

Just War as Deterrence against Terrorism?

Options from Theological Ethics

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ISIS, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, Iran's Quds Force, Afghanistan's Kattani network, Iraq's Kataib Hezbollah—these terrorist organizations, along with making news headlines, are increasingly becoming part of our everyday conversations. Terrorism will always be with us, experts assert, even if it can be degraded to a significant degree. This looming threat has become the “new normal.”¹

What is the Christ-follower to do in the face of terrorism—not to mention war in the world and violence on the street? This topic of terrorism has had particular relevance to the Copan family: my wife and I have a daughter in the city of Paris, who has been living there since September 2012. And so she was present during the two 2015 terrorist attacks. And as it turned out, our oldest son was visiting her in January of that year—at the time of the first (Charlie Hebdo) attack.

After the second (November) Paris terrorist attack—actually, a series of coordinated attacks—our daughter offered her personal reflections in an email prayer letter to family and friends:

I write to you with such joy in my heart! First of all I wanted to say a big thank you for all your messages of support and prayer after the recent attacks here in Paris. The night of the attacks I was at a friend's

ABSTRACT: The increased terrorist threat troubles all right-thinking persons. Terrorism also raises particular theological and ethical questions for Christians. Is the use of (lethal) force ever permissible? Is there a difference between the individual Christian's response to personal enemies and the Christian serving in an official capacity (for example, soldiering, policing) to stop (terrorist) threats to a nation or society? Jesus's commands to “turn the other cheek” and “not resist evil” are understood differently by the just warrior and pacifist camps. This article sets the stage for related articles in this issue by describing the features of “terrorism,” Christian “pacifism,” and the Christian “just war” position as well as some of the attendant tensions and challenges.

1. Daniel R. DePetris, “The 5 Deadliest Terrorist Groups on the Planet,” *The National Interest*, November 16, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/washington-watching-the-5-deadliest-terrorist-groups-the-11687>.

house on the outskirts of the city. I was safely watching a private viewing of a beautiful film. Upon hearing the news, we all immediately checked to see if all our loved ones were alive and doing ok in the city center. (No one I know personally was hurt. My closest links to the tragedy were relatives of friends of friends who were injured or killed.) Though everyone was initially in a state of shock, horror and sadness over what we heard, those who were Christians at the event were given such a spirit of peace after a time of prayer together. The Holy Spirit was there comforting us powerfully. I even felt Jesus himself with me in the kitchen as I washed dishes that night. He was standing with us, answering our prayers with His presence. Since it was dangerous and much of the transport shut down, most of the people who were there for the film showing stayed over that night. It was a giant, lovely, makeshift slumber party.

This past week or so, it has been interesting to observe the different responses of those with whom I was in the room that night and those with whom I interact on a daily basis. Most of the people whom I know here who don't know Jesus are trying to get over their shock and fear. Those who know Christ have his peace, joy and confidence. For us, there is no reason to fear. After all, He has the whole world in his hands. I have seen the testimony that my Christian friends and I have been able to bring to this situation when speaking with those who don't have the same hope as we do. For example, the family for whom I work [as an au pair, along with being a full-time student] are shocked that I have no fear walking in the streets and continuing to go to concerts, etc. "How is that possible?" they ask me. They seem much more open to what I have to say than ever before. I know that if I die, I see God. There is nothing that a terrorist could take from me. I belong to Jesus, and my soul is his. Another shock for the non-Christians is the fact that we pray for the terrorists with love and forgiveness.

My main prayer in light of these events is that the Christians respond well and truly use this opportunity to be shining lights. Even months before these events occurred, my community of faith and I started to really see God work in even more powerful ways than ever before. He is transforming hearts and bringing miraculous healing—both spiritually and physically! (Those who once were lame are now walking freely around Paris with no crutch or limp!) He is speaking in visions and through prayers. We want God to use us in light of these events to work even more powerfully in our midst. Our battle is not against flesh and blood.

For the *individual* believer, this kind of response is certainly beautiful and fitting. But what obligations does a *government* have in the face of such terrorist attacks? Can Christians faithfully serve in official ruling, policing, or fighting capacities in order to resist and even quash terrorism? Is it possible, say, for the Christian *both* to pray for his terrorist "neighbor" yet *also* engage in forceful resistance against him?

Two Major Christian Approaches

Christians typically answer in two different ways. That is, the common line of division runs between the camps of “pacifism”—also called “nonviolence” or “nonviolent resistance”—and “just war.” How should these two sides respond to the question of the mounting terrorist threat? Can Christian just warriors offer a biblically-sanctioned model for shaping a government’s military strategy or defense policy? Or do Christian pacifists have the biblical high ground by rejecting the use of force in the name of following Jesus, whatever the government happens to do? Can pacifists even *offer* advice on statecraft and defense policy? Do just warriors and pacifists share any common ground here?

The contributors to this *Philosophia Christi* theme issue on just war and pacifistic responses to terrorism will present their sides. The inspiration for this theme issue—“Just War as Deterrence against Terrorism? Options from Theological Ethics”—was a panel discussion that took place in Atlanta, Georgia, on November 21, 2015.² It was an Evangelical Philosophical Society-sponsored panel at the American Academy of Religion’s annual meeting.

As session chair and moderator of the panel, I noted that the sobering timing of this discussion, which amplified the need for such a conversation. Just a *week* before, the second wave of terrorist attacks in Paris had taken place, and this was much on our minds. And just the *day* before, an al-Qaeda jihadist affiliate, Al-Mourabitoun (“The Sentinels”), attacked the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako, Mali; 170 hotel guests were taken hostage, twenty of whom were killed.

After the panel discussion, these six essays came together. Later in the notes section of this journal, New Testament scholar and pacifist Scot McKnight reflects on the matter of “Christoform” hermeneutics. He points to the example of theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer—from both his life and writings—to illustrate how this hermeneutic was concretely lived out in the face of the Nazi threat.

Two other noted Christian pacifists weigh in with their perspective. One is the theologian and ethicist—a former colleague at my university—Myles Werntz. The other is theologian and pastor Gregory Boyd. Both present their case of how Christians should respond to terrorism. They advocate a “cruciform” approach, which is most clearly informed by the teaching, ministry, self-sacrifice, suffering, and death of Jesus.

Two other panelists take the just war approach. One is the kiwi philosophical theologian Matthew Flannagan, with whom I have coauthored various works, including *Did God Really Command Genocide? Coming to Terms*

2. When the AAR program was printed, it read “Just War as Deterrence against Terrorism: Options from Theological Ethics”—that is, *without* the question mark.

with *the Justice of God*.³ The second just warrior is Keith Pavlischek—a retired colonel and military affairs expert whose academic background is in theological ethics.

Then offering a final response to Werntz, Boyd, Flannagan, and Pavlischek is J. Daryl Charles. He is a John Jay Institute fellow as well as an author of a numerous books and articles defending just war theory. As noted in his essay, he himself, grew up in the Anabaptist (specifically, Mennonite) tradition.

Mapping the Terrain

For the sake of clarity, we should briefly map out the terrain—first with a clarification on terrorism as well as a brief overview of pacifism and just war theory.

Terrorism

What is terrorism? In brief, it has three fundamental characteristics. First, it is *asymmetrical*. It typically involves the activity of unauthorized individuals or groups against nation-states. This contrasts with the more familiar conventional warfare that takes place between two or more nation-states.

Second, terrorism is also *indiscriminate*. The terrorist does not recognize any combatant-civilian distinction, as he himself engages in random murder. He has no regard for intrinsic human dignity or universal human rights. Nor does the terrorist have any concern for proportionality in the achievement of his ends.

Finally, terrorism is *destabilizing*. It not only has the effect of creating a sense of terror—a term that actually emerged during the French Revolution’s “reign of terror.” Terrorism’s unpredictability also leaves citizens feeling vulnerable and helpless while it disrupts civic order, commerce, and even leisure activities.

Michael Walzer lays out the purpose of terrorism:

to destroy the morale of a nation or a class, to undercut its solidarity; [terrorism’s] method is the random murder of innocent people. Randomness is the crucial feature of terrorist activity. If one wishes fear to spread and intensify over time, it is not desirable to kill specific people identified in some particular way with a regime, a party, or a policy. Death must come by chance.⁴

3. This volume is published by Baker Books (2014).

4. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 197.

Pacifism

If we look at the teaching of Jesus, his Sermon on the Mount uses the language of “not resisting the one who is evil” and “turning the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39). The Christian pacifist highlights how violence begets more violence and how Jesus himself rejected the *lex talionis* mentality of an “eye for an eye.”

Speaking from the Anabaptist tradition, Scot McKnight states in his Sermon on the Mount commentary that pacifism is the truly consistent position for the disciple of Jesus. He insists that this is not “quietism or withdrawal or inactivity,” and it isn’t simple submission or even “nonresistance.” It is rooted in the peacemaking beatitude—seeking peace through nonviolent resistance.⁵

McKnight is quite right when he says, “Jesus is the one to whom we listen.” But *how* should we follow Jesus, though? What does it *mean* to listen to him on matters such as war and the use of force? According to McKnight, it means that “the *lex talionis* at work in the Torah and which prompted Israel’s wars has been set into a new cruciform reality. The wars of Israel say nothing to the followers of Jesus about how to deal with enemies.”⁶ The point of Jesus’s teaching here is “to *avoid violence, absorb injustice, and live in light of what the kingdom is like* in spite of what the world is like now.”⁷

Instead of thinking about what is “realistic” and “practical,” we ought to keep in mind that God’s kingdom is *countercultural*—and, McKnight adds, “amazingly practical.”⁸ He offers his practical insights: “I’ve been asked time and time again these two questions: Do you think the entire country should demilitarize? (What the country does is the country’s *business*. As a citizen I advocate following Jesus.) What about a person who invades your home? (I’d use force to the point of not murdering [*sic*] him.)”⁹ McKnight asserts that turning the other cheek is a response to an act of *violence*—not merely an insult. Thus, the disciple must be willing to suffer violence rather than retaliate. After all, how can I truly love my neighbor if it leads to taking my neighbor’s life?

What’s more, Christians ought to promote alternatives such as “just peacemaking” while eschewing violence. Myles Werntz points out that Christian pacifism is hardly monolithic; instead, it is more wide-ranging than what oft-quoted John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas have promoted:

Both have written on the nature of pacifism in public, but more recent authors have attempted to think about how pacifism is not simply an

5. Scot McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 131.

6. *Ibid.*, 133.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, 134.

9. *Ibid.* Of course, the “*sic*” is inserted for the sake of the just war theorist who distinguishes between *killing*—say, in self-defense or in a just war—and *murder*!

internal church commitment, but a Christian commitment with public implications. More recent scholarship has turned to issues of conflict resolution, approaching the question from a more tactical direction, emphasizing the manner in which nonviolence has functioned empirically.¹⁰

What are some of these versions and expressions of Christian nonviolence? Here is a list—without elaboration—of some of them along with their advocates: “realist” nonviolence (Walter Rauschenbusch), nonviolence of the disinherited (Howard Thurman), nonviolence of Christian discipleship (André and Magda Trocmé), liberationist nonviolence (Hélder Câmara), nonviolence as resistance to death (William Stringfellow), nonviolence of mystical radicalism (Dorothee Sölle), nonviolence as communal practice (Lisa Sowle Cahill), resistance to intimate and societal violence (Traci C. West).¹¹

The Christian pacifist often asks the Christian just warrior pointed questions: “Can you *really* love your enemies if you are resorting to lethal force to take their lives? If you take someone’s life for a purported ‘just cause,’ how can you faithfully apply the Golden Rule—to do to others as you would have them do to you? Does the (lethal) use of force actually reflect the spirit of our self-sacrificing, life-surrendering Savior?” Greg Boyd sets forth the outworking of Jesus’s—and Paul’s—teaching in the Christian disciple’s conduct:

it is important that we notice that Jesus fleshes out his command to love enemies by specifying some of its behavioral implications. We are specifically instructed to “not resist an evildoer,” to “bless,” “pray for,” “do good” to, “be merciful” toward, and to “lend to” our enemies “without expecting to get anything back” (Matt. 5:44–45; Luke 6:28–29, 35). The same holds true for Paul when he instructs us to bless our persecutors (Rom. 12:14), to refrain from retaliating against them (vv. 17, 19), to give them food and drink if they are hungry or thirsty (v. 20) and to overcome evil with good (v. 21).¹²

Violence is rejected outright by both Jesus and Paul.

Just War

The Christian just warrior might respond to the pacifist’s questions and appeals to Jesus’ authority: “Was Jesus himself loving his enemies when he drove them out of the temple, when he called them ‘fools’ and ‘blind

10. Wertz, “Terrorism and the Peace of Christ: Seeking Pacifism’s Future in Theory and Practice,” *Philosophia Christi* 18 (2016): 114.

11. These categories are listed and briefly described in David C. Cramer, “A Field Guide to Christian Nonviolence,” *Sojourners*, January 2016, 30–5. Thanks to my former colleague Myles Wertz for passing on this article to me.

12. Boyd, “A Cruciform Response to Terrorism,” *Philosophia Christi* 18 (2016): 124.

guides,' or even when he threatened them with a judgment of outer darkness accompanied by wailing and gnashing of teeth? Would it not at least seem *possible* to pray for enemies—including enemies of the state—while seeking to stop them by force, lethally if necessary, from harming innocent lives? As N. T. Wright observes, the desire for citizens to be protected and criminals punished is a “basic, and correct, human instinct.”¹³ He notes elsewhere that “evil is real, and some people are so wicked that we simply must wish judgment upon them.”¹⁴

Furthermore, just warriors will note the Golden Rule has often been misunderstood. Theologian Mark Coppenger makes this point in *Providence* magazine—a journal of Christianity and American foreign policy that defends the just war tradition. He refers to the “Platinum Rule”—a reworking or clarification of the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). Jesus’s dictum is *not* a command to act in accordance with what *anyone* wants done for him: a hermit may say she is virtuous for leaving others alone because she wants to be left alone, or a sadomasochist could say he wants to whip people because he enjoys being whipped. Surely this cannot be right. Rather, we should understand Jesus’s dictum—“the Platinum Rule”—as meaning, “As you wish to be treated, *if you were virtuous or admirable*, so treat others.” Given this qualification, the just war theorist may engage in actions to stop hostiles from harming innocents—lethally, if necessary—to prevent them from having even more blood on their hands. This too is an act of neighbor-love.¹⁵

When a Christian police officer reluctantly kills a dangerous criminal threatening others, this is a last resort act that does not spring from hatred, which Jesus opposes. Rather, it is an act of love for the innocent (to protect them) and also the perpetrator (to prevent further bloodguilt). Such is the reasoning of Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf. In the aftermath of the atrocities he and his people experienced in the former Yugoslavia, he rejected the pacifism of his youth and embraced a view approximating the just war theo-

13. Wright says that “even in countries where people hate the authorities and fear the police, when someone commits a murder or even a serious robbery everyone affected by it wants good authorities and good police who will find the culprit and administer justice. That is a basic, and correct, human instinct” (N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans: Part II* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 85).

14. Wright, “N. T. Wright Wants to Save the Best Worship Psalms,” interview by Andrew Byers, *Christianity Today*, September 2013, 79.

15. Mark Coppenger, “Waterboarding and the Platinum Rule,” *Providence 2* (Winter 2016): 50–5.

ry.¹⁶ He concluded that wrath and love are not opposed. Indeed, God himself is wrathful not *despite* his being love, but *because* he is love.¹⁷

The just war theorist insists that he operates with a presumption of *protection*, as Daryl Charles argues, rather than with a presumption *against war* or *of peace*. Further, the issue is not violence versus nonviolence, but just uses of force versus unjust ones. Military historian Victor Davis Hanson has noted that war or military strength has helped bring an end to chattel slavery in America as well as Nazism, fascism, and Soviet communism in other parts of the world.¹⁸

What, then, is the just war position? There have been seven stable and standard criteria over the centuries. And though these principles can be drawn from—or are detectable in—scripture, they are available to all through natural moral law via conscience and reason. For example, in Amos 1–2, God condemns Gentile nations for suppressing their conscience and ripping open pregnant women to expand their borders, violating treaties, and for delivering vulnerable populations into the hands of their enemies.

The first three are *essential* to just war; the last four tend to be more *prudential* and are to be given lesser weight.¹⁹ The criteria are these: (1) just cause, (2) just intent, (3) lawful declaration, (4) last resort, (5) limited objectives, (6) proportionate means, and (7) noncombatant immunity.

16. Volf asserts: “I do think that a military response may be appropriate in cases of intolerable aggression. I shifted from the pacifism of my childhood and early adulthood to the position I am taking now by extending the obligation to love my neighbor when that neighbor’s life is threatened by a third party.” He adds: “I find that I’m not as far from just-war theory as I thought I was” (Volf, “Faith and Reconciliation: A Personal Journey,” in *God’s Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 222).

17. Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 138–9.

18. Victor Davis Hanson, *The Father of Us All: War and History, Ancient and Modern* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010), 7–8.

19. This list is taken from Robertson McQuilkin and Paul Copan, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics: Walking in the Way of Wisdom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 411–12. Here is a fuller explanation:

- (1) Just Cause: Warfare for self-defense or protection of another nation in the face of unprovoked aggression is morally legitimate. This includes having a reasonable hope of success.
- (2) Just Intent: This involves securing a fair peace for friend and foe alike, ruling out revenge, conquest, economic gain, or ideological supremacy.
- (3) Lawful Declaration: The just use of military force is to be officially declared by a lawful government—not private individuals or parties.
- (4) Last Resort: War may be entered into only when reasonable negotiations and compromise with aggressor nations have proven fruitless.
- (5) Limited Objectives: Because peace is the goal of just war, it should not include destroying the hostile nation’s economy and political institutions.
- (6) Proportionate Means: The use of force and weaponry should be for what is needed to repel aggression and deter future attacks (i.e., toward securing a just peace).
- (7) Noncombatant Immunity: Only those who are officially agents of government may fight; individuals not contributing to the conflict (e.g., POWs, medical personnel, casualties, civilian nonparticipants) should be immune from attack.

Furthermore, these criteria are often divided according to *jus ad bellum* (“the justice of war”), *jus in bello* (“justice during war”), and *jus post bellum* (“justice after war”). The justification of war includes just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, and last resort. The criteria for engagement in war are proportionality and noncombatant immunity. And the settling matters after war involves pursuing a cessation of hostilities, pursuing a fair peace, and helping establish a stable government.

Final Comments

This has been but a brief survey and an introduction of key themes pertaining to terrorism and to the divergent Christian visions of pacifism and just war theory. The following four counterpoint presentations, the final response by Charles, and the piece by McKnight in the notes section offer an engaging conversation. Hopefully, these will bring into clearer focus the assumptions, arguments, and implications on both sides. Ideally, readers who are convinced by one of the two positions—or those who may find themselves somewhere in between—will come to appreciate more fully the biblical, theological, and philosophical resources available to address the scourge of terrorism without diminishing love for God and love for neighbor, whether an innocent civilian or a dangerous terrorist.

