-26), and the unconditional importance of reconciliation because those who are reconciled reflect Christ's commandment, and thus are not judged (John 12:47-48). This leads us to conclude that Jesus is neither a pacifist nor a militarist: reconciliation is the imperative if we are to avoid a judgement that condemns us. Greely does not really develop this biblical-ground in his criticisms. However, this volume is a useful, albeit flawed, contribution to an explicitly Christian debate around war and peace issuing from a Postmodern society, a discussion often dominated in the media by a secularist agenda.

