The Causes of War

Meic Pearse's book The Gods of War *gives great insight into the charge that religion is the cause of most war. History shows this is not true: the cause of most war is the sinful human heart, even when religion is invoked as a reason.*

The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that "for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict."{1} Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, "Only the willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today."{2} Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, "theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today."{3}



War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it's not surprising that those hostile to religion would charge people holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.

This view is held by many others, not just despisers of religion. A 2006 opinion poll taken in Great Britain found that 82% of adults "see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree."{4}

To be honest, religion has been, and remains, a source of conflict in the world; but to what degree? Is it the only source of war, as its critics argue? Is it even the primary source? And if we agree that religion is a source of war, how

do we define what qualifies as a religion? This leads to another question. Are all religions equally responsible for war or are some more prone to instigate conflict than others? Once these issues are decided, we are still left with one of the most difficult questions: How does a religious person, especially a Christian, respond to the question of war?

When confronted with the accusation that religion, and more importantly, Christianity, has been the central cause of war down through history, most Christians respond by ceding the point. We will argue that the issue is far too complex to merely blame war on religious strife. A more nuanced response is needed. Religion is sometimes the direct cause of war, but other times it plays a more ambiguous role. It can also be argued, as Karl Marx did, that religion can actually restrain the warring instinct.

In his provocative new book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse argues that modern atheists greatly overstate their case regarding religion as a cause for war, and that all religions are not equal when it comes to the tendency to resort to violence. He believes that the greatest source for conflict in the world today is the universalizing tendencies of modern secular nations that are pressing their materialism and moral relativism on more traditional cultures.

The Connection Between Religion and War

When someone suggests a simple answer to something as complex as war, it probably is *too* simple. History is usually more complicated than we would like it to be.

How then should Christians respond when someone claims religion is the cause of all wars? First, we must admit that religion can be and sometimes is the cause of war. Although it can be difficult to separate political, cultural, and religious motivations, there have been instances when men went

off to war specifically because they believed that God wanted them to. That being said, in the last one hundred years the modern era with its secular ideologies has generated death and destruction on a scale never seen before in history. Not during the Crusades, the Inquisition, nor even during the Thirty Years War in Europe.

The total warfare of the twentieth century combined powerful advances in war-making technologies with highly structured societies to devastating effect. WWI cost close to eight and a half million lives. The more geographically limited Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 resulted in nine million deaths. WWII cost sixty million deaths, as well as the destruction of whole cities by fire bombing and nuclear devices.

Both Nazi fascism and communism rejected the Christian belief that humanity holds a unique role in creation and replaced it with the necessity of conflict and strife. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas regarding natural selection and survival of the fittest had begun to affect philosophy, the social sciences, and even theology. Darwin had left us with a brutal universe devoid of meaning. The communist and fascist worldviews were both firmly grounded in Darwin's universe.

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the communists were just as vocal about their attachment to it. Russian revolution leader Leon Trotsky wrote, "We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life." Lenin argued that the socialist state was to be "a system of organized violence against the bourgeoisie" or middle class. While critics of the Russian Tsar and his ties with the Orthodox Russian Church could point to examples of oppression and cruelty, one historian has noted that when the communists had come to power "more prisoners were shot at just one soviet camp in a single year than had been executed by the tsars during the entire nineteenth

century."{5}

So, religion is not the primary cause of warfare and cruelty, at least not during the last one hundred years. But what about wars fought in the more distant past; surely most of them were religiously motivated. Not really.

Meic Pearce argues that "most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century's secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation."{6} Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that "neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods."{7} Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.{8}

More recently, the Hundred Years War between the French and English, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars were secular conflicts. Religious beliefs might have been used to wrap the conflicts with a Christian veneer, but promoting the cause of Christ was not at the heart of the conflicts.

Pearce argues that down through the millennia, humanity has gone to war for two main reasons: greed expressed by the

competition for limited resources, and the need for security from other predatory cultures. The use of religion as a legitimating device for conflict has become a recent trend as it became less likely that a single individual could take a country to war without the broad support of the population.

It can be argued that religion was, without ambiguity, at the center of armed conflict during two periods in history. The first was during the birth and expansion of Islam which resulted in an ongoing struggle with Christianity, including the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The second was the result of the Reformation in Europe and was fought between Protestant and Catholic states. Even here, political motivations were part of the blend of causes that resulted in armed conflict.

Islam and Christianity

Do all religions have the same propensity to cause war? The two world religions with the largest followings are Christianity and Islam. While it is true that people have used both belief systems to justify armed conflict, are they equally likely to cause war? Do their founder's teachings, their holy books, and examples from the earliest believers encourage their followers to do violence against others?

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced conversions and violence against unbelievers, the connection between what Christianity actually teaches and these acts of violence has been ambiguous at best and often contradictory. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to use violence to further the Kingdom of God. Our model is Christ who is the perfect picture of humility and servant leadership, the one who came to lay down his life for others. Meic Pearce writes, "For the first three centuries of its history, Christianity was spread exclusively by persuasion and was persecuted for its pains, initially by the Jews but later, from 63, by the Romans."{9} It wasn't until Christianity

became the de facto state religion of the Roman Empire around AD 400 that others were persecuted in the name of Christ.

The history of Islam is quite different. Warfare and conflict are found at its very beginning and is embodied in Muhammad's actions and words. Islam was initially spread through military conquest and maintained by threat of violence. As one pair of scholars puts it, there can be no doubt that "Islam was cradled in violence, and that Muhammad himself, through the twenty-six or twenty-seven raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence."{10}

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no God but Allah.'"{11} Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad's death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion's history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

Pacifism or Just Wars?

Although most Christians advocate either pacifism or a "just war" view when it comes to warfare and violence, Pearse argues that there are difficulties with both. Pacifism works at a personal level, but "there cannot be a pacifist state, merely

a state that depends on others possessed of more force or of the willingness to use it."{12} Some pacifists argue that humans are basically good and that violence stems from misunderstandings or social injustice. This is hardly a traditional Christian teaching. Pearse argues that "a repudiation of force in all circumstances . . . is an abandonment of victims—real people—to their fate."{13}

Just war theory as advocated by Augustine in the early fifth century teaches that war is moral if it is fought for a just cause and carried out in a just fashion. A just cause bars wars of aggression or revenge, and is fought only as a last resort. It also must have a reasonable chance of success and be fought under the direction of a ruler in an attitude of love for the enemy. It seeks to reestablish peace, not total destruction of the vanquished, and to insure that noncombatants are not targeted.

However, even WWII, what many believe to be our most justified use of force, failed to measure up to this standard. Massive air raids against civilian populations by the Allies were just one of many violations that disallow its qualification as a just war. As Pearse argues, "war has an appalling dynamic of its own: it drags down the participants . . . into ever more savage actions."{14}

How then are Christians to think about war and violence? Let's consider two examples. In the face of much violent opposition in his battle for social justice, Martin Luther King said, "be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. . . . We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process."{15} Reform was achieved, although at the cost of his life, and many hearts and minds have been changed.

However, another martyr, German minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, rejected pacifism and chose to participate in an attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler, mainly because he despaired that an

appeal to the hearts and minds of the Nazis would be effective.

Neither King nor Bonhoeffer were killed specifically for their faith. They were killed for defending the weak from slaughter, as Pearse puts it. Perhaps Pearse is correct when he argues, "If Christians can . . . legitimately fight . . . , then that fighting clearly cannot be for the faith. It can only be for secular causes . . . faith in Christ is something for which we can only die—not kill. . . . To fight under the delusion that one is thereby promoting Christianity is to lose sight of what Christianity is."{16}

Notes

1. Meic Pearse, The Gods of War (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.
2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 14.
5. Ibid., 31.
6. Ibid., 53.
7. Ibid., 54.
8. Ibid., 55.
9. Ibid., 134.
10. Ibid., 58.
11. Ibid., 59.
12. Ibid., 173.
13. Ibid., 175.
14. Ibid., 173.
15. Ibid., 180.
16. Ibid.

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The Just War Tradition in the Present Crisis

Is it ever right to go to war? Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese provides understanding of just war tradition from a biblical perspective.

Searching for Answers

Recent events have prompted Christians to ask moral questions concerning the legitimacy of war. How far should we go in punishing evil? Can torture ever be justified? On what basis are these actions premised? These problems remain especially acute for those who claim the Christian faith. Fortunately, we are not the first generation to face these questions. The use of force and violence has always troubled the Christian conscience. Jesus Christ gave his life freely without resisting. But does Christ's nonviolent approach deny government the prerogative to maintain order and establish peace through some measure of force? All government action operates on the premise of force. To deny all force, to be a dedicated pacifist, leads no less to a condition of anarchy than if one were a religious fascist. Extremes have the tendency to meet. In the past, Christians attempted to negotiate through the extremes and seek a limited and prescribed use of force in what has been called the Just War Tradition.



The Just War Tradition finds its source in several streams of Western thought: biblical teaching, law, theology, philosophy, military strategy, and common sense. Just War thinking integrates this wide variety of thought through

providing Christians with a general orientation on the issues of war and peace. This tradition transcends denominational barriers and attempts to supply workable answers and solutions to very difficult moral problems. Just War has its origins in Greco-Roman thinking as well as Christian theology: Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin have all contributed to its development.{1}

Just War thinking does not provide sure-fire ways of fighting guilt-free wars, or offer blanket acceptance of government action. It often condemns acts of war as well as condones. Just War presents critical criteria malleable enough to address a wide assortment of circumstances. It does not give easy answers to difficult questions; instead, it provides a broad moral consensus concerning problems of justifying and controlling war. It presents a living tradition that furnishes a stock of wisdom consisting of doctrines, theories, and philosophies. Mechanical application in following Just War teachings cannot replace critical thinking, genius, and moral circumspection in ever changing circumstances. Just War attempts to approximate justice in the temporal realm in order to achieve a temporal but lasting peace. It does not make pretensions in claiming infinite or absolute justice, which remain ephemeral and unattainable goals. Only God provides infinite justice and judgment in eternity through his own means. "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Deut. 32:35; Heb. 10:30).

The Clash of Civilizations

To apply Just War criteria we must first have a reasonable assessment of current circumstances. The Cold War era witnessed a bipolar world consisting of two colossal opponents. The end of the Cold War has brought the demise of strict ideological battles and has propelled the advent of cultural divisions in a multi-polar world. Present and future conflicts exist across cultural lines. The "Clash of

Civilizations" paradigm replaces the old model of East vs. West.{2} People are more inclined to identify with their religious and ethnic heritage than the old ideology. The West has emerged as the global leader, leaving the rest of the world to struggle either to free itself from the West or to catch it economically and technologically. The triumph of the West—or modernized, secular, and materialist society—has created a backlash in Islamic Fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism does not represent ancient living traditions but a modern recreation of ancient beliefs with a particular emphasis on political conquest. Fundamentalists do not hesitate to enter into battle or holy war (jihad) with the enemies of God at a political and military level. The tragic events of 9/11 and the continual struggle against terrorism traces back to the hostility Islamic fundamentalists feel towards the triumph of the West. They perceive Western global hegemony [ed. note: leadership or predominant influence] as a threat and challenge to their religious beliefs and traditions, as most Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals feel threatened by the invincible advance of modern secular society. The error of fundamentalism lies in thinking it can recreate the past and enforce those beliefs and conditions on the modern world. Coercion remains at the heart of fundamentalist practice, constituting a threat potentially worse than modern secular society.

This cultural divide causes Christians to reconsider the basis of warfare premised on the responsibilities of the state to defend civil society against the encroachments of religious extremism that fights in the name of God and for a holy cause or crusade.

This may sound strange at first to theological ears, but an absolute principle of Just War states that Christians never fight for "God and Country," but only for "Country." There is only a secular and civil but necessary task to be accomplished in war, never a higher mandate to inaugurate God's kingdom. In

this sense Just War thinking attempts to secularize war by which it hopes to limit its horrendous effects.

Holy War or Just War

An essential distinction divides Just War from holy war. Just War does not claim to fight in the name of God or even for eternal causes. It strictly concerns temporal and political reasons. Roland Bainton sums up this position: “War is more humane when God is left out of it.”{3} This does not embrace atheism but a Christian recognition concerning the value, place, and responsibilities of government. The state is not God or absolute, but plays a vital role in maintaining order and peace (Matt. 22:21). The Epistles repeat this sentiment (Rom.13; 1 Peter 2: 13-17; 1 Tim.2; Titus 3:1). Government does not act as the organ or defender through which God establishes his kingdom (John 18: 36).

Government does not have the authority to enforce God’s will on unwilling subjects except within a prescribed and restricted civil realm that maintains the minimum civil order for the purpose of peace. Government protects the good and punishes the evil. Government serves strictly temporal purposes “in order that we may lead a tranquil and quite life in all godliness and dignity” (2 Tim. 2:2). God establishes civil authorities for humanity’s sake, not his own. Therefore, holy war that claims to fight in the name of God and for eternal truths constitutes demonic corruption of divinely sanctioned civil authority.

The following distinctions separate holy war and Just War beliefs. Holy war fights for divine causes in Crusades and Jihads to punish infidels and heretics and promote a particular faith; Just War fights for political causes to defend liberty and religious freedom. Holy war fights by divine command issuing from clerics and religious leaders; Just War fights through moral sanction. Holy war employs a

heavenly mandate, Just War a state mandate. Holy war is unlimited or total; anything goes, and the enemy must be eradicated in genocide or brought to submission. The Holy War slogan is “kill ’em all and let God sort them out!” Holy war accepts one group’s claim to absolute justice and goodness, which causes them to regard the other as absolutely evil. Just War practices limited war; it seeks to achieve limited temporal objectives and uses only necessary force to accomplish its task. Just War rejects genocide as a legitimate goal. Holy war fights out of unconditional obedience to faith. Just War fights out of obedience to the state, which is never incontestable. Holy war fights offensive wars of conquest; Just War fights defensive wars, generally responding to provocation. Holy war battles for God to enforce belief and compel submission. Just War defends humanity in protecting civil society, which despite its transitory and mundane role in the eternal scheme of things plays an essential part in preserving humanity from barbarism and allows for everything else in history to exist.

Why Go to War?

Just War thinking uses two major categories to measure the legitimacy of war. The first is called *jus ad bellum* [Latin for “justice to war”]: the proper recourse to war or judging the reasons for war. This category asks questions to be answered before going to war. It has three major criteria: just authority, just cause, and just intent.

Just authority serves as the presupposition for the rest of the criteria. It requires that only recognized state authorities use force to punish evil (Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2). Just War thinking does not validate individual actions against opponents, which would be terrorism, nor does it allow for paramilitary groups to take matters in their own hands. Just authority requires a formal declaration. War must be declared by a legitimate governmental authority. In the USA, Congress

holds the right of formal declaration, but the President executes the war. Congressional authorization in the last sixty years has substituted for formal declaration.

Just cause is the most difficult standard to determine in a pluralistic society. Whose justice do we serve? Just War asserts the notion of comparative or limited justice. No one party has claim to absolute justice; there exists either more or less just cause on each side. Therefore, Just War thinking maintains the right to dissent. Those who believe a war immoral must not be compelled against their wills to participate. Just War thinking recognizes individual conscientious objection.

Just cause breaks down to four other considerations. First, it requires that the state *perform all its duties*. Its first duty requires self-defense and defense of the innocent. A second duty entails recovery of lost land or property, and the third is to punish criminals and evil doers.

Second, just cause requires *proportionality*. This means that the positive results of war must outweigh its probable destructive effects. The force applied should not create greater evil than that resisted.

Third, one judges the *probability of success*. It asks, is the war winnable? Some expectation of reasonable success should exist before engaging in war. Open-ended campaigns are suspect. Clear objectives and goals must be outlined from the beginning. Warfare in the latter twentieth century abandoned objectives in favor of police action and attrition, which leads to interminable warfare.

Fourth, *last resort* means all alternative measures for resolving conflict must be exhausted before using force. However, preemptive strikes are justified if the current climate suggests an imminent attack or invasion. Last resort does not have to wait for the opponent to draw “first blood.”

Just intent judges the motives and ends of war. It asks, why go to war? and, what is the end result? Motives must originate from love or at least some minimum concern for others with the end result of peace. This rules out all revenge. The goals of war aim at establishing peace and reconciliation.

The Means of War

The proper conduct in war or judging the means of war is *jus in bello* [Latin for "justice in war"], the second category used to measure conflict. It has two primary standards: proportionality and discrimination.

Proportionality maintains that the employed necessary force not outweigh its objectives. It measures the means according to the ends and condemns all overkill. One should not use a bomb where a bullet will do.

Discrimination basically means non-combatant immunity. A "combatant" is anyone who by reasonable standard is actively engaged in an attempt to destroy you. POW's, civilians, chaplains, medics, and children are all non-combatants and therefore exempt from targeting. Buildings such as hospitals, museums, places of worship and landmarks share the same status. However, those previously thought to be non-combatants may forfeit immunity if they participate in fighting. If a place of worship becomes a stash for weapons and a safe-house for opponents, it loses its non-combatant status.

A proper understanding of discrimination does not mean that non-combatants may never be killed, but only that they are never intentionally targeted. The tragic reality of every war is that non-combatants will be killed. Discrimination attempts to minimize these incidents so they become the exception rather than the rule.

Killing innocent lives in war may be justified under the principle of *double effect*. This rule allows for the death of

non-combatants if they were unintended and accidental. Their deaths equal the collateral effects of just intent. Double effect states that each action has more than one effect, even though only one effect was intentional, the other accidental. Self-defense therefore intends to save one's life or that of another but has the accidental effect of the death of the third party.

The double effect principle is the most controversial aspect of the Just War criteria and will be subject to abuse. Therefore, it must adhere to its own criteria. Certain conditions apply before invoking double effect. First, the act should be good. It should qualify as a legitimate act of war. Second, a good effect must be intended. Third, the evil effect cannot act as an end in itself, and must be minimized with risk to the acting party. Lastly, the good effect always outweighs the evil effect.

Given the ferocity of war, it is understandable that many will scoff at the notion of Just War. However, Just War thinking accepts war and force as part of the human condition (Matt. 24:6) and hopes to arrive at the goal of peace through realistic yet morally appropriate methods. It does not promote war but seeks to mitigate its dreadful effects. Just War thinking morally informs Western culture to limit its acts of war and not to exploit its full technological capability, which could only result in genocide and total war.

Notes

1. The following books are helpful sources on Just War thinking: Robert G. Clouse, ed. War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991); Paul Ramsey, War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall the Modern War be Conducted Justly? (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1961); Lawrence J. Terlizzese, "The Just War Tradition and Nuclear Weapons in the Post Cold War Era" (Master's Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1994).

2. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

3. Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Evaluation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 49.

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Terrorism and Just War

America's war on terrorism has once again raised important questions about the proper use of military action. President George W. Bush said on September 20, 2001, "Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or justice to our enemies, justice will be done." This message and following statements by President Bush and Secretary of Defense Rumsfield articulated portions of what has come to be known as *just war theory*. This 1600-year-old Christian doctrine attempts to answer two questions: "When is it permissible to wage war?" and "What are the limitations on the ways we wage war?"

Historically, Christians have adopted one of three positions: (1) ***Activism*** – it is always right to participate in war, (2) ***Pacifism*** – it is never right to participate in war, or (3) ***Selectivism*** – it is right to participate in some wars. The just war theory represents the third position and was articulated initially by Augustine who developed it as a logical extension of Romans 13:1-7.

> 1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

> 2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.
> 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;
> 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.
> 5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.
> 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.
> 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Augustine argued that not all wars are morally justified. He said, "It makes a great difference by which causes and under which authorities men undertake the wars that must be waged."

This seven-point theory provides a framework for evaluating military action. A just war will include the following conditions: just cause, just intention, last resort, formal declaration, limited objectives, proportionate means, and noncombatant immunity. The first five principles apply as a nation is "on the way to war" (*jus ad bellum*) while the final two apply to military forces "in the midst of war" (*jus in bello*). Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Seven Points of a Just War

- ***Just cause*** – All aggression is condemned in just war theory. Participation must be prompted by a just cause or defensive cause. No war of unprovoked aggression can ever be justified.

• ***Just intention*** – War must be to secure a just peace for all parties involved. Revenge or conquest are not legitimate motives.

• ***Last resort*** – War must be engaged as a last resort only after diplomacy and economic pressure have been exhausted.

• ***Formal declaration*** – War must be initiated with a formal declaration by properly constituted authorities.

• ***Limited objectives*** – War must be characterized by limited objectives such a peace. Complete destruction is an improper objective. War must be waged in such a way that once peace is attainable, hostilities cease.

• ***Proportionate means*** – Combatants may not be subjected to greater harm than is necessary to secure victory. The types of weapons and amount of force used should be limited to what is needed to repel aggression and secure a just peace.

• ***Noncombatant immunity*** – Military forces must respect individuals and groups not participating in the conflict. Only governmental forces or agents are legitimate targets.

Objections to Just War

Two types of objections often surface against the idea of just war theory. First, there is the moral objection. Pacifists argue that it is never right to go to war and often cite biblical passages to bolster their argument. For example, Jesus said believers should "turn the other cheek" (Matt. 5:39). He also warned that "those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

However, the context of the statements is key. In the first instance, Jesus is speaking to individual believers in his Sermon on the Mount, admonishing believers not to engage in personal retaliation. In the second instance, He tells Peter to put down his sword because the gospel should not be

advanced by the sword. But at the same time, Jesus actually encouraged his disciples to buy a sword (Luke 22:36) in order to protect themselves.

Two political objections have been cited in the last few months against the application of just war theory to our war on terrorism. Critics say that the idea of a just war applies to only to nations and not to terrorists. Even so, that would not invalidate American miliary actions in Afghanistan or Iraq.

But the criticism is incorrect. It turns out that Christian thought about just war predates the concept of modern nation-states. So the application of these principles can apply to governments or terrorist organizations. Moreover, the very first use of American military force in this country was against Barbary Pirates (who were essentially the terrorists of the 18th century).

Critics also argue that since terrorism is an international threat, the concept of just war would require an international declaration of war. This is not true. The U.S. or any other country does not need to get international approval to defend itself. Even so, both President George H. W. Bush and President George W. Bush have brought the issue of Iraq to the United Nations for a vote. But as the current president made clear, he sought UN approval, not permission. He would like multilateral approval and help, but the U.S. is prepared to go it alone if necessary.

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“What is a Christian Perspective on War?”

Is there anywhere in the Bible where God or Jesus speaks or justifies the Christian needing to go to war? I know we are to obey those who are in control of the government, unless the demands go against biblical principles. I also have read the various passages concerning loving our enemies and blessing those who persecute us. But what of war? What about the issues of defending our homes for the cause of freedom, right to worship, or when others infringe on the rights of those living in other countries?

There are essentially three Christian views concerning war:
Activism – it is always right to participate in war.
Pacifism – it is never right to participate in war.
Selectivism – it is right to participate in some wars.

Most Christians generally hold to the third position. This led to the development of what has come to be known as the just war criteria.

A just war would include the following elements:

• Just cause (defensive war)

• Just intention (just peace)

• Last resort (negotiations)

• Formal declaration

• Limited objectives

• Proportionate means

• Noncombatant immunity

There are a number of books that have been written on this

subject of war and the Christian. Here is a short list of books that you might find helpful.

• Clouse, Robert. *War: Four Christian Views*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, revised 1991.
• Holmes, Arthur, ed. *War: Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, revised 1991.
• Payne, Keith and Payne, Karl. *A Just Defense*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987.
• Schaeffer, Francis; Bukovsky, Vladimir; and Hitchcock, James. *Who Is For Peace?* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983.

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The Crusades

The Crusades were more complex than the simple and unfair invasion of Muslim lands by Christians often portrayed in history books. There is cruelty and conquering on both sides.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

At the Council of Clermont in 1095 Pope Urban II called upon Christians in Europe to respond to an urgent plea for help from Byzantine Christians in the East. Muslims were threatening to conquer this remnant of the Roman Empire for Allah. The threat was real; most of the Middle East, including the Holy Land where Christ had walked, had already been vanquished. Thus began the era of the Crusades, taken from the Latin word *crux* or cross. Committed to saving Christianity, the Crusaders left family and jobs to take up the cause. Depending on how one counts (either by the number of actual

crusading armies or by the duration of the conflict), there were six Crusades between 1095 and 1270. But the crusading spirit would continue on for centuries, until Islam was no longer a menace to Europe.

There is a genuine difficulty for us to view the Crusades through anything but the eyes of a 21st century American. The notion of defending Christianity or the birthplace of Christ via military action is difficult to imagine or to support from Scripture, but perhaps a bit easier since the events of September 11th.

So when Christians today think about the Crusades, it may be with remorse or embarrassment. Church leaders, including the Pope, have recently made the news by apologizing to Muslims, and everyone else, for the events surrounding the Crusades. In the minds of many, the Crusades were an ill-advised fiasco that didn't accomplish the goals of permanently reclaiming Jerusalem and the Holy Lands.

Are history books correct when they portray the Crusades as an invasion of Muslim territories by marauding Europeans whose primary motive was to plunder new lands? What is often left out of the text is that most of the Islamic Empire had been Christian and had been militarily conquered by the followers of the Prophet Muhammad in the 7th and 8th centuries.

Islam had suddenly risen out of nowhere to become a threat to all of Christian Europe, and although it had shown some restraint in its treatment of conquered Christians, it had exhibited remarkable cruelty as well. At minimum, Islam enforced economic and religious discrimination against those it controlled, making Jews and Christians second-class citizens. In some cases, Muslim leaders went further. An event that may have sparked the initial Crusade in 1095 was the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre by the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim.{1} In fact, many Christians at the time considered al-Hakim to be the Antichrist.

We want black and white answers to troubling questions, but the Crusades present us with a complex collection of events, motivations, and results that make simple answers difficult to find. In this article we'll consider the origins and impact of this centuries-long struggle between the followers of Muhammad and the followers of Christ.

The Causes

Historian Paul Johnson writes that the terrorist attacks of September 11th can be seen as an extension of the centuries-long struggle between the Islamic East and the Christian West. Johnson writes,

> *The Crusades, far from being an outrageous prototype of Western imperialism, as is taught in most of our schools, were a mere episode in a struggle that has lasted 1,400 years, and were one of the few occasions when Christians took the offensive to regain the "occupied territories" of the Holy Land.*[2]

Islam had exploded on the map by conquering territories that had been primarily Christian. The cities of Antioch, Alexandria, and Carthage had been the centers of Christian thought and theological inquiry for centuries before being taken by Muslim armies in their jihad to spread Islam worldwide. Starting in 1095 and continuing for over four hundred years, the crusading spirit that pervaded much of Europe can be seen as an act of cultural self-preservation, much as Americans now see the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

One motivation for the Crusade in 1095 was the request for help made by the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I. Much of the Byzantine Empire had been conquered by the Seljuk Turks and Constantinople, the greatest Christian city in the world, was also being threatened. Pope Urban knew that the sacrifices

involved with the call to fight the Turks needed more than just coming to the rescue of Eastern Christendom. To motivate his followers he added a new goal to free Jerusalem and the birthplace of Christ.

At the personal level, the Pope added the possibility of remission of sins. Since the idea of a pilgrim's vow was widespread in medieval Europe, crusaders, noblemen and peasant alike, vowed to reach the Holy Sepulcher in return for the church's pardon for sins they had committed. The church also promised to protect properties left behind by noblemen during travels east.

The Pope might launch a Crusade, but he had little control over it once it began. The Crusaders promised God, not the Pope to complete the task. Once on its way, the Crusading army was held together by "feudal obligations, family ties, friendship, or fear."{3}

Unlike Islam, Christianity had not yet developed the notion of a holy war. In the fifth century Augustine described what constituted a *just war* but excluded the practice of battle for the purpose of religious conversion or to destroy heretical religious ideas. Leaders of nations might decide to go to war for just reasons, but war was not to be a tool of the church.{4} Unfortunately, using Augustine's *just war* language, Popes and Crusaders saw themselves as warriors for Christ rather than as a people seeking justice in the face of an encroaching enemy threat.

The Events

The history books our children read typically emphasize the atrocities committed by Crusaders and the tolerance of the Muslims. It is true that the Crusaders slaughtered Jews and Muslims in the sacking of Jerusalem and later laid siege to the Christian city of Constantinople. Records indicate that Crusaders were even fighting among themselves as they fought

Muslims. But a closer examination of the Crusades shows the real story is more complex than the public's perception or what is found in history books. The fact is that both Muslims and Christians committed considerable carnage and internal warfare and political struggles often divided both sides.

Muslims could be, and frequently were, barbaric in their treatment of Christians and Jews. One example is how the Turks dealt with German and French prisoners captured early in the First Crusade prior to the sacking of Jerusalem. Those who renounced Christ and converted to Islam were sent to the East; the rest were slaughtered. Even Saladin, the re-conqueror of Jerusalem was not always merciful. After defeating a large Latin army on July 3, 1187, he ordered the mass execution of all Hospitallers and Templars left alive, and he personally beheaded the nobleman Reynald of Chatillon. Saladin's secretary noted that:

> *He ordered that they should be beheaded, choosing to have them dead rather than in prison. With him was a whole band of scholars and Sufis . . . [and] each begged to be allowed to kill one of them, and drew his sword and rolled back his sleeve. Saladin, his face joyful, was sitting on his dais; the unbelievers showed black despair.{5}*

In fact, Saladin had planned to massacre all of the Christians in Jerusalem after taking it back from the Crusaders, but when the commander of the Jerusalem garrison threatened to destroy the city and kill all of the Muslims inside the walls, Saladin allowed them to buy their freedom or be sold into slavery instead.{6}

The treachery shown by the Crusaders against other Christians is a reflection of the times. At the height of the crusading spirit in Europe, Frederick Barbarossa assembled a large force of Germans for what is now known as the third Crusade. To ease his way, he negotiated treaties for safe passage through

Europe and Anatolia, even getting permission from Muslim Turks to pass unhampered. On the other hand, the Christian Emperor of Byzantium, Isaac II, secretly agreed with Saladin to harass Frederick's crusaders through his territory. When it was deemed helpful, both Muslim and Christian made pacts with anyone who might further their own cause. At one point the sultan of Egypt offered to help the Crusaders in their struggle with the Muslim Turks, and the Turks failed to come to the rescue of the Shi'ite Fatimid Muslims who controlled Palestine.

Human treachery and sinfulness was evident on both sides of the conflict.

The Results

On May 29, 1453 the city of Constantinople fell to the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II. With it the 2,206-year-old Roman Empire came to an end and the greatest Christian church in the world, the Hagia Sophia, was turned into a mosque. Some argue that this disaster was a direct result of the Crusaders' misguided efforts, and that anything positive they might have accomplished was fleeting.

Looking back at the Crusades, we are inclined to think of them as a burst of short-lived, failed efforts by misguided Europeans. Actually, the crusading spirit lasted for hundreds of years and the Latin kingdom that was established in 1098, during the first Crusade, endured for almost 200 years. Jerusalem remained in European hands for eighty-eight years, a period greater than the survival of many modern nations.

Given the fact that the Latin kingdom and Jerusalem eventually fell back into Muslim hands, did the Crusaders accomplish anything significant? It can be argued that the movement of large European armies into Muslim held territories slowed down the advance of Islam westward. The presence of a Latin kingdom in Palestine acted as a buffer zone between the Byzantine

Empire and Muslim powers and also motivated Muslim leaders to focus their attention on defense rather than offense at least for a period of time.

Psychologically, the Crusades resulted in a culture of chivalry based on both legendary and factual exploits of European rulers. The crusading kings Richard the Lionheart and Louis IX were admired even by their enemies as men of integrity and valor. Both saw themselves as acting on God's behalf in their quest to free Jerusalem from Muslim oppression. For centuries, European rulers looked to the Crusader kings as models of how to integrate Christianity and the obligations of knighthood.

Unfortunately, valor and the ability to conduct warfare took precedent over all other qualities, perhaps because it was a holdover from Frankish pagan roots and the worship of Odin the warrior god. These Germanic people may have converted to Christianity, but they still had a place in their hearts for the gallant warrior's paradise, Valhalla.{7} As one scholar writes:

> *But the descendants of those worshippers of Odin still had the love of a warrior god in their blood, a god of warriors whose ultimate symbol was war.{8}*

The Crusades temporarily protected some Christians from having to live under Muslim rule as second-class citizens. Called the *dhimmi*, this legal code enforced the superiority of Muslims and humiliated all who refused to give up other religious beliefs.

It is also argued that the crusading spirit is what eventually sent the Europeans off to the New World. The voyage of Columbus just happens to coincide with the removal of Muslim rule from Spain. The exploration of the New World eventually encouraged an economic explosion that the Muslim world could not match.

Summary

Muslims still point to the Crusades as an example of injustice perpetrated by the West on Islam. An interesting question might be, “Had the situation been reversed, would Muslims have felt justified in going to war against Christians?” In other words, would the rules in the Qur’an and the Hadith (the holy books of Islam) warrant a conflict similar to what the Crusaders conducted?

You have probably heard the term *jihad*, or struggle, discussed in the news. The word denotes different kinds of striving within the Muslim faith. At one level, it speaks of personal striving for righteousness. However, there are numerous uses of the term within Islam where it explicitly refers to warfare.

First, the Qur’an permits fighting to defend individual Muslims and the religion of Islam from attack.{9} In fact, all able bodied Muslims are commanded to assist in defending the community of believers. Muslims are also given permission to remove treacherous people from power, even if they have previously agreed to a treaty with them.{10}

Muslims are encouraged to use armed struggle for the general purpose of spreading the message of Islam.{11} The Qur’an specifically says, “Fighting is a grave offense, but graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque. . . .”{12} Warfare is also justified for the purpose of purging a people from the bondage of idolatry or the association of anything with God. This gives the Muslim a theological reason to go to war against Christians, since the Qur’an teaches that the doctrine of the Trinity is a form of idolatry. Had the situation been reversed, the religion of Islam provides multiple rationalizations for the actions of the Crusaders.

But is there a Christian justification for the Crusades? The

only example of a Christian fighting in the New Testament is the apostle Peter when he drew his sword to protect Jesus from the Roman soldiers. Jesus told him to put the sword away. Then He said, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and He will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” The kingdom that Jesus had established would not be built on the blood of the unbeliever, but on the shed blood of the Lamb of God.

The Crusader’s actions should be defended using Augustine’s “just war” language rather than a holy war vocabulary. Although they did not always live up to the dictates of “just war” ideals, such as the immunity of noncombatants, the Crusades were a last resort defensive war that sought peace for its people who had been under constant assault for many years.

If one of the functions of a God-ordained government is to restrain evil and promote justice, then it follows that rulers of nations where Christians dwell may need to conduct a *just war* in order to protect their people from invasion.

Notes

1. John Esposito, ed. *The Oxford History of Islam,* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 335.
2. Paul Johnson, National Review, http://www.nationalreview.com/15oct01/johnson101501.shtml.
3. Thomas F. Madden, *A Concise History of the Crusades*, (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1999), 10.
4. Ibid., 2.
5. Ibid., 78.
6. Ibid., 80.
7. Zoe Oldenbourg, *The Crusades,* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), 33.
8. Ibid, 32.
9. Qur’an 2:190, 193.

10. Ibid, 8:58.
11. Ibid, 2:217 (also see www.irshad.org/islam/iiie/iiie_18.htm published by The Institute of Islamic Information & Education, P.O. Box 41129, Chicago, IL 60641-0129).
12. Qur'an 2:217.

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