

Sion Gough Hughes

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Can I have a box to stand on? Good evening everybody. Most of you I think I've never seen before if not spoken to; forty of you knew I hadn't. Most of you have seen me or heard me at some stage or other I'm sure. Just to fill you in on a little bit of background, I'm not here on the cause of the side of peace, I'm not here on the side of war; I'm here just to talk to you. I come from a military family. My father was a soldier, my uncles are all soldiers, my grandfather was a soldier and so was my great grandfather. Some say my mother was a soldier but I don't believe that. I, myself was a soldier. I, when I was eighteen years old, seventeen years old I signed up in the military in the UK following in my father's footsteps and had a wonderful wonderful time. And then the first Gulf War came along and we went to Iraq and we had a wonderful time as boys of 18-19 do. We drove in tanks and we flew in planes and we rode in ships and we fired guns and it was all a big adventure. And then we came home and we were immediately posted to Northern Ireland. Which wasn't so good. That was a terrible place to be and not long after that there were a few incidents that had happened and I decided that I would leave the military.

I left and in natural progression, I went from the military straight to theological college. Doesn't everybody? I did my my theological degree and then I trained for the ministry and then with a years work with the Presbyterian Church; I went back into the military, I went back as a Padre into the army. So I've seen it from both sides. I've seen the soldiers' side and I've seen the Padre's side. Oh and I did a masters degree. Don't ask me why um though I did. umm my, my masters degree was on the idea of just war and this is what I want to talk to you tonight about very briefly.

Is there ever a just war? War and Christianity is what we're talking about this evening and one of the things I looked at very much in in my thesis and then also in my padre life; life as a padre was is there ever a just war? Now, completely agree with what Barry, Barry said earlier on which was, we do need padres' in the military, chaplains' in the military really really do. People are there; we're needed there. As Christian people we are needed there, whether we agree with what we're doing or not we are definitely needed there. But is there ever a just war? Can we ever say there is a just war? Let me take the Gulf War which is what I know, that was not a just war in my humble opinion. I don't believe in fighting for the price of petrol which is really what it came down to um if we're being totally honest here. And I, I could say a lot more about that but I'm not going to mention George Bush.

Northern Ireland, now there's a lot of cont, a lot of controversy about Northern Ireland. I've been there in two states; I went there as a soldier and I went there as a Padre. Is there ever a just war? I really don't think so. One of the things I have a pleasure of doing in Melbourne is I'm the Padre to the Normandy Veterans Association. Um and we see some wonderful wonderful people there. Very Very brave people, June the sixth, 1944; you know the whole D-Day landing and all the things that happened around the Second World War. It doesn't look like it but some of you may even remember that. You're all looking very young this evening but some of you might. I don't but is there ever a just war? I've heard it said and one of the things people have said to me, Yes it. No war is just except for the Second World War, now that was a; we had to do that. Now I'm not going to get into the argument whether we should or shouldn't have, I'm not, I, I, I'm not going to get into that. All I, all I would say is; if it started out just, it certainly didn't end as just. Dresden and Coventry are two places that jump immediately to mind. And if you want to ask that about me later on, I'm happy to go on further into that.

As Christian people though where do we stand? As people, the majority (I think) that are here this evening err as church going people; where do we stand? Think of the words of Jesus "there will always be wars and rumours of wars" (taken from the Old Testament) "there will always be wars and rumours of wars". As Christians we are called to minister where we are, in what ever situation we find our self; as a Padre I have the privilege of talking to people in very very tense situations. It's a leveller. As a, as a Presbyterian, as a Presbyterian at the time I was in Northern Ireland now, I don't need to explain to you the difference between Presbyterians and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland. No need at all. And while I was there, I was called out cause one of the guys in our unit had been shot. He wasn't badly injured but he was shot, he was cold, he was scared, he was frightened and I was the closest padre. "Will you go out to see him?" Flap jacket on, big helmet, big cross; couldn't miss who I was. Off I went, I went to see this chap and he said to me "father" and I knew immediately what I was dealing with and Presbyterian minister in the middle of Northern Ireland talking to a Roman Catholic.

"Father" he said "am I going to die?" I'd already talked to the medic and I knew he wasn't. And I said "no son your not, you're your going to be fine, we're going to get you back" and he said "before I move, I'm need communion" well he said I need mass actually but I'm bringing my prejudice into that, I need mass. Well I said, I'm a and Presbyterian and he said "I don't care, I don't care, I need, I need mass, I need communion". And all we had, and err I didn't take out my communion thing with me, I didn't have time to think about it. All we had was a hip flask of whiskey and a packet of digestive biscuits. And we sat there, the two of us and an army medic and his mates standing around and we had a communion service with whiskey and biscuits. A Presbyterian and a Roman Catholic, very and Presbyterian indeed; yes; Presbyterian and a Roman Catholic in Northern Ireland, now if that's not a great level; I don't know what is.

We minister where we are, there will always be wars and rumours of wars. But as Christian people we are call to, to respond to where we are and the

situation we find ourselves. Now we may agree or we may disagree, we may stand on one side of the camp or the other. I don't mind, I don't care where you stand. You can be the consummate peace maker or the ultimate war mongerer but we minister where we find ourselves. Whiskey and Biscuits on the forwards row in Northern Ireland was to me was the greatest; one of the greatest things in my Christian life. To stand there and to help this Roman Catholic (not that it made any difference) but to help this Roman Catholic through one of his difficult times.

Can there ever be a just war? I personally don't think so. But we're called to be where we are and to spread Christ, Christ's gospel as we can. Thank you for listening.