

Just War Theory

What should a Christian do in a time of war? What has Scripture, the Christian theological tradition and, all importantly, Jesus Christ got to say about war? If all countries took a vow of non-aggression, only going to war in self-defence then would war be eradicated? Early on the Church developed a Just War Theory, which justified war under limited conditions. Was the Church right?

THE JUST WAR THEORY

Just war theories abound; they are not necessarily Christian. Any nation or tribe will invent theories, principles, to justify aggression and war – either as a pre-emptive strike, or in self-defence. Such theories will often invoke religious justification, claiming to be in accord with the will of some ‘god’ or ‘idol’.

Recently Radan Karadzic, at his trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague, following the UN indictment, claimed his actions in the fragmented former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s were ‘*holy and just*’. Adolf Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf*, was in effect a just war theory, it justified in neo-Pagan religio-political terms the actions of the Nazis invading and subjugating Europe and attempting to annihilate the Jews. The *pax romana* was the achievement of peace and prosperity within the Roman Empire by a brutal crackdown on dissent and any military attempt to challenge Roman authority: the use of crucifixion on a vast industrialized scale ensured that any rebellion was short-lived, hitting back hard served as a warning to others. Was such oppression a just war?

Defining acceptable criteria for war would appear to have evolved with the development of nation states often characterized by racial and cultural identity. But where does the concept of ‘just’ – justice – come in? Is the concept of the ‘just’ a religious view? Is the invention of criteria for war necessary to placate conscience?

MILITARY ETHICS

The theory of a ‘just’ war is often associated with a Roman Catholic doctrine of military ethics. However, the idea of containing and channelling, of ethically justifying, all-out war was a concern of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. For example, Plato (c. 428-347BC) was concerned about the rightful conduct of war, and the importance of *virtue* and *restraint* in warfare. The Roman writer Cicero (106BC-43BC) argued that military action had unambiguous aims and objectives, in particular how and when to fight, but also how different adversaries should be tackled and how they should be treated after the cessation of hostilities: ‘*The only excuse, therefore, for going to war*’, wrote Cicero, ‘*is that we may live in peace unharmed*’. Military ethics informed by a just war theory is essentially from the work of the Patristic theologian Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and the Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), however, there have been many others who have attempted to account for war, to vindicate aggression, from a ‘just’ and ‘equitable’ perspective.

Coventry Cathedral, bombed to destruction in 1941.

The Cross on the altar in the ruins was originally made from charred roof timbers, the words behind the altar are “Father Forgive”, from Jesus’s words from the Cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

BASIC PRINCIPLES

The concept of a Roman Catholic derived just war is underpinned by certain basic beliefs:

First

The taking of human life is wrong (we will come to the distinction between murder and lawful killing later), however, tribes and nations have an obligation of security, protection and preservation. War must be defensive, never offensive. This is a duty of defence, and raises questions of justice. At times measured force and violence may be the only justifiable means of defence.

Second

In Christian terms specific criteria and conditions were defined by which kings and rulers could decide a) if it was just to go to war, and b) the conditions under which a war could be fought.

Third

War is evil ... under certain circumstances. From a broadly Christian perspective, and in the context of a doctrine of military ethics, a just war theory is grounded in the proposition that going to war is the *lesser* evil, but, this implies, that war and violence is still evil, just the *lesser of two evils*. Therefore in the West rulers and governments of all persuasions were implicitly recognizing and defining war as evil and wrong, specifically from a Christian perspective, but unavoidable under certain circumstances.



CONFLICT & AGGRESSION...

THE BASIC JUST WAR THEORY

JUS AD BELLUM

The Right to go to War

Just Cause

Warfare must be just and not solely for colonization or for punishment. Civilians must be in imminent danger, intervention must be to protect life rather than take it.

Comparative Justice

The injustice suffered by one nation or peoples must significantly outweigh that suffered by the aggressor.

Legitimate Authority

Governments, public authorities or trans-national bodies (for example NATO or the UN) may wage war given just cause.

Right Intention

Correcting a suffered wrong is a right intention; economic or material gain is not.

Probability of Success

The probability of success must be weighed and taken seriously. Lives should not be lost in a futile cause, or where disproportionate measures are used to achieve a small or limited victory.

Last Resort

All peaceful, diplomatic and feasible alternatives must be shown to be exhausted.

Proportionality

The degree of destruction and violence used must not exceed the threat, or the suffering experienced by an occupied people.

JUS IN BELLO

How to conduct war

Distinction

The principle of distinction means that war should be directed at military forces and combatants, and not civilians. The bombing of residential areas that exclude military targets is excluded, likewise indiscriminate acts of terrorism, or reprisal against civilians, are unjust.

Proportionality

The principle of proportionality dictates that an attack cannot be launched on a military target in the knowledge that the civilian injuries would exceed the anticipated military advantage.

Military necessity

The principle of minimum force dictates that war must lead to the defeat of an enemy, the destruction of military targets only; there must therefore be limited death and destruction.

WAR & PEACE

Originally defined by Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers, the just war theory as we have come to know it was defined by and in relation to God in Christ. Therefore in the Christian West war was recognized and defined as wrong, but unavoidable. According to the Roman Catholic doctrine there are two elements: *jus ad bellum* (above - the criteria whereby war is justified) and *jus in bello* (above - the manner in which war is conducted according to certain ethical criteria).

In recent years, and in many ways resulting from the nature of war in the twentieth century — the century of greatest conflict and death through war, a century dominated by secularism — a third category has been added,



issuing essentially from secular theorists, which addresses how a war is ended, and how a just peace is achieved: *jus post bellum* (above, right - for example, peace treaties, reparation, reconstruction, war crimes trials, and so forth).

The concept of the right of self-defence is often seen as complementary to a just war theory, however, they both differ by degree of emphasis. In the twentieth century this degree of emphasis allowed for a greater or lesser use of force and re-scripting of ethics to suit the situation. Often this justified the use of force by any necessary means: the end justifies the means.

Sir Jacob Epstein, 'St Michael's Victory over the Devil' (Revelation 12:7-9), bronze sculpture entrance to the new by Coventry Cathedral.

Questions

Read and discuss the basic Just War theory as set out above-

- ◆ How do you define what is Just ?
- ◆ Is War ever justified?
- ◆ Is Pacifism ever justified?
- ◆ Under what Conditions would you be prepared to kill, or inflict severe suffering?
- ◆ Can war only ever be defensive?
- ◆ If all countries took a vow of non-aggression, only going to war in self-defence would war be eradicated?
- ◆ How would the Just War Theory apply to a civil war ?
- ◆ How should war within families be resolved, justly ?
- ◆ How would the Just War Theory apply to the war, the struggle, we all wage to stay on the right side of sanity when anger boils up in us ?

...JUSTICE & DEFENCE

THE POST-CONFLICT, JUST WAR THEORY

JUS POST BELLUM

How to End a War

Cessation of Hostilities

In the twentieth century secular theorists (for example, Gary Bass, Louis Iasiello and Brian Orend) formulated a post conflict addition to the Just War theory. The theory of *Jus post bellum* concerns justice after a war, including peace treaties, reconstruction, war crimes trials, and reparations.

Just Cause for Termination

Termination of hostilities may take place if there is evidence that the original cause is now satisfied, if the cause has now been solved. Termination of hostilities may take place if the aggressor accepts/negotiates terms of surrender/cessation. Termination of hostilities may take place if a war becomes unwinnable, or the aims for going to war cannot be achieved without using excessive force.

Right Intention

Termination of hostilities may take place if the aim and objective change to revenge.

Justice & Reconciliation

Both sides — the victor as much as the original perpetrator — must be willing to allow its forces to be subject to impartial investigation (i.e. for war crimes).

Public Declaration and Authority

The terms of peace must be made by a legitimate authority, and the terms must be accepted by a legitimate authority. (But what constitutes a legitimate authority given that authorities are in effect self-referential - they create their own authority?)

Discrimination

It is valid to differentiate between political and military leaders, and between combatants and civilians. Measures and punishment is to be aimed at those responsible for the conflict.

Truth and Reconciliation

Truth and reconciliation will often be more important than punishment.

Proportionality

Any terms of surrender must be proportional to the rights that were initially violated.

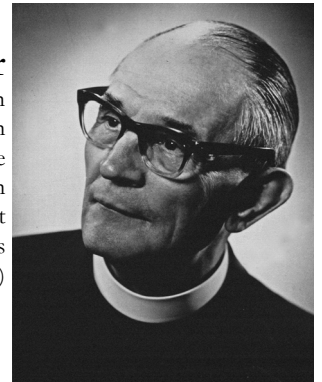
WAR OR PEACE ?

First they came for the communists, and I did not
speak out—
because I was not a communist;
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did
not speak out—
because I was not a trade unionist;
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak
out—
because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me—
and there was no one left to speak out for me.

MARTIN NIEMÖLLER

Martin Niemöller

Friedrich Gustav Emil Martin Niemöller, 1892-1984, Lutheran pastor theologian speaking before the Confessing Church in Frankfurt on 6 January 1946 about the rise to power of the Nazis (the National Socialists.)



Pablo Picasso, 'Guernica', 1937. Painted in response to the bombing of the town of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War - the first instance of indiscriminate aerial bombing of civilians (in Europe). In 1940 Coventry was 'blitzed', razed to the ground, followed by Hamburg, etc., and the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan.

Q : Is it possible to write a Just War Theory for the carpet bombing of civilians in cities?

A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSE...

What should a Christian do when it comes to the call to take up arms?

Thou Shalt Not...

The obvious place to start is the sixth commandment: “*Thou shalt not kill (ratsach)*” (Exodus 20:13). This should be more accurately translated as “*Thou shalt not commit an illegal killing*”. *Ratsach* (רָצַח - pronounced *ram-tsakh*) is properly a primitive root meaning to dash in pieces, that is, to kill another human being, especially to murder, put to death in anger. *Ratsach* evokes an irrational act, an unmeasured response – to strike out destructively with no consideration whether the other person lives or dies, to slay, to exterminate, to destroy. This is the sin of Cain (Genesis 4:1-16, specifically 8b). Properly speaking *ratsach* applies to an illegal killing. The nearest we have in English is the word murder (that is, as a noun and a verb, the unlawful premeditated killing of one person by another); however, here we have a problem. The difficulty here is that the British government – a secular liberal humanist government – defines what constitutes legal and illegal killing. Legality for the ancient Hebrews was defined by and in relation to God (to יְהוָה - YHWH, the righteous LORD): hence the divine permission for the Hebrews to defend themselves, on numerous occasions, against the invading Philistines. The response from the ancient Hebrews was in obedience to YHWH, God, the personal Lord, the eternal self-existing one. This was no distinct, impartial, deity, but the one true God, the personal God who expected right behaviour, who dictates the terms of morality and ethics and expects his chosen people to behave as such: war and justice were part of this heteronymous ethic, given, revealed, serving salvation history.

Biblical Wars

In Biblical times armies believed that they were led by their gods. The Hebrews carried the divine presence in the form of the Ark of the Covenant — the law given by the one true, living God — onto the battlefield (Numbers 10:35-36; 1Samuel 14:18). Therefore, because God could not be conquered, any defeat was ascribed to the faithlessness of the

Israelites, any victory to God's will for his chosen people. For the ancient Hebrews, different categories of war were distinguished: *milhemet hovav* (obligatory war), was considered by some as identical with *milhemet mitsvah* (war commanded by God); and *milhemet reshut* (permitted war). One only has to consider the dynamic account of apocalyptic war contained in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (the “War Scroll”) to consider the implications of this; or the apocalyptic tension only resolved through war in the Book of Daniel (and in Revelation in the New Testament). In the state of Israel today Jewish scholars debate whether Jews should serve in non-Jewish armies in wars that do not directly affect Israel: the majority decided that the principle of *dina' de-malkhuta' dina'* (the laws of the country are to be observed) obliges Jews to serve. The Hebrew ethic of an eye for an eye usually draws ire from pacifists, but it did represent a measured response that limited violence whilst attempting to answer cries for justice. It countered the ethic common amongst the pagan and heathen tribes/nations surrounding ancient Israel where if one man was killed retribution demanded five, if five were killed twenty were demanded in retaliation — matters escalated into war.

A Loving Response

But we are Christians — and what does Christ require? Christ's requirement is embodied in the Law of Love. (Matthew 5:43-48, 19:19, 22:37; Mark 12:30-33; Luke 6:27-36, 7:36-50, 10:27, 11:42f, 16:13; John 8:42, 13:34-5, 14:15-31, 15:9-17, 17:26, 21:15-17 conversely, Matthew 24:12, John 5:42, 12:25, 15:19). The question then is how do you define love? The answer is in the Greek word *agape* (ἀγάπη — self-giving, self-denying, altruistic love). Therefore do we just sit back and do nothing when darkness and evil engulf our neighbours, ourselves? It was for situations like this that the church evolved a Just War theory.

Justice & Vengeance

The Just War theory identified not only armed conflict between or among nations or groups of people, but also an intense protracted struggle not involving arms: ‘soldier of Christ’ (*miles christi*) and the ‘army of Christ’ (*militia Christi*) engaged in spiritual combat with evil. The majority of Christians have accepted armed conflict as characteristic of life in an as yet not fully redeemed world. Christians may, therefore, morally participate in a just war according to the guidelines laid down in the tradition; by contrast, Christians must not take part in unjust



Left : David & Goliath.
Far left : Nicholas Poussin. 'The Battle of Joshua & the Amalekites'. 1625

...HOW TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR

wars. Hence the theory of the lesser of two evils. A Christian could take up arms or participate in war if the evil of war was less than the evil that would result from not taking up arms. A just war therefore can only be defensive, never aggressive, although the theory did allow for the reluctant and limited use of force whereby a Christian might be required in charity to serve the needs of an innocent neighbour being attacked. However, the just war theory has been severely tested by contemporary events: nuclear weapons; or the so-called 'war on terrorism', or 'wars of liberation', and of course the perverse thinking of a suicide bomber. All these may appear "just" depending on the position you come from: what is the ground or foundation of your thinking, your desire? What place does vengeance and retribution hold in you motivation — and should it? How far a Christian can participate in war will continue to be a thorny question. Defence is a necessary response to evil; hostility is a negation of the good.

Reconciliation

But what did Jesus Christ have to say? Jesus looks at the issue how will we stand when before him in judgement at the end of days? Hence the emphasis on reconciliation — reconcile with your neighbour before coming before God or you will both face retribution (Matthew 5:23-24 & 18:21-35). This, like much of Matthew's gospel is about inter-Christian relations. But we also bear a responsibility to those outside the faith, both on an individual and on a national level: we are our brother/sister's keeper, and we will be held responsible (Ezekiel 33:8-9). Therefore we must exhaust utterly all avenues of reconciliation and making peace before resorting to war:

"Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments ... are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."
Romans 13:8f

Faith

When confronted by the centurion who sought the healing of his servant, Jesus does not use the situation for an anti-war polemic. On the contrary, he praises the military discipline in the centurion's mind that has produced such faith — "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith" (Matthew 8:5-13)! And we are told to obey the authorities over us because they are God-given: render unto Caesar (Mark 12:17) — so much for rebellions, civil wars and revolutions.

Turn the Other Cheek...

But to take this issue of reconciliation further, it is this that perhaps is at the heart of how Christians (indeed how all people) should live. Conflict may be inevitable but warring is the result of the Fall, therefore it is not how we should live, it is not how we are meant to live: we should live in peace and harmony. Jesus does appear to be talking about conflict between individuals, or small groups, hence the principle

which we cannot, must not, ignore of turning the other cheek even when confronting evil (Matthew 5:38-42): again, is this because of the eschatological implications? Does this apply to individuals or to nations? Also we are called to love not just our friends but our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48) — endorsed by Paul's comments in Romans (13:8f). Perhaps there can never be any justification for war between groups of Christians — is this what Paul and Jesus were referring to?

There is an assertiveness, a claim to equality, given the socio-cultural context of Jesus's sayings, in turning the other cheek. Greeks and Romans would spar, box, but both participants were deemed equal. When they fought they used fists or the back of the hand. If a master was to strike a slave it was with the palm of the hand - a slap - never the fist or back of the hand as this would imply equality. By turning the other cheek a slave would be inviting the same punishment but — using the same hand — the slave master would have to use the back of the hand to strike the other cheek, thereby implying equality. By turning the other cheek the slave (or a subjugated nation like Israel under the Romans) was provoking the assailant rather than submitting submissively: 'I am your equal, you cannot harm or destroy me in the long term'.

So, what should a Christian do when it comes to the call to take up arms? The answer is not as simple as militarists or pacifists would like it to be. Above all must be Jesus' comments recorded in John's gospel -to love one another, and be prepared to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:9-13). And within this must be our desire to seek, find and serve the will of God in Christ.

Read, study, mediate on this passage, Jesus's words, from John's Gospel—

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

John 15:9-13 NRSV

Q : How do we love one another, what is acceptable love for one another ?

Q : How do we know when it is right to lay down our life ?

Q : Is the will of a nation state, for example in conscription, equal to the will of God in such matters ?

THE JUST WAR THEORY...

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE?

In recent years there have been calls to re-write or extend the just war theory in response to terrorism. This demand has echoed from military quarters, but also, pertinently, from some within the churches, and from MPs in Parliament. When talking about the so-called war on terror initiated by the American President George W. Bush in 2001 in response to 9/11 – the attack on the United States by fundamentalist Muslim terrorists serving the religio-militaristic organization, Al-Qaeda – what exactly do these calls for a rewritten and re-structured just war theory entail.

A PSEUDO-CHRISTIAN RESPONSE?

We can deduce three principles to a war on terror:

First, strike back harder, more destructively and more decisively than the antagonist

Second, act, strike, pre-emptively if a threat is perceived – this involves a serious suspension of human rights and freedoms

Third, colonization – take over countries that give shelter and succour to terrorists and convert the citizens away from the belief system that has led to the war in the first place.

Q : Do these three principles now constitute a new just war theory?

Q : Do these three principles contradict the traditional (Roman Catholic) just war theory?

Q : Theological and philosophical speculation aside, what is the Biblical basis for war?

Many of the Church of England bishops were categorically against the invasion of Iraq, but were silent about the invasion of Afghanistan. The BBC News reported that, *“Church of England bishops have made their most outspoken criticism yet of plans for military action against Iraq with one of them accusing the government of acting as judge, jury and executioner. They repeated their view that an assault on Saddam Hussein would unacceptably lower the threshold for war and said it could not be morally justified ... ‘There is absolutely nothing new now which would justify us going over the awesome threshold of war,’ Bishop of Oxford Richard Harris said.”*

QUESTION—

To what extent does a war on terror rely on the tactics of the terrorist? Postmodern secular liberal humanist society in the West (the society that has waged this war on terror) is a society justified not by Christ’s atoning sacrifice but by protectionist killing (the Iraq-Afghanistan wars, abortion on an industrialized scale, stem-cell research, vivisection, suicide, euthanasia, etc.). So what is this war on terror being waged for? Initially to defend ourselves against random acts of terror (such as 9/11); then there was Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction. However, these chimeras appear to have vanished; so, why are people still dying?

What does the Bible tell us about war and peace, and how the people of God should respond. Augustine and Aquinas formulated a just war theory from, in effect, reasoned disputation drawing heavily on ancient Pagan Graeco-Roman philosophers. The just war theory whether Christian or otherwise must surely be informed primarily by Biblical theology rather than philosophical disputation. If this is so then we find three distinct ethical responses to war and conflict in the Bible.

The Pagan Principle: Vengeance in Excess

Amongst the Pagan nations that surrounded ancient Israel – indeed this is an ethic that can be found amongst tribes and nations the world over – is a war ethic, recounted several times over in the Old Testament, evidenced in the actions of these Pagan nations as they preyed on the Israelites. The Hebrews were explicitly forbidden by the Lord God, by YHWH, from following this war ethic as a way of retribution. This is the principle that vengeance is demanded in excess of an equitable, measured and just response. According to this war ethic if one goat was stolen, five – on average – were taken as revenge and reparation. If one man was murdered, five – on average – were killed in revenge. But when the five were killed, twenty-five were then demanded, and so on. According to this ethic hostilities cease when one side capitulates under the pressure of all-out violent war. The victorious side would often then execute hundreds simply as a warning against insurrection, and to celebrate victory. In occupied territories such as France and Norway during the Second World War the Nazis ratcheted-up this demand for greater reparation. If one German soldier was killed, exactly 100 civilians were rounded up and summarily executed. The ratio of reparation was therefore increased from 5:1 to 100:1.

The Ancient Hebrew Principle: An Eye for an Eye

An ‘eye for an eye’ (Leviticus 24:19-21, Exodus 21:22-25, and Deuteronomy 19:21; in Hebrew, *ayin tabat ayin* (עין תחת עין) countered the principle where vengeance was demanded in excess of an equitable, measured and just response. Properly considered an eye for an eye was a measured just response to an unlawful act, a measured response that limited violence whilst attempting to answer the need for justice. This principle is grounded in the law of equitable retribution; an offence should not generate a greater offence. Retribution is thereby restricted, contained and defined, but in relation to the will of YHWH and the given laws of the Torah: an exact, proportionate, measured and controlled response was designed to ensure justice, reparation, and to prevent either the anarchy of lynch mob vengeance, or matters escalating out of control into all out war. Ghandi is reputed to have said that an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind. Ghandi is objecting to the concept of reparation, which can be seen as stoking the furnaces of resentment. However this is not what is happening here. An eye

... & A WAR ON TERRORISM

for an eye was specifically given to ensure a constrained, just, and measured response so that intensification and escalation was avoided. This was why hangmen and executioners developed as outsiders from society – they had no tribal allegiance, so when one man was executed for the murder of another, no tribe was then offended by the actions of the executioner.

The Christian Principle: Turn the Other Cheek

In the Gospels we find a radical approach from either the ancient Pagan nations, or from the Pentateuch: to turn the other cheek, bite the bullet, stop and think, ‘Why have we been attacked?’, ‘How may we have offended?’, ‘How can we stop the escalation of violence?’ This is the New Testament approach, explicitly stated by Jesus Christ in the Gospels. And in case we decide to dismiss this as a one-off Jesus sound bite that was miss-reported or can be contextually rejected, or whittled away by a hermeneutic of suspicion, the emphasis is clear:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Matthew 5:38-46

This is not just passive resistance, but complicity to a degree, this is radical. Indeed the victim is taking control of the situation. But it exudes authority, the authority of the righteous one – who allowed himself to be tortured and slaughtered on a cross. However difficult this sounds Jesus certainly practiced what he preached. Luke extrapolates:

“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Luke 6:27-31

Is this why the Apostle Paul talks of blessing those who persecute us, mourning with those who mourn, attempting to live in harmony and leaving no room for pride (Romans 12:14-16)? Should we fight evil with evil? No, we should not take revenge, for revenge is the Lord’s prerogative (Deuteronomy 32:35, Romans 12:19 & Hebrews 10:30), and we should not repay anyone evil for evil (Romans 12:18-19). If we are attacked we should shame our enemy into retreating:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12: 20b-21

If we do not want others to treat us violently, brutally, if we do not want our enemies to kill us, then why do we do this to them: why do we violently brutalize, torture and kill those we label as our enemies even when they were not directly involved in 9/11?

The War Ethic for a War on Terror?

So, which Biblically informed path did Tony Blair and George W. Bush follow for their war on terrorism which resulted from 9/11? – Pagan, Hebrew or Christian? In trying to decide you may like to consider the following fact. According to data compiled by the US State Department, as of 16 February 2010, at least 869,720 people have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since the American, British and coalition action started. This is data based on and compiled from the lowest credible estimates, compiled from witness accounts and military observation. Therefore 289 people – men women or children – have been killed in exchange for each American killed in, or as a result of, the 9/11 attack on America. In addition, according to the same cautious compilation of data, again based on the lowest credible figures, over 1.1 million people – in addition to the 869,720 killed – have been seriously injured in Iraq and Afghanistan as a direct result of American, British and coalition action. Killing 289 people in exchange for each American killed on 9/11 is considerably more than the 5 lives for every 1 life killed that the Pagan tribes surrounding the ancient Hebrews demanded. It is nearly three times the level of reparation demanded by the Nazis in the occupied territories – and it is still not over.

Q : Can war ever be controlled to the extent that it is ‘just’ ?

Q : How realistic is it to, ‘turn the other cheek’ ?

Q : Where does authority lie when nation states demand people die through armed conflict ?

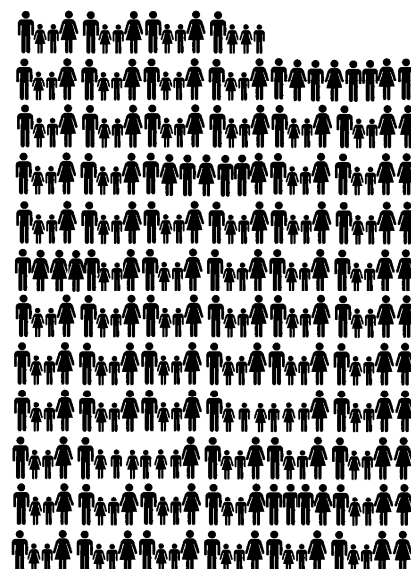
Q : Is modern weaponry innately amoral ?

Vengeance in Excess of an Equitable, Measured and Just Response: The (Re-)Development of a Pagan War Ethic

THE BUSH-BLAIR:
RESPONSE TO 9/11
289 lives for every 1 lost

Around 3000 people were killed on 9/11; according to the US State Department, as of 16 February 2010, at least 869,720 people have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of US, British and coalition action: that is, 289:1.

The Pagan tribes & nations surrounding ancient Israel demanded 5:1; the Nazis, in the occupied territories 100:1 if a German officer was killed.



A TALE OF TWO SOLDIERS



Kris had not been in the city long. Indeed Kris had not been in the army for long, three months in fact. Although conscripted Kris believed in what his country was doing here in a foreign land. They had invaded the traditional enemy, seven years ago; for centuries they had wanted to extend their borders south, gain a southern sea port, and, they could impose their lifestyle and values on these primitive people who were often considered to be barely human. Having studied politics and philosophy at the university Kris knew this was right, but all the military trappings did not sit easily, but *Right was theirs, it was holy, without a doubt simply because it was.*

Alex had grown up knowing the threat from the neighbouring country across the desert to the north, having been raised by nationalist parents who loved the flag, loved the culture and music, which was now banned by the occupiers — Alex's education was geared to a purpose: how to belittle, hassle, denigrate and attack, and ultimately to kill the occupier. *Right was theirs, it was holy, without a doubt simply because it was.*

Kris would have preferred to have been in military intelligence, but he was too young and had been drafted as an ordinary infantryman (besides Kris's father lacked the funds, as a goat farmer from the mountains, or contacts to buy him a commission). For the umpteenth day in a row he was on sentry duty at the main railway station on the coast, guarding the entrance into the ticket hall; people passed by, averting their gaze, never talking, there were even those who intentionally stamped in puddles so as to cause a splash, but he simply ignored them (other soldiers would have these children arrested, interrogated). Kris was an idealist who believed in the cause, believed they were bringing Enlightenment to these benighted people: as a child he had learned the rhetoric and the superiority.

Alex as a teenager had joined the resistance, having also learned the rhetoric, the superiority, now trained for defiance and struggle, prepared to pay the cost — in blood. As a paramilitary Alex was prepared to lay down life, to sacrifice,

trained in guerrilla warfare so as to attack and not be seen, cause maximum damage without reprisal, teach and train so that others would support the cause, question not the tactics.

On a grey morning of fine drizzle Kris stood guard, an habitual routine, greeting politely people who did not answer. Suddenly someone tall, face shielded behind a balaclava, pushed through the people in the entrance and threw a small package into the ticket hall, turned and ran — in seconds the bomber, Alex, was lost in the crowd and the traffic. Kris turned and saw the panic as people cried out and rushed for the exits, jamming them so no one could get out. Guessing the bomb's fuse would run for seconds not minutes Kris thought fast and decided. Kris lay down on the small package. There was a muffled explosion as the package exploded killing and dismembering Kris as his body absorbed the contents of the nail bomb. There were a few minor injuries among the people in the ticket hall, but the they were alright. Kris was soon forgotten, his people, the invader and colonisers, hated.

Questions

Just how real does theology get?—

- ◆ Can you reverse the roles in this story? Does it still work ?
- ◆ What does it mean to lay down you life for your friends but also your enemies ?
- ◆ How possible is it to tell oppressed people to love their enemies ?
- ◆ Read the original Harvey Andrews song (opposite), is there too much polemic, controversial politics, for the Christian meaning of the song to come through ?
- ◆ People who are reconciled are with Christ, where does this leave the irreconciled ? (Matt. 5:23-26)
- ◆ If Jesus's gift is peace, then can anyone in conflict be saved ?
- ◆ If British soldiers returning dead from Afghanistan are hailed as heroes, was the same reaction by German families justified whose sons and daughters were killed by the French resistance ?
- ◆ Is any Just War Theory irrelevant, because in the end it comes down to individuals making individual decisions which are right or wrong before God (Matthew 25)?
- ◆ Can evil people uncharacteristically do good ?
- ◆ In war is one side ever completely wrong? Is one side ever completely right ?

The two names in this story are intended to be non-gender specific (thus there are no pronouns). This story is based on Harvey Andrew's folk song, 'Soldier', 1972, which was based on a real life incident in 1971 from Northern Ireland, when an RUC police station was bombed and a British soldier sacrificed himself to the bomb to protect civilians. Harvey Andrews song was banned by the BBC "*lest feelings be exacerbated in the nationalist community of Northern Ireland, or the British public be incited to attack innocent Irish people.*" The Ministry of Defence advised (and still advises) British soldiers not to sing the song in pubs where it may incite strong emotive behaviour.

To hear the original song: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NpaT5LDFgM&feature=related>

TWO POEMS/SONGS

The Soldier (Harvey Andrews, 1972)

In a station in the city a British soldier stood
Talking to the people there if the people would
Some just stared in hatred, and others turned in pain
And the lonely British soldier wished he was back home again

Come join the British Army! said the posters in his town
See the world and have your fun come serve before the Crown
The jobs were hard to come by and he could not face the dole
So he took his country's shilling and enlisted on the roll

For there was no fear of fighting, the Empire long was lost
Just ten years in the army getting paid for being bossed
Then leave a man experienced a man who's made the grade
A medal and a pension some mem'ries and a trade

Then came the call for Ireland as the call had come before
Another bloody chapter in an endless civil war
The priests they stood on both sides the priests they stood behind
Another fight in Jesus's name the blind against the blind

The soldier stood between them between the whistling stones
And then the broken bottles that led to broken bones
The petrol bombs that burnt his hands the nails that pierced his skin
And wished that he had stayed at home surrounded by his kin

The station filled with people the soldier soon was bored
But better in the station than where the people warred
The room filled up with mothers with daughters and with sons
Who stared with itchy fingers at the soldier and his gun

A yell of fear a screech of brakes the shattering of glass
The window of the station broke to let the package pass
A scream came from the mothers as they ran towards the door
Dragging their children crying from the bomb upon the floor

The soldier stood and could not move his gun he could not use
He knew the bomb had seconds and not minutes on the fuse
He could not run and pick it up and throw it in the street
There were far too many people there too many running feet

Take cover! yelled the soldier, Take cover for your lives
And the Irishmen threw down their young and stood before their wives
They turned towards the soldier their eyes alive with fear
For God's sake save our children or they'll end their short lives here

The soldier moved towards the bomb his stomach like a stone
Why was this his battle God why was he alone
He lay down on the package and he murmured one farewell
To those at home in England to those he loved so well

He saw the sights of summer felt the wind upon his brow
The young girls in the city parks how precious were they now
The soaring of the swallow the beauty of the swan
The music of the turning world so soon would it be gone

A muffled soft explosion and the room began to quake
The soldier blown across the floor his blood a crimson lake
There was no time to cry or shout there was no time to moan
And they turned their children's faces from the blood and from the bones

The crowd outside soon gathered and the ambulances came
To carry off the body of a pawn lost in the game
And the crowd they clapped and cheered and they sang their rebel song
One soldier less to interfere where he did not belong

And will the children growing up learn at their mothers' knees
The story of the soldier who bought their liberty
Who used his youthful body as a means towards an end
Who gave his life to those who called him murderer not friend

Dulce et decorum est (Wilfred Owen, 1917)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed
through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!--An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.--
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
Bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,--
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie:

*Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*



Downloads

Please visit the Theology Discussion Group
webpage in the Christ Church website-

<http://www.christchurch-westwimbledon.org/theology-discussion-group/theology-discussion-group1.htm>

You will find a link to a YouTube video of
Andrew Harvey's, 'Soldier', and other
material that may be useful.

There is also a supplementary sheet to
be downloaded on torture in the Iraq
conflict with important questions to
discuss on the evening of the meeting.