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Norms of war in Protestant Christianity

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Protestant just war thought has much in common with its Catholic counterpart. The fathers of the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin, viewed political power conservatively, and largely appropriated Catholic just war thinking – especially Augustine and Aquinas – into their theological perspectives. True to the spirit of the Reformation, they also drew directly from the Old and New Testaments. Ultimately, most of the newly emerging Protestant churches, and their modern successors, would adopt just war theory.

Embracing just war theory was as political as it was theological. Luther and Calvin clung to the medieval conception of government as a divinely ordained gift, necessary for earthly order. At the same time, politically they relied on sympathetic princes for protection. Geneva even presented Calvin an opportunity to institute a Protestant theocracy. Over the last five hundred years, many Protestant denominations have been state churches, making the issue of legitimizing violence essential.

The panoply of denominations makes it difficult to systematically describe Protestant thought about war. These denominations, having evolved in the half millennium since the Reformation, developed in different historical and national situations and claim a variety of founding genealogies. To structure this discussion of Protestant just war thought, this chapter considers Protestants as five broad historically based groups: Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican, Evangelical and Anabaptist. Within each of these divisions are numerous independent groups, which in practice may differ greatly (and may not even recognize each other as members of the

same family of denominations!). The first three – Lutherans, Calvinists and Anglicans, and their daughter churches – have often been state churches, or at least dominant social forces. These three Protestant families generally uphold just war theory, largely as it was inherited from the Catholic tradition. Evangelicals, a very loose grouping of denominations and sects, locate their historical roots in one or more of the first three traditions. Their beliefs about war are as highly varied as their origins. Anabaptists, with a few notable exceptions, encompass the “Peace Churches”, which uphold pacifism.

This chapter examines three variants of Protestant thinking about war: the just war tradition, pacifism and crusading. The just war tradition receives the most attention – arguably, those claiming it have been the most dominant denominations, in political, social and demographic terms.

The Protestant just war tradition

The Lutheran, Calvinist and Anglican traditions, and many of their successors, uphold traditional just war theory, inherited from their Catholic predecessors. Several denominations within these three traditions have explicitly declared it to be part of Church doctrine.¹

This section explores the most influential thinkers from these just war traditions, starting with Luther and Calvin in the sixteenth century, before considering the contributions of Grotius and Pufendorf in the seventeenth century and Tillich, Barth, Niebuhr and Ramsey in the twentieth. By focusing on these thinkers as individuals, rather than attempting to construct a systematic historical narrative, I follow Jean Bethke Elsh-tain’s lead, treating the just war discourse “as an authoritative tradition dotted with its own sacred texts, offering a canonical alternative to realism as received truth”.²

The foundations of Protestant just war thought

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was the most prominent reformer of his time, and had considerable influence on Protestantism. He was born in Saxony, and his father was prosperous enough to send him to university, to study law.³ In 1505, however, after nearly being struck by lightning, Luther rather suddenly entered an Augustinian monastery. His Ninety-Five Theses, publicly calling for major reforms in the Catholic Church, appeared in 1517.

The rampant political instability in the Germany of his day clearly leaves Luther longing for peace and order. He likens a prince who engages in a just war to a surgeon who amputates a diseased limb, sacrificing some for

the common good. If princes could not use force, “everything in the world would be ruined ... Therefore, such a war is only a very brief lack of peace that prevents an everlasting and immeasurable lack of peace.”⁴ The starting point for Luther’s just war theory, as it had been for Aquinas, is therefore the question of just authority.⁵

Luther condemns rebellion in favour of submission to state power – even when unjustly exercised. Rebellion is intolerable, violating both Christian and natural law. On the eve of the 1525 Peasants’ War, Luther implores the princes to consider the peasants’ demands and to defuse their anger by rendering justice. He warns that the war’s outcome is unpredictable: “Do not start a fight with them, for you do not know how it will end.”⁶ Yet despite sympathy for their cause, Luther warns the peasants against armed rebellion. Citing Paul, he reminds them of their duty to submit to authority.⁷ Although they are suffering gross injustices, the peasants as Christians are obliged “not to strive against injustice, not to grasp the sword ... but to give up life and property”.⁸ After all, “a wicked tyrant is more tolerable than a bad war”.⁹ Rebellion, like “a great fire ... attacks and devastates a whole land ... it makes widows and orphans, and turns everything upside down, like the worst disaster”.¹⁰ A rebel is worse than a simple murderer, for he “attacks the head himself and interferes with the exercise of his word and his office”.¹¹ Although punishment of a murderer may be left up to the prince, any good citizen can – and should – capture and punish a rebel to preserve public order.

Luther’s definition of rebellion is quite specific. The Diet of Augsburg proclaimed in 1530 that all Reformation heresy should be removed from the empire. In this case, Luther counsels Protestants that self-defence is not rebellion, and urges soldiers not to obey the emperor if he orders them to suppress the movement forcibly.¹² So long as the Protestants did not first use violence, physical defence against the temporal authorities’ intervention should not be counted as rebellion. The reasoning stems from Luther’s belief that the “two kingdoms” were separate: the princes were overstepping their temporal authority by interfering in spiritual matters. Heresy could not be a legitimate cause for war.

Luther’s principle of just authority applies equally to war and peace. Political leaders are granted their positions by God, and the right to use force to maintain order is not limited to Christians: “even a heathen ruler has the right and the authority to punish.”¹³ Punishment of tyrants should be left in God’s hands.¹⁴ In the case of the Peasants’ Rebellion, Luther reminds the princes that they are God’s servants, and that, if they fail to fulfil their duties by “punishing some and protecting others”, they will themselves become “guilty of all the murder and evil these people commit”.¹⁵

Luther's theology does not permit crusading. The issue here is also just authority. The spiritual powers are not to intervene in secular affairs, and vice versa. After the defeat of King Louis II of Hungary by the Turks in 1526, Europeans discussed the appropriate response. Luther felt that a war of self-defence against the Turks was not only justified but required by duty. However, he objected to the idea that the war's cause should be considered religious and that the war's aim should include eliminating Islam. Luther saw the war as God's punishment for Christendom's impiety, so military action had to be seen as a "secular struggle, not a religious crusade".¹⁶ Furthermore, Luther strongly protested against calling the European army "Christian", for to do so would dishonour Christ's name, not only by associating it with violence but also because "there are scarcely five Christians in such an army, and perhaps there are worse people in the eyes of God in that army than are the Turks".¹⁷ Additionally, it was wrong in Luther's eyes to make a temporal leader the defender of the gospel or the head of Christendom. Ultimately, the Turk should be allowed to "believe and live as he will", for, "if the emperor were supposed to destroy the unbelievers and non-Christians, he would have to begin with the pope, bishops, and clergy, and perhaps not spare us or himself".¹⁸

Luther's careful reading of the Scripture made him keenly aware of the tension between just war theory's conditional tolerance of violence and the Gospel's apparent pacifism. He therefore stresses personal non-violence even while permitting the state to use violence to uphold order. In Luther's work, just war theory can be understood only in light of the "two kingdoms theory". This Augustinian idea holds that Christians simultaneously inhabit two realms: one spiritual and perfect, the other earthly and inherently sinful. Luther shares Augustine's view that our world is by nature corrupted, and thus the "coercive and violent" functions of the state are needed to protect the innocent.¹⁹

Rather than equating the ideal world with the end time, Luther imagined it as present in the private Christian life. Of course, as Luther constantly reminds his readers, the number of "true" Christians is very small indeed; thus, temporal authority is needed to preserve earthly peace.²⁰ Luther's politics is thus very realistic: "Certainly it is true that Christians . . . are subject neither to law nor sword, and have need of neither. But take heed and first fill the world with real Christians before you attempt to rule it in a Christian . . . manner."²¹

Applying the two kingdoms theory, Luther argues that it is possible to bear the sword over non-Christians "in a Christian manner", for the sake of justice and order.²² Luther explains: "the Scripture passages which speak of mercy apply to the kingdom of God and to Christians, not to

the kingdom of the world.”²³ Although the “severity and the wrath of the world’s kingdom seems unmerciful”, it is actually “not the least of God’s mercies”, since it ensures justice for the innocent.²⁴ So, although “no Christian shall wield or invoke the sword for himself and his case, on behalf of another . . . he may and should wield it . . . to restrain wickedness and to defend godliness”.²⁵

Following Augustine, Luther distinguishes between the occupation of soldiering and the individual soldier. The soldier’s work (or the judge’s or hangman’s) is in itself necessary, even “right and godly”, but whether or not the soldier is a good man depends on him alone.²⁶ Luther’s justification of the soldier’s profession relies on his own interpretation of the New Testament. As neither Jesus nor John the Baptist explicitly forbade soldiering, it must be “certain and clear enough that it is God’s will that the temporal sword and law be used for the punishment of the wicked and the protection of the upright”.²⁷ Luther also highlights several New Testament incidents where the apostles had opportunities to forbid Christians from being soldiers, yet did not: John confirmed the soldiers’ calling, telling them to be content with their wages, and Peter converted the centurion Cornelius, without telling him to abandon his profession.²⁸

If temporal authority is a necessity – even a positive good – and if the military profession has not been condemned in the New Testament, then logically war itself must be justifiable. Luther cites Romans and I Peter to argue that “the very fact that the sword has been instituted by God to punish evil, protect the good, and preserve peace . . . is powerful and sufficient proof that war and killing along with all the things that accompany wartime and martial law have been instituted by God”.²⁹

Implicitly, Luther limits just cause to state defence. War itself represents “the punishment of wrong and evil” for the sake of “peace and obedience”.³⁰ Whoever starts a war is wrong, as is anyone who looks for cause to fight.³¹ Princes are not to fight their feudal superiors, even if they have been wronged.³² But they may defensively fight against equals, inferiors and foreign governments.

War should always be the last resort. Pointing to Mosaic law, Luther insists that the Christian prince should first offer the antagonist “justice and peace”, before resorting to violence.³³ Therefore war must be fought only when an enemy “attacks and starts the war, and refuses to cooperate in settling the matter according to law or through arbitration and common agreement”.³⁴

Luther is not as interested in just means. If the cause is just, then the necessary means are justifiable. In a just war of self-defence, “it is both Christian and an act of love to kill the enemy without hesitation, to plunder and burn and injure him by every method of warfare until he is con-

quered”.³⁵ The language Luther uses to exhort the nobles to suppress the Peasants’ Rebellion reveals nearly any tactic to be acceptable: “Let no one have mercy on the obstinate, hardened, blinded peasants who refuse to listen to reason; but let everyone, as he is able, strike, hew, stab and slay, as though among mad dogs.”³⁶

Nonetheless, Luther does draw a distinction between legitimate tactics of war and other violent acts that often occur in wartime. Although the enemy may be killed in just about any fashion, the army should exercise self-control. Luther draws on Deuteronomy 20, where God commands the Israelites not to hew fruit trees for siege works, and deduces that such a God would “never have permitted them to rage against women and girls in debauchery, lust, and other violence after conquering the enemy, as happens nowadays in our barbarity”.³⁷ After victory, restraint should be shown and peace and mercy offered to those who surrender.

There is also a possibility for conscientious objection. On the one hand, Luther argues against pacifists who, “because of tenderness of conscience”, deny that Christians can ever participate in war, pointing to the passage in Luke in which John the Baptist tells the newly baptized soldiers to be content with their wages.³⁸ Subjects are bound to follow their lords into battle, so long as they are not convinced the cause is wrong. However, if it is unjust, they should neither “fight nor serve”, despite the consequences.³⁹

Ultimately, the Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1531), Article 16, enshrined just war theory as Church doctrine:

It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rule were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order, and that Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evil doers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, etc.⁴⁰

Lutheranism became the dominant religion of the Scandinavian countries and much of Germany, garnering a great deal of social and political importance in Europe.

John Calvin (1509–1564) shared many of Luther’s ideals, and became an important leader of the Reformed Church. Born in France, Calvin was first sent to Paris to be educated toward a theological vocation; his father later withdrew him to study law instead. Ultimately, Calvin completed both degrees after his father’s death. He does not seem to have been inspired by Protestant ideas before 1533, when he rather suddenly gave up his ecclesiastical benefices rather than taking orders in the Catholic Church.⁴¹ His greatest opus, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, was

published in 1535; a year later, he settled in Geneva to help implement the Reformation's ideals. Calvin remained in Geneva for most of his life, helping to "shape the life of the city as a community of believers, united in both the civil and religious orders under a shared commitment to Christ".⁴²

Like Luther, Calvin was deeply troubled by the political insecurity of his time, making the threat of disorder one of the dominant themes in his works.⁴³ His justification for the use of force at home and abroad focuses on a fear of anarchy. This concern with maintaining peace and order leads him to criticize the Anabaptists, who encouraged their members to withdraw from public life and to be strictly non-violent.

Aquinas was of greater importance for Calvin than for Luther, possibly because of their shared affinity for the classics. Calvin draws freely from Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca and others. He derives from them his concept of natural law, leading him to assert the decidedly Renaissance belief that "the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men".⁴⁴

In the *Institutes*, Calvin enters the discussion of the legitimacy of warfare from a similar starting point to Luther's: the importance of civil authority as a God-given office. Like Luther, Calvin makes it clear that Christians should not withdraw from public life: "no one ought to doubt that civil authority is a calling, not only holy and lawful before God, but also the most sacred and by far the most honourable of all callings in the whole life of mortal men."⁴⁵ Leaders' power is invested in them by God, creating a set of reciprocal duties. The magistrates owe their subjects protection, and should strive to uphold God's will; subjects owe their magistrates respect and obedience.

Magistrates must use force to fulfil their duty as "ordained protectors and vindicators of public innocence, modesty, decency, and tranquillity ... [providing] for the common safety and peace of all".⁴⁶ The magistrate's army "is not only an agent of the kingdom of the World, but of God".⁴⁷ Christian leaders may use their power "severely to coerce the open malefactors and criminals by whose wickedness the public peace is troubled or disturbed".⁴⁸ Like Augustine and Luther, Calvin asserts that the magistrate is not the actual actor judging and hanging criminals, but rather serves as God's tool, carrying out God's commandments on earth.⁴⁹ Mostly Calvin justifies the domestic use of force by reference to the Old Testament, although he does cite the apostle Paul (Romans 13) to argue that the sword has been given by God to earthly rulers.

Using the domestic analogy, Calvin asserts that leaders also have the right to wage wars to execute "public vengeance" and to "preserve the tranquillity of their dominion" by checking "the fury of one who disturbs

both the repose of private individuals and the common tranquillity of all, who raises seditious tumults, and by whom violent oppressions and vile misdeeds are perpetrated".⁵⁰ However, war must always be a last resort. Citing Cicero, Calvin argues that "everything else ought to be tried before recourse is had to arms".⁵¹ A ruler should not "lightly seek occasion" to fight, nor "accept the occasion when offered, unless . . . driven to it by extreme necessity".⁵²

Just cause for Calvin is primarily limited to self-defence. An invader – whether a king or a host of common criminals – is a robber and should be "punished accordingly".⁵³ Here, Calvin diverges from Luther. Intriguingly, although Calvin's legitimation of the sovereignty of kings and states is based heavily on both Old and New Testament sources, his discussion of war as a policy relies largely on natural law reasoning. Whereas Luther firmly based his justification of war on biblical sources, Calvin points to "natural equity and the nature of the office" as justifications.⁵⁴ Rather than teasing out a comprehensive doctrine justifying war from the New Testament's stories of soldiers' conversion, Calvin abruptly ends the section by stating: "and the Holy Spirit declares such wars to be lawful by many testimonies of Scripture."⁵⁵ Calvin justifies himself by arguing that "an express declaration of this matter is not to be sought in the writings of the apostles; for their purpose is not to fashion a civil government, but to establish the spiritual Kingdom of Christ".⁵⁶

Like Luther, Calvin does not approve of rebellion. Subjects owe their rulers respect and obedience, regardless of their quality or justness.⁵⁷ He likewise counsels unhappy citizens to rely on God to avenge them in His own time, and "not at once think that it is entrusted to [them], to whom no command has been given except to obey and suffer".⁵⁸ Thus, although Calvin believed that constitutions and certain forms of representative government could be used to curtail kings' tyrannical tendencies (and repeatedly condemned abuse of power⁵⁹), his political theory provided little room for subjects to create such institutions independently.⁶⁰

Calvin also touches on the question of just means. Rulers should not "be carried away with headlong anger, or be seized with hatred, or burn with implacable severity".⁶¹ Citing Augustine, he argues that they should instead "have pity on the common nature" present even in their enemy.⁶² Enemies should be shown the same regard one would wish for one's self.

A form of conscientious objection is possible for Calvin, since obedience to earthly rulers must never lead to disobedience to God. Rulers derive authority from God, but, "if they command anything against him, let it go unesteemed".⁶³ Unlike Luther, who specifically discussed conscientious objection in wartime, Calvin's discussion of the subject is general and does not address soldiering directly.

Calvin's Reformed movement, which spread across northern Europe and later to North America, was the predecessor of several large Protestant groupings, including the Reformed, the Christian Reformed, the United Reformed, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists (the United Churches of Christ) and some Baptist churches. These churches generally respect the just war tradition. The Presbyterian Church, for example, upholds the just war tradition as part of its doctrine. Article 23 of the 1648 Westminster Confession of the Presbyterian and Congregationalist traditions states:

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate (appointed or elected political office) when called there unto; in the managing whereof, as they ought to especially to maintain piety, justice and peace, according to the wholesome laws of each commonwealth, so, for that end, they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and necessary occasions.⁶⁴

The distinction between the Lutheran and Calvinist approaches to just war is subtle. A few key differences are notable. For Luther, the initial question as to whether Christians can justifiably use violence is more theologically and politically troubling. Luther carefully develops the two kingdoms theory to explain away the tension between New Testament calls for radical peace and the violence seemingly necessary for earthly stability and order. Luther does not deny the pacifist call; he simply sets it aside for some future time. Reinhold Niebuhr will explore this perpetual contradiction in the twentieth century.

For Calvin, the problem of justifying the Christian use of violence in the first place is not so significant. Influenced by natural law, Calvin views violent conflict as inevitable in human society. His focus, therefore, is on who may use violence, and how, in order to maintain a just order. Later, some aspects of Calvin's thought would be used to justify crusading-type violence, as for example during the English Civil War.

Like Lutheranism and Calvinism, the Anglican Church broke with Catholicism in the sixteenth century, for reasons as much political as religious. Ultimately, Queen Elizabeth I created an inclusive Calvinistic Protestantism, although the Church hierarchy remained highly conservative. The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Confession, dating to 1571, were influenced by the earlier Augsburg and Wurttemberg confessions. Article 37, dealing with civil magistrates, focuses on the temporal and spiritual role of the English monarch. Without theological discussion, it simply asserts that "it is lawful for Christian men, at the commandment of the Magistrate, to wear weapons, and serve in the wars".⁶⁵ This just war stance has been upheld by the Anglican Communion to the present,

and by several of its daughter churches, including the Methodist and Wesleyan denominations.

Protestant just war thought and international law

Protestant just war thought is closely interwoven with international law. In the seventeenth century, Grotius and Pufendorf considered the ethics of warfare. It is important to note, however, that they framed their work not as contributions to Protestant just war thinking per se, but rather as projects of humanistic, international law.

Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), the Dutch legal scholar, published treatises on international law, ranging from the law of the sea to religious toleration. *Of the Laws of War and Peace*, published in 1625, is of central importance. Grotius unites theological and humanist perspectives in his discussion of whether war can ever be just, and in what circumstances. Grotius openly acknowledges his intellectual debt to Alberico Gentili, an Italian Protestant legal scholar whose *De Jure Belli* (1598) greatly influenced him. But Gentili's work, aimed at legitimizing English policy towards the Spanish armada, was later overshadowed by Grotius' more systematic approach. This section focuses on Grotius, who had the greater influence not only on other Protestant thinkers but on virtually all scholars of international law in the Western tradition.

Grotius asserts that war is a natural right. As Europeans explored Asia and the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the idea of natural law – a universal set of principles observed by all peoples – came under fire from sceptics pointing to the vast array of cultures whose values seemed so irreconcilable. Grotius thus based his natural law system on the “one universal precept the sceptics did accept: the natural urge of all of us to self-preservation”.⁶⁶

Grotius does not treat natural law completely secularly. He posits that, “since the law of nature is perpetual and unchangeable, nothing contradictory to it could be commanded by God, who is never unjust”.⁶⁷ Thus, although the Old Testament Mosaic laws are no longer binding for Christians, they serve as a good example for formulating modern laws of war. Furthermore, the New Testament also does not forbid war: “the laws of Christ do not impose duties . . . above [those] . . . required by the law of nature.”⁶⁸ To justify his view, Grotius, like Luther and Calvin, points to the interaction between John the Baptist and the newly converted soldiers, arguing that, if Christians were obligated to give up the sword, an explicit command would have been given then. Grotius also agrees with Luther that true Christians would not need force: “if all people were Christians, and lived like Christians, there would be no wars.”⁶⁹

Grotius, like Luther, makes just authority the primary condition for establishing just cause. No war can be lawfully made except by the sovereign authority of a state. That authority lies explicitly in the political leaders, not in the people. Rebellion is not permissible, because subjects do not have a “right to restrain and punish kings for an abuse of their power”.⁷⁰ War must be openly declared, not because secrecy is problematic ethically, but because it must be clearly demonstrated that the war is the will of the sovereign.⁷¹

Just cause for Grotius centres on self-defence. Aware that rulers could use “defence” to veil their pursuit of power and material gain, Grotius specifies that true self-defence arises only out of necessity, and must be based on actual knowledge of another’s hostile intent, and not merely on fear or jealousy of the other’s potential.⁷² A war cannot be just simply because of its realist benefits, by providing territory or wealth. National honour is also not an acceptable cause, and Grotius is adamant that religious or moral causes cannot be justified – no doubt a critical response to the ongoing Thirty Years War between Protestant and Catholic states.⁷³ Lastly, Grotius explains that a leader must not simply act in a just way, but must have just intentions for doing so.⁷⁴

Grotius’ definition of self-defence is not as narrow and restrictive as it first seems. While cautioning that leaders should always act for the good of the entire country (and not their private interests), he argues that in some cases it may be just to intervene on behalf of others.⁷⁵ States may thus justly fight to protect allies and to uphold bonds of Common Nature. Grotius also permits war to recover an indemnity or to punish another state for some wrongdoing. Both of these can be subsumed by a broad definition of self-defence. Collecting an indemnity can be a form of territorial self-defence and, since the primary “crime” in the international system is a violation of sovereignty, punishment too can be seen as a subset of self-defence. The difference here is that, whereas self-defence implies simply staving off an invasion, punishment allows states to protect themselves further by preventing future crimes.

Grotius devotes more attention than his predecessors to the lawful conduct of war. Any means leading to a just end of the war are justifiable, but what is “right” in legal terms may not always be “moral”.⁷⁶ Christians are called to restraint, especially regarding the lives of innocents. Grotius upholds Aquinas’ principle of double effect: “it will be necessary to guard against things, which fall not within the original purpose of an action, and the happening of which might be foreseen: unless indeed the action has a tendency to produce advantages, that will far outweigh the consequences of any accidental calamity.”⁷⁷ Although civilians may be injured or killed in the course of a legitimate military action, “yet human-

ity will require that the greatest precaution should be used against involving the innocent in danger, except in cases of extreme urgency and utility".⁷⁸ Grotius defines innocents as those who do not bear arms, such as women, children, priests, philosophers and merchants.⁷⁹ Such civilians may be killed in war, but not intentionally, unless their deaths are absolutely and inevitably necessary in military terms. His source for this is not a Christian one, but rather the Roman historian Seneca.

Even enemy soldiers should be shown some mercy, when they are not posing an active threat: "No one can be justly killed by design, except by way of legal punishment, or to defend our lives, and preserve our property, when it cannot be effected without his destruction."⁸⁰ Likewise, after surrender has been tendered, further bloodshed is no longer legitimate.⁸¹ Alluding to his disgust over the violence between Christians during the Hundred Years War, Grotius urges conquerors to permit the continuance of the existing religion.⁸²

Grotius even lays out principles for the respect of enemy property. The seizure or destruction of property may be legal, but yet not moral. Wanton destruction of property is unwarranted. Unnecessary violence and damage should be avoided, especially in capturing towns, where the lives and livelihoods of innocent residents are at risk. Grotius argues that, "besides being no way conducive to the termination of war, [such means] are totally repugnant to every principle of Christianity and justice".⁸³ Additionally, art, religious objects and tombs ought to be spared. Although the law of nations may give armies the legal right to destroy them, as a sign of respect it is better to forbear.⁸⁴

Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694) was Grotius' intellectual and historical successor. Born in Saxony, he entered the University of Leipzig to study Lutheran theology, developing an interest in natural law and moral philosophy. By 1659, he had moved to Holland, where Grotius' son recommended him to the Elector Palatinate. In 1673, *On the Duty of Man and Citizen According to Natural Law* was published.

Unlike his predecessors, who implicitly considered mankind as naturally sinful and tragically doomed to violence, Pufendorf declares that "it is most agreeable to natural law that men should live in peace . . . [which] itself is a state peculiar to man, insofar as he is distinct from the beasts".⁸⁵ War, however, "is sometimes permitted, and occasionally necessary", when one's property or rights cannot be defended in any other way.⁸⁶

Just cause is broader for Pufendorf, as it had been for Grotius, in the tradition of Aquinas who permitted war not only in self-defence but also for the righting of wrongs. One's fellow citizens have the highest claim to defence, followed by allies, friends and kin. Pufendorf legitimizes

collective security, permitting fighting “on another’s behalf”, assuming that the other party “has a just cause and . . . the party coming to aid has a reasonable ground for conducting hostilities on his behalf against the third party”.⁸⁷

War can be justly fought to collect “what is due to us from others but has been denied, or the procurement of reparations for wrong inflicted and of assurance for the future”.⁸⁸ Although just cause can thus be claimed even in offensive wars, rulers must take care that war is always the last resort. Amicable settlement should always be sought first and, if there “remains some doubt about right or fact”, one should avoid turning to arms.⁸⁹

Just intent is also significant. Even a just cause can lead to an unjust war if the leader is motivated by “lust for wealth and lust for power”.⁹⁰ Going to war on the basis of a false pretext, such as “fear of the wealth and power of a neighbour, unjustified aggrandizement, desire for better territory, refusal of something which is simply and straightforwardly owed . . . or desire to extinguish another’s legitimately acquired right”, is unjust.⁹¹

Like Grotius, Pufendorf carefully describes rules for just means. He similarly distinguishes between the natural right to inflict unlimited suffering on one’s enemy and the moral obligation to fight with moderation. A distinction must be made between “what an enemy may suffer without wrong and what we ourselves may inflict without loss of humanity”.⁹² The minimum of necessary force should be used, because “humanity . . . requires that so far as the momentum of warfare permits, we should inflict no more suffering on an enemy than defence or vindication of our right . . . requires”.⁹³ The concern with moderation is thus two-fold: respect for the humanity of one’s enemy and of one’s self.

Pufendorf also discusses enemy people’s property rights. Unlike Grotius, who liberally upheld their right to keep their property, Pufendorf simply refers to the common practice of warfare. By custom, property taken by soldiers is acquired for the state, but it is a “universal practice” that movable property is left to the soldiers, who take it as a reward or in lieu of pay.⁹⁴

A century later, Swiss Protestant Emerich de Vattel would continue the conversation about international law in a decidedly secular tone in his *Law of Nations* (1758). This secularism is presaged in Grotius and Pufendorf, who carefully separate the roles of Church and state, as well as private and public morality. The integration of Protestant theologies of violence with modern secular international law suggests that, at least in the case of the mainstream denominations, there has been a willingness to accept and encourage the development of international law and institutions to limit and control violence.

Protestant just war theory: Facing the twentieth century and beyond

World War II's devastating destruction and genocide led to a resurgence in Protestant just war thought in Europe and the United States. Theologian Karl Barth (1886–1964) served as a pastor in his native Switzerland before becoming a professor of theology in Germany. On the eve of World War II, he attacked the German government as heretical in its attempt to nationalize the Church. Expelled from Germany in 1935, he volunteered for the Swiss army after the outbreak of war.⁹⁵ Although he vehemently opposed Nazi totalitarianism, Barth did not view Communism as an equal threat, and was the only prominent theologian of the era not to condemn the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.⁹⁶

The crux of Barth's critique of Nazism is that God ordains neither state nor nation. This differs from Luther, who claimed the state is created by God for mankind's sake. Barth argues that raising the nation to such a position is "heretical by the fact that it inevitably introduces a foreign deity, a national god".⁹⁷

With the state no longer sacrosanct, the recourse to war becomes more complex. Even national self-defence cannot be a sufficient just cause. Barth even questions the defence of one's own person, arguing that such self-defence is "almost entirely excluded" by divine command.⁹⁸ Self-defence is not "natural", because it is not obvious why "force should be met by force, aggression by aggression, disorder by disorder", creating a cycle of violence resolving nothing.⁹⁹ Self-defence thus "degrades" the self, and perhaps more importantly violates the rights of the aggressor over whose life God "does not give us any authority".¹⁰⁰ Therefore, defence of our selves, our possessions and others' possessions should be prohibited.

However, "it is certainly not the case that God has abandoned . . . the common life of man to the confusion which would inevitably result if . . . individuals could assault others without restraint and at their own impulse".¹⁰¹ Therefore, one *can* act to defend another's life. In that case, "it will not be a matter of his own conflict with the assailant, in which he tries to overpower and disarm him as an enemy, but of God's conflict with the disorder and disaster which devastate humanity".¹⁰² Killing can be justified to defend others – especially one's community. There can be something in the life of the state that, if surrendered, would mean "[yielding] something which must not be betrayed, which is necessarily more important . . . than the preservation of life itself, and which is thus more important than the preservation of the lives of those who unfortunately are trying to take it".¹⁰³

Barth's definition of what is valuable enough to be thus defended is very limited. Concerns about the balance of power, honour, even the

internal conditions of another state are all “too paltry to be worth the terrible price involved for their realization by war . . . War for such reasons is an act of murder.”¹⁰⁴ Even “the existence or non-existence of a state does not always constitute a valid reason for war”, because sometimes a state’s licence to exist has “expired” and it would be “thus better advised to yield and surrender”.¹⁰⁵ A state has a right to self-defence only when it “has serious grounds for not being able to assume responsibility for the surrender of its independence” because the consequences would be so devastating for the life of its citizens as a people.¹⁰⁶

Although war may sometimes be justified, the Church should always “start with the assumption that the inflexible negative of pacifism has almost infinite arguments in its favour and is almost overpoweringly strong”.¹⁰⁷ War should not be accepted as a “normal, fixed and in some sense necessary part of . . . the just state”.¹⁰⁸ Instead, the Church should encourage states to fashion a just peace so war is no longer needed, urging states to observe “fidelity and faith in their mutual dealings as the responsible presupposition of a true foreign policy, for solid agreements and alliances and their honest observance, for international courts and conventions”, and to disband their “standing armies in which the officers constitute *per se* a permanent danger to peace”.¹⁰⁹

Barth also upholds conscientious objection. In his view, “killing is a very personal act, and being killed a very personal experience. It is thus commensurate with the thing itself that even in the political form which killing assumes in war it should be the theme of supremely personal interrogation.”¹¹⁰ The burden of responsibility for killing in war lies squarely on the individuals involved – both as citizens and as soldiers. Thus, the state cannot command a man to serve, because “the state is not God”.¹¹¹ But a conscientious objector must meet two conditions. First, this “act of insubordination” must be carried out in a way that does not deny the state but affirms it.¹¹² The individual’s opposition must be a service to the political community, and not just a means of keeping his own hands clean. Second, the objector must accept the consequences of his objection without complaint. He cannot accept alternative service: if the war is not worthy of being fought with weapons, it should be resisted even in its non-military forms, such as civilian or ambulance service.

The views of German theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) on war would also be strongly influenced by the two world wars. A Lutheran minister in Berlin, Tillich was sent to the front in 1914 as a chaplain. In 1932, while teaching at Frankfurt University, he stood up against storm troopers who attacked students there, and was pressured to leave Germany. In 1935, he accepted an invitation from Reinhold Niebuhr to come to Union Theological Seminary in the United States. By the late

1950s, he had become the “foremost Protestant thinker” in the United States.¹¹³

Like Barth, Tillich argues that the totalitarian state is inherently in conflict with the Church. The Church should neither be subjected to state power, nor radically separated from it. In a 1934 essay, Tillich criticizes the traditional Lutheran position that the Church has the right to influence the state only indirectly, arguing that it leads to an “absence of public criticism of state activities” and a “separation between private and public morality”.¹¹⁴ If the state makes claims of an absolute and totalitarian character, it inevitably conflicts with the Church. Although the Church is not “absolute itself”, it “gives evidence of the absolute”, whereas the state has only “the task of regulating the finite and social sphere, and therefore has no right to a claim of an absolute or totalitarian character”.¹¹⁵ The Church must therefore demand that the state remain within its limits.

The difficulty, however, is that, even as the Protestant Church emerged to “challenge the totalitarianism of the Catholic church”, the Reformation itself “propagated a nationalism of which culture as well as religion became its victims”, and the “church’s opposition to nationalistic ideology, with its unjust claims and untrue assertions, became weaker with every decade of modern history”.¹¹⁶ Between the “subjection of the churches to the national states” and the “liberal ideal of separation of church and state”, the Church has been rendered “impotent” in modern times.¹¹⁷ The Church must reclaim its independence and not allow itself to be pushed into a narrow corner of the social fabric. Otherwise, the Church loses “its radical otherness” and becomes no more than a “benevolent social club”.¹¹⁸

For Tillich, international institutions can help foster more peaceful relations between nation-states, and even lead them towards greater (although never total) unity. “Despite all failures,” Tillich writes in 1936, the League of Nations “has put into effect the idea of a ... sphere of power superior to individual sovereignty; the struggle for power of the national groups takes place at least partially in the arena of a legal order, which is democratic in form”.¹¹⁹ Institutions’ capacity to create unity is limited by the competitive nature of human communities and by the fact that such institutions are “determined by a group of leading nations”, namely the winners of the world wars.¹²⁰

With this view of the international community in mind, Tillich lays out two conditions for a just war: when a higher unity must be created or defended. For the first case, Tillich provides the example of the American Civil War, when the nation had to be held together by force for some greater good (the expansion of civil rights); for the latter, Tillich points to the American Revolutionary War, when the colonies had to separate

from Britain to acquire their legitimate political rights.¹²¹ Just causes represent “creative justice” or “a justice whose final aim is the preservation or restitution of a community of social groups, subnational or supranational”.¹²² Creative justice is the only legitimate cause for war.

But there is “no way of saying with more than daring faith whether a war was or is a just war in this sense”, for there are so many variables to consider and human reason is limited.¹²³ Nonetheless, this inescapable incertitude “does not justify the cynical type of realism which surrenders all criteria and judgements, nor does it justify the utopian idealism which believes in the possibility of removing the compulsory element of power from history”.¹²⁴ Thus, the Church must encourage peace, but nonetheless should not deny this tool of statecraft to the body politic. After all, pacifism may end “in consequences which are opposite from those intended” in a world where “national as well as international peace depends on the power to restrain the violators of peace”.¹²⁵

Tillich also explicitly deals with the issue of nuclear weapons in the years after World War II. War cannot be just if it is “in reality universal suicide”, and thus “one can never start an atomic war with the claim that it is a just war, because it cannot serve the unity which belongs in the Kingdom of God”.¹²⁶ Furthermore, a nuclear war would be evil “if it could not serve the principle of creative justice”, since it would be “[annihilating] what it is supposed to defend”.¹²⁷ The “impotency of conventional weapons does not lift the prohibition against the use of atomic weaponry . . . no first use of atomic weapons is permitted; and should this mean withdrawal from territory, this is a tolerable short term consequence”.¹²⁸ However, “one must be ready to answer in kind, even with atomic weapons, if the other side uses them first”, for the “threat itself could be a deterrent”.¹²⁹

In the United States, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1972) became one of the foremost Protestant just war theorists. The son of an immigrant Lutheran preacher, Niebuhr became a professor at New York’s Union Theological Seminary. In 1932, Niebuhr and his younger brother (theologian H. Richard Niebuhr) engaged in a landmark debate within the pages of *The Christian Century*. Responding to the Manchurian crisis and the looming spectre of World War II, the younger Niebuhr believed that strict pacifism was the appropriate Christian response, penning the “Grace of Doing Nothing”. He denied the usefulness of just war criteria, arguing that “war cannot be evaluated in terms of the rightness of particular causes, an exercise that results only in self-righteous hubris”.¹³⁰

But the elder Niebuhr argued that engagement was necessary, laying the foundations for Christian realism. Niebuhr pragmatically asserted that no specific norm could be taken absolutely, that “the thing for the moralist to keep in view historically is the social goal, and values must

be wielded against each other to produce the pattern of activity that will result in the most egalitarian and inclusive social good".¹³¹ For this reason, Niebuhr's work does not provide a systematic approach to just war theory, although it does outline a justification for violence and suggest some ways in which inter-state peace could be established.

Like Pufendorf, Niebuhr was moderately optimistic about the human potential to live in harmony. In his view, humankind is blessed with a "natural impulse", prompting him "to consider the needs of others, even when they conflict with his own".¹³² But although education could encourage people to expand their range of benevolent impulse, "there are definite limits in the capacity of ordinary mortals", making it impossible for them to give others the same rights they grant themselves.¹³³

As a result, coercion is a natural requirement for "all social co-operation on a larger scale than the most intimate social group".¹³⁴ Although states cannot rely on coercion alone to maintain unity, they would be lost without it. Realistic about the relationship between order, coercion and justice, Niebuhr admits that "power sacrifices justice to peace with the community and destroys peace between communities . . . the power that prevents anarchy in intra-group relations encourages anarchy in inter-group relations".¹³⁵ Indeed, "the fact that the coercive factor in society is both necessary and dangerous seriously complicates the whole task of securing both peace and justice".¹³⁶ Humankind should not naïvely hope for an ideal society, but should instead concentrate on creating a society "in which there will be enough justice, and in which coercion will be sufficiently non-violent to prevent his common enterprise from issuing into complete disaster".¹³⁷ Ultimately, the "political order must be satisfied with relative peace and relative justice".¹³⁸

Violence should not be blithely dismissed as a reasonable tool for achieving justice and social change. Although coercion undermines justice in some respects, "equality is a higher social goal than peace".¹³⁹ Without equality, "peace" is really nothing more than "an armistice within the existing disproportions of power".¹⁴⁰ Therefore, it is wrong to assume that "violence is intrinsically immoral".¹⁴¹ Niebuhr unequivocally states: "Nothing is intrinsically immoral except ill-will and nothing is intrinsically good except goodwill."¹⁴² Human motives are inevitably mixed, and a priori classifying certain means of achieving them as wrong or right is unjust. Typically, overt acts of violence (such as outright rebellion) are condemned, whereas covert acts of violence (such as systemic economic injustice) are tacitly permitted. So if coercion is ethically justified, although "always morally dangerous", we cannot "draw any absolute line of demarcation between violent and non-violent coercion".¹⁴³ Intent is difficult to determine, and our habits and laziness lead us to assume that non-violent acts are motivated by goodwill whereas violent

ones are driven by ill will. In Niebuhr's view, this "traditionalized instrumental value" attached to all actions based on their violence or non-violence obscures the intents behind them, as well as their long-term effects.¹⁴⁴

For Niebuhr, the question of whether the use of force is justifiable hinges on its intended results: "a political policy cannot be intrinsically evil if it can be proved to be an efficacious instrument for the achievement of a morally approved end."¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Niebuhr recognizes that violence as a political tool carries special moral risks and consequences. In the short term, "the destruction of life or the suppression of freedom result in the immediate destruction of moral values".¹⁴⁶ Whether this sacrifice could be justifiable depends on the circumstances.

Nations are, by nature, too selfish and hubristic "to make the attainment of international justice without the use of force possible".¹⁴⁷ The danger is that inter-state politics easily falls into an endless cycle of violence, as nations avenging wrongs against themselves engender new wrongs against others. Niebuhr therefore lays out several methods for overcoming this cycle and "making force morally redemptive".¹⁴⁸ One method is to place violence in the hands of a community or organization "which transcends the conflicts of interest between individual nations and has an impartial perspective upon them".¹⁴⁹ The League of Nations could have served such a role, but Niebuhr is sceptical about its potential for impartiality, given the broad differences in power between states. Furthermore, the international community itself neither carries enough "prestige" nor represents a "sufficiently unified" communal spirit to discipline violators.¹⁵⁰ Because of its institutional weakness, it would have difficulty proving itself in the one really important test of its efficacy: whether it would be "able to grant justice to those who have been worsted in battle without requiring them to engage in new wars to redress their wrongs".¹⁵¹ Recognizing that human society will probably never completely escape social conflict, Niebuhr does not advocate abolishing coercion, but rather proposes limiting it by "counselling the use of such types of coercion as are most compatible with the moral and rational factors in human society and by discriminating between the purposes and ends for which coercion is used".¹⁵² Realistically, the international community can reduce the occurrence of violence but cannot hope to banish it entirely.

Unlike Luther and Calvin, who unequivocally condemned rebellion, Niebuhr sees it as potentially leading to greater justice. The short-term upheaval of rebellion may be worth the long-term improvement in social justice: "if a season of violence can establish a just social system and can create the possibilities of its preservation, there is no purely ethical ground upon which violence and revolution can be ruled out."¹⁵³ If coer-

cion is accepted as a necessary instrument of social cohesion, not only do violent and non-violent coercion have to be considered as a single category, but the distinction between coercion used by governments and that used by revolutionaries must also disappear.

Although Niebuhr justifies the use of force, he spends very little time on the question of just means. He does comment that, “if violence can be justified at all, its terror must have the tempo of a surgeon’s skill and healing must follow quickly upon its wounds”.¹⁵⁴ Logically, it seems that just means must therefore uphold the end goal of peace. Additionally, in his discussion of the possible injustices associated with non-violent coercion (i.e. boycotts and sanctions), Niebuhr points out that these tactics are no better than their violent counterparts at isolating the guilty from the innocent.¹⁵⁵ Implicitly, Niebuhr thus upholds the principle of non-combatant immunity. However, just as the validity of force as a legitimate political tool could be judged only against its ends, Niebuhr’s lack of attention to just means suggests a similar relativist emphasis.

After the advent of the nuclear bomb, Niebuhr re-evaluated his thinking about just means. At first, he did not judge nuclear weapons to be significantly different from the conventional weapons already available, considering them an expansion of scale rather than a revolutionary technology threatening the very roots of just war thought.¹⁵⁶ When the massive US retaliation policy emerged, Niebuhr called it “reckless” and a violation of the principle of non-combatant immunity, yet came short of suggesting that the potential for nuclear war had really changed the nature of international politics.¹⁵⁷ Ultimately, Niebuhr’s thought evolved towards a new “nuclear realism”, recognizing that the risks involved in the new technology call for more than restraint, and perhaps even a policy of avoidance of war.¹⁵⁸

Almost a generation after Niebuhr, Paul Ramsey (1913–1988) emerged as a significant Protestant just war thinker. A Methodist, Ramsey’s theological roots lay in the Anglican tradition. Conservative both politically and religiously, Ramsey’s work was a reaction against “the dominance of Niebuhrian political realism on the Protestant ethical scene – not because of its realism about coercion, but because of its political approach to morality”.¹⁵⁹ For Ramsey, a Christian ethic could not be based on the political calculation of good ends. Instead, it must draw on a priori moral principles.

The most fundamental moral principle is love. In *Basic Christian Ethics*, Ramsey systematically presents his theological principles. Love functions in a distinctive way in Ramsey’s theology, appropriating “much of the function of a Roman Catholic natural law ethic, without either its metaphysical or its teleological grounding”.¹⁶⁰ Natural law is rejected on the Reformation grounds that it wrongly directs the “cultivation of virtue

toward human fulfilment, rather than to ... obedience to God's commands".¹⁶¹ For Ramsey, as for Augustine, love justifies the recourse to war (as opposed to concerns for justice, as in Niebuhr).

Ramsey was most occupied with the question of just war at the height of the Cold War, in the 1950s and 1960s, penning both *War and the Christian Conscience* (1961) and *The Just War* (1968). The latter text revises and reworks many ideas from the first, and so represents Ramsey's most refined ideas.

Like Luther, Ramsey holds that Church and state operate in separate spheres. Religious communities should be concerned with political doctrine, but "in politics the Church is only a *theoretician*", clarifying and laying out the legitimate options for choice.¹⁶² Churches should not try to influence particular policy decisions, but should instead establish an ethical basis from which to evaluate them. In a sense, Churches can create *political doctrine* but not *policy*; they can say what may be done, but not what should or must be done.¹⁶³ Churches must submit to political authority, for political decision-making "is an image of the majesty of God".¹⁶⁴

As for Luther and Calvin, Ramsey sees power as inherently involved in politics. Governments have the responsibility to uphold the national common good and, as far as they are able, the international common good.¹⁶⁵ The common good is based on order, without which achieving other goods becomes impossible. Order is "not a higher value in politics than justice, but neither is humanitarian justice a higher value than order"; instead, each is conditional upon the other.¹⁶⁶ Thus, there is always a certain degree of tragedy in politics, as it tries to negotiate between these often competing goals.

Ramsey traces the origins of just war not to natural justice but to "the interior of the ethics of Christian love".¹⁶⁷ Retelling the story of the Good Samaritan, Ramsey imagines what might have happened if the Samaritan had arrived while the robbers were still assaulting the man on the roadside. Should the Samaritan have just stood by, waiting for the altercation to end, before carrying the victim to the inn? Although Christ did teach that disciples should turn the other cheek, he did not counsel them to "lift up the face of another oppressed man for *him* to be struck again on *his* other cheek ... Instead, it is the work of love and mercy to deliver as many as possible of God's children from tyranny."¹⁶⁸ If forced to choose between the perpetrator of injustice and his victims, one must prefer the latter – they are deserving of love and protection. Thus, military force is justified out of "love for neighbours threatened by violence, by aggression or tyranny".¹⁶⁹

The issue of right intention is clearly present in Ramsey's work. He argues that "it is never right to intend to do wrong that good may come of

it”.¹⁷⁰ This is especially true in a nuclear world. At the height of the Cold War, with the very real threat of mutually assured destruction, Ramsey counselled that “nuclear weapons have only added to this perennial truth a morally insignificant footnote: it can never do *any good* to intend or do wrong that good may come of it”.¹⁷¹ Whereas this interpretation led him in his earlier work to deny the justness of nuclear deterrence, in his later book he revises that position, arguing that deterrence does not really rest on the intent to murder.

Ramsey also upholds the traditional just means principles, especially non-combatant immunity. Although love for one’s neighbour might justify the recourse to force, it could not justify a decision “to intend and directly to do the death of the aggressor’s children as a means of dissuading him from his evil deeds”.¹⁷² The same love that permits violence limits its scope. Nonetheless, this restriction does not mean that non-combatants “were to be roped off like ladies at a medieval tournament”;¹⁷³ they are immune “only from direct, intended attack”.¹⁷⁴ Ramsey claims that the just war tradition “never supposed that non-combatants were morally immune from indirect injury or death on however colossal a scale, if there is proportionate grave reason for doing this”.¹⁷⁵ One must make a prudential decision among good, evil and lesser evil consequences. Nonetheless, acts of murder and acts of war are not synonymous: “indiscriminate bombing or counter-people warfare stands indicted as intrinsically wrong.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, counter-population nuclear targeting is unacceptable (because it directly and intentionally puts civilians in harm’s way), but counter-force nuclear targeting may be acceptable, even if it causes large numbers of civilian casualties.¹⁷⁷

Ramsey also addresses the issue of counter-insurgency warfare. Recognizing that the balance of nuclear terror had opened the world to a multiplication of small-scale conventional wars, Ramsey concentrates on the question of how a counter-insurgency war could be conducted justly. His discussion begins with a reminder that, in determining the justice of any war’s conduct, the two most fundamental principles are those of discrimination and proportionality.¹⁷⁸ These principles apply equally to *both* sides in the conflict.

Unlike his predecessors, Ramsey does not discuss whether rebellion (or insurgency) itself is legitimate, assuming that sometimes insurgencies have justified causes. Nonetheless, Ramsey points out that insurgents often overstep the bounds of discrimination. An insurgency movement resorting to terror engages in “an inherently immoral plan of war, no matter how many benefits are supposed to accrue from it”.¹⁷⁹

The problem for the army involved in counter-insurgency warfare is that it risks involving itself in terror as well, owing to the intermixing of civilians and insurgents. Ramsey argues that modern war, “both at the

highest nuclear level and at the sub-conventional level”, has become “irremediably indiscriminate . . . by an entire rejection of the moral immunity of non-combatants from direct attack”.¹⁸⁰

Ramsey suggests that a clearer principle of discrimination is needed, more clearly defining the nature of a combatant. A combatant “means anyone who is an actual bearer of the force one seeks to repress by resorting to arms”, even if he or she does not wear a uniform.¹⁸¹ Some surrendered soldiers fit this category, if it cannot be assured that they are completely disarmed, as do some apparent civilians, if they are evidently armed. Ultimately, Ramsey admits that it may be so difficult to sort out the combatants from the non-combatants that fighting a just war may become impossible. In that case, an alternative would be to combat the insurgency politically rather than militarily. Ultimately, “even if a revolution happens to be wholly unjustifiable because it uses means no end can warrant and seeks ends for which no political means are apt and is on balance evil in its worldwide consequences”, that does not mean that it should be opposed militarily.¹⁸² If a war is not winnable using just means, then justice may demand that it not be fought.

Protestant pacifism

Pacifism has always played a role within Protestantism as a counterbalance to just war thought. For the first four centuries, pacifist movements were limited to the smaller sects: the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, the Quakers in the seventeenth, and the Brethren in the eighteenth.¹⁸³ These denominations, unlike the dominant Protestant state churches, were suspicious of state power, encouraging their members to remain separate from the world. Basing their politics on the “doctrine concerning the separation of the faithful from the world” and a “conception of the church as a suffering church”, most Anabaptists historically embraced “the practices of persecution and oppression”.¹⁸⁴ Thus, they would fight to defend neither themselves nor their state, and some would even go so far as to refuse to serve the state in any capacity. The relationship between Anabaptist groups and the state Protestant (and Catholic) churches was a troubled one. Several theological differences separated the Anabaptists from the mainline churches, of which the just war issue was one of the most significant. By refusing to serve the state in wartime, Anabaptists came to be seen as not only theologically heretical but politically dangerous.

The twentieth-century Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder is the most dominant voice to arise from one of these traditional Peace Churches. Yoder’s influence reaches far beyond the scope of traditional

Protestant pacifism, directly influencing theologian Stanley Hauerwas, who has become an outspoken advocate for pacifism from within mainstream Protestantism.

Yoder writes from outside the just war canon, yet his work encourages just war thinkers to take their own tradition more seriously.¹⁸⁵ His book *When War Is Unjust* directly engages both Catholic and Protestant just war thinkers, including critical responses from each of these traditions. Yoder argues that it is essential to engage those who uphold just war theories, because “it is still the case that every time just-war proponents exercise effective discipline and limit the harm they do, fewer lives and other values will be destroyed than if they had not applied that restraint”.¹⁸⁶

Yoder criticizes just war theory for employing a sliding scale of ethics. Once the proposition is accepted that the commandment against killing can occasionally be violated, it becomes necessary to make more and more exceptions in order to maintain the viability of the system.¹⁸⁷ The rules must evolve as military technology and tactics develop; otherwise they lose their efficacy. Furthermore, the laws of war unsurprisingly favour the interests of their crafters. Thus, they reflect the power disparity between states in the world, reinforcing structural injustice. Lastly, Yoder points out that just war theory’s validity depends on its ability to distinguish between wars, permitting some while condemning others. Yet just war theory only very rarely accomplishes the latter: politically it is too difficult, and theoretically it raises an uncomfortable possibility. If a war cannot be waged justly, then a strict reading of just war theory implies that it should not be fought at all. But if the cause were just enough to legitimize violence, how is it that possible?

Much of Stanley Hauerwas’ (1940–) advocacy of pacifism also directly confronts just war theory on its own terms. Hauerwas’ first forays into the just war/pacifism debate came in response to the 1983 pastoral letter from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States condemning nuclear weapons.¹⁸⁸ In the pastoral letter, the bishops take on a near-pacifist (what Yoder would call a “nuclear pacifist”) position,¹⁸⁹ arguing that, given the dangers inherent in nuclear weapons and the ever-present risk of escalation, warfare is less desirable now than ever. Yet they stop short of true pacifism, leaving open the possibility of Christian participation in war as a means of achieving earthly justice. Hauerwas also criticized the United Methodist Bishops’ Pastoral (1985) on the question of nuclear war.

Hauerwas argues that the difficulty in maintaining a just war position is that tolerating war in certain circumstances gives war a moral status that then obscures our ability to judge it. To truly test the legitimacy of this status, an account of war must be made that would show “that if war

were eliminated we would be morally the worse for it”.¹⁹⁰ War is more than violence on a grand scale; it is an institution. This institution, clearly the product of human choices, is perceived as “an external agent . . . an unsolicited yet unavoidable consequence of our shared activities”.¹⁹¹ Like any institution, war serves its creators’ interests – in this case, states – enabling them “to perpetuate their own particular shared goods, to preserve their histories and moralities”.¹⁹² In other words, war protects not merely the existence of a people but, more importantly, “their interpretation of their existence”.¹⁹³

But the illogic of war as a positive good emerges out of the very attempt to demonstrate its positive side. How can just war be an exception to the general rule of non-violence, if war itself is an institution so determinative of our state system? Scepticism about the possibility of just war theory actually condemning a particular war leads Hauerwas to argue that “just war theory is not just a theory of exceptions, but an attempt to limit the destructive potential of war once it is recognized as a moral necessity . . . [I]t does not attempt to make war impossible, but rather to make the moral necessity of war serve human purposes.”¹⁹⁴ Thus, war theory “is a theory of statecraft”, seeking not peace but “the maintenance of ordered justice through which the innocent are protected”.¹⁹⁵

Hauerwas argues that just war theorists’ focus on the political “necessity” of violence fails to recognize that Christ has already created the possibility of peace on earth. Their condemnation of war reflects not theology but rather military reality: the existence of nuclear weapons threatens to turn any conflict nuclear, so therefore churches must reject war itself, to prevent mankind’s destruction. But Hauerwas wonders whether this really has “anything to do with pacifism. If war is wrong, then nuclear war is clearly wrong, but no conclusions about how to keep war nonnuclear need to be drawn to reach that conclusion.”¹⁹⁶

Unlike Luther and Calvin, who conceived of two separate kingdoms, Hauerwas argues that the “kingdom has been made present fully in Jesus Christ”.¹⁹⁷ The heavenly kingdom exists here and now, interwoven with the earthly one. Consequently, “the Christian commitment to non-violence is therefore not first of all an ‘ethic’ but a declaration of the reality of the new age”.¹⁹⁸ Just war theory presumes a separation between these kingdoms; true pacifism denies it.

The use of war as a political tool is for Hauerwas a denial of God’s power to act in shaping the course of human history. War is nothing but “the desire to be rid of God, to claim for ourselves the power to determine our meaning and destiny”; thus, “our desire to protect ourselves from our enemies, to eliminate our enemies in the name of protecting

the common history we share with our friends, is but the manifestation of our hatred of God".¹⁹⁹

However, giving up war as a tool should not be misconstrued as abdicating the responsibility to be active in the world. Pacifism is not easily "summed up as antiwarism or antiviolence".²⁰⁰ Christians must be committed optimists, believing that war is not inevitable, and must make their message heard. This means changing the terms of the debate. The state is not an institution ordained by God to order human society; it is simply a fact of our existence in this time and place. Politics is not synonymous with power, but instead is an ongoing conversation.

Pacifism thus understood is about learning "to deal with conflicts through truth rather than violence".²⁰¹ If just war is "an account of politics that is nonutopian in the interest of keeping the political within humane limits", pacifists must offer a more hopeful view of politics.²⁰² Rather than denying the political nature of our common life, "non-violence requires that we become political by forcing us to listen to the other rather than destroy them".²⁰³ Most importantly, the Church must demonstrate its message of peace by *being* its message of peace. Its primary goal is not so much to "make the world more peaceable or just", as to manifest "the peaceable kingdom in the world".²⁰⁴ Christians must be patient when faced with injustice, recognizing that they "cannot seek 'results' that require [them] to employ unjust means".²⁰⁵

Since the late twentieth century, some dominant Protestant denominations have grown increasingly pacifistic in their views. The emergence of weapons of mass destruction has led some to declare that, in the modern world, a just war is no longer possible. These denominations, including the Federal Council of Churches, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodists, have developed a "just peace" theory. This perspective begins with the assumption that war is unjust, rather than asking whether war could be justified or justly fought in certain circumstances. It also assumes that peace is possible, that war is not the obvious result of a fallen human nature. For this reason, this newly emerging tradition stresses cooperation and active peace-making, and applauds the efforts of the United Nations.

This theory claims that "the revolution in the destructiveness of conventional weapons (to say nothing of nuclear, biological or poison gas weaponry) is so massive that one cannot fight without an unacceptable amount of loss of innocent life".²⁰⁶ The United Methodist Church, for example, declared in the 1972 edition of its *Book of Discipline* that "though coercion, violence and war are presently the ultimate sanctions in international relations, we reject them as incompatible with the gospel and spirit of Christ".²⁰⁷ The Church's *Social Principles* declare its

rejection of war “as an instrument of national foreign policy”.²⁰⁸ This position has been upheld in the subsequent editions.

Protestant crusading

At the opposite extreme, the crusading concept would be reinstated, to some extent, by the Reformed churches, especially those with Calvinist tendencies.²⁰⁹ This choice reflects the denomination’s early struggle for existence as a militant minority caught up in the wars of religion, as well as its theocratic conception of Church-led governance.²¹⁰ The earliest Protestant rhetoric of holy war dates to the Eighty Years War, not only on the Continent but within England as well.

Holy war differs from just war in three major ways.²¹¹ First, in just war theory, the legitimate authority to declare war lies with the secular leader, acting on his own terms. By contrast, the authorization for a holy war comes from a religious authority, or from God himself, through a special revelation. Political leaders may be the recipients of such revelations, but they act under the explicit direction of a higher power, and not on their own terms. Secondly, holy wars not only use religious language rhetorically, but are fought for religious reasons, whereas just war theory denies the legitimacy of such causes. Lastly, just war theory holds open the possibility that there is some justice on both sides or, at the very least, the political and moral legitimacy of the other side’s leaders are not irrevocably damaged by the mere fact of fighting for an unjust cause. Put simply, a good person could fight a bad war. Holy war, however, is understood as a struggle between good and evil, turning the other side into a “demonic and damned enemy committing sacrilege”.²¹² For this reason, it tends towards a self-righteousness that does not lend itself well to limiting the scale of the violence.

It is important to note, however, that Protestant crusading did not emerge explicitly as a third perspective on war, clearly separate from just war thought. Many theologians who use language reflective of a crusading or holy war position believe themselves to be speaking from within the just war tradition itself. Puritan theologians and ministers justifying England’s Civil War, for example, did not abandon “the formal framework of just war theory”, although they moved in the direction of holy war.²¹³ During World War I, most priests and ministers in Britain accepted that the “traditional teaching of the ‘just war’ theory was undeniably valid”, despite using crusading language in sermons and pamphlets.²¹⁴

The theological discussion of holy war and its justification re-emerges in the discourse each time there is a significant war. During the English

Civil War, the Puritans claimed God as their commander in war, passionately invoking the Bible to urge fellow Christians to violence, evidencing “a mentality not foreign to the crusades”.²¹⁵ The Puritans found justification for their stance in Calvin, and also in a popular theological perspective of the time that “lessened the distance between old and new covenants, and, in fact, gave priority to the former in defining a normative pattern of Christian conduct in civil society”.²¹⁶ Likewise, during the American Revolution, Congregationalist and Presbyterian ministers supported the colonists’ cause with crusading language.²¹⁷ During World War I, some conservative Anglican priests argued that Germany should be showed little mercy, with the Bishop of London even calling for a “holy war”.²¹⁸ In the United States, the language of Crusade re-emerged in the Protestant discourse during the Vietnam War and later during the first Gulf War in 1991.

Most recently, crusading language has appeared in the Evangelical Protestant discourse surrounding the war on terror and the Iraq War in the United States. This language has been used not only by certain fundamentalist and evangelical ministers, but also by key Republican Party leaders and even the President himself. (The President, having been raised Episcopalian, is a member of the United Methodist Church, neither of them an Evangelical denomination.) On the one hand, these politicians base much of their public justification for the recourse to war on just war theory, presumably to appeal to a broader range of voters. In his 2003 State of the Union address, President Bush asserted: “If war is forced upon us, we will fight in a just cause and by just means,” language that he repeated numerous times throughout the year.²¹⁹ At the same time, the President has consistently used language more reflective of a holy war perspective. In addition to using enemy images in his rhetoric (that is, portraying the other as explicitly evil), Bush also explicitly painted the conflict itself as a struggle between good and evil: “Out of evil will come incredible good,” he declared in October 2002.²²⁰ A sympathetic chronicle of his years in the White House describes Bush as viewing the war on terror as a “religious war” between Christians and Muslims.²²¹

Conclusion

Within Protestantism, the proper role for violence is still a matter of active consideration. The dominant Protestant churches have historically accepted just war theory, but, with the development of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, several of these churches have

begun to adopt positions that are nearly pacifist in nature. Their case is not that violence per se is unjust, but that modern weapons may make the just use of violence impossible. Nonetheless, none of these churches has officially forsaken the just war position, or cut it from its confessional statements.

Pacifism, once considered heretical by the dominant Protestant denominations, is the official position of only a few smaller denominations, and has remained vocal in its call for a radical transformation of politics. Its radical opposite, the crusading perspective, still exists, although not supported by the largest denominations. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of Crusade has reappeared in the Protestant tradition each time a major war looms, in the arguments made by theologians, ministers and politicians alike. Thus, Protestant just war theory remains at the crossroads between pacifism and Crusade, in a debate yet to be resolved.

Notes

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2. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Epilogue: Continuing Implications of the Just War Tradition", in Jean Bethke Elshtain (ed.) *Just War Theory*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 1992. p. 323.
3. Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994, p. 101.
4. Martin Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved", trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in J. M. Porter (ed.) *Luther: Selected Political Writings*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974, p. 103.
5. James Turner Johnson, "Aquinas and Luther on War and Peace: Sovereign Authority and the Use of Armed Force", *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 31(1), 2003: 16.
6. Martin Luther, "Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia", trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in Porter (ed.) *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, p. 72.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
9. Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved", p. 109.
10. Martin Luther, "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants", trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in Porter (ed.) *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, p. 86.
11. Martin Luther, "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants", trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in Porter (ed.) *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, p. 97.
12. Martin Luther, "Dr. Martin Luther's Warning to His Dear German People", trans. Martin H. Bertram, in Porter (ed.) *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, pp. 136, 139.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 87. See also, "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants", pp. 97–98: "even if I served a Turk and saw my lord in danger, I would forget my spiritual office and stab and hew as long as my heart beat. If I were slain in so doing, I should go straight to heaven."

14. Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved", p. 109.
15. Luther, "Against the Robbing and Murdering Hoards of Peasants", p. 87.
16. Martin Marty, "Can Soldiers Be Saved?", *Christian Century*, 120(12), 14 June 2003, p. 47.
17. Martin Luther, "On War Against the Turk", trans. Charles M. Jacobs, in Porter (ed.) *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, p. 123.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
19. Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, p. 108.
20. Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed", trans. J. J. Schindel, in Porter (ed.) *Luther: Selected Political Writings*, p. 54.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
23. Luther, "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants", pp. 92–93.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
25. Luther, "Temporal Authority", p. 59.
26. Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved", pp. 101–102.
27. Luther, "Temporal Authority", p. 52.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
29. Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved", p. 102.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–114.
32. Luther, "Temporal Authority", p. 65.
33. *Ibid.* See also, Martin Luther, "Lectures on Deuteronomy", in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.) *Luther's Works, Volume 9*. St Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1960, p. 203. In regard to Deuteronomy 20, Luther points out that God commanded the Jews to "first offer peace to their enemies", a practice he claims was also observed by some Gentiles, citing Virgil.
34. Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved", p. 114.
35. Luther, "Temporal Authority", p. 66.
36. Luther, "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants", p. 94.
37. Luther, "Lectures on Deuteronomy", p. 204. See also Luther, "Temporal Authority", p. 66: "one must beware of sin, and not violate wives and virgins."
38. Luther, "Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved", p. 116.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
40. Augsburg Confession, Article XVI, "Civil Government", in *Augsburg Confession – A Confession of Faith Presented in Augsburg by Certain Princes and Cities to His Imperial Majesty Charles V in the Year 1530*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1980, p. 16.
41. Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era: 1500–1650*. New York: Macmillan, 1967, p. 312.
42. Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, pp. 109–110.
43. Derek S. Jeffreys, "'It's a Miracle of God That There Is Any Common Weal Among Us': Unfaithfulness and Disorder in John Calvin's Political Thought", *Review of Politics*, 62(1), 2000: 107.
44. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [1535], ed. John T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 21. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960, 4.20.16.
45. *Ibid.*, 4.20.4, p. 1490.
46. *Ibid.*, 4.20.9, p. 1496.
47. Paul Munday, "John Calvin and Anabaptists on War", *Brethren Life and Thought*, 23, 1978: 244.

48. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.9, p. 1496.
49. *Ibid.*, 4.20.10, p. 1497.
50. *Ibid.*, 4.20.11, p. 1499.
51. *Ibid.*, 4.20.12, p. 1501.
52. *Ibid.*, 4.20.12, p. 1500.
53. *Ibid.*, 4.20.11, p. 1499.
54. *Ibid.*, 4.20.11, p. 1499.
55. *Ibid.*, 4.20.11, p. 1500.
56. *Ibid.*, 4.20.12, p. 1500.
57. *Ibid.*, 4.20.29, p. 1516.
58. *Ibid.*, 4.20.31, p. 1518.
59. Jeffreys, “‘It’s a Miracle of God That There Is Any Common Weal Among Us’”, p. 114.
60. Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.20.30. Here, Calvin uses Old Testament sources to show that “God raises up manifest avengers from among his own servants, and gives them his command to punish accursed tyranny”. Uprising can thus be justified (only) in the case of a direct command from God.
61. *Ibid.*, 4.20.12, p. 1500.
62. *Ibid.*, 4.20.12, p. 1500.
63. *Ibid.*, 4.20.32, p. 1520.
64. Article 23, “Of the Civil Magistrate”, 6.128(2), *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church [USA], Part I: Book of Confessions*. Louisville, KY: The Office of The General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, USA, 1999, p. 147.
65. See <http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html> (accessed 4 November 2008).
66. Benedict Kingsbury, “Confronting Difference: The Puzzling Durability of Gentili’s Combination of Pragmatic Pluralism and Normative Judgment”, *American Journal of International Law*, 92(4), 1998: 717.
67. Hugo Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace* [1625]. Kessinger Publishing, 2004, I.1.
68. *Ibid.*, I.2.
69. *Ibid.*, I.2.
70. *Ibid.*, I.3.
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72. *Ibid.*, II.22.
73. *Ibid.*, II.22.
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75. *Ibid.*, II.25.
76. *Ibid.*, III.1.
77. *Ibid.*, III.1.
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90. Ibid., 16.4, p. 168.
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94. Ibid., 16.13, p. 171.
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96. Daniel Cornu, *Karl Barth et la Politique*. Geneva: Éditions Labor et Fides, 1967, p. 167. See also “Witness to an Ancient Truth”. Barth “[regarded] anticommunism as a matter of principle an evil even greater than communism itself”, finding such a knee-jerk reaction to be not only totalitarian but also naïve about the failings of Western capitalism (see Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, pp. 57, 63).
97. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961, p. 305.
98. Ibid., p. 429.
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100. Ibid., p. 430.
101. Ibid., p. 434.
102. Ibid., p. 435.
103. Ibid., p. 462.
104. Ibid., p. 461.
105. Ibid., p. 461.
106. Ibid., p. 461.
107. Ibid., p. 455.
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109. Ibid., p. 460.
110. Ibid., p. 466.
111. Ibid., p. 467.
112. Ibid., p. 467.
113. “To Be or Not to Be”, *Time Magazine*, 16 March 1959.
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116. Paul Tillich, *Systemic Theology: Three Volumes in One*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967, p. 216.
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169. Ibid., p. 144.
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