

The Debate over War in a Christian Context

There is a war on. In fact there are many wars on. Some started recently; some started a long time ago. Some are close to home; some are far away. Some are civil wars; some are international wars; some are a messy combination of the two. Some are fought in the name of self-defense, some in the name of autonomy, religion, ethnic identity, or political allegiance. Despite the hopes of many, war is still a common way for nations, as well as ethnic, political, and religious groups, to address disputes with one another at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Even countries not at war are spending a significant proportion of their wealth on preparing for the possibility of war in the future. Citizens of these countries have an ongoing obligation to reflect on the morality of the wars that are being fought, or are being prepared for, in their name. When, if at all, is it right for a country to go to war? What rules should be observed during warfare? Should one serve in the armed forces? How much, if anything, is legitimate to spend on the military?

The beginning of the twenty-first century puts these long-standing questions in a very particular geopolitical context. The September 11, 2001, al Qaeda attack on the United States and the many global events precipitated by it lead to questions such as, What is the appropriate response to a terrorist attack? What are the appropriate criteria for national self-defense? What responsibility do nations have to obey the judgments of the United Nations?

This book addresses these questions in the context of the long tradition of Christian reflection on war. Unlike most books on this topic, however, it does not present one answer. Instead, it represents both sides of the long-standing argument Christians have had with one another, between those who think that war is sometimes a regrettable necessity and those who think

that the use of force is never right. For most of the history of the Church, most of its members have believed that war could sometimes be justified, but a significant minority has considered war to be always illegitimate. Throughout this book Brian Stiltner, an American Roman Catholic theologian, takes the former view, and David Clough, a British Methodist theologian, takes the latter. In each chapter we start by outlining some common ground and end by debating where Christians should stand. We hope that accompanying us in the course of the debate will help our readers to become clear about where they stand on this fundamental ethical issue.

What does it mean to debate war ethically? At the beginning of chapter 1 we will describe two approaches to ethical reasoning within Christian ethics. These and most other methods of reasoning about ethics aim to assist people to be thoughtful about fundamental questions of human meaning and to live in accord with the values indicated by their answers to those questions.

This very general statement can be developed in many different ways, but one basic agreement in Western traditions is that ethics is a reflective process. One must think about ethical problems and come to a conscientious decision through a process of proper reasoning. For religious traditions, the communal context of ethics is crucial: that one follow the teaching of one's religious community is important. Even so, ethics is not a matter of simply acting upon the orders of authorities—whether these be parents, religious teachers, or political leaders—even though it is appropriate to listen to these authorities and give their suggestions or commands a great deal of deference. That ethics is a reflective process also means that individuals can discuss an ethical problem with others, who give reasons for their views. Others may not change their views, but at least both parties can better understand the sources of the disagreement. Hopefully, by examining the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective, individuals can together build stronger arguments—if not a middle ground, then at least a modified position that responds to some of the concerns of others.

We hope that reading this book and discussing it with others will help the reader better understand the factors that go into a decision for war and, more important, demonstrate that a person need not be an expert before taking a stand. To think ethically about war does not require one to have a fixed attitude. What is required is a thinking attitude. Holding unwaveringly to the rightness of a claim can be valuable as long as reasons for such tenacity are

clear and held conscientiously. However, changing or modifying a view can also be valuable, if a person has encountered new information or seen things in a different light. Both ways require one to reflect, discuss, assimilate new information and arguments, and acknowledge mistakes humbly. War is too serious a matter to be thought of uncritically with views that have not been tested.

Therefore, in this book we invite our readers to reflect further on the world, to recognize the urgency of these issues in which millions of human lives are at stake, and to think critically about the religious and cultural traditions in which they are situated. We invite each reader to develop and refine an ethical position on war, so that each can be an informed participant in political debates. We invite our audience to discuss and debate these issues with others as we ourselves will do in the pages of this book.

WHY A CHRISTIAN FOCUS?

One of the main contexts in which most people learn, develop, and interpret their morality is the religious setting. We have chosen to privilege this context, specifically Christianity, in this book. As Christian ethicists and citizens of the two nations that led the military invasion of Iraq in 2003, we feel a great urgency to think about this war—not merely by itself, but for what it represents about the direction of the foreign policy of our nations and the fate of the world in the twenty-first century. We write, first of all, as theological ethicists to fellow Christians, asking them to study their tradition in its complexity and then to take a reflective, critical stand on the morality of war. Of course, very few readers will be developing their ethical position on war on a blank slate. Even those people who are unaware of having an ethical position on war have, very likely, some basic attitudes about the moral implications of faith that—as we will show—bear on the morality of war. Each person probably has some basic views or instincts about the acceptability of violence, at least in certain situations. Would one use deadly force against a home invader? Could one serve on a jury and vote for the death penalty? Was the 2003 war on Iraq a terrible decision or a necessary, though imperfect, decision? We want to take the answers to such questions and hold them to the light of Christian reflection.

Christians have as much reason as anyone to be perplexed about war. Christians of most denominations are raised with the understanding that the

Church sometimes supports “just wars.” Many Christians in the United States and some in the United Kingdom supported the 2003 war on Iraq, believing that it was a necessary action to protect themselves and the global community from weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, or to liberate the people of Iraq from Saddam Hussein’s rule. Many other Christians in both countries believed their Christian faith required them to oppose the war. The dividing lines went right through some denominations, sometimes between the leaders of the denomination and the membership. So, despite being inheritors of a rich moral tradition, Christians found themselves divided about whether to support the war in Iraq and at odds about the best ways to respond to terrorism.

Facing both a complex tradition and demographic division among Christians today, we strive to shed light on what is shared by Christians and to identify the adequacy of the various ethical stances that divide Christians. Our exploration is located within a Christian context, using the ethical frameworks of just war tradition and pacifism. We aim to illuminate what is at stake between these positions for Christians and for the churches. We try to shed light upon the thinking of Americans and Europeans on the questions of global order. As members of different churches and citizens on different continents, the authors reflect some of the differences running through the debate on the war on terror: between just war supporters and pacifists; between theologians using natural law reasoning and theologians taking a witness-based approach to social problems; between Americans and Europeans; between advocates of military responses to terrorism and rogue states and critics who believe that military reactions to these problems are unwise or even immoral.

In the debate portions of each chapter, Brian Stiltner and David Clough speak from the respective sides of these four polarities. Yet we debate not in order to defeat the other position; rather, sharing a desire to develop a faithful Christian witness appropriate to current realities, we seek to identify what is shared and not shared between the major positions within Christianity. We debate in order to test our views and perhaps to modify some of them in response to persuasive arguments by the other. We will not talk past each other, as too often happens in political and media debates. The concluding chapter will give us a chance to take stock of what can be learned from a constructive debate between just war and pacifism. Of course, any debate has the risk of appearing to represent diversity while excluding other viewpoints. Therefore, in the debates that follow, we will try to be sensitive to what we have in com-

mon as well as our differences so we can become aware of our shared blind spots. For instance, a possible limitation in our vision is that we are citizens of nations wealthy enough to fight wars overseas, rather than citizens of poor nations whose peoples are disproportionately represented among those killed and injured in wars.

This book is not only for Christians. We think it will be useful to readers regardless of their religious background or lack of it, because understanding Christianity is vital to understanding the current debate over the ethics of war. We see three reasons for this. First, Christianity is the largest religion worldwide, claiming one-third of the earth's population. The Christian faith is an important shaper of attitudes and actions. Christians are involved in political power and interreligious relations that can bear good or ill for the causes of peace and security around the globe. Although there has been a gradual decline in churchgoing and church membership in the developed world, Christianity, especially in its evangelical forms, remains a rapidly growing religion in the developing world. There it competes for adherents with Islam, which is the second largest religion in the world and is growing even faster than Christianity. To explain and analyze Islam is beyond the scope of this book, but we believe it is crucial for Christians collectively to gain a better understanding of Islam and to develop relationships with its followers. Furthermore, our treatment of terrorism and the Iraq War should be sensitive to differences between the mainstream of Islam and the militant phenomenon of jihadism.

A second reason to study Christianity is that this religion is often criticized, either specifically or as part of a general criticism of religion, as one promoting strife and violence. This challenge has to do partly with war yet goes beyond it. We do not deny that lay Christians and Church leaders historically have wielded violence in some of its most horrible forms. Certain interpretations of Christian beliefs have contributed to violence and still have the power to do so. Support for war is problematic enough, but religious persecution, crusades, and genocide appear in ghastly, lamentable chapters in Christian history. So we must explain, to the extent we can, why Christians have been involved in violence and whether violence is in any way endemic to our faith. We want to face this history of Christianity honestly and show that it must not be the face of Christianity today.

Third, Christianity has been a major influence in shaping the discourses that Western cultures use to debate the morality of war, and political leaders

have used this influence to decide when to go to war. The primary discourse with political import is the just war tradition, a body of political-philosophical guides about when military action is justified. The main assumption undergirding the tradition's occasional acceptance of war is that political authority is essential for the right ordering of society. Society must use force when force is the only means available against those who would endanger the common good. This assumption is criticized at the theoretical and practical level, particularly by pacifism; we will be subjecting it to close scrutiny in this book.

Our overarching task in this book is to assess the authenticity and practicality of just war and pacifism from the perspective of Christian faith. Does the just war tradition, which has been the dominant result of Christian reflection on war for sixteen hundred years, deserve to retain this privileged position today? If Christians use just war reasoning, do they inevitably play into the game of rationalizing nationalist self-interests and legitimating the large-scale destruction of life and property that is the inescapable consequence of war? Should Christians, instead, embrace pacifism as the most faithful response to Jesus' call to discipleship, or is pacifism an irresponsible ethic in a dangerous world? These and many other tough questions will be asked of the two traditions on war.

CONTENDING POSITIONS ON WAR

To locate where our debate takes place within Christianity, it will be useful to identify four historical and contemporary positions concerning the obligations of Christians toward war and peace. Because Christianity has been intertwined with the development of Western culture, versions of these positions also appear in secular political thought. Likewise, although it will not be further remarked upon, versions of and analogues to these positions are found in many religious and cultural traditions around the world. These positions are being simplified here for ease of description and, as embraced by actual Christians, they are not always sharply divided from nearby positions.

Christian pacifism renounces deadly violence in fidelity to the teaching and witness of Jesus Christ. Pacifists understand Christian churches as communities whose members try to live as disciples of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Jesus taught his disciples to “turn the other cheek,” that is, not to

respond to violence with violence. Pacifists see violence as a terrible blemishing of God's gift of life; they note that often the vulnerable and despised persons in society bear the brunt of violence.

Jesus reached out to such people in his own day and thereby transformed our way of looking at the world. Jesus expressed a dramatically new vision of God's plan for humans in the image of the reign of God. In hopeful anticipation of the reign of God, inaugurated in Jesus Christ and to be fully manifested at his return, Christian pacifists strive to live in a way that witnesses to this new order. The early Christian communities were pacifist, as was most of the organized Church until the fourth century. During the sixteenth-century Reformation, organized Christian pacifism enjoyed a resurgence, which saw the birth of the peace churches. The Amish and Mennonites are the best known of the surviving peace churches; a related group known as the Hutterites will be described in chapter 2. Every subsequent century has seen the birth of new churches and religious movements espousing pacifism. Throughout Church history until today, many organizations, leaders, and theologians have urged Christians to take up the challenge of peacemaking. Despite the social unpopularity that can meet this vision in a time of war and fear, it is a vision that inspires many Christians. We will see, in chapter 2, that there are a number of ways to interpret and apply this vision.

The *just war tradition* of reasoning was taken over from its roots in classical Roman political thought by Saint Ambrose and Saint Augustine in the fourth and early fifth centuries and then developed by a number of Catholic and Protestant theologians in the West. Starting in the late Middle Ages, a secularized strand of the tradition became incorporated into the developing body of international law. Just war tradition is called a "tradition" because it is a historically developing body of reasoning about war. For this reason it is also called just war "theory," "doctrine," "thought," or "reasoning." We will use many of these terms in the book for the sake of felicity but will often use "tradition" as a reminder that just war is more than a rule book and that it has taken distinctive shape in various cultural and religious milieus.

The tradition comprises several criteria against which to judge a case for going to war or to judge an ongoing or completed war. A nation must meet all the criteria for going to war (*jus ad bellum*) before starting military actions and must rigorously abide by the criteria while fighting in war (*jus in bello*). Failure to do so makes the nation's actions immoral and often illegal under international law. None of the criteria, which will be individually explained

in chapter 2, are distinctively Christian, but they are defended by advocates of the tradition as a reasonable way for Christians to decide which wars they should support and which they should stand against given certain assumptions about Christian life and the nature of the world.

The remaining two positions are, generally speaking, more accepting of violence than just war doctrine, but they are quite different from one another. *Christian realism* can be seen as taking just war's insights about the necessity of force in an imperfect world to stronger or—its advocates would say—more consistent conclusions. In its general sense, political realism asserts that we cannot expect virtuous behavior from individuals, and still less from groups. Therefore, realists are prepared to act outside the bounds of standard morality in order to protect the self-interests of their nation or group. The secular version of realism is often characterized, even by its supporters, as amoral, that is, unconcerned with ethical principles. Some thinkers have advanced a Christian version of realism; the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1972) is identified as its contemporary progenitor. Niebuhr did not think of his realism, which he claimed to model on the thoughts of St. Augustine, as amoral but as pragmatic about the limitations of applying moral ideals to political struggles. In contrast to the just war tradition, Christian realism does not regard war as a reasonable action for the sake of the common good but as a tragic use of imperfect methods in a situation of sin. Christian realism is not necessarily more bellicose than Christian just war theory, but it is prepared to consider the use of violence in circumstances and in ways that are beyond the limits that the just war tradition has set.

In a sense, realism—whether secular or Christian—puts a bookend on one side of just war doctrine and pacifism places a bookend on the other side. These bookends set limits on what is acceptable under just war theory, but they also exert an influence on those who support the theory. On the one hand, just war thinkers often are attracted to realists' rhetoric about the need to take action in a dangerous, sinful world; on the other hand, they share pacifists' concerns about the fragility of peace and the horrible destructiveness of war. Whether just war can maintain a coherent perspective between these two positions will be tested in this book.

Since September 11, 2001, the perceived increase in the threat of terrorism and nuclear proliferation has brought out a realist strain in some just war thinkers. Therefore, we will expand on the analysis of realists and their influ-

ence, for good or ill, on just war tradition throughout the book. On the other hand, just war theory's high standards for the use of force and its aim of reestablishing peace suggest overlaps with pacifism. Another contemporary strain of just war thinking, which gained increasing popularity during the cold war, articulates the doctrine as starting its analysis from a presumption against violence. This way of thinking about just war has been embraced in official documents from many Christian denominations. We will introduce this issue in chapter 2 and continue to explore the compatibility of pacifism and just war throughout the book.

Finally, the *holy war* position has been a major attitude toward war in Christian history. Another name for this position, the "crusade mentality," derives from the era of the Crusades, which were military campaigns led by various European rulers from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries to take control of Palestine (the Holy Land) from the Muslim empires. The holy war position believes that God directly commands Christians to fight certain wars. A major reason for war in this view is to spread the Christian faith. In a similar vein, the holy warrior may claim that the faith is under attack, so a defensive war must be fought; yet in doing so, the holy warrior will not shy from creating a political order in which Christianity is favored and other religions are forbidden.

The holy war mentality has also found expression in other world religions, particularly in the diffuse jihadist movement in Islam. There are a number of ideological, psychological, and sociological reasons that some believers embrace extremist movements in their religious community. Chapter 5 will examine the holy war paradigm in the context of terrorism. The holy war mentality drives Islamist extremists to embrace the techniques of terror, but it has also propelled domestic Christian terrorism in the United States, exacerbated Catholic-versus-Protestant struggles in Northern Ireland, and provided a pillar of ideological support for the American and British war on terror.

As theologians and ethicists, we acknowledge there is legitimate diversity in the Christian tradition, so both pacifists and just war thinkers can make legitimate ethical claims in the name of Christianity. Though we both will criticize the overall program of Christian realism, we accept that certain Christian realist claims have warrant in the tradition and that students of Reinhold Niebuhr have contributed useful ideas to the Christian debate over war. However, we are united in completely rejecting holy war as a legitimate Christian

ideal. Holy war violates Jesus' teachings on mercy, forgiveness, and humility, and it recklessly confuses God's purposes with human interpretation.

STRUCTURE OF THE ARGUMENT

The first chapter, "Sources and Methods for a Christian Ethic of War," explains how our conversation is located within a Christian context, with Brian Stiltner endorsing just war tradition and David Clough advocating pacifism. We present two divergent manifestations of Christian ethics: thinking from a starting point of reason versus revelation, and speaking to a civic audience versus the church community. These approaches can overlap and complement each other in some ways, but the basic differences generate different ethical assumptions between just war and pacifism. We also survey relevant biblical texts before concluding with a debate between the authors concerning how theological, ethical, and biblical interpretations impact the just war and pacifism controversy. Chapter 2 explains in depth the two ethical perspectives in its title, "Christian Pacifism and the Just War Tradition." We summarize the historical development of these perspectives and provide a guide for understanding them in a modern context, including an innovative typology of pacifist positions. We then discuss the controversial question of the relationship between pacifism and just war theory. The final section of the chapter is again devoted to an exchange of views, this time concerning which position is best rooted in the Christian tradition.

Then follow four chapters treating problems of modern war. In chapter 3, "Does Humanitarian Intervention Pass the Test?" we scrutinize what ought to be the easiest Christian case to make for war: the rescue of innocent third parties from attack. If just war thinkers can maintain a strong case that violence is justified in some of these situations, they vindicate a fundamental claim of their theory. If pacifists identify flaws with just war thinking on this topic, or even show that there are better ways to protect people than to start a war, their argument against other uses of military power will be all the stronger. Because just war thinkers and pacifists both embrace the cause of human dignity, humanitarian intervention is a useful context in which to look for shared assumptions and values between these two perspectives, which are otherwise so often placed at odds. This chapter discusses the challenges of humanitarian intervention with the help of case studies mak-

ing clear what is at stake. The final debate section confronts hard questions for the pacifist and just war traditions alike.

The problem of chapter 4, “The Challenge of Weapons Proliferation,” is as old as human society: Can groups agree to forgo the use and possession of weapons and then abide by the promises they make? Following the historical presentation of this problem—via four case studies on bows and arrows, chemical and biological weapons, nuclear weapons, and conventional arms—we consider how Christian theologians and churches have addressed weapons proliferation, relying upon pacifist, just war, and realist reasoning. Then we make a frank assessment of the political and ethical challenge of weapons proliferation today before launching into a debate over whether and how it can be achieved.

Chapter 5, “Political and Holy Terrorism: Frameworks for Analysis and Action,” analyzes the responses to terrorism offered by pacifism and just war theory. We examine four case studies of different kinds of terrorist attacks: the Oklahoma City bombing, the bombing of Pan Am flight 103, republican and loyalist violence in Northern Ireland, and al Qaeda’s jihadist terrorist campaign. We offer an original scale for understanding the similarities and differences between these attacks in terms of the relative role played by nations, terrorist groups, and individuals, and use this to illuminate the discussion of appropriate responses to them. The debate section looks at alternative ways of understanding the motivations of terrorists and the options for formulating an effective response to them.

In chapter 6, “Spreading Democracy or Asserting National Interests? The Case of the Wars on Iraq,” we critically assess the use of just war theory in the debates over the Persian Gulf War of 1991, the period of sanctions during the 1990s, and the Iraq War of 2003. We aim to shed light on how just war doctrine was used or abused in these debates. A fundamental ethical question in this chapter is whether preventive war represents a new and acceptable category of just war, or whether it is simply a new way to dress up the assertion of national self-interests. The analysis of this chapter will contribute to a deeper ethical understanding of the ongoing violence in Iraq and address challenges that will shape international relations in the decades ahead.

The concluding chapter, “A Christian Agenda for a Warring World,” summarizes and extends the reflection of the previous chapters concerning the viability, coherence, and development of just war theory and pacifism. We

bring the ethical and theological status of the two theories back into the foreground, asking whether these positions can work together or, conversely, whether a Christian must choose between them. Judging that the positions have important shared goals and values, we set out a peacemaking agenda for all Christians in the twenty-first century.