

## How Should a Christian Think About War?

The aim of this presentation is to look at the question of the ethics of war in the light of Scripture and draw the basic outline of classical just war theory as it has come down to us from Augustine through Aquinas and Grotius. Can we find a meaningful middle-ground from a Christian perspective between two extremes of militarism and pacifism?

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### I Tension between war and peace in the Bible.

- I.1. “What is the **source of wars** and fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you? You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires.” – **James 4:1-3**
- I.2. “Thou shalt not kill” -- **Ex. 20:13**.
- I.3. “For government is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.”  
**Romans 13:4**
- I.4. **Judges 11:12-28** – Jephthah and ammonites.

### II Just war theory – providing a moral framework for war in order to restrict the desire for war.

- II.1. Tranquility of societal peace is in itself a moral good to be maintained by use of force if necessary.
- II.2. Making difference between *violence* and legitimate *use of force*.
  - Monopoly of arms.
  - Keeping tranquility of order within (police) and without (military) the realm.

- James Turner Johnson: “[Tradition] *made no distinction between the use of force by the political community against forces threatening justice, order and peace within or outside its borders. An important distinction was made between the **use of force for the common good (bellum) and the private use of force (duellum).***”

- The distinction between *bellum* and *duellum* must be maintained or the result will be descending into barbarism of private wars!

II.3. Two main aspects of just war theory:

- **JUS AD BELLUM:** what is sufficient **justification** for going to war.
- **JUS IN BELLO:** what are **justified means** for waging war.
  - there are factors that restrict what actions can be taken during the war, what is allowed and what is not.
    - not to harm civilians; difference between legitimate military targets (e.g. hospitals); guilt of the combatants vs. innocence of non-combatants.

II.4. Challenge: In modern warfare blurring the lines between “war” and “military operation”.

### III The necessary criteria of just war in classical theory (St. Augustine)

III.1. **RIGHT AUTHORITY** - Only legal authority has the right to declare war.

- Maintaining political and civil order in society is ethically good.
- Monopoly of violence belongs to the rightful ruler (king, state)

III.2. **RIGHT CAUSE** – The reason for going to war must be just, morally right.

- Defending oneself against unprovoked and unjust attack.
- Reclaim something that was taken unjustly by force.
- To punish evil.

III.3. **RIGHT INTENT** – To maintain and/or restore peace in society; tranquility of order

- One must not go to war for hate, personal glory, bloodthirst or the lust of battle.

- Use of force must be successful; it must be the last resort; it must result in more good than evil.
- The goal of war must be to restore peace; not utopistic peace or heavenly peace, but societal *tranquility of order*.

#### IV Some reflections on just war drawn from Thomas Aquinas

I.1. Rightful and just ruler (Romans 13:1-6), political authority above whom there is no other.

- Princes, vassals, soldiers or churches do not have the right to start a war.
- War is not a private affair; There must be public authority which is necessary condition for a peaceful and ordered society.

#### V Terrorism vs. just war

V.1. **James Turner Johnson:** “Although tradition has made war possible between two states, both of which, because of the complexity of things, seem to have a legitimate reason for it, the violence that we call terrorism is in itself morally evil since it attacks the very foundations of the political community. The power that uses force to combat and punish terrorism is thus the same power that seeks to protect the good social order as such. Terrorism knows no justice, only injustice.”

V.2. **Dr. Keith Pavlichek:** “The very nature of terrorism is that it seeks to undermine and disrupt the social order, justice and peace maintained by the public authorities. An attack on these social goods is therefore an attack on all the people who benefit from them.”

- Terrorism is a private thing done not by state-actors; disrupts tranquility of order for private ideological reasons.
- Motives for private wars rise from ideological reasons, ethnic or religious fanaticism, that know no state borders.
- Just war is a western Christian idea not known in Islam.

#### VI Some thoughts on pacifism

VI.1. Absolute pacifism - Consistently against all killing.

- **Claim** - “No war can be just. All wars are morally wrong. If we respond to destruction in kind, we show that we are no better. It is always wrong to respond to violence with violence.”

- **Critique** - This view **leads to moral reductionism**: makes no distinction between cold-blooded murder, vengeful lynching mob and police, who may need to use lethal force against murderer who fights against arrest.

## VI.2. Classical pacifism (Anabaptists)

- **The Schleitheim Confession of Faith, (1527)**: “The sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and puts to death the wicked, and guards and protects the good. In the Law the sword was ordained for the punishment of the wicked and for their death, and the same [sword] is [now] ordained to be used by the worldly magistrates ... it will be asked concerning the sword, Shall [a Christian] be a magistrate if one should be chosen as such? The answer is as follows: They wished to make Christ king, but He fled and did not view it as the arrangement of His Father. Thus shall we do as He did, and follow Him, and so shall we not walk in darkness.” (Article #6, The Sword)
- **Pavlicheck**: *Schleitheim pacifism avoids moral reductionism and intellectual inconsistency.*

## VII Is just war theory applicable in modern world?

- Definitions: “War”; “special military operation”?
- Serving as a Christian in a military of dictators?
- Ethical dilemmas jus in bello: - “I was just following orders!”
- Weapons of mass destruction?
- Complex super-power geo-politics and “national interests”.
- “If you want peace, prepare for war”.