Introduction

1. As you begin reading this book, do you have a position on whether war can be justified? Which of the four positions outlined in the Introduction best expresses your convictions? What most attracts you about that position?

2. Do a brief investigation of newspapers and/or news sources on the web. What wars and military engagements are going on in the world at the time you are reading this book? Compare your results with other readers. Are there more wars going on than you were aware of? Why do we hear a lot about some wars and little about others?

3. Describe examples when religion has, in your opinion, contributed to violence. Describe examples when religion has, in your opinion, contributed to peace. Why are both results possible?

4. Is it possible to have honest and respectful dialogue about war in today’s culture? What are the circumstances that make such dialogue difficult?

Chapter 1

1. Which of the two approaches to Christian ethics we have outlined most attracts you? Why? What else would you want to add to a description of how we should do Christian ethics?

2. Do you find it a problem that some people are developing and living their ethics from a Christian perspective, some from a Muslim perspective, others from a secular perspective, and so on? Can people in the world get along if we live our lives based on different perspectives?
3. Why do Christians disagree about whether using force is justifiable? What factors (such as different interpretations of certain beliefs, historical experiences, sociological factors, etc.) are influential in causing these differences?

4. Do the authors successfully explain why the Jewish/Christian Bible does not authorize holy war? Are the Old Testament texts still a “problem” for Jews and Christians, that is, a source that could lead to rationalizing violence?

5. Is Jesus’ teaching on nonviolence authoritative today? If so, what kinds of responses toward aggression and abuse, if any, could be consistent with Jesus’ teaching: imprisonment, restraint of an attacker, or other options? If you believe that Jesus’ nonviolence does not rule out self-defense and participation in war, then how do you explain the apparent contradiction between Jesus’ example and later acceptance of war by Christians?

6. It has been charged that just war advocates do not really put their hope in Jesus’ promise of the coming reign of God (see, pp. 33–34 and 229–230). Is it possible to live fully in obedience to that vision? When Christians try to make the world “better” by participating in coercive practices (including, but not limited to war), are they exhibiting a lack of hope or faithfulness?

7. How do you read the social location of the Church in the modern world? Is it more like what Clough describes (the Church is not taken seriously and needs to reclaim a prophetic voice) or like what Stiltner describes (the Church is able to participate effectively in common public deliberation)?

Chapter 2

1. “Is it morally right—indeed, is it morally obligatory—to use deadly force to defend oneself and other individuals, such as family members, from an attacker who is about to use violence?” (p. 69). What is the foundation for your own answer? What are the practical problems with assuming that violent self-defense is a good idea? Which co-author had the better of this debate, in your opinion?

2. Just war theorists, as well as realists, could challenge pacifists: “A state simply can’t act on the advice of pacifists—at least not all the time. To think otherwise is irresponsible” (p. 71). Which co-author had the better of this debate, in your opinion? What would you add to the discussion?

3. Pacifists challenge just war theorists on their theory’s tendency to slippage and rationalization: “Isn’t this what war has always been like: when it really counts, any means is justified by the end of winning?” (p. 74). Do just war thinkers bend the rules when push comes to shove? Or even if not, don’t political and military leaders inevitably bend and break the rules because they are convinced that winning a war is of ultimate importance? Come up with specific historical examples when the ethics of war were violated.
4. Which author had, for you, a more compelling vision of the Christian church’s priorities (pp. 78–80)?

5. Investigate the websites of Christian denominations and interfaith organizations; most of them have statements and speeches about problems of war and violence. Are the churches today saying the right kinds of things in relation to the problem of war, in your opinion? Are they doing things to back up their statements?

6. What do you think of the Just Peacemaking project, based on the author’s first description of it (pp. 66–68)? Does Just Peacemaking help bring some resolution to yesterday’s debates, by moving forward to constructive initiatives? Does it seem hopeful as well as realistic?

Chapter 3

1. Chapter 3 begins by saying that humanitarian intervention “ought to be the easiest Christian case to make for war” (p. 82). Where is the just war argument for humanitarian intervention strongest and where is it weakest? Where, in practice, do most humanitarian interventions fall short?

2. The authors debate the possibility of altruism on the part of nations. What is your perspective on this issue? Discuss in relation to the case of Kosovo or other recent examples of nonintervention (Rwanda, Darfur) or controversial intervention (Sierra Leone, Iraq).

3. Which of the four conditions discussed in the chapter were satisfactorily met in the NATO intervention in Kosovo, and/or which of the four criticisms are sound? Based on this experience, how could the U.S. and other nations have improved their intervention?

4. Clough and Stiltner each criticize the United Nations and the international system, though for somewhat different reasons. What improvements would you like to see in the U.N. and international relations?

5. A Just Peacemaking practice that offers an alternative to military intervention is cooperative conflict resolution (CCR). What CCR practices have you seen, such as peer mediation? Where could CCR be effectively used in American society, the university, or in our everyday lives? What role are religious groups playing (or should they be playing) in resolving conflicts?
Chapter 4

1. What do you consider to be the sensibility of restricting any category of weapon, whether by church decree or by treaty? Was the attempt to restrict bows and arrows in the 12th century the beginning of an impossible task? Or have some of the treaties of the last 150 years—such as the Hague and Geneva Conventions—been worthwhile for the international community?

2. Was the United States’ dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan at the end of World War II moral or immoral? Consider especially the contrasting positions of Elizabeth Anscombe and Reinhold Niebuhr discussed on pp. 122–124.

3. Given what the authors say about the limited effectiveness of biological and chemical weapons, do you think that the rhetoric of “weapons of mass destruction” corrupted America’s and England’s public deliberations about whether to launch war on Iraq in 2003? Can the U.S. and U.K. consider themselves moral leaders on this issue if they themselves do not fully forswear NCB weapons?

4. Is it important to challenge the four assumptions on p. 126? Are these assumptions indeed at odds with fundamental Christian (or other religious) assumptions discussed in the book? Do non-religious people have equal reason to challenge these assumptions?

5. Where should the international community be going on the issue of proliferation in the years ahead? Would any of the Just Peacemaking practices (see. p. 67) be effective for reducing weapons proliferation?

Chapter 5

1. What have you read in this chapter that helped you understand the motivations of terrorists better?

2. What light is shed on jihadist terrorism by putting it in the context of other religious and non-religious terrorism?

3. Do you agree with the authors terrorism is not irrational? Is it either unethical or politically dangerous for a nation to try to respond to the grievances of terrorists as part of their anti-terrorist strategy?

4. Both authors are dubious about the military paradigm of response, although Stiltner sees value in characterizing some acts of terrorism as warfare and in taking a military response sometimes. In regards to the terrorism that your nation is likely to encounter, would you argue for an only law-enforcement approach, a mixed approach, or a more robust military approach? Explain how such responses would be both effective and ethical.
5. The encroachment on domestic civil liberties as a result of counter-terrorism has been increasingly debated in the U.S., U.K., and other nations. In the U.S., the controversies include the USA Patriot Act, warrantless wiretaps, and open-ended detention of prisoners without giving them full legal rights to challenge their detentions. What concerns you about these issues? Are you in support of any of these actions? Keep in mind both effectiveness and ethical foundation of your answers.

6. The authors take one paragraph each at describing peacemaking initiatives in response to terrorism. How do you react to the idea? Is there any place for forgiveness and reconciliation in Americans’ and Britons’ responses toward terrorism?

7. What is the place for forgiveness and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, or in any other conflicted part of the world? For somewhat more hopeful examples, investigate the “truth and reconciliation” processes in South Africa after apartheid and in Rwanda after the genocide.

Chapter 6

1. How have you been affected by the Iraq War—personally, as a citizen, as a religious person? Do you think that are as engaged in the war as we should be?

2. Do you know anyone served as a soldier or in another role in Iraq? What should we think people who have died in Iraq? What is the appropriate way to honor their sacrifices?

3. Evaluate the four pro and con arguments for waging the war on Iraq. Knowing everything we know today, was the war on Iraq that the U.S. and U.K. led ethical, unethical, or a mixed case? Use ethical theories and principles in support of your position.

4. Are you encouraged by any events in Iraq in recent months: elections, political developments, or reductions in violence in some area of the country? Or do you see the situation in Iraq as increasingly chaotic?

5. What is your ethically and politically informed opinion on how quickly the U.S. and other national should withdraw troops from Iraq?

6. What lessons do our nations need to learn from the failures of the Iraq War?

Conclusion

1. What is your ethical position on war after reading and discussing the book? Did you change or modify your initial position? If so, why?
2. If you hold by your initial position on war, have you discovered some value in one of the alternative positions?

3. Do you find that Christian pacifism and just war tradition share important common ground? More or less common ground than you supposed at the beginning of the book?

4. Should we be optimistic or pessimistic about the possibility of reducing war in the future? Christian thinkers remind us that optimism is not the same as hope—it’s the difference between mere wishful thinking that leads to inaction and trust in God and others that leads to concrete actions of love. Is there a basis for hope for a more peaceful world?

5. Discuss the four tasks for Christian peacemaking. Develop some further concrete examples of each task. Add to the authors’ list, if you wish.

6. What impact do you hope your reflections on religion, war, and peace will have on your professional choices and personal life?

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