Justice in warfare: the ethical debate over British area bombing of German cities in World War II

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Dissertation

JUSTICE IN WARFARE:
THE ETHICAL DEBATE OVER
BRITISH AREA BOMBING OF GERMAN CITIES
IN WORLD WAR II

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To the memory of my father, Harold Rutherford Alexander (1930 – 2008), who taught me from an early age the value of critical thinking and inspired in me the love of the history of ideas.
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(Order No. )

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ABSTRACT

During World War II the British Royal Air Force undertook a campaign of area bombing of German cities, resulting in hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties. The debate over the ethics of this policy began at the time and has continued to the present. Area bombing clearly violated the traditional Just War norms of discrimination and noncombatant immunity. Apologists for the bombing have argued that such norms are no longer applicable in conditions of modern total war; critics of the bombing disagree. This dissertation defends the continuing relevance and applicability of these norms, and argues that area bombing constituted a violation of the moral laws governing the conduct of warfare. The dissertation also shows that the seeming intractability of the ethical debate on area bombing results from the participants’ positions being informed by distinct and often incompatible ethical traditions. To understand and evaluate the different positions in the debate, it is necessary to engage critically with these underlying traditions.

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The dissertation shows how five ethical traditions touching on the norm of noncombatant immunity conditioned the positions taken by protagonists in the debate. The ethical traditions are Holy War / Crusade; Classical Realism; Christian Realism; Christian Just War / Jus in Bello; and Christian Pacifism. The first part of the dissertation explores the theoretical background and historical development of each of these traditions. The second part examines five protagonists in the British debate during World War II and analyzes how their positions were informed by the ethical traditions considered in the first part. The participants examined are Lord Vansittart (Holy War / Crusade), Captain Basil Liddell Hart (Classical Realism), Archbishop William Temple (Christian Realism), Bishop George Bell (Just War / Jus in Bello), and Vera Brittain (Christian Pacifism). The dissertation evaluates the strengths, weaknesses, and contributions of each of these traditions. By considering the voices raised against the area bombing at the time – especially those of Bishop Bell and Vera Brittain – the dissertation seeks to encourage theologically and ethically informed opposition to potential violations of the jus in bello norms in present and future conflicts.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APF ................................................................. Anglican Pacifist Fellowship
BBC ............................................................... British Broadcasting Corporation
BRC ................................................................. Bombing Restriction Committee
CND ................................................................. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
COPEC .......................................................... Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship
FOR ................................................................. Fellowship of Reconciliation
LNU ................................................................. League of Nations Union
MAD ................................................................. Mutual Assured Destruction
MP ................................................................. Member of Parliament
NATO ............................................................ North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PPU ................................................................. Peace Pledge Union
RAF ................................................................. Royal Air Force
USAAF .......................................................... United States Army Air Force
USSBS ........................................................... United States Strategic Bombing Survey
VAD ................................................................. Volunteer Aid Detachment
WCC ............................................................... World Council of Churches
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Prologue: Operation Gomorrah

On July 24, 1943, at approximately 11 p.m., a fleet of over seven hundred Royal Air Force (RAF) bombers took off from bases in eastern England and headed for northern Germany. Luftwaffe radar operators picked up and started tracking the formation, but at about 12:15 a.m., the images on their screens dissolved into “a snowstorm of whirling streaks and dashes.”¹ The bombers had for the first time deployed “Window” – thousands of strips of tinfoil released into the air to blind enemy radar defenses. Known to the Americans as “chaff” and to the Germans as Duppel, Window had been available for several years, but the RAF had been deterred from using it by the fear that the Germans would do likewise. By 1943, however, Luftwaffe bombers no longer posed a serious threat to Britain; and in view of growing losses to enemy air defenses in the night skies over Germany, Bomber Command’s Air Marshall Sir Arthur Harris requested permission to introduce this countermeasure. Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave his personal approval, declaring, “Let us open the Window!”² For the first time in the Allied air war against Germany, the bombers were able to get a clear run at their target, largely

¹ A.C. Grayling, Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan (New York: Walker, 2006), 15.
² Max Hastings, Bomber Command (London: Pan, 2010), 258.
unopposed by radar-guided enemy fighters and anti-aircraft guns. Their destination was Germany’s second largest city, Hamburg. “Operation Gomorrah” had begun.

Over the next ten days, Hamburg was the target of four major nighttime raids by the RAF and two daylight raids by the American Eighth Air Force. The aiming point for the nighttime raids was the city center. On the first raid, the bombers dropped 2,290 tons of bombs, most of them incendiary devices, and vast areas of Hamburg were devastated with the loss of only twelve aircraft – a much lower casualty rate than on previous raids against other cities. The next day, 127 American bombers attempted precision attacks against two targets within the city: the Blohm and Voss Shipyards, and the Klockner aircraft engine factory. But smoke from fires still burning from the previous night obscured the targets so that only a few bombs fell on the shipyards and none on the factory. When the Americans returned the next day, the city’s defenders lit thousands of smoke pots to send up another smokescreen. The attackers opted for two secondary targets, a U-Boat construction facility and a power station. The latter was hit, cutting off electricity to half the city.

The RAF launched its second major nighttime raid against Hamburg on July 27, producing the unprecedented phenomenon that the Germans immediately labeled

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Feuersturm, which translates into English simply and accurately as “firestorm.” On this mission, 735 bombers dropped 2,326 tons of bombs, at a cost of seventeen bombers lost. The firestorm seems to have resulted from the combination of three factors. First, the summer weather had brought unusually high temperatures and low humidity. Second, most of Hamburg’s fire-fighting vehicles and appliances were in the western part of the city, still putting out fires from the raid of July 24, especially in coke and coal stockpiles. So, when the incendiary devices began to fall on the other side of town, the fire services arrived too late to contain the conflagration. Third, because of Window, the bomber stream was once again able to get a clear run at the city, remain in tight formation, and achieve an unusually concentrated pattern of bombing.

Although the first alarms were sounded at 11:40 p.m., the bombers did not arrive until an hour later, as they circled around the city and approached from the east. Fifteen Pathfinder aircraft dropped markers, all of which fell approximately two miles east of the aiming point at the city center. But because Hamburg was so large, most of the bombs fell on densely inhabited working class and middle class residential districts. These areas consisted of narrow streets of closely packed six-story apartment blocks, each housing around eighteen families. As the combination of high-explosive bombs and incendiary devices rained down, fires quickly spread out of control.

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5 Middlebrook, “Firestorm,” 91.

The firestorm is generally reckoned to have started at 1:20 a.m., twenty-three minutes after the bombing began.\(^7\) Burning buildings started sucking in air from the streets outside and from other buildings with smaller fires; these streams of hot air brought with them sparks and burning brands which set more buildings alight. Soon, the whole area became a sea of fire, drawing in air from all directions at hurricane speeds. The initial firestorm probably covered one square mile. As the raid continued, the bombing pattern slowly spread eastward back along the bombers’ line of approach – the phenomenon known as “creepback” – so that the firestorm eventually engulfed an irregular rectangle measuring about three miles from east to west and one and a half miles from north to south.\(^8\) Rising to altitudes of thousands of feet, the flames were visible to Allied aircraft more than a hundred miles away.\(^9\) Although the bombing lasted just over an hour, the firestorm reached its greatest intensity in the early morning hours after the bombers had left. It began to abate at 4 a.m. and ended between 6 and 7 a.m.

Around 16,000 apartment buildings were set ablaze.\(^10\) Most of these buildings had basement air raid shelters where nearly the entire civilian population took refuge when the bombing started. As temperatures started to rise in the shelters, those within had to decide whether to remain where they were or seek safety outside. Many of those who left

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\(^7\) Middlebrook, “Firestorm,” 92.

\(^8\) Middlebrook, “Firestorm,” 93.

\(^9\) Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 18.

\(^10\) Middlebrook, “Firestorm,” 93.
the shelters were carried by the wind into the center of the firestorm; others were killed by flying debris. Perhaps the worst deaths of all were suffered by those who became stuck on road surfaces where the asphalt had melted from the heat. But surprising numbers of people managed to struggle against the wind away from the center of the firestorm to find refuge in canals, bomb craters, and parks. The greatest loss of life occurred among those who stayed in the basement shelters. The overwhelming cause of death was carbon monoxide poisoning, which resulted from the firestorm drawing the good air out of the shelters and replacing it with smoke or colorless gases. The inhabitants of some shelters tried to escape but found the exits blocked by the collapsed buildings; others appeared to have died peacefully, not realizing what was happening. The bodies in some shelters were found baked or molten by the intense heat; in others all that remained was a layer of ash on the floor, caused by flash fires that incinerated the dead bodies as the firestorm died out and oxygen re-entered the room. The number of civilian deaths from the firestorm is estimated at 46,000, including 22,000 women and 5,000 children.\footnote{Neillands, \textit{The Bomber War}, 241.} In one night the RAF killed more civilians in Hamburg than the Luftwaffe had killed in Britain during the eight months of the Blitz from September 1940 to May 1941.\footnote{Hastings, \textit{Bomber Command}, 261.}

The next day, rightly anticipating more raids to come, the city authorities ordered all surviving inhabitants not needed for essential work to evacuate. Approximately 1.2
million people left by nightfall. When 777 RAF bombers returned for a third raid on the night of July 29, casualties on the ground were far fewer because what was left of the city was largely deserted. By this time, also, the German air defenses had begun to adopt new tactics to counteract Window. Instead of relying on directions from radar operators on the ground, German fighter pilots began to fly at high altitudes over the cities being bombed so they could see the silhouettes of the bombers against the flames on the ground, and attack from above. Allied casualties began to creep back up. On July 29, the RAF lost twenty-eight bombers, and another thirty when they attacked Hamburg for the last time on August 2. This last raid was largely ineffectual due to thunderstorms over the city.

Both apologists for and critics of these raids acknowledge that Operation Gomorrah was a huge success measured against the objectives of the RAF’s area bombing policy. Martin Middlebrook, a critic of the area bombing, writes that the evacuation of Hamburg was, in strictly military terms, the culmination of Bomber Command’s victory: “area bombing operations had stopped the normal life of a major city.”\(^\text{13}\) Robin Neillands, an apologist for the bombing, similarly writes: “From the point of view of effect, the 27/28 July raid was a triumph. Large areas of the city were destroyed, hundreds of factories and offices were damaged, and the bulk of the population had to flee the city, with a devastating effect on industrial production.”\(^\text{14}\) The


\(^\text{14}\) Neillands, The Bomber War, 241.
Nazi leadership was shaken. Hitler ordered a news blackout and refused to visit the city. Albert Speer, the Minister in charge of armaments production, later wrote:

Hamburg put the fear of God into me. At the meeting of Central Planning on July 29, I pointed out: “If the air raids continue on the present scale, within three months we shall be … coasting downhill, smoothly and relatively quickly ...” Three days later I informed Hitler that armaments production was collapsing and threw in the further warning that a series of attacks of this sort, extended to six more major cities, would bring Germany’s armaments production to a total halt.  

Neillands writes that the destruction of Hamburg “shook Germany to the core,” and that if Harris had been able to devastate another German city as completely within a few days, the Nazi leadership might have been moved in the direction of seeking terms of peace.  

While the area bombing of German cities continued with horrific destruction and loss of life, however, there were no more conflagrations on the scale of Hamburg until the September 1944 raid on Darmstadt more than a year later, which killed 10,550 people, and the February 1945 raid on Dresden, which killed more than 30,000 people when the war was almost over. Never quite grasping that the nearly total destruction of Hamburg was made possible by repeated raids on successive nights, Harris remained reluctant to attack the same target more than once in a short period lest the defenders anticipate where


16 Neillands, *Bomber Command*, 243. Given Hitler’s refusal to seek peace terms even when the Allied armies were overrunning Germany in 1945, this suggestion seems implausible.

17 Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 317.

18 Since Dresden was full of refugees fleeing the Eastern Front at the time of the raid, the numbers of those killed are difficult to know, and estimates in various histories range from 20,000 to 120,000. The “more than 30,000” figure comes from Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 324.
the bombers would strike next. Still, the British leadership saw Hamburg as a major victory in the air war against Nazi Germany. Although, unlike Harris, Churchill did not believe that bombing alone would defeat the enemy, he was, according to Hastings, “still greatly attracted by bringing fire and the sword upon Germany’s cities, and he was delighted by Harris’s triumph at Hamburg.”

The Problem of Moral Evaluation

The July 1943 Hamburg raids were an integral part of a British strategy of area bombing – also known as “obliteration bombing” or “carpet bombing” – of German cities from 1941 to 1945. I began with Hamburg for two reasons. First, as noted, both advocates and critics of the area bombing policy agree that the Hamburg raids represent one of that policy’s greatest successes measured against its objective of halting the normal functioning of major cities. Even if one argues that the raids did not have the explicit aim of killing civilians – a debatable assumption, to be discussed further below – the civilian deaths were nonetheless accepted as the unavoidable consequence of the policy. No one at the time, or in the years since, ever suggested that the numbers of civilian deaths at Hamburg resulted from a military operation having gone horribly wrong in trying to achieve other, less deadly, objectives. Second, even though I did not dwell on the gruesome details of the eyewitness accounts, the graphic descriptions of the suffering and death of civilians bring one face-to-face with the sheer horror on the ground. Reading

what it was like under the bombs, one is apt to experience emotions of revulsion, sadness, anger, and pity for the victims.\textsuperscript{20} Apologists for the area bombing admit as much. Neillands writes of the firestorm: “It was, by any standard, a horrific event – hard to justify, terrible to contemplate in later, peaceful years.”\textsuperscript{21}

Emotional reactions do not by themselves amount to moral judgments. At first glance, the World War II British area bombing of German cities appears to have constituted a clear violation of the \textit{jus in bello} norm of noncombatant immunity, which in Europe had originated in the Christian Just War tradition and by the twentieth century had been incorporated into customary international law. Yet in the ethical debate that began at the time, and which has continued ever since, apologists for the area bombing have argued either that considerations of military necessity overrode the customary norms, or indeed that the conditions of modern war have rendered such norms archaic and obsolete. In this study, my aim is to explore how different ethical traditions inform the various moral judgments that have been made for and against the area bombing. I bring my own framework of ethical presuppositions to the investigation. Writing from the viewpoint of the Christian Just War tradition, my goal is to engage other ethical traditions in a dialogue which I hope will highlight their respective strengths and weaknesses, as well as their potential for learning from one another. Along the way, I will mount an

\textsuperscript{20} For graphic eyewitness descriptions of the experiences of the bombed during the Hamburg raids, see Middlebrook, “Firestorm,” 85-109, and Beck, \textit{Under the Bombs}, 63-71.

\textsuperscript{21} Neillands, \textit{The Bomber War}, 241.
argument for the continuing validity of the norm of noncombatant immunity. A brief overview of the *jus in bello* norms is thus necessary at the outset, followed by an explanation of my emphasis on ethical traditions, and the restriction of the scope of this study specifically to the British wartime debate.

**Discrimination, Noncombatant Immunity, and Proportionality**

The Just War tradition proposes criteria for evaluating the morality of war. These criteria fall under two main headings: *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. The *ad bellum* criteria furnish tests for evaluating whether a proposed war may justly be undertaken: just cause, right intention, legitimate authority, last resort, and reasonable chance of success. The basic presumption of the tradition is in favor of peace and against war; the burden of proof is on those who would fight.\(^{22}\) The *ad bellum* criteria function as a series of tests by which a cumulative case can be made – and accepted or rejected – for overriding this default presumption in exceptional cases. The goal of such a justifiable war must always be the restoration of peace on just terms. Many commentators regard the war against Nazi Germany as a classic example of a justifiable war within the terms of this tradition.

The moral questions raised by the World War II area bombing of Germany fall under the tradition’s second heading, *jus in bello*. Where the *ad bellum* criteria address

whether to fight, the *in bello* criteria address how to fight. The *in bello* criteria lay the ethical foundation for laws of war designed to govern and regulate the belligerents’ use of force during armed conflicts. Moreover, the *in bello* criteria are intrinsically related to the *ad bellum* criteria. Christian Just War theorist Daniel M. Bell Jr. writes: “Justice in going to war and in waging war are not two separate and distinct disciplines, like, say, building an automobile and driving it.” 23 The *in bello* criteria specify ways in which wars must and must not be fought if the very values are to be preserved that justified the resort to force in the first place.

The *in bello* criteria are generally reckoned as two: discrimination and proportionality. Both criteria play a critical role in moral evaluations of the area bombing. The term “discrimination” is often used interchangeably with “noncombatant immunity,” but this usage oversimplifies matters. Discrimination applies to both human and non-human targets, and the basic question is whether they are legitimate military objectives. The norm of discrimination permits attacks on military targets such as enemy bases or factories engaged in the production of arms, but prohibits attacks on non-military targets such as schools, orphanages, hospitals, nursing homes, libraries, places of worship, and cultural monuments. Noncombatant immunity is a subcategory of discrimination, and applies specifically to human targets. Not all the inhabitants of an enemy state are

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23 Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church rather than the State* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 209. One could argue, though, that the dos and don’ts of driving an automobile are more intrinsically related to the way in which it was built than Bell seems to allow.
legitimate targets of attack, but only “combatants,” those directly involved in the enemy state’s war effort, whose activities constitute a material threat to one’s own war effort, military forces, and society. In modern war, it is often difficult to distinguish combatants from noncombatants, since much of a society’s industries and infrastructure contribute in various ways to its war effort. But Oliver O’Donovan, Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology at Oxford University, rightly argues that the distinction between combatants and noncombatants remains valid even though it does not always correspond to the traditional distinction between the wearers of military and civilian uniforms:

A well-aimed missile might knock out a mechanic, a politician, a computer operator and a driver, all technically ‘civilians’, without causing one truly noncombatant death. On the other hand a doctor, a chef, a lawyer and a plumber may all be in uniform, and yet effectively noncombatants. Drawing the line can be a nice matter. … Yet while we puzzle over the twilight cases, we cannot overlook the distinction between day and night: a soldier in his tank is a combatant, his wife and children in an air-raid shelter are noncombatants.\(^\text{24}\)

In other words, despite many gray areas, there are also vast fields of black and white; and the line distinguishing combatants and noncombatants must be drawn somewhere.

By its very nature, the British area bombing of German cities – as opposed to selective attacks on specific targets such as munitions factories, airfields, or oil installations – was indiscriminate. As many bombs as possible were dropped over built-up urban areas in the hope that at least some of them would hit targets of military significance. Hundreds of thousands of noncombatant civilians were killed, and vast

areas of cities were devastated without regard for any distinction between military and non-military targets. By the norms of discrimination and noncombatant immunity, then, the area bombing was morally unjustifiable.

At this point, however, an apologist for the area bombing might object that what the *jus in bello* principles of discrimination and noncombatant immunity prohibit are specifically *direct* and *intentional* attacks on civilians and non-military targets. What is known as the “doctrine of double-effect” acknowledges that an attack on an enemy military target may inadvertently kill noncombatants. But even if such deaths are foreseeable, they do not render the attack morally illegitimate provided that they are *indirect* and *unintentional*. So long as the attack is directed against the military target with the sole aim of rendering it useless to the enemy, the attendant civilian deaths become – in the unfortunate phrase – “collateral damage,” a regrettable side-effect of a legitimate military operation. So, the apologist might argue, during World War II entire German cities were legitimate military targets considered precisely as centers of industrial production crucial to the Nazi war effort, and the intention of the bombing was not to kill civilians *per se*, but to hasten Allied victory by progressively degrading Germany’s ability to wage war. Max Hastings writes: “It is a gross abuse of language to identify area bombing as a ‘war crime,’ as do some modern critics. The policy was designed to hasten the defeat of Germany by destroying its industrial base, not wantonly to slaughter innocents.”

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But even granting the premise that the civilian deaths resulting from the area bombing were indirect and unintentional – a point to be addressed presently – the other *jus in bello* criterion, proportionality, figures in at this point. This criterion qualifies the doctrine of double-effect by requiring that the death, destruction, and suffering caused by a military action be justified by its anticipated benefits. While enormously difficult and subjective, the weighing of such putative costs and benefits is an inescapable dimension of decision-making by military commanders in the field and their political masters. For example: Are the military benefits of taking out an enemy radar station really worth the lives of the five to ten civilians who are likely to die as a result? If the answer is yes, does that assessment change if new intelligence puts the likely number of civilian deaths closer to fifty or 100? The criterion of proportionality proposes that at a certain point, when the foreseeable death and destruction grow out of all proportion to the hoped-for benefits, the planned military operation becomes morally unjustifiable and should be called off.

A case can thus be made that the sheer scale of the death and destruction caused by the area bombing was out of all proportion to any military benefits that it could reasonably have been expected to produce. I certainly think this myself; but that thought remains a subjective assessment with which others are free to disagree. The problem is that framing the question in this way allows in principle for the justification of the killing of virtually any number of noncombatants by the claim that the military benefits were great enough to be worth it. Some military historians argue that the area bombing
weakened the Nazi war effort, and hastened the Allied victory, to an extent that rendered the civilian loss of life the regrettable side-effect of a necessary military strategy.

Some recent Just War theorists argue, however, that it is a misreading of the tradition to suggest that the more important a military objective is deemed to be, the greater is the number of foreseeable but unintentional noncombatant deaths that can be tolerated in its pursuit. Daniel Bell proposes that to ask how many civilian deaths are permitted in any given set of circumstances is to ask the wrong question, because the traditional formulation of noncombatant immunity requires those engaged in military operations to take positive steps to avoid, reduce, and minimize noncombatant casualties.\(^26\) Michael Walzer writes that “due regard” for noncombatants requires combatants to accept a higher risk of death to their own military forces rather than increase the risks to civilian populations.\(^27\) There is a duty, in other words, not only to refrain from direct and intentional attacks on civilians, but also to take responsibility for protecting civilians from harm. On this count, certainly, the area bombing exhibited a reckless disregard for civilian populations and thus remains an egregious violation of the norm of noncombatant immunity.

For the sake of argument, I have so far granted the premise that the area bombing did not intentionally target civilians. But this premise is open to question. Any military


attack has what might be called its subjective intentions, what the attackers consciously admit that they are trying to achieve, and its objective intentions, which are inherent in the nature of the military operation itself, its weapons and tactics, and the characteristics of its target. The architects of Bomber Command’s strategy may well have believed that their intention was to attack cities but not the civilians who lived in them. Yet by their very nature cities remain places where people live by the hundreds of thousands. The indiscriminate bombing of an urban area cannot but have the objective intention of attacking noncombatants and non-military targets, no matter what the attackers tell themselves and the public they are really trying to do.

Moreover, it is not clear that apologists for the area bombing are being entirely honest with themselves insofar as they claim that killing civilians was not part of area bombing’s subjective intentions. Before World War II, British military theorists of the strategy of air power argued that one of the advantages of overwhelming bombing attacks against an enemy’s homeland would be what they called “the moral effect” – what today would be called the psychological effect, or the effect on morale. Striking terror into the German civilian population was one of the explicit aims of the RAF bombing strategy; and such an aim inescapably presupposes the killing of significant numbers of civilians combined with the credible threat of more such killing to come. In terms of the Just War tradition, then, the area bombing policy stands morally condemned as having violated the norm of noncombatant immunity on the basis of both objective and subjective intentions.
The Role of Ethical Traditions

In the foregoing, I have sketched out a preliminary moral evaluation of the area bombing from the viewpoint of the Christian Just War tradition’s norms of discrimination and proportionality. Other writers offer very different moral judgments. Such competing evaluations of the area bombing often read as though they were written in different ethical languages. The point can be illustrated by briefly comparing extracts from two recent commentators. In a thoughtful 1998 essay, David Ian Hall of King’s College, London, writes that the arguments of the bombing’s moral critics, while heartfelt and sincere, nonetheless betrayed “a naïve understanding of the dialectic between morality and war.”

After all, it is not so much a case of this or that means of waging war that is immoral or inhumane. War itself is immoral. Once full-scale war has broken out the means for limiting its barbarities, excesses, and horrors are virtually non-existent. The moral question is then whether or not it is imperative to fight the war at all? If the answer is yes, then the proper course, indeed the moral obligation implicitly undertaken by going to war, is to win as quickly and cheaply as possible.

It follows that if a given war is not only justified but morally imperative, then military necessity becomes the factor that legitimizes virtually any actions that promise to shorten the war and hasten victory. Consciously or unconsciously, Hall is representing the Realist tradition of international relations theory; and within that tradition his argument

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resembles the military ethic associated above all with the American Civil War general William Tecumseh Sherman. Now contrast this perspective with that of Christian Just War theorist Daniel M. Bell, Jr., who writes the following:

Put bluntly and simply, the criterion of discrimination holds that one may not intentionally kill noncombatants. For example, one may not legitimately target cities in the hope of undermining enemy morale and shortening the war, nor may civilians be targeted in order to reduce the number of combatant casualties. The failure to discriminate between combatants and noncombatants in waging war renders the killing of civilians in war an act of murder. Moreover, it renders those who do such killing little different from terrorists.

Much could be said about both Hall’s and Bell’s arguments; the point to note here is the mutually contradictory character of their respective moral assertions. One affirms what the other denies. For Hall, the hope of shortening the war justifies virtually any military action that promises to contribute to the achievement of that end, provided that the war itself is morally justified. For Bell, however, not even the promise of shortening the war and reducing casualties overall can justify the intentional killing of noncombatants, which remains murder, and verges on terrorism. A basic theme of this study is that such competing moral assessments of the area bombing differ not so much because they assess the historical facts differently as because they are informed by different ethical traditions. And here it is necessary to say something about ethical traditions in general.


31 Bell, Just War as Christian Discipleship, 210-211.
At its narrowest focus, the history of ethics concentrates on specific writings, such as Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, or, at a slightly broader level, on the ethical thought and writings of a specific individual, such as Aristotle himself. At the next level, the focus widens to encompass ethical *theories* developed by multiple writers, or indeed whole *schools* of ethical thought. The term “tradition” is broader still. An ethical tradition can encompass multiple writings, writers, theories, and schools. The Latin word *traditio*, “to hand down,” suggests one defining feature of a tradition: it spans generations. Conscious adherents of a tradition are generally able to point to thinkers and writers in previous generations from whom they have learned and whose teaching they seek to carry forward, adapt, and develop for the future. Some traditions go back for millennia, such as the Jewish tradition or the Platonic tradition; others are of more recent origin, such as the Marxist tradition or the Freudian tradition. Beginning in the 1990s, a number of comparative studies have appeared on the different traditions of international ethics and the ethics of war and peace.32 While older studies tended to see the two principal

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competing schools of thought on international relations as utopianism and realism, these more recent studies have brought to light a diversity of traditions, such as natural law, pacifism, Marxism, and feminism, as well as the insights of specific religions, such as Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism.

Terry Nardin defines tradition as “the authoritative presence of a continuously transmitted past.” By this definition, adherents of a tradition believe it (1) to have originated in the past; (2) to have present authority and significance; and (3) to have been passed down over intervening generations. Nardin is careful to distinguish ethical traditions from systems of moral philosophy or ethical theory; he writes that it is “an error to think that an ethical outlook or tradition is in essence a theoretical system of general principles” Unlike static theoretical systems, ethical traditions are always evolving: “To think ethically is to move back and forth between the general and the particular – to draw upon general principles in reaching particular judgments and decisions and, at the same time, to revise those principles in light of the particular circumstances in which they are used.”

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33 One of the classic texts introducing this distinction was Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (1939; repr., New York: HarperCollins, 2001).


35 Nardin, “Ethical Traditions,” 2.

Another treatment of ethical traditions is given by Martin Wight (1913 – 1972) in a posthumously published volume of his lectures in international relations theory at the London School of Economics. Wight’s use of the term differs strikingly from Nardin’s. According to Wight, traditions are patterns of repetition and recurrence. His premise is that “political ideas do not change much, and the range of ideas is limited.”37 Faced with contemporary problems of overwhelming subjective urgency, it is liberating to acquire the historical perspective by which one realizes that “the same moral predicaments and the same ideas have been explored before.”38 Wight identifies three principal traditions of international theory: Realism, Rationalism, and Revolutionism (or, alternatively, Machiavellianism, Grotianism, and Kantianism). His definition of a tradition as a pattern of recurrence allows him to group within, say, the Revolutionist tradition such disparate figures as the religious revolutionists of the seventeenth century, the French revolutionists of the eighteenth century, and the totalitarian revolutionists of the twentieth century.39 His point is that participants in a tradition often have more in common with each other by way of family resemblances than they either realize or would be willing to acknowledge.

Wight thus views ethical traditions more in structural terms, Nardin in historically contingent terms. Nardin makes the participants’ consciousness of belonging to a tradition essential to the tradition’s existence, while Wight allows thinkers, writers, and

37 Wight, The Three Traditions, 5.
38 Wight, The Three Traditions, 6.
39 Wight, The Three Traditions, 8.
political agents to be unwitting participants in traditions of whose existence they may remain blissfully unaware. Nardin approaches traditions as evolving bodies of teaching and practice consciously handed down from generation to generation by self-identified adherents of the tradition, while Wight approaches traditions as patterns of repetition and recurrence in the responses of widely disparate figures to similar sets of circumstances throughout history. Yet, for all their differences, these two accounts of tradition may be more complementary than contradictory. A choice does not necessarily have to be made between the two approaches at the outset. Some ethical traditions may fit Nardin’s description better, while others may fit Wight’s. For the moment, then, it seems safest to note the existence of the two approaches and be ready to ask which one offers a better account of any ethical tradition under examination.

Outside international relations theory, the writer who has done perhaps the most to call attention to the importance of traditions in moral discourse is the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. According to MacIntyre, ethical traditions arise in the context of the institutions and practices of specific societies. They consist of extended philosophical conversations arising from and periodically re-examining “the beliefs and concepts of the social group within whose shared life the activities of philosophical enquiry are carried

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40 MacIntyre’s three most important mature works are generally reckoned to be After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), Whose Justice, Which Rationality? (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), and Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). In this summary, I have relied mainly on Kelvin Knight, ed., The MacIntyre Reader (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).
Such traditions do evolve and change over time as the social contexts in which they are embedded likewise evolve and change. Sometimes traditions split and go in different directions; conversely, rival traditions sometimes merge and are integrated, as in the synthesis of Aristotelianism and Augustinianism achieved by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Yet it remains difficult to decide between rival traditions because they draw upon conceptual schemes of presuppositions, terms, and procedures that are rational in relation to the social contexts in which they arose, but largely alien to one another. For example, to affirm the applicability of an Aristotelian conceptual framework is to preclude a Humean conceptual framework from having similar applicability: “And hence arises the fundamental incompatibility of theories of justice framed in terms of one of those schemes with theories framed in terms of the other.”

Now, the temptation at this point is to conclude that MacIntyre’s position is one of relativism and perspectivism, in which the rival claims of incommensurable ethical traditions can never be finally resolved. But MacIntyre does not leave matters there. He does affirm that there is no way of conducting ethical inquiry outside the particularities of a tradition; there is no neutral vantage point beyond tradition from which to evaluate and adjudicate between competing traditions. All ethical inquiry is conducted within the conceptual framework of one tradition or another. But it is possible to overcome the

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41 MacIntyre, “Precis of Whose Justice, Which Rationality?” in Knight, MacIntyre Reader, 106.


43 MacIntyre, “Precis of Whose Justice, Which Rationality?” 106.
difficulties involved in understanding and giving an account of the concepts and beliefs of a tradition that is alien to one’s own. To return to the language metaphor, alien traditions may be like foreign languages, but foreign languages can still be learned and, to some extent, translated. And the moment at which one tradition may be shown to be rationally inferior to another tradition is when it is confronted with some crucial and unavoidable problem that it cannot solve with its own resources. If, at this point, the protagonists of a rival tradition can show those facing this crisis why the problem has arisen, how their own tradition is unable to overcome it, and how the resources of the second tradition can overcome it without confronting any other insurmountable problem, “then it would be rational, on their own terms, for those in crisis to abandon their previous tradition and instead adopt the alternative.”

MacIntyre’s wider philosophical project is to demonstrate on these terms that the Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics is the most fully rational one available, and hence the truest, especially in relation to its Enlightenment and Nietzschean rivals. For the purposes of this study, however, MacIntyre’s analysis of ethical traditions suggests the following points of importance. First, rival moral assessments of the World War II area bombing disagree with one another because they are informed by ethical traditions that presuppose largely incompatible schemes of concepts and presuppositions. Thus, to understand why different commentators disagree on their assessments of the moral issue, it is crucial to understand the ethical traditions from which they are explicitly or

44 Knight, introduction to The MacIntyre Reader, 17.
implicitly working. Second, such an inquiry cannot be undertaken from a neutral vantage point beyond all ethical traditions; hence, as an investigator, I must recognize and acknowledge the influence on my thinking of the Christian Just War tradition from within which I work. Third, even though I am inescapably working from the framework of this particular tradition, with sufficient study and attentiveness I should be able to give a reasonably accurate account of the rival traditions informing moral assessments with which I disagree. And fourth, from such a comparative account of rival traditions it may be possible to identify points at which one tradition might be shown to be unable on its own terms to deal with problems that another tradition can address more effectively. Conversely, it may be possible also to show points of convergence between disparate traditions and, hence, scope for cooperation between their respective adherents.

The British Debate during World War II

Apologists for the area bombing sometimes imply that its moral critics have the luxury of indulging in armchair ethics from the vantage point of a time of peace when it is all too easy to forget the gut-wrenching decisions that arise from the exigencies of war. Neillands hints in this direction when he writes of the Hamburg firestorm that it was “hard to justify, terrible to contemplate in later, peaceful years.”\(^{45}\) Later, in his chapter dealing with the moral questions raised by the area bombing, he writes: “Finally – and this point should be added to every other point mentioned above or below – there was a

\(^{45}\) Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 241.
war on. Moral arguments which overlook, dismiss or devalue that point are fundamentally flawed.”\textsuperscript{46} Moral philosophers, he continues, may second-guess actions taken from military necessity during war, but “wars are not usually fought by moral philosophers.”\textsuperscript{47} Although elsewhere Neillands does acknowledge that moral objections to the area bombing were raised during the war itself, he nonetheless gives the impression that retrospective criticisms made during peacetime are inherently suspect on the grounds of forgetting that “there was a war on.” However, human beings characteristically make all sorts of moral judgments decades or even centuries after-the-fact upon the decisions, actions, and policies of people who lived in very different times and places. Often only such after-the-fact reflection can yield the necessary insights into the guiding moral principles that might be brought to bear on similar situations in the future. Still, by its rhetorical force, Neillands’s suggestion highlights the desirability of identifying individuals who questioned the morality of these actions \textit{at the time they were taking place}. In this way, it is possible to avoid the danger of retroactively holding the past accountable to anachronistic moral standards. My focus is thus on the debate \textit{in Britain during World War II}, although in some cases I may suggest ways in which the ethical traditions informing the debate have developed in the years since. Part of the price of focusing on the \textit{British} debate, however, is the exclusion of voices raised in other countries, such as that of the American Jesuit priest John C. Ford in his 1944 essay “The

\textsuperscript{46} Neillands, \textit{The Bomber War}, 383; italics in original.

\textsuperscript{47} Neillands, \textit{The Bomber War}, 386.
Morality of Obliteration Bombing.” Although beyond the scope of my project, the influence of Ford’s work on ethical reflection in the United States merits further study.

The Plan for this Study

Several writers have already described the key figures and arguments in the British moral debate during World War II. Their works lay out, from different perspectives, the arguments of some of the same wartime figures whom I shall be considering. During more or less the same period, other writers have produced works dealing with ethical traditions in relation to international relations, war, and peace. Yet, to my knowledge, no-one has yet attempted to locate the protagonists of the British wartime debate within the array of different ethical traditions which they represent. In the present study I propose to undertake precisely this task.

My plan is to consider the question of the area bombing from the viewpoint of five ethical traditions as represented by one or more of their key British wartime protagonists. The five traditions, and their representative figures, are the following:

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51 See footnote 32 above.
(a) Crusade or Holy War – Lord Vansittart
(b) Classical Realism – Basil Liddell Hart
(c) Christian Realism – Archbishop William Temple
(d) *Jus in bello* – Bishop George Bell
(e) Christian Pacifism – Vera Britannia

In Part One below, I devote one chapter each to the five ethical traditions, tracing their historical development and exploring their theoretical foundations. Then, in Part Two, following an initial chapter on the historical background and debates surrounding the area bombing, I devote one chapter each to the protagonists listed above, showing how their position in the debate was influenced by and expressive of one or more of the ethical traditions discussed in Part One. Along the way, I will engage in dialogue with each of these traditions and their respective representatives from my own Just War perspective, advancing the thesis that the British area bombing of German cities unjustly violated the *jus in bello* norms of noncombatant immunity and proportionality – norms which should have been observed in World War II and which remain valid today. Of the traditions listed above, the one with which I identify most closely is obviously (d). While I admire Bishop Bell, however, I will ask how he could have witnessed more effectively and, indeed, whether in its historical development up to the twentieth century the *Jus in bello* tradition had been weakened in ways that compromised its influence.
A Note on Ideal Types

A danger inherent in the procedure outlined above is that of inadvertently caricaturing historically unique figures – Vansittart, Lidell Hart, Bell, etc. – by trying to fit them into predefined conceptual categories. The best way to avoid this pitfall is to acknowledge at the outset that my historical sketches of the five traditions to some extent represent “ideal types,” a tool developed by the sociologist Max Weber (1864 – 1920) for comparing and categorizing similar phenomena in history.\textsuperscript{52} Weber faced the challenge of negotiating a path between two extremes in the German academic world of his day: on one hand, an idealism that reduced historical phenomena to mere repetitions and recurrences of abstract “iron laws of history” without regard for the uniqueness and contingency of particular events; and, on the other hand, an historicism that emphasized the fundamental unrepeatability of particular events to the exclusion of identifiable similarities and patterns. Weber’s solution was to devise the ideal type as a logically consistent and internally coherent conceptual model that could describe most of the key characteristics of similar historical phenomena without pretending to exhaust all their particular features in any given instance. What prevents these ideal descriptions from becoming reality-distorting caricatures is the frank admission that they are not intended as anything more than convenient yardsticks for purposes of comparison and classification. Actual historical instances will conform to them in some respects but not in others. Examples of Weber’s ideal types include “bureaucracy,” “charismatic leadership,”

“institutional leadership,” and, most famously, “the Protestant ethic,” and “the spirit of capitalism.” Subsequent writers who have used this method include Ernst Troeltsch in his threefold classification of Christian social organization into the Church type, the Sect type, and the Mystical type;⁵³ and H. Richard Niebuhr in his fivefold typology of Christian approaches to the relationship between “Christ and culture.”⁵⁴

So, when I describe the contours and structure of an ethical tradition, I will to some extent be constructing an ideal type. The chosen representative figure in the British World War II debate may not only conform to and exemplify the tradition in some respects, but also deviate and diverge from it in others. Some individuals may turn out to straddle two or more ethical traditions at the same time. This process of comparing the ideal types of traditions with their actual historical representatives may well lead to ongoing revisions in the descriptions of the ideal types themselves.

A Note on Sources

Since this project is a study in Christian Ethics rather than Church History, my initial plan was to work mostly from the relatively abundant secondary literature already available on both the ethical traditions under consideration and the World War II debate on the area bombing. On a trip to London in December 2013, however, I was able to spend four days at the Lambeth Palace Library – the official archive of the Church of


⁵⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper, 1951). Niebuhr’s categories are the Christ of culture, Christ against culture, Christ and culture in paradox, Christ above culture, and Christ the transformer of culture.
England – reading the unpublished letters and papers of three of the debate’s wartime protagonists: Bishop George Bell of Chichester, Basil Liddell Hart (who carried on a voluminous correspondence with Bell during and after the war years), and Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple. In many cases, this material confirmed the accounts of the period by historians who have already made extensive use of it; in other cases, it offered new insights and nuances. Where appropriate I have incorporated information from these primary sources into my narrative.
PART ONE

JUSTICE IN WARFARE IN THEORY:
CONSIDERATIONS ON NONCOMBATANT IMMUNITY
CHAPTER TWO
HOLY WAR, CRUSADE, AND TOTAL WAR

Arguments justifying the World War II area bombing of German cities often appeal to concepts such as “military necessity,” according to which actions that would otherwise be wrong can be justified in wartime as regrettable but necessary means to a greater good, such as defeating an unjust enemy state and restoring peace on just terms. In subsequent chapters such arguments shall be considered further. In this chapter and in Chapter Eight below, the focus is on the more disturbing possibility that arguments might be made to attempt to justify the killing of enemy civilians in certain types of war as a morally licit and possibly even virtuous action, in itself. In other words, where the first type of argument offers a justification of the intentional killing of noncombatants in instrumental terms, this type of argument does so in intrinsic terms. Theoretically, for example, it is possible to envision an argument justifying the targeting of whole populations for attack on the grounds that enemy noncombatants and combatants share alike in the guilt of some crime that merits collective punishment. In this chapter, my plan is to examine the claim made by Roland Bainton and others that “crusades” – whether in the form of religiously-motivated holy wars or their secularized counterparts, ideologically-motivated total wars – tend inexorably towards unrestrained violence against noncombatant populations. Subsequently, Chapter Eight will take up the question of whether some justifications of the area bombing drew on crusading imagery to suggest that the German civilian population shared in the war guilt of the Nazi regime to the
extent that it became morally deserving of the indiscriminate death and destruction rained from the air by the Allied bombers.

**The Holy War Tradition**

Justifications of the killing of enemy noncombatants in war are not necessarily foreign to the Christian tradition. In his influential study *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace* (1960), Roland H. Bainton distinguished three competing attitudes that have appeared in Church history: Pacifism, Just War, and Crusade.\(^1\) According to Bainton, moral restraints on the conduct of warfare are most likely to break down within the third category, holy war or crusade. A good place to begin, then, is by looking at Bainton’s depiction of the crusading mentality with a view to asking later on whether such attitudes are reflected in the justifications offered for the area bombing of German cities.

**The Bainton Paradigm**

Bainton begins with the observation that where the pacifist view was dominant in the Christian tradition in the earliest centuries, and the Church inherited the Just War ethic from classical Greek and Roman thought around the time of Constantine, the crusading ideal arose last, in the High Middle Ages, from the theocratic notion that the Church should impose its will by force on a recalcitrant world.\(^2\) The medieval Church

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derived many of its images of holy war and crusade from the Hebrew Scriptures. The books of Deuteronomy, Numbers, Joshua, and Judges record “a genuine religious crusade against the Canaanites.” At Jericho and Ai, God commanded the invading Israelites to exterminate all the inhabitants, people and animals, leaving nothing alive. Later, the First and Second Books of the Maccabees likewise describe the Maccabean revolt as a holy war waged at God’s command.

Bainton writes that although the historicity of some of the massacres recorded in the Old Testament is doubtful, the early Church nonetheless incorporated these stories into its canon of scripture; and the medieval architects of the Christian crusade drew their warrants from the conquest of Canaan and the Maccabean wars. Although the term “crusade” is most often associated with the series of military expeditions mounted by the Western Church from the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries to retake the Holy Land from the Muslims who had conquered it four centuries earlier, the term was also used to describe Church-sanctioned military campaigns in Europe, such as those against the Moors in Spain, pagans in the Baltic region, and the Albigensians in southern France. The Just War tradition’s *jus in bello* restraints largely fell into abeyance when crusaders took up arms against those whom they saw as infidels. At the conclusion of the siege of Jerusalem in 1099, the victorious crusaders massacred thousands of the Muslim and

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3 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 46.

4 The theology and practice of “the ban,” in Hebrew *ḥērem*, is discussed further below.

5 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 51-52.
Jewish inhabitants of the city, including women and children. At the siege of Beziers at the beginning of the Albigensian Crusade in 1209, when asked by the soldiers sacking the town how to distinguish Catholics from heretics, the papal legate is said to have replied, “Kill them all; God will know which are his.”

After the Middle Ages, Bainton continues, the crusading mentality resurfaced in the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most of the churches of the Reformation adopted the Catholic Just War doctrine.\(^6\) Calvinism in particular tended towards the crusade because of its theocratic conception of the Church,\(^7\) and its view of the state as ordained by God to support true religion.\(^8\) In the English Civil War, the Puritan forces regarded victory in battle as the Lord’s doing, and a sign of divine approval of their cause.\(^9\) The seventeenth-century Wars of Religion were marked by repeated atrocities by both sides. The Catholic forces of the Holy Roman Empire massacred approximately 25,000 of the 30,000 inhabitants of the Protestant city of Magdeburg at the conclusion of a seven-month siege in 1631. After the 1649 massacre of the English royalist and Irish Catholic garrison at Drogheda in Ireland, along with many

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\(^6\) Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 142.

\(^7\) Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 143.

\(^8\) Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 145.

\(^9\) Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 150.
of the town’s civilian inhabitants, the Puritan commander Oliver Cromwell wrote: “I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches.”

Bainton suggests that crusading attitudes re-emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Northern Evangelical Christians saw the American Civil War as a crusade to abolish slavery. Likewise, many Christians in Britain and the United States viewed World War I as a crusade against militarism and as “the war to end all wars.” Yet the carnage of the First World War dampened the crusading mentality; the American and British approach to the Second World War was marked more by “contrition and grim necessity.”

Bainton offers a comprehensive definition of the crusading mentality in the following sentence: “The crusading idea requires that the cause shall be holy (and no cause is more holy than religion), that the war shall be fought under God and with his help, that the crusaders shall be godly and their enemies ungodly, and that the war shall be prosecuted unsparingly.” Bainton is suggesting that because crusaders see themselves as godly and their enemies as ungodly, their unsparing prosecution of the war is likely to entail atrocities, massacres, and other violations of the jus in bello norms. He

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10 Bainton, Christian Attitudes, 151.
11 Bainton, Christian Attitudes, 198.
13 Bainton, Christian Attitudes, 221.
14 Bainton, Christian Attitudes, 148.
concludes that the crusading mentality tends to break down all restraints upon the conduct of war: “The enemy is beyond the pale, the code of humanity collapses.”

**Varieties of Holy War**

Bainton’s paradigm of Pacifism, Just War, and Crusade has been enormously influential. Subsequent writers on Christian thought concerning war and peace have adopted this scheme with minor modifications. But other historical studies have revealed aspects of Bainton’s paradigm to be overly simplistic. In particular, James Turner Johnson, Professor of Religion at Rutgers University, has developed a comprehensive and persuasive critique of Bainton’s analysis of holy war. The term “crusade” refers in its strict sense only to a narrowly defined type of military expedition authorized by the Church at a specific period in history. Yet Bainton applies the term even to modern wars – such as the American Civil War and World War I – which were not holy wars but are often assigned to other categories such as “ideological war” or “total war.” In *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions*, Johnson locates the crusades within the overarching category of *holy war*. Use of the term “crusade” as a

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16 See, for example, Joseph L. Allen, *War: A Primer for Christians* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2001); Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); and John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), especially 27-41. Also, three of the five traditions examined in the present study are those identified by Bainton.

convenient metaphor for all these categories – holy war, ideological war, total war – nevertheless suggests certain threads of commonality among them. The task, then, is to examine these categories more closely, to understand both how they differ from one another and what they have in common.

After noting that the study of holy war is complicated by the existence in the modern world of secular belief systems that have often engendered attitudes, practices, and passions commonly associated with holy war, Johnson offers a provisional definition of the term as referring to “conflicts that have a strong ideological, motivational, social, or other connection with one religious tradition or another.” He agrees with Bainton that in Western history the holy war idea appears in the Old Testament, the medieval crusades, and the post-Reformation Wars of Religion. Yet he argues that Bainton’s fourfold definition of “crusade” – a war fought for a holy cause, under God and with God’s help, by godly crusaders against ungodly enemies, and prosecuted unsparingly – oversimplifies the matter considerably.

A basic point for Johnson is that holy war means different things in different contexts. He enumerates the following ten meanings associated with holy war:  

1. War fought at God’s command  
2. War fought on God’s behalf by his duly authorized representative

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3. War fought by God himself
4. War fought to defend religion against its enemies, both without and within
5. War fought to propagate right religion or to establish a social order in line with divine authority
6. War fought to enforce religious conformity and/or to punish deviation
7. Warfare in which the participants are ritually and/or morally “holy”
8. The militant struggle for faith by means of arms alongside nonviolent means
9. Warfare under religiously-inspired (charismatic) leadership
10. A phenomenon recognized during or after the fact as an “absolute miracle”

From this pluralistic collection of meanings, Johnson concludes that holy war is not a single phenomenon but a group of related phenomena. Other authors define holy war more narrowly, focusing on the divine mandate for war – Johnson’s second and third meanings listed above. Jewish scholar Reuven Firestone writes: “When war is authorized by God, it is holy. That is the bottom line with holy war—it is authorized by God. Whether the fighter has faith while engaged in combat or whether the warrior is in a ritual state of purity in relation to the holiness of the camp are related considerations, but the core issue is whether the combatants believe that their war is sanctioned by God.”

Likewise, John Howard Yoder defines holy war as war that is seen as being not merely licit but as having “positive moral merit” because it has been commanded by “a god or a

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Some of Johnson’s ten meanings of holy war – such as numbers four through six above – might fit better under a separate category of “religious warfare.” Still, Johnson’s point remains valid: holy war can mean different things when used by different writers in different contexts. It is thus crucial to pay attention to the various meanings with which the term is used within specific historical periods.

Holy War in the Bible

Christian attitudes to holy war have been profoundly shaped by the Hebrew Scriptures. Beginning in the Book of Exodus, the Old Testament contains repeated descriptions of God as a warrior: “The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name” (Exodus 5:3). Assembled for battle, the Israelites are called “the armies of the living God” (I Samuel 17:26). Firestone writes that the Hebrew Bible is full of stories of God sanctioning wars against Israel’s enemies, and of biblical heroes such as Moses, Joshua, Saul, and David leading Israel to war at God’s command. In terms of a distinction later developed by Rabbinic Judaism, while a few of Israel’s wars were “discretionary wars” initiated by Israel’s leaders without reference to God, most were “commanded wars” fought by God, with God, and for God.

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22 The term “holy war” is not used in the Bible, and was first coined by Friedrich Schwally as *Heilige Krieg* in 1901.

Firestone offers the following description of Israelite holy war. In the Bible, God’s wars on behalf of Israel aim at protection or deliverance of the people from their enemies, or at the acquisition and sanctification of the people’s divinely given lands. Ancient Israel’s holy wars begin with the Exodus from Egypt and end with the completion of the settlement of the Promised Land, around the turn of the first millennium BCE. The Book of Deuteronomy gives the concept its most fully developed theological expression. Composed in its final form long after the events it describes, it is likely giving an idealized picture of “what should have happened” rather than of “what will happen.” The relevant texts specify two principal war aims: securing possession of the land that God has promised to Israel; and making sure that once in possession of the land Israel remains faithful to God. The texts thus call repeatedly for the destruction of those in the land who practice idolatry, whether Canaanite or Israelite. Behind these commands, however, lies the warning that God’s own chosen people will themselves be destroyed if they forsake their God and practice the abominations of the idolaters. Indeed, as punishment for the sins of the people, God sometimes ordains and determines wars destructive to Israel, such as the Babylonian conquest of Judah in 586 BCE. With few exceptions, God commands holy war against idolatrous peoples only within the boundaries of the Promised Land. The purpose of Israel’s holy wars is never to bring “right religion” to the nations, but rather to strengthen the people’s position, and the integrity of their religious system, within their own God-given borders.

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Missing from Firestone’s otherwise insightful and illuminating account is any acknowledgment of the moral problems attendant upon the Old Testament’s depiction of the conquest, dispossession, and periodic massacre of the existing Canaanite inhabitants of the land. The practice of “the ban,” in Hebrew ḥērem, entailed the slaughter of all people and animals in a captured town, together with the destruction of the town and everything in it. In this way, the whole town was ritually devoted or given to God so that the conquerors could take neither slaves nor booty. In his classic study *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, Gerhard von Rad locates this practice within a more comprehensive description of holy war as a ritual sequence comprising the following steps:  

1. A blast of the trumpet and the sending out of messengers to assemble the people
2. Gathering of the militia in the camp
3. Ritual purification of the men in the camp, including sexual renunciation
4. A ceremony of mourning and repentance, if the occasion for the gathering was a misfortune suffered under enemy attack
5. Offering of sacrifices, including a consultation of the oracle of God
6. Proclamation by the leader, “The Lord has given [the enemy] into your hands!”
7. Marching out toward the enemy, in the faith that God goes before his people

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8. Loss of courage by the enemy

9. Opening of the battle with a war cry

10. A divine terror that comes over the enemy, resulting in panic and defeat

11. Consecration of the spoils of war to God: human beings and animals alike are slaughtered; gold and silver go into God’s treasury

12. Ritual dismissal of the army with the cry, “To your tents, O Israel!”

Holy war in ancient Israel was thus, according to von Rad, “an eminently cultic undertaking … prescribed and sanctioned by fixed, traditional, sacred rites and observances.”

The theology of Israelite holy war, and the ritual sequence above are unique to the very specific historical context. However, the canonization of these texts in the Jewish and Christian scriptures has resulted in their often unfortunate misapplication in different historical circumstances. American Indian theologian George E. Tinker writes, for example, that John Winthrop and the seventeenth-century Puritan settlers of New England saw themselves as a new Israel settling in a new Promised Land: “the closest analogy to Indian history in the hebrew (sic) scriptures seems to be the experience of the Canaanites, who were dispossessed of their land and annihilated by a foreign invader.”

26 George E. Tinker, *Spirit and Resistance: Political Theology and American Indian Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 89-90. For a Palestinian Christian critique of the use of the biblical Conquest narratives in modern Zionism, see Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 74-114. The holy war mentality is also foundational for and present in the Doctrine of Discovery developed by the papacy (and adopted by all European nations) to rationalize Spanish and Portuguese seizure of indigenous peoples’ lands and natural goods in the Americas and Africa during the 15th—18th centuries, and subsequently adopted by Protestant nations in Europe and
The next major period of holy war in the Bible occurs some 800 years after the Conquest, and is recorded in the First and Second Books of the Maccabees, which describe the successful Jewish rebellion against Seleucid Greek rule in the second century BCE. In reaction to the aggressive Hellenizing program of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, which included the attempted suppression of Jewish religious practices, the revolt broke out in 167 BCE, led initially by one Mattathias and subsequently by his son Judas Maccabeus. The feast of Hanukkah commemorates Judas’s capture of Jerusalem in 164 BCE, and his subsequent cleansing and rededication of the Temple after its defilement by a statue of Zeus – referred to in the Book of Daniel as “the abomination that makes desolate” (Daniel 11:31; 12:11). Judas’s victory inaugurated a period of Jewish independence under the Hasmonean Dynasty, which lasted for 120 years until the Roman general Pompey made Judea a Roman province in 40 BCE. The Books of I and II Maccabees portray the rebellion against Seleucid rule as a war fought according to God’s will for the sake of the Jewish people, the city of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Torah, in the assurance that divine favor would guarantee military success.²⁷

The other major biblical writing from this period is the Book of Daniel, which Firestone dismisses as “essentially a pietistic work” with no references to war and

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unsupportive of activist movements. Daniel nonetheless exemplifies the genre known as Apocalyptic, which flourished during the period from 200 BCE to 200 CE, and is critical to any understanding of the subsequent development of Christian conceptions of holy war. In Apocalyptic literature, a seer or visionary typically reveals divine secrets or mysteries using highly symbolic and mythical imagery which, when correctly decoded, discloses the meaning of past, present, and future history. Bernhard Anderson summarizes the principal theological themes of Apocalyptic as follows.  

28 "In the present age, God’s people are subject to oppression and violence perpetrated systematically by the powers of evil. While the present age is under the dominion of evil, however, the age to come is under the dominion of God; in the new age, evil will be overcome and all things made new. Only God can bring about the triumph of peace and justice by intervening from without to destroy the whole evil world system; the victory of God’s dominion does not come from within the historical process. The time of God’s intervention is near; some visionaries even announce the timetable. God’s triumph is certain but, contrary to modern notions of progress, the present situation will get worse and worse until the final crisis when God’s dominion prevails. This message, Anderson suggests, was designed to encourage oppressed religion minorities to

28 Firestone, Holy War in Judaism, 26.

29 The rest of this paragraph follows Bernhard Anderson, Contours of Old Testament Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 305-309.
stand firm in their faith, even when the odds seemed overwhelmingly against them, and they were required to undergo persecution and martyrdom.

A key contribution of apocalyptic literature to biblical theology was the hope for the resurrection of the dead. Prior to this period, the only Jewish conception of life after death was the shadowy netherworld existence of Sheol. In answer to the vexing question of why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer in this world, the idea of resurrection promised a coming day when the righteous ones who had died unjustly would be rewarded and compensated for their sufferings, while their tormentors would be punished. The key passage was Daniel 12:2: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Thus, those who die sleep until the end of the present age, when they are awakened to share in God’s victory with those who are then alive. The promise that those who die fighting for a holy cause will be rewarded for their sacrifice in the world to come became a powerful incentive to take up arms in later Christian conceptions of holy war.

Yet nothing in apocalyptic theology necessarily leads its adherents to embrace holy war. The early Christian readers of the Revelation to John, the quintessentially apocalyptic work at the end of the New Testament, were almost certainly pacifists. Apocalyptic does offer the assurance that present sufferings and tribulations are part of a larger plan that will end in God’s victory and the vindication of his people. One response to this assurance could be the posture of bearing present sufferings with patience and

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equanimity without succumbing to the temptation to fight back, as is the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. But Apocalyptic likewise offers those committed to armed rebellion the assurance that they are participating in God’s own war against the forces of evil in the present age. Thus, Anderson writes that the Book of Daniel was written during the Maccabean Revolt as a tract for revolutionaries: “The conviction that history moved inevitably, and by prearranged plan, toward the coming of God’s kingdom on earth fired the zeal of a small band of the faithful, enabling them to act in hope when, humanly speaking, everything was against them.  

After the catastrophic Roman suppression of both the Jewish Great Revolt against Rome in 66-70 CE, and of the Bar Kokhba Rebellion in 132-135 CE, emergent Rabbinic Judaism repudiated the concept of holy war. Only after the Holocaust and the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 were ideas of holy war revived and taken seriously again in some strands of Judaism, developments beyond the scope of this study. Before turning to Christian conceptions of holy war, however, it is crucial to remember that the Church inherited these biblical texts of holy war and Apocalyptic struggle as part of its canon of scripture; and thence derived a vast array of stories, examples, and images that would fire the imaginations of Christian holy warriors and crusaders in the centuries to come. While mainstream Christian exegesis tended to read

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31 Anderson, Contours of Old Testament Theology, 309.
32 Firestone, Holy War in Judaism, 42-98.
33 Firestone, Holy War in Judaism, 201-324.
holy war texts in the Old Testament and Revelation allegorically as prefiguring the Christian spiritual struggle against temptation and sin, the possibility remained open for more literal readings of these texts as authorizing actual religious wars. The most famous eyewitness description of the crusaders’ massacre of the inhabitants of Jerusalem in 1099 quoted verbatim Revelation 14:20: “And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, even as high as a horse’s bridle.”

Medieval Holy War

In his typology, Bainton presents holy war as antithetical to the Just War tradition. Johnson shows, however, that at least two of the jus ad bellum criteria – just cause and legitimate authority – are points where the two traditions turn out on closer examination to be analogous. Bainton depicts a series of antitheses: the cause or aim of a just war is the defense of life and property; that of a holy war is the pursuit of a religious ideal. The requisite authority of a just war is the prince or the state; that of a holy war is God, the Church, or some inspired religious leader. The attitude of just warriors is one of grim resignation to performing an unpleasant but necessary task, the attitude of holy warriors is zeal to wreak God’s vengeance upon the enemy. In the Bainton paradigm, these differences carry over into the conduct of war: whereas the just war is marked by

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35 Tyerman, Fighting for Christendom, 100.

moderation in means, the holy war almost inevitably leads to indiscriminate violence. Johnson shows, however, that in the medieval West the holy war idea developed out of the Just War tradition, substituting religious content for secular content within the *jus ad bellum* criteria. The medieval conception of the natural and supernatural realms as operating on two parallel levels resulted in a two-tier theory of authority and justification. With respect to just cause, Catholic Just War theorists such as Aquinas in the thirteenth century, and Vitoria and Suárez in the sixteenth century, acknowledged that war could be justified by religious as well as secular aims. As late as the seventeenth century, the Dutch Protestant Just War theorist Grotius listed “crimes against God” alongside political offenses as justifying war. With respect to legitimate authority, Aquinas, Vitoria, and Suárez recognized authorization of war by the Church as well as by the civic ruler. Finally, Johnson disputes Bainton’s assertion that medieval holy war *necessarily* led to unrestrained violence. The classical Just War theorists made no distinction as to licit means in wars for religious and political causes. The same *jus in bello* standards applied to both types of war.

One possible weakness of Johnson’s argument is that the classical Just War theorists he cites were writing towards or after the end of the Middle Ages. It is thus possible that they were trying to assimilate the phenomenon of medieval holy war to the Just War tradition and retroactively impose *jus in bello* restraints after the fact. Yet elsewhere Johnson writes that from the beginning both the Christian and Islamic normative traditions put limits on the conduct of holy war; neither tradition condoned
wanton slaughter.\textsuperscript{37} To the question of whether medieval crusaders were subject to normative restraints on the conduct of warfare against Muslim forces, Johnson answers affirmatively, but immediately acknowledges that it is unclear how effective these restraints were in practice. The crusaders would have learned from the Just War tradition that such passions as hatred of the enemy and bloodlust in the heat of battle were \textit{sins}, to be avoided if possible, and for which penance was necessary to the extent that one succumbed to them. Moreover, the ideals of chivalry – such as courtesy shown to worthy opponents, and protection of the weak and innocent – would have figured prominently in the crusaders’ worldview and sense of honor. But again, Johnson admits, it is not clear how far these ideals had developed by the time of the crusades, and to what extent they were thought to apply in wars against non-Christians.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{The Crusades}

Just as medieval holy war was a subcategory of just war – all holy wars were by definition just wars, but not all just wars were necessarily holy wars\textsuperscript{39} – so the crusade was a specific and narrow subcategory of holy war. All crusades were, by definition, holy wars; but not all holy wars were crusades. Prior to the crusades, the Church had from time to time endorsed the military campaigns of early medieval Christian kings and

\textsuperscript{37} Johnson, \textit{The Holy War Idea}, 101-102.

\textsuperscript{38} Johnson, \textit{The Holy War Idea}, 110-111. However, see the section on “The Late Medieval Consensus” in Chapter Five below, where I discuss how writers like Christine de Pizan saw the norm of noncombatant immunity as applying solely to fellow Christians.

\textsuperscript{39} Tyerman, \textit{Fighting for Christendom}, 103.
warriors, such as Clovis and Charlemagne, giving their conflicts the status of holy wars by prayers, liturgies, and blessings. In the late ninth century, Pope John VIII (872 – 882) had offered indulgences to those who fought and died in battle against the Muslims threatening Rome.\footnote{Tyerman, 	extit{Fighting for Christendom}, 104-106.} In the years leading up to the crusades, Pope Gregory VII (1073 – 1085) recruited his own army, the \textit{militia Sancti Petri}, to counter the power and ambitions in Italy of the Emperor Henry IV.\footnote{Tyerman, 	extit{Fighting for Christendom}, 111.}

Historians give a variety of definitions to the term “crusade,” but one particularly compelling approach is that of Jonathan Riley-Smith in his book \textit{What were the Crusades?}\footnote{Jonathan Riley-Smith, \textit{What were the Crusades?} 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002).} Unlike definitions that focus geographically on the crusaders’ destination of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, or on their aim of securing Christian access to the holy places, Riley-Smith’s analysis has the advantage of accounting for features that the crusades to Palestine had in common with other crusades in places like Spain, the Baltic, and southern France. From the time that Pope Urban II (1088 – 1099) called the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095, the crusading movement took over a century to take coherent form. The term “crusade” itself did not appear until the early thirteenth century, in the southern French \textit{langue d’oc} word \textit{crozada}.\footnote{Tyerman, 	extit{Fighting for Christendom}, 29.} From the first, however, the crusaders were known by the Latin term \textit{crucesignati}, “those signed with the cross.”

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\footnote{Tyerman, 	extit{Fighting for Christendom}, 104-106.}
\footnote{Tyerman, 	extit{Fighting for Christendom}, 111.}
\footnote{Jonathan Riley-Smith, \textit{What were the Crusades?} 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2002).}
\footnote{Tyerman, 	extit{Fighting for Christendom}, 29.}
term points to the first defining feature of a crusade: its participants took a vow to participate in a military expedition with defined religious aims; and they were expected to attach a distinctive cloth cross to their clothing and wear it until the vow had been fulfilled. The second feature was that the participants were answering a call to arms that could be made only by the Pope. Third, those who took the vow gained certain temporal privileges, notably that their families, interests, and assets would be protected in their absence. Fourth, by fulfilling the vow, the crusaders gained a papal plenary indulgence, guaranteeing the remission of their sins, and the status of martyrs and the promise of eternal salvation if they died in battle. The most distinctive feature of crusading was thus that it was penitential. Crusades were thus called “pilgrimages,” and crusaders “pilgrims,” as pilgrimage to the holy places had been for centuries a means of performing penance for sins. Riley-Smith writes:

[The crusaders] believed they were embarking on a campaign in which their obligations, at any rate if completed, would constitute for each of them an act of condign self-punishment. They were not supposed to travel gloriously but to dress simply as pilgrims with their arms and armour carried in sacks on pack animals. In 1099, after the fall of Jerusalem, many of the survivors of the campaign threw away their arms and armour and returned to Europe carrying only the palm fronds they had collected as evidence that they had completed their pilgrimage.

Christopher Tyerman likewise emphasizes this penitential aspect of the crusade, noting that as recently as 1066 the victorious Normans had been required to perform a modest penance

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44 Riley-Smith, What were the Crusades? 2-3.

45 Riley-Smith, What were the Crusades? 7-8.
penance for the slaughter they had inflicted at the Battle of Hastings, even though they were fighting with a papal blessing in a cause their clergy considered to be just. The revolutionary feature of the crusades was that they turned violence into a penitential act rather than an act requiring penance. The subsequent founding of the crusading orders – such as the Knights Hospitaller, the Knights Templar, and the Teutonic Knights – transposed the piety, discipline, and penance of Christian monasticism into the life and activity of military organizations.

Crusading after the Crusades

The term “crusade” had a specific and narrow meaning in its original medieval religious context. How, then, did the term come to be used in the modern era to describe very different types of military and nonmilitary campaigns? In answer to this question, Christopher Tyerman traces the development of the historical memory of the crusades in subsequent Western culture. His overall point is that use of crusading imagery has tended to reflect more the concerns of later eras – the present projecting itself on the past – than those of the crusaders themselves. In the sixteenth century, humanist scholarship promoted admiration for the faith and heroism of the crusaders that crossed the confessional divides created by the Reformation. With the rise of nation-states, crusaders such as Richard the Lionheart of England and Louis IX of France were held up as

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national heroes.\textsuperscript{48} Full-blown disapproval emerged only in the eighteenth century, when Enlightenment writers such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Hume looked back on the crusades as exemplifying the ignorance, superstition, fanaticism, and violence of a dark age. While largely sharing this negative evaluation, in his \textit{Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire} (1776 – 1788) Edward Gibbon saw a positive side to the crusades as containing the seeds of Western expansion, opening up new markets of European trade, manufacture, and technology – a theme that would be taken up by nineteenth-century writers.

Partly in reaction against such Enlightenment views, nineteenth-century Romanticism – which included movements of medievalism and orientalism – came to idealize the crusades as “a totem of national identity, cultural dominance, religious duty, or memorable adventures.”\textsuperscript{49} In her book \textit{The New Crusaders}, Elizabeth Siberry offers a fascinating study of the image of the crusades in the historiography, literature, art, and music of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{50} In Britain, the crusades provided the setting for four of Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels, most famously \textit{Ivanhoe} (1819). While Scott idealized medieval chivalry, he was too skilled a novelist to paint a one-dimensionally uncritical portrait of the crusades; in \textit{The Talisman} (1825) he depicted the Muslim leader Saladin as exemplifying many of the noblest chivalric ideals that the crusaders themselves often betrayed by their selfish ambition and cruelty. Scott’s

\textsuperscript{48} Tyerman, \textit{Fighting for Christendom}, 191.

\textsuperscript{49} Tyerman, \textit{Fighting for Christendom}, 196.

popularity and influence were enormous, and a more romanticized image of the crusades flourished in the works of the many novelists, poets, artists, and composers he inspired.  

Meanwhile, in France the Royalist historian Joseph François Michaud set forth in his *Histoire des Croisades* (1812) a monarchist, nationalist, anti-revolutionary, and Christian triumphalist view of the crusades that denigrated Islam and Islamic culture. Advocating a European mission of spreading civilization to “oriental countries,” Michaud helped provide an early justification for nineteenth-century colonialism. 

Tyerman points out that Muslim radicals in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have inherited this Western supremacist hijacking of the image of the crusades, thus becoming co-heirs to a nineteenth-century European construct of the crusades as Western imperialism. 

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Tyerman continues, the word “crusade” came to be “applied metaphorically or analogously to any good cause.” In sermons and speeches, clergy and politicians regularly described the First World War as “a great crusade.” Siberry devotes an entire chapter to the use of crusading imagery in World War I, pointing out that sermons tended to emphasize the spirit of self-sacrifice reflected in the crusader’s parting from home, family, and friends to take part in an uncertain and

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52 Tyerman, *Fighting for Christendom*, 200-201.


54 Tyerman, *Fighting for Christendom*, 196.
dangerous enterprise.\textsuperscript{55} While crusading imagery fell into disfavor amidst the disillusionment that followed World War I, it did not entirely disappear. On the eve of the D-Day landings in northern France, in his Order for the Day of June 6, 1944, General Eisenhower described the planned operation as “a great crusade.”\textsuperscript{56} Later, in the immediate postwar years, Eisenhower titled his war memoirs \textit{Crusade in Europe}.\textsuperscript{57} On September 16, 2001, describing the coming American response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush declared, “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while.”\textsuperscript{58} However, the White House quickly apologized for the use of the term given its offensiveness to Muslim sensibilities.

Tyerman suggests that by the time of General Eisenhower’s description of the D-Day offensive as “a great crusade,” the term itself had become debased: “The connection with spiritually redemptive holy warfare had become drained of much meaning. Any conflict promoted as transcending territorial or other material aims could attract the crusade epithet, increasingly a lazy synonym for ideological conflict.”\textsuperscript{59} Tyerman further notes that contemporary justifications for war to liberate countries from

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Siberry, \textit{The New Crusaders}, 89.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Tyerman, \textit{Fighting for Christendom}, 197.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Dwight D. Eisenhower, \textit{Crusade in Europe} (New York: Doubleday, 1948).
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Tyerman, \textit{Fighting for Christendom}, 197.
\end{itemize}
oppressive governments or to intervene militarily for humanitarian ideals often recast the rhetoric of holy war, if not crusade, in a secular mold: “Arguably, promoting a transcendent cause more easily elicits support than attempting to persuade intellectually by detailing legality.”60

This post-medieval career of crusading imagery helps explain why Bainton used the term “crusade” to designate his third category of Christian attitudes to war and peace. It also highlights the shortcomings of Bainton’s use of the term. Bainton was clearly pointing to a broader category of attitudes towards war – but one which comprises not only religious holy war but also its secular equivalents. The question, then, is whether crusades and holy wars themselves perhaps belong to a wider category of ideologically motivated wars – what Tyerman calls war for a transcendent cause – that are the most likely to escalate into unrestrained warfare entailing violations of the _jus in bello_ norms. Before considering this question, however, it is necessary to examine the third major manifestation of the holy war idea in the seventeenth-century European Wars of Religion.

Puritan Holy War

In _The Revolution of the Saints_ (1965), Michael Walzer quotes a sermon of Saint Bernard exhorting crusaders to a “double warfare” – comprising a war of flesh and blood against earthly enemies, and a war of the spirit against Satan and vice. This crusading

60 Tyerman, _Fighting for Christendom_, 207.
spirit, Walzer writes, was recapitulated in the hundred years of “Protestant militancy” from the 1550s to the 1650s that reached its culmination in Cromwell’s England.\textsuperscript{61}

The seventeenth century, Walzer writes, saw new forms of military organization and tactics that made possible for the first time something resembling modern warfare. The medieval crusades had introduced all-volunteer armies composed of individuals who had taken the cross. But where much medieval and Renaissance warfare had been conducted by vassals and mercenaries, the seventeenth century saw the beginnings of genuine citizen armies, such as the national conscript army of King Gustavus Adolphus in Sweden, and the Parliamentarian New Model army of Oliver Cromwell in England. The Swedes broke with medieval precedent and attempted to fight through the winter. The English and Dutch took the lead in getting rid of richly ornamented weapons and uniforms to get on with the serious business of war.\textsuperscript{62} The religious purpose of war had to be made explicit, Walzer suggests, to sustain morale in these new forms of military organization. Saints and citizens were more likely than vassals or mercenaries to commit themselves to long and difficult struggles on God’s behalf.\textsuperscript{63}

The militancy of the Church and the image of the Christian life as spiritual warfare were already ancient themes. But in England, especially, Puritan writers and preachers began to develop a theology of actual holy war as the outward manifestation in


\textsuperscript{63} Walzer, \textit{Revolution of the Saints}, 276-277.
the political sphere of this inward spiritual struggle. Said one Puritan preacher, “Above all creatures, God loves soldiers.” In the hands of Puritan divines, the Catholic doctrine of the Just War underwent a gradual but complete transformation. With respect to the *jus ad bellum* criterion of legitimate authority, God’s call came to replace the king’s command. With respect to just cause, such aims as God’s glory, the advancement of the Gospel, and God’s vengeance upon idolaters came to replace such secular aims as repelling aggression. At least in theory, the medieval Just War had a clear terminal point, ending as soon as the injustice or crime that had occasioned the war had been corrected and the status quo restored. By contrast, the Lord’s battles went on and on, as long as Satan continued to be active and to find political allies upon earth. The Puritans thus came to see the world as the arena of permanent warfare, requiring methodical organization, continuous military training, and unflagging discipline.

Lisa Sowle Cahill elucidates some of the key differences between the medieval crusade and Puritan holy war. Where the crusaders emphasized their own sinfulness and need for penance, the Puritans emphasized the godliness of their soldiers. Where the crusaders saw the kingdom of God as a place of reward after death, for which they were prepared to undergo great hardships and deprivations in this life, the Puritans sought to realize God’s reign on earth. Where the crusaders represented an established, organic, organic,

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64 Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints*, 278.


and hierarchically ordered society, and fought at the behest of its highest spiritual authority, the Puritans sought to establish a new religious commonwealth enforcing godly living by political control — and they were prepared to challenge all existing earthly authorities who stood in the way of this goal. As Walzer emphasizes, the Puritan approach to holy war was ultimately *revolutionary* with respect to the existing social and political order, in ways that anticipated the secular revolutionary movements of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

Part of what made the Puritan approach revolutionary, Walzer suggests, was the growing influence of Apocalyptic thought. Joseph Mead’s *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627), an authoritative work for Puritan revolutionaries in the 1630s and 1640s, envisioned the Millennium as an actual earthly kingdom, coming into existence after the final overthrow of the Beast. This vision set Puritan political and military activism within a “world-historical context” interpreting events since the Reformation as the literal fulfillment of the imagery in the Books of Daniel and Revelation. The Puritans thus cast their Anglican and Roman Catholic enemies as the Antichrist. However, most Puritan conceptions of the Apocalypse anticipated not a sudden eruption of God’s reign into human history, but rather unrelenting hard work and painful struggle to construct a new society.

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Walzer suggests further that when the enemy has come to be characterized as Antichrist – literally demonized – casuistic distinctions as to right conduct in warfare are likely to be pushed aside. Thus the Puritan Richard Bernard could declare: “In a just and necessary war, the conquered are in the hands of the conquerors.”\(^{70}\) Puritan writers, Walzer continues, emphasized the idea of the “extralegal privileges” of the saints. According to the Puritan William Perkins, “God is an absolute God, and so above the law; and may therefore command what the law forbids.”\(^{71}\) When one believes that one has received a direct command from God to do what the laws of war forbid, then the forbidden act becomes not only licit but mandatory and even praiseworthy. Just as the new forms of military organization and tactics anticipated much modern warfare, Walzer comments, so the new religious ideology of men like Bernard and Perkins pointed toward “the nightmare of total war.”\(^{72}\)

Walzer’s picture of Puritan holy war coheres well with the Bainton crusade paradigm. Here again, however, Johnson vigorously challenges the view that holy war ideas in the seventeenth century led always and inevitably to all-out war. Surveying Roman Catholic, English Puritan, and French Calvinist authors who advocated war for religion in the period from 1550 to 1650, Johnson finds a surprising diversity of views on the right conduct of such war. Several writers did advocate unrestrained prosecution. In


\(^{71}\) Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints*, 284.

\(^{72}\) Walzer, *Revolution of the Saints*, 293.
some cases, however, such views were predicated on the assumption that religious war was being waged not against an equal sovereign government but against subjects in rebellion – who were regarded as having forfeited their rights under the contemporary laws of warfare. Other writers, especially the French Calvinists, departed little from the received normative tradition on the limits to war, even applying such limits more stringently to wars for religion. That such limits were often disregarded in practice was for these writers evidence that the perpetrators were not fighting in a holy cause after all.

Johnson comments further that the Puritan soldiers of Cromwell’s New Model Army were unusually disciplined for their time, both in camp and on the battlefield, and that such discipline is inconsistent with the sort of unrestrained behavior towards noncombatants that signifies violation of the *jus in bello* norms. Johnson characterizes the massacre at Drogheda as the one occasion where Cromwell lost control of his men, the exception rather than the rule, and hence no proof that his armies waged holy war unrestrainedly. Here, however, Johnson slightly overstates his case. Although atrocities against civilians *were* relatively rare during the English Civil War, following the Battle of Naseby (June 14, 1645), Cromwell’s soldiers massacred about 100 women, probably Welsh-speaking camp followers of the defeated Royalist forces, in the mistaken belief

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74 Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 235.
that they were Irish Catholics.\textsuperscript{75} In Ireland, his troops committed massacres not only at Drogheda in July 1649, but also at Wexford in October of the same year. Cromwell himself gave the order for the Drogheda massacre an hour after the town’s defenders had surrendered and had been taken prisoner. One of the most disturbing aspects of this episode for the contemporary reader is the realization that in putting the garrison to the sword, Cromwell was acting \textit{in accordance with} the contemporary laws of siege warfare, which permitted the summary execution of defending soldiers in a besieged town which had refused to surrender when called upon to do so. Only the massacre of the civilian population constituted a clear violation of the laws of war at the time.\textsuperscript{76}

In any case, Johnson’s overall conclusion is persuasive: holy war ideas may be a factor in raising the level of unrestrained violence in particular wars, but “this is far from the admission that holy wars are inevitably total, unrestrained wars.”\textsuperscript{77} What Johnson \textit{does} admit is a link between religious belief and the practice of war:

Where a holy cause is assumed to justify unrestrained violence to assert or maintain it, a tendency toward total war in practice is present. Conversely, where a holy cause is believed to impose restraints upon its warriors, this belief creates and sustains a tendency to toward limited warfare. This is the \textit{real} connection


\textsuperscript{77} Johnson, \textit{Just War Tradition}, 237.
between the holy war idea and the mutually opposed concepts of total war and the just war—limited war tradition.\textsuperscript{78}

Here Johnson mentions the distinct category of total war, a phenomenon generally associated with more recent history. Johnson’s suggestion that holy war ideas can tend in the direction of either total or limited war raises the question of whether secular ideologies and belief-systems can do likewise, the question taken up next.

**Limited War and Total War**

One consequence of the disproportionate destructiveness of the Wars of Religion was a rejection of the very idea of religious war.\textsuperscript{79} By one estimate, the Thirty Years’ War (1618 – 1648) reduced Germany’s urban population by thirty-five percent and its rural population by forty-five percent.\textsuperscript{80} The Peace of Westphalia (1648) enshrined the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, by which each prince would have the right to determine the official religion of his own state, and is generally regarded as having laid the groundwork of the modern international system of state sovereignty. Two decades previously, in 1625, Hugo Grotius had published his landmark *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace) which had vigorously reasserted the *jus in bello* norms

\textsuperscript{78} Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 237; italics in original.

\textsuperscript{79} Johnson, *The Holy War Idea*, 114.

over and against the ferocity of the religious wars of the times and which became a foundational text in the development of modern international law.

Within the context of the Westphalian state system, the 140 years from 1648 to 1789 are traditionally described as a period of limited warfare. Use of this term does not suggest that wars became less frequent; on the contrary, war was seen as an inevitable and inescapable dimension of international political life. But, according to the standard historical narrative, wars became less destructive and easier to manage and restrain. Armies were relatively small; major battles were relatively infrequent, with elaborate maneuvers, feints, and counter-feints often substituting for actual engagements; such battles as did occur were largely fought on battlefields away from heavily populated areas; civilian immunity was widely observed; opposing military commanders regarded one another as honorable equals in a game that functioned as a sort of theatre for the aristocracy. 81 These limited means of war reflected limited ends; in late seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, war functioned as a means of adjusting dynastic, territorial, and economic disputes within the context of a commonly accepted social, political, and legal order. War was still horrific, for it is horrific by nature, but “historians need to distinguish between shades of horror.” 82

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81 David A. Bell, The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007), 5.

82 Bell, The First Total War, 5.
The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars of 1789-1815 signaled the end of the age of limited war and the beginning of a new age of total war. In Revolutionary France, the forces of democracy and nationalism created a citizens’ army through universal male conscription – the levée en masse – resulting in the new phenomenon of a “nation in arms.” Other countries followed the French example.\(^\text{83}\) In the nineteenth century, new modes of transportation, particularly the railway, allowed ever larger armies to be mobilized and deployed more quickly, and sustained longer in the field, than ever before. At the same time, industrialization equipped armies with new weapons of enhanced range, accuracy, and rates of fire. The American Civil War (1861 – 1865) demonstrated that industrial capacity had become a key to victory: it was now necessary to be able to out-produce as well as outfight an enemy. And the creation of a war economy resulted in the society that sustained a war effort also becoming as much a target for military action as the army that waged war on its behalf.\(^\text{84}\) The logic of these developments led to the twentieth century becoming known as “the century of total war.” By the time of World War II, the quintessential total war, whatever distinctions remained between the military and civilian sectors had vanished.\(^\text{85}\)

\(^{83}\) Beckett, “Total War,” 255.

\(^{84}\) Beckett, “Total War,” 257.

Military historians have generally defined total wars in terms of the following five characteristics:\(^{86}\)

1. Intensity – warfare is conducted with ferocity using all available means
2. Range – wars become global and are fought in multiple regions of the world
3. Mobilization of civil society – civilian populations become essential to the war effort, and thus become targets of attack
4. Lack of restraint – the war is fought heedless of the restraints of morality, custom, and international law
5. Nature of the goals – the war aims of the belligerents are unlimited, so that a total war can end only with the total defeat of one side or the other

Such is the traditional narrative of the transition from limited war to total war. In recent years, however, a number of military historians have called it into question on the twin grounds that the limited wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not so limited, and the total wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were not so total. Some of the wars fought in Europe in the period of limited war laid waste vast areas of central Europe and the Low Countries at regular intervals, and entailed horrific massacres of civilians.\(^{87}\) With respect to range, the Seven Years’ War (1756 – 1763) was fought in


\(^{87}\) Beckett, “Total War,” 254.
Europe, North America, the Caribbean, West Africa, India, and the Philippines. Conversely, as Roger Chickering points out, the word “total” lends itself to rhetorical excess. Even in World War II, all sides observed significant restraints: for example, poison gas was not used in combat; and prisoners of war were often treated in accord with the existing norms of international law. In many of the belligerent countries, the lives of civilians away from the fronts often went on more normally than the definition of total war would imply. The distinction between the home and fighting fronts never disappeared entirely. As David A. Bell puts it, total war is “one of those concepts that seems to get blurrier the closer you come to it.”

Despite these difficulties, military historians generally believe that the distinction between limited war and total war remains meaningful even if it requires more nuanced and critical use than in the past. Jeremy Black proposes that a major problem in the discussion arises from the conflation of the terms “total war” and “modern war.” He suggests that the totality of war is defined by the ends at stake in the minds of the participants, whereas the degree of modernity describes the means employed. Thus, it is possible that total war is a continuous phenomenon over time, the forms of which change

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88 Black, Age of Total War, 3.
90 Chickering, “Use and Abuse,” 19.
91 Bell, The First Total War, 7.
92 Black, Age of Total War, 10.
from one environment to another.\textsuperscript{93} Roger Chickering likewise concludes that the military history of total war must also be cultural history – involving, for example, the popularization of new definitions of “the other,” and changing perceptions of the goals and acceptable means of war.\textsuperscript{94}

Following this line of thought, David A. Bell argues that a transformation in the “culture of war” drove the participants in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars relentlessly towards total engagement, the mobilization of all available resources, and the abandonment of all restraint.\textsuperscript{95} On one hand, the Enlightenment had held up a vision of perpetual peace as the end toward which humankind was progressing through social changes taking place according to scientifically observable laws. On the other hand, Europeans had begun to see war as an object of fascination – a form of Romantic self-expression that could be cleansing and even redemptive. This potent combination led to a cultural transformation that Bell describes, significantly, as “apocalyptic.”\textsuperscript{96} Whereas the previous era had seen war as an inescapable and continuous dimension of political life, European intellectuals and political leaders now saw war as a unique event, a once-for-all struggle that must be fought until the enemy had been completely defeated, thus inaugurating the era of perpetual peace. The French politician-general Charles-François

\textsuperscript{93} Black, \textit{Age of Total War}, 3.

\textsuperscript{94} Chickering, “Use and Abuse,” 27.

\textsuperscript{95} Bell, \textit{The First Total War}, 8.

\textsuperscript{96} Bell, \textit{The First Total War}, 6-7.
Dumouriez declared in 1792, “This war will be the last war.” Similar sentiments were echoed 122 years later by H.G. Wells in his 1914 tract, *The War that will End War*: “This, the greatest of wars, is not just another war—it is the last war!” As Bell’s use of the word “apocalyptic” suggests, this vision resembles nothing so much as a secularized version of the impending reign of God found in the apocalyptic visions that animated earlier generations of religious holy warriors.

Bell suggests that war viewed in these terms is likely to become all-out and unrestrained. Here, he turns to the insights of Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt, which he says cannot be ignored despite the repugnant character of their author. In 1932, Schmitt wrote that a war fought for perpetual peace, and considered to be the last war, degrades the enemy and makes him into a monster that must be utterly destroyed. In reflections on partisan warfare beginning with the Spanish struggle against Napoleon, Schmitt went on to propose the concept of “absolute enmity” in which each side denies the very humanity of the other. Bell illustrates these consequences by chronicling in detail the horrific campaign of the French Revolutionary army in the region of south-western France known as the Vendée in 1793-1794. In response to a Catholic and Royalist counter-revolutionary uprising, the Republican general Louis-Marie Turreau sent twelve detachments of two to three thousand soldiers each crisscrossing the territory in grid

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97 Bell, *The First Total War*, 4.


fashion with orders to make it uninhabitable. These “hell columns” (*colonnes infernales*) burned houses, destroyed food stores, killed livestock, and engaged in rape, pillage, and slaughter on a massive scale. In some towns and villages they indiscriminately killed men, women, and children, including those who protested their loyalty to the Republic, on the grounds that no-one who lived in the Vendée could truly be loyal. According to the most reliable estimates, from 220,000 to 250,000 people – over a quarter of the region’s population – lost their lives.100

The temptation at this point is to identify total war with *ideological* war, and to conclude that when belligerents view their conflict as between competing systems of deeply-held beliefs and values – whether religious or secular – the overwhelming tendency will be to dehumanize and demonize the enemy to the extent that unlimited and unrestrained warfare will almost inevitably result. Here again, however, Johnson offers a salutary contrary perspective. Just as holy war may or may not tend towards total war based on the actual religious beliefs motivating the participants, so ideological motivation *may* lead to unrestrained warfare against noncombatants – as in the Vendée – or it may not. For example, the American Civil War was to a large extent an ideologically motivated conflict and is often held up as an early model of total war. Yet both sides appear to have respected the norm of noncombatant immunity. During the Civil War, the Union Army gave official recognition to the *jus in bello* norms in the Lieber Code – named for its author, Francis Lieber (1798 – 1892) – one of the first modern military

100 Bell, *The First Total War*, 156-157.
 manuals for officers in the field. In his 1864 march from Atlanta to Savannah, General William T. Sherman wrought as much destruction as possible to Southern industries, but his forces were under strict orders to respect civilians as long as they refrained from active resistance.\textsuperscript{101} The American wars in Korea and Vietnam had a strong ideological component, but nonetheless remained limited so far as the United States was concerned.\textsuperscript{102} Johnson admits that “historically, wars in which religious or national feeling, or some other ideological component, run high have tended to be the most destructive.” Nevertheless, he concludes, “the ideas of holy war, national war, and ideological war do not in themselves require unrestrained combat and unlimited destruction and … the actuality of such wars reveals no necessary link between absolute goals and unlimited prosecution of war.”\textsuperscript{103}

Towards a Theory of Total War

In this chapter so far, I have surveyed the historical development of the ideas of holy war, crusade, and total war in the West with the aim of understanding the sorts of religious beliefs and secular ideologies that are apt to lead not only to violations of noncombatant immunity but also to justifications of the killing of noncombatants as a
licit or even praiseworthy act. The influential Bainton paradigm oversimplifies the matter by suggesting a direct causal connection between a crusading mentality and the loss of restraint in warfare. Holy wars and ideological crusades may and often do lead to atrocities, but not necessarily, and not always. The task now is to try to identify some of the factors which not only make loss of restraint in the conduct of war more likely, but also encourage justifications of such unrestraint as a positive good.

Johnson proposes a definition of total war that includes unrestrained prosecution as an integral element. The first characteristic of total war, he writes, is that the cause of war is perceived as ultimate in nature, involving defense of the most basic values of a nation or society. Second, a total war commands broad popular support in the belligerent nations, often stimulated by strong anti-enemy propaganda. Third, the economic and human resources of the belligerent nations are mobilized so that the whole society becomes involved in support of the war. Fourth, and most especially, prosecution of a total war is marked by disregard of the restraints imposed by custom, law, and morality, so that total war bears hardest on noncombatants, whose traditional protections evaporate. Johnson then proposes a list of four factors, which, taken together, tend to produce total war:

104 Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 229.

1. *A goal able to justify totalistic means* – A fundamental difference between limited and total war, Johnson writes, is the end or cause that is perceived to justify the conflict. In the eighteenth century the ends of war were limited, and so was the warfare; but in all-out wars, the ends are generally framed in absolute terms: preserving the Union (American Civil War); ending all wars (World War I); unconditional surrender (World War II).

2. *A High Degree of Popular Motivation* – Widespread public acceptance of the absolute goal of the war, often fueled by strong anti-enemy propaganda, tends to encourage public acceptance of unrestrained methods of waging war.

3. *Capability to Wage Total War* – Even absolute goals that command widespread public support do not lead to total war when the means are not available. A state may simply not have the military and economic resources to wage total war; or it may be deterred from doing so by rational calculations of the relations of forces and the actual character of the enemy threat.

4. *An Opponent of Similar or Greater Military Capacity* – Johnson points out that most political leaders and military establishments are reluctant to engage in the sorts of acts of cruelty and wanton destruction that characterize total war for their own sake. The motivation to do so typically arises in circumstances where the enemy’s strength makes it difficult to achieve one’s goals by more limited military means.
Although I shall attempt below to nuance this list by pointing out some factors that Johnson leaves underemphasized, it offers a compelling picture overall. To anticipate the discussion in Chapter Eight of justifications of the area bombing, all four of Johnson’s factors were operative during World War II. The British war aims were absolute, aiming first at national survival and then very quickly at the total defeat of Nazi Germany. This war policy commanded a high level of popular support. The capacity to wage total war – in precisely the form of area bombing – was available to the British when a conventional land war in Europe was not yet feasible. And, almost to the end of the war, Nazi Germany constituted a formidable and dangerous military opponent.

Reflecting on Johnson’s four factors, I think that definitions of total war would benefit from distinguishing among different modes of totality. War may be total in relation to its **ends**, its **means**, and its **effects**. While the standard definitions of total war tend to conflate these modes, talk about total war becomes more meaningful when there is clarity about the kind of totality that is presupposed. A war may be total in its **effects** in the sense that it brings total destruction to a given area and indiscriminate suffering and death to its population, even when the perpetrator is motivated by limited war aims and is employing far less than his total war-making capacity. A war may be total in its **means** insofar as a nation or society is mobilizing all the human, economic, and military resources at its disposal, but depending on its capabilities, this totality of means may have only limited destructive effects. And a war may be total in its **ends** insofar as its war aims are absolute in character. As the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz pointed
out in the early nineteenth century, the ends of war tend to dictate the choice of means, and the aim of completely defeating the enemy and destroying his war-making capacity leads in the direction of total or “absolute” war. When war is seen as total in terms of ends, however, the realm of perceptions, belief systems, and world views has been entered. And both religions and secular ideologies are capable of contributing to and shaping a society’s perceptions of its war aims in relation to a particular enemy, as well as its perception of that enemy as an enemy.

What types of perception-shaped goals are most likely, then, to engender justifications of unrestrained total war? Taken together, Johnson’s first and fourth factors point to the perception that the stakes in a particular conflict are total. When a group, society, or nation believes itself to be fighting in a life-or-death struggle for its very existence – defined in terms of either its physical survival, its way of life, or its most fundamental values and beliefs – then a strong incentive arises to abandon all restraints in the prosecution of war. Examples of this dynamic abound in the history traced in this chapter so far. The Deuteronomistic history portrays the Conquest of Canaan in such life-or-death terms: Israel’s very survival as God’s chosen people was seen to require the complete destruction of Canaanite culture and worship. The Books of the Maccabees likewise depict a life-or-death struggle of the Jewish religion against pagan oppression.

106 Clauzewitz’s famous dictum that war is “a continuation of policy by other means” has the implication that when the political ends – i.e., war aims – are total, the means employed in warfare will tend towards absolute or total war, whereas when the political ends are limited, the means employed in warfare will likewise tend to be limited. See Carl von Clauzewitz, On War, ed. Louis Wilmot, Wordworth Classics of World Literature, (Ware, UK: Wordworth, 1977), 20-23.
Crusaders to the Holy Land believed that securing Christian control of the Holy Places represented a life-and-death issue for Christendom. Participants in the crusade against the Albigensians perceived themselves as combating a heresy that constituted a mortal threat to the life of the Church and Christian society. The protagonists in the seventeenth-century Wars of Religion understood themselves to be fighting to ensure that true religion would prevail in Europe; the Puritans in particular saw themselves as struggling to bring into existence a godly society over and against the forces of Antichrist. The French Revolutionaries saw the stakes as total: the Republic embodying the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity must either destroy or be destroyed by the forces of tyranny. The American Civil War and the two World Wars also represented conflicts in which the belligerents perceived the stakes as total in terms of the survival of a particular way of life, or a system of fundamental beliefs and values.

A second consideration concerns perceptions of the opponent. Johnson subsumes this question into his second factor, writing that governments often initiate strong anti-enemy propaganda campaigns to build popular support for total war aims; and that such propaganda tends to create public acceptance of unrestrained warfare against enemy populations. While this may be often the case, however, it is not necessarily always the case. Negative perceptions of the enemy may precede propaganda campaigns. Indeed, seeing a particular outside group as “other” or “alien” can shape the sorts of perceptions of a threat to one’s group’s identity or way of life that tend in turn to engender absolute war aims. A passage in Book V of Plato’s Republic exemplifies the way in which such
perceptions of the enemy lend themselves to justifications of unrestrained warfare. In dialogue with Glaucon, Socrates proposes that since all Greeks are united by ties of blood and friendship, when Greeks fight barbarians – with whom they are naturally enemies – the conflict should be called “war,” but when Greeks fight Greeks – with whom they are naturally friends – the conflict should be called “discord.” Parties to a discord fight as those who intend someday to be reconciled, whereas parties to a war fight to enslave and destroy their enemies. Greeks should neither devastate the lands nor burn the houses of other Greeks; nor should they suppose that all the inhabitants of a Greek city – men, women, and children – are equally their enemies. Lamenting the tendency of Greeks to wage unrestrained warfare against one another as if they were fighting barbarians, Plato in this passage gives one of the Western tradition’s first written codifications of rudimentary *jus in bello* norms. Yet while making this plea for moderation and restraint in intra-Greek warfare, he takes it for granted that war with barbarians ought to be total and unrestrained: “our citizens must behave [with moderation] toward their [Greek] opponents; and toward the barbarians they must behave as the Greeks do now to one another.” For Plato, then, the perception of the barbarians as alien and other intrinsically justifies the war aim of enslaving and destroying them.

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Such perceptions of the enemy as fundamentally alien may arise from racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, national, or ideological differences. In the event of war such perceptions can easily create conditions in which arguments for unrestrained warfare find widespread acceptance. A contrary argument could be made that some of the fiercest conflicts in history have been fratricidal civil wars in which the adversaries had far more in common ethnically and culturally than they had differences. Even in these instances, however, religious or ideological disagreements may account for each side rapidly coming to perceive the other as fundamentally alien – indeed as traitorous to an otherwise shared heritage and identity. Overall, then, one reason why holy wars and ideological wars seem prone to escalate to the level of unrestrained warfare is that by their nature they are apt to involve perceptions of the enemy as a mortal threat to one’s own most basic beliefs, values, and commitments. Such perceptions can lead all too easily to a process of demonizing and dehumanizing the enemy so that abandonment of traditional restraints becomes justifiable in the minds of those engaged in the fighting.

The passage from Plato’s Republic quoted above suggests a closely related third consideration. Socrates asserts that when Greeks fight Greeks, they should not suppose that all the inhabitants of the adversary’s city should be considered equally their enemies: “for they know that the guilt of war is always confined to a few persons and that the many are their friends.” In other words, the quarrel is with the political leadership of the adversarial city and not with the greater part of its inhabitants. The distinction

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109 Holmes, War and Christian Ethics, 19.
between the government of an enemy state and its civilian population is a basic presupposition of the norm of noncombatant immunity. Plato conversely implies that in wars with barbarians, no such distinction should be made: all alike are in principle enemies and thus legitimate targets for destruction or enslavement. Here, then, is a third factor that makes escalation to unrestrained war more likely: the refusal to make any moral distinctions between the enemy government, including its armed forces, and the civilian population. When people see themselves as engaged in a life-or-death struggle against not just a particular regime but an entire nation or people, justifications for direct attacks on the enemy civilian population may well be forthcoming.

**Conclusion**

Johnson’s critique of Bainton’s influential paradigm of the crusading mentality shows that “war for a transcendent cause” – to use Tyerman’s term – may or may not lead to unrestrained violence in the prosecution of war. Whether it does lead in this direction depends largely on the *content* of the religious or ideological beliefs that provide the justification for war. When people believe that a holy or transcendent cause justifies unrestrained violence, then the tendency is towards total war. Conversely, when people believe that a holy or transcendent cause imposes restraints on violence, then the tendency is towards limited war. The question, then, is what types of beliefs are likely to establish a link leading from a holy or transcendent cause to unrestrained violence. In this chapter, I have suggested that such beliefs will likely comprise the following three themes: (a) the conflict as a life or death struggle with an irrecconcilable opponent in
which the identity, way of life, and fundamental values of either or both sides are at stake; (b) perceptions of the enemy as fundamentally alien or “other;” and (c) the lack or erosion of any meaningful moral distinction between the enemy government and its civilian population. In Chapter Eight, I will examine the actual “non-military” justifications advanced at the time for the British area bombing of German cities in terms of the extent to which they reflected and expressed such beliefs.
Classical realism is an ethical tradition that addresses the relationship between conventional morality and the behavior of states in the real world. Stephen Forde writes that realism is the “second oldest” perspective in the ethics of international relations, the oldest being a “patriotic moralism” which identifies one’s own side as right in a simple struggle between good and evil. Against such a view, Forde writes, realism emerges as a kind of skepticism about the relevance of moral categories to international politics.¹ The realist tradition combines a pessimistic view of human nature with an analysis of the international system as inherently anarchic. That is, without any overarching power or authority to mediate their disputes according to principles of right and justice, states pursue their own interests in ways that often lead to violent conflict. Life in the international sphere is thus marked by a permanent competition for power that fosters war.² In such a dangerous world, states frequently find it necessary to defend their interests by immoral means.³ Jonathan Haslam characterizes realist thought in terms of the idea of “reason of state” – the belief that the moral rules applicable to individuals in


² Michael Joseph Smith, Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 1.

³ Forde, “Classical Realism,” 63.
their dealings with other individuals are not transferable to states in their dealings with other states, so that the security and interests of the state should prevail over all other interests and values.\textsuperscript{4} Nuancing this picture somewhat, David R. Mapel writes that the central prescriptive claim of realism is not that states should always act immorally, but rather that morality should not always govern their conduct. In other words, states may and perhaps should act morally when they can, but from time to time exceptional situations arise when their interests require them to override conventional morality.\textsuperscript{5}

With respect to the ethics of warfare, Mapel writes that the realist tradition holds that even wars fought for limited ends with limited means must sometimes entail the deliberate killing of innocent people.\textsuperscript{6} Realism rejects the view that there are inherent limits on the measures that states may threaten or use to protect themselves.\textsuperscript{7} Here, then, is a direct challenge to the \textit{jus in bello} norms of the Just War tradition. In this chapter my aim is to explore the contours of classical realism, first, by examining the thought of three thinkers generally held to exemplify the tradition: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes. Other writers in the realist tradition could also be considered – including Bodin, Spinoza, and Rousseau – but the three chosen will suffice to give a definitive sampling of the


\textsuperscript{6} Mapel, “Realism and the Ethics of War and Peace,” 55.

\textsuperscript{7} Mapel, “Realism and the Ethics of War and Peace,” 65.
tradition’s key features. These writers anticipate the question of attacks on innocent civilian populations in wartime when they address what might be called “the problem of cruelty,” and it is instructive to pay close attention to what they say about when cruelty is and is not justified. Then, I will look briefly at the “military realism” of the U.S. Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman, whose putative dictum “war is hell” raises the question of the relationship between the realist tradition and total war. Finally, I will consider the role of consequentialist ethics in the realist tradition, and compare the moral reasoning of realism with that of utilitarianism. Subsequently, in Chapter Nine, I will explore the influence of the classical realist tradition on the British debate over the area bombing of German cities during World War II as expressed in the writings of the military historian and strategist Basil Liddell Hart.

**Thucydides’ Peloponnesian War**

Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* recounts the conflict between Athens and Sparta from 431 to 404 BCE. Written by an Athenian general who served in that war, it has been described as “an exemplar for critics and sympathizers alike of the philosophy of Realism in international relations.”8 Pangle and Ahrensdorf remark: “insofar as ‘realism’ means the attempt to understand political life by focusing on the

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actual behavior of political communities rather than on how they ought to behave, Thucydides would seem to be the classic of realism.\textsuperscript{9}

Thucydides is considered one of the first serious historians in the Western tradition because he wrote neither to vindicate the justice of one side’s cause over the other’s in the conflict, nor to set forth inspiring stories of heroism or moral example, but rather to explain events as impartially and dispassionately as he could. In his introduction he assures his readers that he has tried wherever possible to verify his sources and check his facts, sifting and comparing eyewitness accounts, to achieve reasonable accuracy. Yet his concern is not simply to understand the events for their own sake, but rather to illustrate certain recurring traits of universal human behavior:

And it may well be that my history will seem less easy to read because of the absence in it of a romantic element. It will be enough for me, however, if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future. My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but has been done to last for ever.\textsuperscript{10}

Thucydides then acknowledges that since he and his informants could not remember the precise words used at key moments by the actors in the drama, he has taken the liberty of reconstructing their speeches, “keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the


words that were actually used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation.” Just as Plato’s dialogues use Socrates’ various interlocutors to present different sides of philosophical arguments, so Thucydides uses the speeches of his principal actors in a much less systematic way to present competing ideas on the ethics of warfare and statecraft.11

Thucydides and Socrates were contemporaries; the philosophical debates of fifth-century Athens reflected in Plato’s dialogues supply the context for many of the ideas expressed in The Peloponnesian War. The teachers known as the Sophists professed to impart wisdom and virtue. While the Sophists’ ideas were often diverse and eclectic, one belief that many held in common was that morality is rooted in human convention or law (nomos) rather than in the nature of things (physis). The teacher Antiphon contended, for example, that conventional morality is opposed to nature, whose injunctions are to maximize pleasure and avoid pain. But true human self-interest lies in following these dictates of nature; conventional morality should be obeyed only if the harm suffered from breaking it would be greater.12 The Sophist Callicles in Plato’s Gorgias takes a more radical position. Against Socrates’ suggestion that it is better to suffer than to inflict injustice, Callicles argues that “the people who institute our laws are the weak and the many.” The purpose of such laws is to restrain the more powerful from “having a greater

11 Boucher, Political Theories, 47.
12 Boucher, Political Theories, 58.
share,” which the weak and the many characterize as shameful and unjust. But, says Callicles, “Nature shows … both among the animals and in whole races of men … that the superior rule the inferior and have a greater share than they.” In Plato’s Republic, in response to Socrates’ search for a definition of morality or justice that holds true everywhere, the Sophist Thrasymachus argues that justice is “nothing other than the advantage of the stronger party.” Pressed to clarify his meaning, Thrasymachus explains:

Now, each government passes laws with a view to its own advantage: a democracy makes democratic laws, a dictatorship makes dictatorial laws, and so on and so forth. In so doing, each government makes it clear that what is right and moral for its subjects is what is to its own advantage; and each government punishes anyone who deviates from what is advantageous to itself as if he were a criminal and a wrongdoer. So, Socrates, this is what I claim morality is: it is the same in every country, and it is what is to the advantage of the current government. Now, of course, it’s the current government that has power, and the consequence of this, as anyone who thinks about the matter correctly can work out, is that morality is everywhere the same—the advantage of the stronger party.

In other words, the laws may differ according to the form of government, but in all cases they serve the interests of the party in power. Finally, at the level of interstate conflict, in Plato’s Laws the Cretan Kleinias explains to the Athenian stranger that King Minos originally promulgated the island’s laws with a view to preparedness for war: “For what

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14 Plato, Gorgias, 483e, p. 54.

most humans call peace he held only to be a name; in fact, for everyone there always exists by nature an undeclared war among all cities.”  

The speeches of the Athenians in The Peloponnesian War bear distinct similarities to this stream of Sophist teaching. Thucydides emphasizes the role of conventional laws and institutions in modifying human nature and improving the human condition. The internal strength of both Sparta and Athens lay in their respective constitutions, which restrained private interests in favor of the common good of each state. Good laws, piety, and education strengthen the state by aligning private interests with the common interest. But the elimination of uncertainty and fear within the polis does not extend to the external sphere of interstate relations, where by nature states will seek to maximize power in the pursuit of security to the disregard of moral constraints. War, in particular, strips away convention and reduces human life to the pursuit of immediate interests. Human nature, which is fixed, prescribes a code of conduct in interstate relations that overrides appeals to justice and morality.

At the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, the Greek world was divided into two rival alliances of city-states, dominated respectively by Athens and Sparta. With a powerful navy, democratic Athens had built an undemocratic empire of colonies and tribute-paying allies situated primarily in islands and coastal settlements across the

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17 Boucher, Political Theories, 61.

18 Boucher, Political Theories, 62.
Aegean Sea. With an oligarchic constitution, Sparta had a powerful army and maintained an alliance of similarly oligarchic city-states, largely located in the Peloponnesus, which it treated as rough equals. In modern jargon, the Greek world was a bipolar system with one bloc of regimes dominated by a conservative land power, the other led by a “restless, innovative sea power.”

Thucydides remarks that “What made war inevitable was the growth in Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta.” David Boucher comments that here Thucydides makes a significant contribution to our understanding of war by distinguishing between its ostensible, immediate, and official justification and its unstated, long-term, deep causes. For Thucydides, the real cause of the war was mutual fear: the Athenians feared the secession of their allies to Sparta and the dissolution of their empire; the Spartans feared the growth of Athenian power to an extent that sooner or later made war with Athens inevitable. Forde notes that this notion has important ethical consequences, effectively excusing the Spartans for going to war because their fear of Athenian power compelled them to do so. Such an analysis systematically excludes a *jus ad bellum* approach to the war’s origins.

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20 Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, 1.23, p. 49.


22 Forde, “Classical Realism,” 70.
The immediate cause of the war was a dispute between Corcyra, a small neutral city, and Corinth, an important Spartan ally. After Corcyra defeated Corinth in a naval battle, the Corinthians appealed to Sparta for assistance in subduing the Corcyreans, who in turn appealed to Athens for protection. The problem was that receiving Corcyra into the Athenian alliance would violate the terms of an existing treaty between Athens and Sparta. In their speech to the Athenians, the Corcyrean ambassadors appeal directly to the Athenians’ self-interests; in return for protection against the Corinthians, Corcyra will put its considerable naval forces at the Athenians’ disposal. The Athenians will thus gain a powerful ally in the inevitable war with Sparta.23 For their part, the Corinthian representatives in their speech invoke legality and fairness, effectively presenting an alternative view of security based on adherence to existing agreements and treaties.

The Athenian decision in favor of Corcyra illustrates Thucydides’ view that faced with a choice between a concrete gain in power and fidelity to existing agreements, states most often choose power.24 Subsequently, on the eve of the Spartan declaration of war, Athenian representatives in Sparta argue that they cannot be condemned for having acquired their empire: “We have done nothing extraordinary, nothing contrary to human nature in accepting an empire when it was offered to us and then in refusing to give it up. Three very powerful motives prevent us from doing so – security, honor, and self-interest. And we were not the first to act in this way. Far from it. It has always been a rule


that the weak should be subject to the strong.”

Throughout Thucydides’ work, the Athenians repeatedly claim that moral categories of right and justice are inapplicable to relations between states. Each state has the obligation to look after its own interests; and it is in the interest of each state to rule where it can. The stronger have always subjugated the weaker, and the Athenians are only doing to others what others would do to them if the positions were reversed. The Athenians never attempt to disguise their motives or justify their imperialism on moral grounds.

The Spartans oppose the realism of the Athenians with the moralistic claim that they are fighting to save Greece from the tyranny of Athenian imperialism. Theirs is therefore a just war favored by the gods. The Athenians accuse the Spartans of hypocrisy: “as for their relations with others … the Spartans are most conspicuous for believing that what they like doing is honorable, and what suits their interests is just.”

Pangle and Ahrensdorf suggest that Thucydides’ account of Spartan behavior confirms the Athenian criticism. The Spartans are also motivated by fear and self-interest. They go to war because they fear of growing Athenian power. Despite their moralistic claims that they have refrained from building an empire as the Athenians have, the real reason is that

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25 Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, 1.76, p. 80.

26 Boucher, Political Theories, 76.

27 Boucher, Political Theories, 73.

28 Pangle and Ahrensdorf, Justice Among Nations, 15.

29 Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, 5.105, p. 405.
their own power is based on an internal empire of Helot slaves. Despite a sacred oath to protect the independence of Plataea, the Spartans massacre the Plataeans to gain the assistance of Thebes in their war against Athens. Pangle and Ahrensdorf conclude that in contrast to Spartan hypocrisy about their motives, the Athenians are at least honest in acknowledging that they are imperialists and in not pretending to be morally superior to their enemies. 30

Many commentators have discerned a classically tragic dimension in Thucydides’ work. Ultimately, as the war continues over a period of twenty-seven years, the Athenians’ realism corrodes the moral consensus on which the internal cohesion of their society depends. Individual Athenians come to believe that no moral constraints apply to them even as citizens; private self-interest and factional strife prevail over the common good in the domestic life of the polis. This unraveling of civic life at home contributes to the final defeat of Athens in the war as much as military setbacks abroad. Forde remarks: “This development tempers Thucydides’ realism without undoing it. Realism is tragic. By doing what is necessary internationally, communities undermine the moral consensus on which their integrity as communities depends.” 31 Boucher comments that for Thucydides, “Human nature is destructive of civil society and civilized conduct, and threatens to subvert the constraints which modify it. The conventional institutions of morality which modify human behavior are both necessary and desirable, but


nevertheless fragile.”\textsuperscript{32} Pangle and Ahrensdorf make the intriguing suggestion that Thucydides is implicitly criticizing the Athenian realist thesis for its inability to support an effective foreign policy because of its failure to meet the community’s psychological need to believe that it is acting morally. On several occasions, the Athenians seem not entirely to believe their own realist argument and express fear that their injustices are incurring divine wrath. However hypocritical, the Spartans’ claim that their cause is just and that the gods are on their side responds better to natural human longings, and is thus ultimately more “realistic,” than the amoral realism of the Athenians.\textsuperscript{33}

The Problem of Cruelty: Melos and Mytilene

Thucydides’ treatment of issues related to the \textit{jus in bello} norms comes to the fore in two debates concerning the fate of the inhabitants of Aegean islands defeated by the Athenians. The better known of the two is the Melian Dialogue. Originally founded as a Spartan colony, the island of Melos has maintained neutrality between Athens and Sparta. In the summer of the sixteenth year of the war, the Athenians land a large force on Melos, and send ambassadors to negotiate with the Melian leaders. The Athenians demand that the Melians surrender the island peacefully, in return for what they describe as the generous terms of “alliance on a tribute-paying basis, and liberty to enjoy your own

\textsuperscript{32} Boucher, \textit{Political Theories}, 62.

\textsuperscript{33} Pangle and Ahrensdorf, \textit{Justice Among Nations}, 23-29.
property.”34 The Melians refuse, staking their hope on Spartan intervention and, since their cause is just, the help of the gods. In response to the Melians’ assertion that the Spartans are honor-bound as their kinsmen to come to their assistance, the Athenians point out that the Spartans are much too cautious to undertake such a risky venture given Athenian control of the seas. Moreover, the Melians have no claim to moral superiority, and hence no claim to the gods’ favor, because the Athenians are only doing what the Melians would do to them if their positions were reversed. All human beings are compelled by their nature to pursue the power which they believe to be in their interest: “the strong do what they have the power to do, and the weak accept what they have to accept.”35 The Athenians thus appeal to the Melians to do what is in their interest as the weaker party: “You, by giving in, would save yourselves from disaster; we, by not destroying you, would be able to profit by you.”36 After considering the Athenians’ demands, the Melians reply that they are not prepared to give up their liberty. “But we invite you to allow us to be friends of yours and enemies to neither side.”37 Withdrawing from the negotiation, the Athenians besiege the city of Melos and, upon its fall the


following winter, put all its men of military age to death and sell all its women and children into slavery.\textsuperscript{38}

Some commentators characterize the slaughter and enslavement of the Melians as an act of excessive cruelty that was not a necessary consequence of the Athenian argument.\textsuperscript{39} Boucher writes that the Athenian action against Melos was disproportionate to the island’s size and strategic value, and bordered on the obsessive.\textsuperscript{40} But the arguments put forward in the Melian dialogue suggest why the Athenians considered the massacre necessary. In response to the Melians’ argument that their neutrality does not hurt Athens, the Athenians explain that Melian independence sets an unacceptable precedent for other islanders who are yet to be subdued, or Athenian subjects who have become restless and rebellious.\textsuperscript{41} Since the Melians have refused the opportunity to surrender peacefully, the Athenians calculate that they must make an example of them to deter others from being as stubborn. On this reading, Thucydides is presenting the fate of the Melians as the consequence of the Athenians’ perceptions of their vital interests. In this sense, the Athenians understand their action to be one of necessary punishment rather than gratuitous cruelty.

\textsuperscript{38} Thucydides, \textit{Peloponnesian War}, 5.116, p. 408.

\textsuperscript{39} Pangle and Ahrensdorf, \textit{Justice Among Nations}, 21.

\textsuperscript{40} Boucher, \textit{Political Theories}, 75.

\textsuperscript{41} Thucydides, \textit{Peloponnesian War}, 5.99, p. 403.
The earlier fate of the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos stands in contrast to that of Melos. In the third year of the war the Mytileneans, allies of Athens, rebel and go over to the side of Sparta. The Athenians defeat the Mytileneans and call an assembly of the Athenian polis to decide how to respond to their rebellion. The assembly initially decides to put to death the entire male population of the city, and to sell the women and children into slavery – precisely the same fate as Melos will suffer thirteen years later. On the next day, however, “there was a sudden change of feeling and people began to think how cruel and how unprecedented such a decision was, to destroy not only the guilty, but the entire population of a state.”

Another assembly is called. An Athenian named Cleon argues vigorously that the original sentence should stand on grounds of both morality and self-interest. The Mytileneans have committed a great crime for which they deserve the most severe punishment. By failing to punish them, the Athenians will jeopardize their empire by encouraging other subject peoples to revolt. Cleon concludes: “Punish them as they deserve, and make an example of them to your other allies, plainly showing that revolt will be punished by death.”

The opposing argument is put forward by an Athenian named Diodotus, who argues that sparing the Mytileneans is the course that is really in the Athenians’ interests. Diodotus proposes the criteria for decision in nakedly realistic terms:

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If we are sensible people, we shall see that the question is not so much whether they are guilty as whether we are making the right decision for ourselves. I might prove that they are the most guilty people in the world, but it does not follow that I shall propose the death penalty, unless that is in your interests; I might argue that they deserve to be forgiven, but should not recommend forgiveness unless that seemed to me the best thing for the state.\textsuperscript{44}

The gathering, Diodotus continues, is not a law court deciding what is right and just, but a political assembly, deliberating on how Mytilene can best be made useful to Athens. The Mytileneans have committed a great crime, but in so doing they have only acted according to human nature: “Cities and individuals alike, all are by nature disposed to do wrong, and there is no law that will prevent it, as is shown by the fact that men have tried every kind of punishment, constantly adding to the list, in the attempt to find greater security from criminals.”\textsuperscript{45} But capital punishment is notably ineffective in deterring crime. When a city revolts, therefore, “we must not make the condition of rebels desperate by depriving them of the possibility of repentance and of a chance of atoning as quickly as they can for what they did.”\textsuperscript{46} Thus, when a city in rebellion realizes that it cannot succeed, it will come to terms. But if Cleon’s method is adopted, every city that revolts will hold out to the end, because it knows it has nothing to gain by early surrender. The result will be far greater expenditure on sieges, along with the recovery of utterly ruined cities from which future revenues will be lost. Moderation in punishments

\textsuperscript{44} Thucydides, \textit{Peloponnesian War}, 3.44, p. 219.

\textsuperscript{45} Thucydides, \textit{Peloponnesian War}, 3.45, p. 220.

\textsuperscript{46} Thucydides, \textit{Peloponnesian War}, 3.46, p. 221.
will “secure for ourselves the full use of those cities which bring us important contributions.” Diodotus adds that in the cities of the Athenian empire the aristocracies or oligarchies are the parties most likely to revolt, while the majority of the people are friendly to Athens. By destroying the democratic party in Mytilene, which did not participate in the revolt, the Athenians will make the democratic parties in other cities more likely to support future revolts led by the oligarchs. Diodotus concludes: “It is far more useful to us, I think, in preserving our empire that we should voluntarily put up with injustice than that we should justly put to death the wrong people.” Following Diodotus’s speech, the assembly votes by a narrow majority to reverse its decision, and the Athenians put to death only those Mytilenean leaders whom they judge directly responsible for the rebellion.

The respective fates of Melos and Mytilene indicate that the realist criterion for deciding upon acts of cruelty is state interest rather than right or justice. Commentators sympathetic to the realist tradition are quick to point out that this criterion supplies a significant restraint on the conduct of war; some indeed suggest that the Athenian treatment of Mytilene is more consistent with realist principles than the Athenian treatment of Melos. Pangle and Ahrensdorf write that it would be unwarranted to conclude from the fate of the Melians that the Athenian realist thesis leads inexorably to inhumanity, because rightly understood the Athenian argument allows for and encourages

47 Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, 3.46, p. 221.

48 Thucydides, Peloponnesian War, 3.47, p. 222.
a considerable degree of gentleness. Unlike the Spartans, who believe that all who oppose them are unjust and therefore deserving of punishment, the Athenians cannot morally blame those who oppose their interests in the pursuit of their own interests. The calling of the second assembly in response to the people’s revulsion at the initial condemnation of the Mytilineans suggests that within the realist tradition humanitarian concerns do operate as a constraint upon gratuitous violence, condoning only those acts of cruelty believed to be required by state interests. In the realist view, then, the question by which an act of cruelty is evaluated is not “Is it just?” but rather, “Is it necessary?”

Machiavelli

After Thucydides, political thought was dominated for centuries by the more idealistic perspectives of Plato and Aristotle. Saint Augustine of Hippo – to be considered in the next chapter – incorporated elements of realism into his description of political life in a fallen world. Yet full-blown classical realism does not emerge again until the early sixteenth century in the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527). Forde writes that Machiavelli develops the realist argument in its purest form. According to Boucher, while Machiavelli’s thought is more complex than many stereotyped interpretations have recognized, realist principles still dominate his thought.

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50 Forde, “Classical Realism,” 64.

From 1498 until 1512 Machiavelli held a post in the civil service of the Republic of Florence, in which capacity he went on a variety of diplomatic missions to other Italian city-states, the papal court in Rome, and royal courts in France, Spain, and Germany. His diplomatic travels allowed him to observe first-hand the political techniques of such figures as Pope Julius II, Cesare Borgia, Ferdinand II of Aragon, and Louis XII of France. For a time he was also in charge of organizing and training the Florentine militia. In 1512, however, aided by Spanish troops, the Medici family returned to power in Florence and dissolved the Republic. Machiavelli was arrested and tortured on suspicion of conspiracy against the new regime, but was soon released. Out of a job, he retired to his country estate, where he supported himself by farming and devoted his spare time to reading and writing. The remaining fourteen years of his life saw his greatest creative output. During his forced retirement, he wrote The Prince, The Discourses, The Art of War, the History of Florence, and a variety of plays, poetry, and stories. His best-known work, The Prince, failed in its objective of gaining him employment with Lorenzo de Medici, to whom it was dedicated, but has since become “one of the half dozen books that have done most to shape Western thought.”

Forde writes that for Machiavelli, realism represents a new and scientific approach to politics. Boucher suggests that the science Machiavelli’s writings most

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closely resemble is medicine. Especially in the *The Prince* (c. 1513), and *The Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy* (c. 1517),\(^{54}\) Machiavelli diagnoses and prescribes remedies for disorders in the body politic.\(^{55}\) The lessons of history furnish the knowledge that the physician of state needs. Given the fixity of human nature – an assumption Machiavelli shares with Thucydides – history is not so much an account of human development as a series of illustrations of trans-historical principles: “whoever wishes to foresee the future must consult the past; for human events ever resemble those of preceding times. Men ever have been, and ever will be, animated by the same passions, with the same results.”\(^{56}\) While human nature is fixed, however, different individuals, and indeed different nations and peoples, exhibit different preponderances of virtues and vices which remain constant over time, so that in similar circumstances one will succeed and another fail. Like Thucydides, Machiavelli holds a pessimistic view of human nature: “For it may be said of men in general that they are ungrateful, voluble, dissemblers, anxious to avoid danger, and covetous of gain.”\(^{57}\) And again: “whoever desires to found a state and give it laws must start with assuming that all men are bad and ever ready to display their vicious nature, whenever they may find occasion for it.”\(^{58}\) Human desires

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\(^{54}\) The dates given are the approximate dates of writing. Both books circulated privately during Machiavelli’s life and were published only after his death, *The Prince* in 1532; *The Discourses* in 1531.

\(^{55}\) Boucher, *Political Theories*, 92.


\(^{57}\) Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 17, p. 61.

\(^{58}\) Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, 1.3, p. 117.
know no bounds, but the human capacity to attain these desires always falls short, so that people are generally discontented with their lot.\(^{59}\) People fear losing what they have, and feel they can only be sure of keeping it by gaining more at the expense of others.\(^{60}\)

Alongside this pessimistic view of human nature, Machiavelli holds a high view of the state as the supreme and all-inclusive good.\(^{61}\) Early in *The Discourses*, he describes the origins of states. At the beginning of the world, human beings were few in number and dispersed throughout all lands, living like beasts. But as their numbers grew, they experienced the need to unite for purposes of defense, and chose leaders whom they promised to obey. Disobedience to these leaders engendered an awareness of right and wrong, which was soon codified in written laws along with the prescribed punishments for violating them. “Such was the origin of justice.”\(^{62}\) Laws make men good.\(^{63}\) Haslam remarks that “Machiavelli was not against constitutional rule; far from it. But power was the first issue to be considered.”\(^{64}\) The sure foundations of all states are good laws and good arms. But good laws depend on good arms, which come first.\(^{65}\)


\(^{60}\) Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, 1.5, p. 124.


\(^{64}\) Haslam, *No Virtue like Necessity*, 30.

\(^{65}\) Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 12, p. 44.
The natural condition of relations among states is hostility and competition.\textsuperscript{66} States are driven by fear, envy, and ambition\textsuperscript{67} to dominate their neighbors: “The desire to acquire possessions is a very natural and ordinary thing, and when those men do it who can do so successfully, they are always praised and not blamed.”\textsuperscript{68} Machiavelli particularly admires the Roman Republic, whose policy of expansion enabled it to dominate much of the known world. The prince should have no other aim or thought than the study of war. Princes who neglect the art of war lose their states. In peace the prince ought continually to practice for war, keeping his men well-disciplined and exercised. By going out hunting frequently, he learns the lay of the land, and sees better how to defend it. The prince must read history and study the actions of great military leaders, examining the causes of their defeats and victories.\textsuperscript{69} Machiavelli dislikes mercenaries, whom he regards as inherently unreliable, and favors instead the creation of citizens’ militias and armies.\textsuperscript{70} The virtues associated with war help promote qualities of citizenship and patriotism that strengthen the state.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{66} Machiavelli, \textit{The Discourses}, 3.12, p 451.

\textsuperscript{67} This triad corresponds loosely to Thucydides’ security, honor, and self-interest.

\textsuperscript{68} Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, 3, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{69} Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, 14, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{70} Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, 12-13, pp. 44-53.

\textsuperscript{71} Boucher, \textit{Political Theories}, 138.
Machiavelli’s conception of the relationship between politics and morality is complex. Since the state creates the conditions within which justice and morality can flourish, it follows that justice and morality have no place in interstate relations. He quotes the dictum of Livy: *justum enim est bellum quibus necessarium, et pia arma ubi nulla nisi in armis spes est.*  

72 Deceit in warfare is meritorious.  

73 Part human and part beast, the prince must combine the strength and courage of the lion with the cunning of the fox. Treaties, agreements, and promises need not be kept when they no longer serve one’s interests and the original reasons for them no longer apply.  

74 Although Machiavelli does not use the term “reason of state,” it is implicit in his thought as doing what is necessary for the state’s survival and wellbeing.  

75 Towards the end of *The Discourses,* he writes: “For where the very safety of the country depends upon the resolution to be taken, no considerations of justice or injustice, humanity or cruelty, nor of glory or of shame, should be allowed to prevail. But putting all other considerations aside, the only question should be, What course will save the life and liberty of the country?”  

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72 Machiavelli, *The Prince,* 26, p. 96. “For wars are just for those to whom they are necessary; and arms are sacred where there is no hope except in arms” (my translation).


74 Machiavelli, *The Prince,* 18, pp. 64-65.

75 Boucher, *Political Theories,* 137.

76 Machiavell, *The Discourses,* 3.41, p. 528.
Not just in external relations, but also in internal governance, the prince or political leader will find it necessary to violate the precepts of conventional morality.

Machiavelli explains his view of the relation between politics and morality as follows:

[M]any have imagined republics and principalities which have never been seen or known to exist in reality, for how we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather learn to bring about his own ruin than his preservation. A man who wishes to make a profession of goodness in everything must necessarily come to grief among so many who are not good. Therefore it is necessary for a prince to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it, according to the necessity of the case.77

While the prince must avoid those vices which would cause scandal and so jeopardize the state, he must also be prepared to exercise those vices without which it would be difficult to preserve the state. Some actions which seem virtues lead to ruin, and others which appear to be vices generally result in greater security and wellbeing.78 On the assumption that the practice of morality is possible only in the context of a well-run state with good laws, Machiavelli believes that the ruler operates in a pre-moral sphere where the ordinary rules of morality do not apply and all is competition and hostility. This understanding is the opposite of the natural law tradition, which assumes that the natural order is, at bottom, a moral order. For Machiavelli, the natural order punishes rulers who attempt to play not by its rules but by moral rules instead. Paradoxically, moral behavior


in politics not only leads to failure, but tends to produce a greater measure of evil than a purely realistic course.\textsuperscript{79} The immoral actions committed by the ruler are directed towards a good end: political stability and the well-being of the state. Machiavelli’s assumption is that the ruler’s interests in consolidating power and ruling securely coincides with the state’s interests in order and stability. The state provides the stable conditions within which the good life of its citizens can flourish. Machiavelli thus introduces a dual standard: in the pursuit of their states’ interests, rulers may and should do things that no ordinary man or woman would be justified in doing.\textsuperscript{80}

Machiavelli does not say that rulers should always behave immorally, but only as and when they judge it necessary.\textsuperscript{81} It is good to seem – and also to be – merciful, humane, sincere, and religious; but one must be ready when it is needful to assume the opposite qualities. Sometimes the prince, especially a new prince, “cannot observe all those things which are considered good in men, being often obliged, in order to maintain the state, to act against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion.”\textsuperscript{82} Yet to all who see and hear him, the prince should seem to be all mercy, faith, integrity, humanity, and religion. The greatest paradox of Machiavelli’s thought is that while the ruler must be prepared to commit any necessary immorality, he must at the same time

\textsuperscript{79} Forde, “Classical Realism, 67.

\textsuperscript{80} Smith, \textit{Realist Thought}, 10.

\textsuperscript{81} Forde, “Classical Realism,” 68.

\textsuperscript{82} Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, 18, p. 65.
strengthen and build up the conventional morality of his citizens. This policy requires a conscious and intentional hypocrisy that stands in sharp contrast with the honesty of Thucydides’ Athenians. Machiavelli seeks to avoid the corrosive effects of realism on the domestic life of the community that Thucydides describes as having undermined Athens. Over and against the honesty of the Athenians, Machiavelli implicitly endorses the moralistic hypocrisy of the Spartans.

In this light, one aspect of the British government’s policy during World War II that seems truly Machiavellian is the public dissimulation it practiced regarding the bombing of Germany. When challenged on the numbers of civilian deaths resulting from the bombing, official British statements reiterated that the targets were military bases, factories supporting the German war effort, communications centers, and transportation systems. They seldom acknowledged that the RAF was indiscriminately bombing entire urban areas in the hope of randomly destroying targets of military and industrial value within them. Even though British policy was driven more by ideological and moral principles than classical realism would recommend, nonetheless governments at war often seem to follow Machiavelli’s advice of deliberately misrepresenting actions of questionable morality to avoid undermining popular support at home.

Finally, Machiavelli takes a completely instrumental view of cruelty. In recommending strategies for princes in holding on to newly acquired states, he discusses several alternatives: taking up residence or planting colonies in them; allowing them to keep their own laws and customs while taking tribute from a client government that
accommodates one’s interests; and finally, he remarks offhandedly, laying them waste. He especially recommends the last option in the case of free cities: “whoever becomes the ruler of a free city and does not destroy it, can expect to be destroyed by it, for it can always find a motive for rebellion.”

He holds up as “an example to be imitated by all,” Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, whose exploits included “destroying all who were of the blood of those ruling families which he had despoiled. … For of the dispossessed rulers he killed as many as he could lay hands on, and very few escaped.” Examining the case of Agathocles of Sicily, who rose to power by massacring the Senate and richest citizens of Syracuse, Machiavelli asks how it is that some are able to rule in peace for many years after committing such acts, while others have been overthrown precisely because of their cruelty. He answers by distinguishing between cruelties well-committed and cruelties ill-committed: “Well committed may be called those … which are perpetrated once for the need of securing one’s self, and which afterwards are not persisted in, but are exchanged for measures as useful to the subjects as possible. Cruelties ill-committed are those which, although at first few, increase rather than diminish with time.”

A prince must be prepared to incur the charge of cruelty for the sake of keeping his subjects united and faithful. It is more merciful to keep order by the

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86 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 8, p. 34.
judicious use of cruelty than to allow disorders to arise which are ultimately crueler to the community than the prince’s targeted executions. While it is better to be feared than loved, a prince must use cruelty in such a way that the people fear him without hating him. No prince can afford to incur the hatred of his subjects. He should take their lives only for manifest reasons; and even then he can avoid their hatred by refraining from interfering with their property or their women: “men forget more easily the death of their father than the loss of their patrimony.” For Machiavelli, then, cruelty is justified to the extent that it is necessary or useful to the interests of the state; while gratuitous cruelty tends to jeopardize those same interests and so is unjustified.

**Hobbes: Leviathan**

After Thucydides and Machiavelli, the writer most closely associated with the classical realist tradition is Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679). Students of the history of political thought have long recognized the importance of Hobbes’s theory of the social contract and the absolute authority of the government thus established; students of international political theory have more recently discovered the significance of his analogy of life in the pre-civic “state of nature” with relations among states in the international sphere. Boucher writes: “Hobbes has now become the rival of Machiavelli in lending his name to a distinct tradition of thought in international relations.”

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88 Boucher, *Political Theories*, 145.
The son of a vicar from Malmesbury in Wiltshire, Hobbes was educated at Magdalen Hall, Oxford, and became tutor to the son of the Earl of Devonshire. His first published work was an English translation of Thucydides, in 1628. During the 1620s, he became secretary to Francis Bacon; and a trip to the Continent in 1634-1637 brought him into contact with Galileo. Under these influences he resolved to develop a scientific account of politics. His first work, *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, was published in May of 1640; and while it had the style of a scientific treatise, it also supported King Charles I in his struggle with Parliament. With the growing strength and intransigence of the Parliamentary party, Hobbes feared for his safety and fled to Paris. Here he set to work on his most famous book, *Leviathan*, which he had published in London in 1651. He presented it to the young King-in-exile Charles II, whose mathematics tutor he had been for several years. The English Royalists in Paris were displeased with the book’s naturalistic account of the origins of governmental authority, and French Catholics were angered at its attacks on the papacy. Hobbes thus returned to England in 1651, made his peace with the Puritan Commonwealth, and settled in London to live as inconspicuously as he could. At the Restoration in 1660, Charles II was happy to welcome Hobbes to court as an amusing intellectual, and gave him an annual pension of £100. After the Great Fire of 1666, however, *Leviathan* came under attack by a Parliamentary Committee investigating books tending to “atheism, blasphemy, and profaneness.”

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came of the charges, Hobbes was encouraged not to publish anything further on politics. C.B. MacPherson comments that “*Leviathan* still stands as the crowning achievement of his political science. It was, as Hobbes puts it in the final pages of *Leviathan*, ‘occasioned by the disorders of the present time’.”

Haslam notes that early modern realist thinkers such as Machiavelli, Bodin, and Hobbes had often lived through breakdowns in the security of political life, whence they derived pessimistic views of human nature and an emphasis on the necessity for strong government.

From Galileo, Hobbes had learned a method of understanding complex phenomena – the trajectory of a cannonball, for example – by resolving them into their component parts, understanding the motions of each in terms of imagined or hypothetical simple forces, and then recombining them to arrive at a theoretical explanation of the phenomenon under consideration.

Similarly, to understand political society, Hobbes sought to resolve it into its component parts – individual human beings – whose “motions” could in turn be resolved into hypothetical simple forces which, when recombined, would give a scientific account of individual and collective human behavior. Hobbes hypothesized that the motions of a human being can be reduced to the effects of a mechanical apparatus – consisting of sense organs, nerves, muscles, imagination, memory, and reason – moving in response to the impact of external stimuli. The human

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92 This paragraph follows MacPherson, “Introduction,” 25-30.
mechanism also has its own inbuilt impulsion to motion, a basic desire to keep going, which expresses itself in the drive to avoid death. The whole activity of each individual consists of “endeavors” towards what will assist, and away from what will impede, its continued motion. These endeavors are “appetites” and “aversions.” Even the most complex voluntary human actions can be understood as the result of a process of calculation and deliberation calling into play memory, imagination, reason, and sense perception, and putting them to work in the service of appetite and aversion. MacPherson writes: “This was Hobbes’s striking scientific hypothesis. All human actions could be resolved into elementary motions of body and mind which the scientist could recombine in a way that would explain everything.”93 Two features to be noted are, first, that in place of earlier accounts of society as a corporate organism, Hobbes sees only an aggregate of individuals; second, that in his emphasis on appetite and aversion he lays a foundation for the later emphasis of utilitarian ethics on pain and pleasure. MacPherson notes that Jeremy Bentham’s “hedonistic calculus” has obvious Hobbesian roots.94

Hobbes proceeds in the opening chapters of Leviathan to offer a series of propositions about human nature. First, as already noted, human beings are moved by appetites and aversions. Second, a human being’s power is his present means to obtain some apparent future good. Third, every human being seeks power. Fourth, every human being’s power resists and hinders the effects of every other human being’s power, so that


an individual’s power consists of his abilities considered not in absolute terms, but in
terms of how far his abilities exceed those of other individuals. Fifth, all acquired power
consists in command over some of the powers of other human beings; that is, the only
way to acquire power is to master the powers opposed to one’s own. Sixth, some human
beings’ desires are without limit, from which it follows, seventh, that all humankind is
marked by “a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in
Death.”95 In summary, Hobbes’s most basic beliefs are that every human being naturally
shuns what is evil, especially death; and that all human beings are perpetually engaged in
a struggle for power over other human beings.96

Having laid these theoretical foundations, Hobbes sets forth his well-known
picture of a hypothetical “state of nature” preceding the institution of states and
governments. Human beings are equal in strength, intelligence, and other abilities to the
extent that no individual can ever be secure from the threats and attacks of other
individuals. “Three principall causes of quarrel” move human beings to fight one another:
“First, Competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, Glory”– that is, desire for economic
gain, fear for security; and ambition for reputation or prestige.97 In the absence of a
common power to keep them in awe, human beings live in a state of war: “and such a

97 Hobbes, Leviathan, 13, p. 185. This triad corresponds loosely to those of Thucydides (security, honor, self-interest) and Machiavelli (fear, ambition, envy).
Warre, as is of every man, against every man.\textsuperscript{98} War consists not only of actual fighting, but also in the “known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary.”\textsuperscript{99} In this war of all against all, there is no industry, agriculture, navigation, or building: “no Arts; no Letters; so Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”\textsuperscript{100} Moreover, nothing is unjust: “The notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice have no place. Where there is no common Power, there is no Law; where there is no Law, no Injustice.”\textsuperscript{101} In a state of war, force and fraud are the two cardinal virtues.

Still, even in the state of nature, human beings have natural rights and are subject to natural laws. By the “right of nature,” each individual is entitled to use his own power to do whatever he deems necessary to preserve his life – even to the extent of taking the lives of others. But since the unfettered exercise of this right multiplies insecurity for all, it is also a law of nature, discernible by reason, to seek peace with others. A second law of nature, then, is that one should be willing, when others are also willing, to lay down one’s right to all things necessary for self-preservation, “and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.”\textsuperscript{102} One way of

\textsuperscript{98} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, 13, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{100} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, 13, p. 186.
\textsuperscript{101} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, 13, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{102} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, 14, p. 190.
laying down this right is to transfer it to someone else who will exercise it on one’s behalf; and ultimately the only way to transcend the state of nature and achieve real security is for all individuals in a given area to transfer their rights to a common power: “as if every man should say to every man, I Authorise and give up my Right of Governing my selfe, to this Man, or to this Assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy Right to him, and Authorise all his actions in like manner.”103 This irrevocable covenant brings into being the commonwealth, governed by the sovereign power, whose twin purposes are to secure internal peace and to defend against external enemies.

The pure state of nature is a logical construct which Hobbes does not believe ever to have existed historically. Its purpose is to provide a theoretical justification for the state’s authority over individuals, even though in actual practice most states originated as small groups of people gradually extended their power over other groups by conquest and subjugation. Hobbes is saying, in effect, that the state’s moral authority is as if all individuals had transferred their rights of self-preservation to the sovereign in a mutual covenant; and, more importantly, that the civil strife and disorder resulting from challenges to the sovereign’s authority portend a return to deadly anarchy approximating the state of nature. Boucher shows, moreover, that Hobbes believed the actual pre-civil condition of humankind to have consisted not in a perpetual state of war of every individual against every individual, but rather in a constellation of small groups and communities – generally organized around families – whose relations took the form of

constantly shifting alliances and confederacies for mutual protection. Highly unstable, such alliances tended to hold together in the face of a common threat, but dissolved into mutual warfare when the threat receded.\textsuperscript{104} Between such groups and communities there was still no justice or injustice. It was considered just and honorable to raid and plunder as a way of life: “And in all places, where men have lived by small Families, to robbe and spoyle one another, has been a Trade, and so farre from being reputed against the Law of Nature, that the greater spoyles they gained, the greater was their honour.”\textsuperscript{105}

Hobbes repeatedly suggests that the relations among sovereign states are analogous to the pre-civil state of nature in this “modified” or historical form.\textsuperscript{106} Since no common sovereign exists to hold states in awe, there is neither justice nor injustice in the international sphere.\textsuperscript{107} The law of nations is the law of nature.\textsuperscript{108} Relations among states resemble the war of all against all: “Kings, and Persons of Soveraigne authority, because of their Independency, are in continuall jealousies, and in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another; that is, their Forts, Garrisons, and Guns upon the Frontiers of their Kingdomes; and continuall

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\item \textsuperscript{104} Boucher, \textit{Political Theories}, 148-155.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, 17, p. 224.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Boucher, \textit{Political Theories}, 157.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Boucher, \textit{Political Theories}, 145.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Hobbes, \textit{Leviathan}, 30, p. 394.
\end{itemize}
Spyes upon their neighbours; which is a posture of War.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the sovereign has the responsibility to do whatever he judges necessary for the defense of the commonwealth against external threats. One must be both forewarned and forearmed, raising money, maintaining an army and navy, building fortifications, and engaging in espionage, sabotage, and pre-emptive attack as necessary.¹¹⁰ “So in States, and in Common-wealths not dependent on one another, every Common-wealth (not every man) has an absolute Libertie, to doe what it shall judge (that is to say, what that Man or Assemblie that representeth it, shall judge) most conducing to their benefit. But withal, they live in the condition of a perpetuall war, and upon the confines of battel, with their frontiers armed, and cannons planted against their neighbours round about.”¹¹¹

Many commentators have wondered whether Hobbes’s logic points towards the creation of a world-state or international political authority. For his part, Hobbes thought the prospect unlikely. Even though international relations resemble the state of nature, states themselves establish contexts within which a good life is generally possible for their subjects. Once it reaches a certain size and power, a commonwealth is able to achieve its objectives of securing internal peace and external security reasonably well in a way that individuals and small groups in the state of nature cannot do for themselves. A world-state would lack the external threat against which states were instituted, and its


¹¹⁰ Boucher, *Political Theories*, 157-158.

internal relations would likely dissolve in rebellion and civil strife. The larger a state grows territorially, Hobbes believed, the more overextended and subject to disunity it is likely to become.\footnote{Boucher, Political Theories, 161-162.}

Hobbes’s comments on cruelty in war are somewhat surprising. While there was no justice or injustice in the “modified” state of nature which Hobbes believes to have obtained in the historical pre-civil condition of humanity, there was nonetheless a rough code of honor. To be a reliable confederate in a world of shifting alliances, one needs to be known to keep one’s word and honor one’s commitments. Moreover, the laws of nature forbid those engaged in warfare to be carried away by their passions and indulge in gratuitous cruelty with no prospect of future benefit. While there is no law to make it an injustice, cruelty in warfare is dishonorable, and most often an expression of cowardice. Courageous and magnanimous people do not perpetrate cruelty.\footnote{Boucher, Political Theories, 153-154.} When warlike groups made their living by robbing and plundering one another, “men observed no Lawes therein, but the Lawes of Honour; that is, to abstain from cruelty, leaving to men their lives, and instruments of husbandry.”\footnote{Hobbes, Leviathan, 17, p. 224.} Such restrictions on the conduct of small groups in the state of nature extend to the conduct of states in the international sphere. The sovereign should refrain from unnecessary wars; one who is too impetuous in starting wars will soon bring ruin to the commonwealth. To the extent possible, states
should seek to advance their prosperity by peaceful trade and commerce with other states, rather than by wars of conquest. ¹¹⁵ As Boucher sums up Hobbes’s position: “In the international sphere, in the absence of a sovereign, there is no justice or injustice, but there are principles relating to honorable and dishonorable acts which serve to restrain excessive acts of cruelty or recklessness.”¹¹⁶

**Military Realism: William Tecumseh Sherman**

In his deployment of the concepts of natural law and natural right, Hobbes fundamentally altered and transformed the natural law tradition in Western ethics. As described by a classical natural law theorist such as Thomas Aquinas, the first principle of natural law is that good is to be done and evil avoided,¹¹⁷ whereas for Hobbes the first principle is to avoid death and ensure one’s own survival. For Aquinas, natural law prescribes virtues oriented towards the common good,¹¹⁸ whereas for Hobbes natural law is the principle of completely self-interested behavior – and, in much subsequent Western ethics, natural law becomes the principle of “enlightened self-interest.” For Aquinas, natural law prescribes both individual virtues and the form of life in community within


¹¹⁶ Boucher, *Political Theories*, 163.


which human beings as social and political animals attain their ends; whereas for Hobbes natural law applies only in the state of nature. Thus, where Aquinas regards natural law as applying equally to the pre-civil and civil states of human life, Hobbes introduces a sharp disjunction between the “natural” and the “social.” Before the social contract human beings have a natural right to do anything necessary to ensure their own survival against their enemies, whereas afterwards they are governed by laws and institutions of human origin. For Hobbes the great nightmare to be avoided at all costs—which he saw portended in the English Civil War—is a return to the pre-civic state, in which the civilizing constraints of human institutions are discarded and the law of nature prevails. Some subsequent thinkers have theorized that while peacetime relations among states are marked by more sociability and are thus more subject to common moral standards than the realist tradition generally allows, war nonetheless represents a return to something like a Hobbesian state of nature in which the only operative laws become the imperatives of survival, defeating one’s enemies, and restoring peace on one’s own terms by any means necessary. A key representative of this strain of thinking, sometimes known as “partial realism,” or “military realism,” is the United States Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman (1820 – 1891).


120 On the varieties of realism, including “strong,” “moderate,” and “weak” realism, see Jeff McMahan, “Realism, Morality, and War,” in Nardin, Ethics of War and Peace, 78-91; on “partial” realism, see David Fisher, Morality and War: Can War be Just in the Twenty-First Century? (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24-27.
On September 1, 1864, Sherman captured Atlanta, Georgia, an important base for the Confederate army, a junction of four railways, and “a fortified town, with magazines, arsenals, foundries, and public stores.”121 On September 4, he notified Washington that he intended to evacuate the town’s civilian inhabitants, who consisted mainly of women and children. He believed that the requirements of occupying and garrisoning captured enemy towns took too many soldiers away from active fighting, and he later wrote in his memoirs that he had resolved “to make Atlanta a pure military garrison or depot, with no civilian population to influence military measures.”122 Subsequently, after the evacuation, he ordered on November 15 the burning of the government, industrial, and military buildings of Atlanta so that it could not again be used as a base for Confederate forces. His army then set out across Georgia to Savannah, and thence north into the Carolinas, cut off from its supply lines, foraging off the land and wreaking a sixty-mile-wide swathe of destruction of civilian property designed to degrade the Confederate war economy and break civilian morale.

In letters written at the time of the evacuation of Atlanta, Sherman committed to paper the key ideas associated with military realism. In his initial letter to Washington on September 4, he concluded: “If the people raise a howl against my barbarity and cruelty, I will answer that war is war, and not popularity-seeking. If they want peace, they and their


relatives must stop the war.”\footnote{Sherman, \textit{Memoirs}, Vol. 2, 111.} He then wrote to the Confederate General John Hood proposing a two-day truce to transfer Atlanta’s civilian population to locations behind Confederate lines. Hood replied that he had no choice but to accept the proposal, and added: “the unprecedented measure you propose transcends, in studied and ingenious cruelty, all acts ever brought to my attention in the dark history of war. In the name of God and humanity, I protest.”\footnote{Sherman, \textit{Memoirs}, Vol. 2, 119.} In their ensuing correspondence Sherman and Hood traded charges and counter-charges as to which of them had violated which laws of war in their recent battles. Sherman argued that it was more humane to get the women and children of Atlanta out of harm’s way than to leave them vulnerable to further fighting there. He also charged that Hood had no business invoking God and humanity when his side had started the war: “In the name of common-sense, I ask you not to appeal to a just God in such a sacrilegious manner. You who, in the midst of peace and prosperity, have plunged a nation into war – dark and cruel war.”\footnote{Sherman, \textit{Memoirs}, Vol. 2, 120.}

Meanwhile, the mayor and two councilmen of Atlanta wrote to Sherman pleading with him to rescind the order for the evacuation, pointing out the suffering, loss, and hardship that the evacuees would face: “And how can they live through the winter in the woods – no shelter or subsistence, in the midst of strangers who know them not, and

\footnote{Sherman, \textit{Memoirs}, Vol. 2, 111.}
\footnote{Sherman, \textit{Memoirs}, Vol. 2, 119.}
\footnote{Sherman, \textit{Memoirs}, Vol. 2, 120.}
without the power to assist them much, if they were willing to do so?“126 In response, Sherman wrote that while he sympathized with the distress that his order would cause, the overriding interest of everyone involved was peace, which could only be achieved by the defeat of the Confederate armies. The evacuation of Atlanta was a necessary means to that end. He then wrote his most famous lines:

You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it; and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out. I know I had no hand in making this war, and I know I will make more sacrifices today than any of you to secure peace. But you cannot have peace and a division of our country. …

You might as well appeal against the thunder-storm as against these terrible hardships of war. They are inevitable, and the only way the people of Atlanta can hope once more to live in peace and quiet at home, is to stop the war, which can only be done by admitting that it began in error and is perpetuated in pride. …

I want peace and believe that it can only be reached through union and war, and I will ever conduct war with a view to perfect and early success.

But, my dear sirs, when peace does come, you may call on me for anything. Then will I share with you the last cracker, and watch with you to shield your homes and families against danger from every quarter.

Now you must go, and take with you the old and feeble, feed and nurse them, and build for them, until the mad passions of men cool down, and allow the Union and peace to settle over your old homes at Atlanta.127

Sherman stands outside the classical realist tradition insofar as he believes that his own side has the just cause, and that the moral blame for the sufferings he is inflicting falls


127 Sherman, *Memoirs*, Vol. 2, 126-127. Sherman never committed to writing the slogan most often associated with his name, “War is hell,” but is believed to have used the expression informally.
squarely upon the Confederates’ shoulders. But his military realism comes to the fore in the claim that where considerations of morality and justice obtain during peacetime, war once unleashed has a logic and momentum of its own.¹²⁸ Sherman did not believe that morality is irrelevant to the conduct of war; even in the burning of Atlanta and the marches through Georgia and the Carolinas he was careful to avoid direct violence against civilians. But he did believe that once war has begun, the imperative of winning as quickly as possible may justify extreme measures that override such considerations of morality and justice as prevail in peacetime. War itself is immoral; the best way to end the immorality of war is to do whatever is necessary to win. Apologists for the British area bombing of German cities make similar arguments to this day.

**Realism and Utilitarianism**

Martin Wight writes that for realists war is an instrument that rulers will use without scruple or moral repugnance. Realists advocate the use of superior force with no consideration except military effectiveness. The argument that the massive deployment of strength will shorten the war and save lives in the long run, Wight remarks, “is a proposition in utilitarian ethics.”¹²⁹ Wight’s introduction of this term into a discussion of realist attitudes towards the conduct of warfare raises the question of the relationship


between utilitarianism and realism. Examining this relationship yields some valuable insights into the moral logic of the realist position.

In an essay on “Utilitarianism and International Ethics,” Anthony Ellis directly addresses the British area bombing of German cities.\textsuperscript{130} He begins by explaining that utilitarianism in its modern form is the detailed articulation of two basic premises: first, that the only thing that is intrinsically good, or good-in-itself, is well-being or happiness; and second, that an action or practice is to be judged morally right or wrong solely on the basis of its consequences. These two thoughts combine to yield the idea that all duties can be reduced to the one duty of trying to maximize well-being or utility. In the late eighteenth century, Jeremy Bentham defined happiness in individualistic terms as the minimization of pain and the maximization of pleasure – an idea with clear Hobbesian roots. Utilitarianism thus laid down the criterion that government policies should aim to maximize the “general happiness” – sometimes described as “the greatest good of the greatest number.” After discussing the various refinements to the utilitarian tradition made by Bentham’s successors, from J.S. Mill to R.M. Hare, Ellis turns to the implications of utilitarian ethics for world affairs in general and the morality of war in particular. He writes that utilitarianism diverges from the Just War tradition specifically with regard to the \textit{jus in bello} norms which, he remarks, contain “an irreducibly

Utilitarianism denies the validity of the distinction between intended deaths and foreseen-but-unintended deaths of enemy combatants on which the Just War tradition’s doctrine of double-effect hinges. The question for utilitarianism is never the nature of the act itself, but the outcome. Whereas the Just War tradition must condemn the British area bombing of German cities since the clear intention was at least partly to kill civilians, from the utilitarian perspective the only question is whether such action promoted the general welfare: for example, did it hasten the end of the war, make a postwar settlement easier, set a harmful precedent, and so forth? “On such counts,” Ellis concludes without explaining why, “the net effect of the strategy was bad.” Nonetheless, Ellis has made the point that for utilitarianism the moral evaluation of the area bombing depends on the consequences rather than any inherent quality of the action itself.

An essay by David R. Mapel, “Realism and the Ethics of War and Peace,” illuminates the similarly consequentialist logic of the realist tradition. Realism, he writes, rejects the view that there are any inherent limits on the means that states may threaten or use to protect themselves; it particularly opposes the jus in bello norm that forbids attacking noncombatants. The Just War tradition presupposes a natural law ethic in which what is evil about certain actions cannot be explained purely in terms of their consequences, but must be found in the intentions that give those actions their inherent character. One may not intend to do evil that good may come of it. The doctrine of


132 Mapel, “Realism and the Ethics of War and Peace,” 54-77.
double-effect specifically forbids actions informed by evil intentions while permitting actions informed by licit intentions that have foreseeably evil effects. But realism rejects the doctrine of double-effect, and effectively substitutes motive for intention as the criterion of an action’s morality in warfare. Where intention focuses on the inherent end or nature of an action, motive focuses on the agent’s overall purpose defined in terms of the action’s consequences. So, Mapel argues, contrary to the doctrine of double-effect, those who drop bombs with the intention of destroying factories must also take responsibility for the intention to inflict collateral harm on the innocent civilians who will foreseeably be killed as a result. In warfare, however, actions are justified or condemned not by the intentions of those who commit them but by their motives.\(^{133}\)

Mapel also shows that the realist tradition shares the utilitarian tradition’s consequentialism, but with one key difference. Where utilitarianism takes into account the overall or general consequences of an action, practice, or policy – indeed, what might be called its “global” consequences – realism narrows the criterion down to consequences defined in terms of state interests. That is, while a utilitarian will ask whether area bombing has beneficial consequences for the whole world, a strict realist will ask only whether it is in the interests of the state inflicting the bombing. It is a utilitarian argument to suggest that the area bombing was justified in that it shortened a war that would otherwise have claimed many more lives on all sides. But it is a realist argument to suggest that the bombing was justified solely in terms of, say, the numbers of lives of

\(^{133}\) Mapel, “Realism and the Ethics of War and Peace,” 64-67.
British soldiers it helped save following the D-Day landings. In practice, apologists for the area bombing tend to slide back and forth between the utilitarian and realist versions of the consequentialist moral argument.

**Concluding Reflections**

The realist tradition can be read in three ways: first, as denying the applicability of moral categories to foreign policy and military decision-making; second, as describing the actual behavior of states in the real world as necessarily and inevitably motivated solely by self-interest to the exclusion of moral concerns; and third, as prescribing how states ought to behave in such a world even if they do not always do so. With respect to the first reading, Michael Walzer points out that it is not accurate to say that even in wartime the conventional language of morality and immorality has no meaning. When the Melians in Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War* accuse the Athenians of an unjust act of aggression, both sides understand exactly what is being said, even if the Athenians proceed to argue that they are only doing what everyone else has always done in similar circumstances. When the Athenians repent of the decision to massacre and enslave the Mytilenens, and call a second assembly to reconsider the question, it is clear that they are prompted by concerns about the morality of the contemplated action, even if ultimately Diodotus justifies the more merciful policy on grounds of self-interest alone. When

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134 Mapel, “Realism and the Ethics of War and Peace,” 68.

General Sherman affirms that “war is cruelty,” he is admitting the applicability of moral categories to his actions, even as he attempts to shift the blame away from himself to those whom he considers to have started the war. In claiming that states often act in ways that seem immoral, and that in many cases they indeed ought to do so, the realist tradition implicitly admits the applicability of moral categories to all decisions and actions in the spheres of foreign and military policy, as indeed to all other aspects of human behavior.

At the descriptive level, the realist tradition paints a portrait of state behavior in an anarchic world with no overarching international authority to mediate and resolve conflicts according to principles of justice. Left to their own devices, states have no other criteria for action than their interests as variously described in terms of power, prosperity, and prestige. But the claim that such interests *always* override moral considerations in the actual behavior of states is simply not accurate. Political and military leaders often do act in accordance with moral principles – making decisions and formulating policies that are difficult to justify in terms of state interests alone, and which are sometimes clearly harmful to those interests. To cite the obvious example from Thucydides, the Melians resist Athenian aggression on principle. They could spare themselves death and enslavement by accommodating the Athenian demands at the outset. Despite their stated reliance on divine intervention and Spartan assistance, the Melians appear to understand the risks they are taking; yet their commitment to maintaining their independence takes precedence over considerations of their very survival. The realist tradition thus fails to account for the powerful influence that moral principles often do exert on policy.
There remains, then, realism as a policy prescription. At this level, the tradition claims that when states insist on acting according to moral principles they are apt to imperil their interests to a dangerous degree, and cause much unnecessary suffering into the bargain. Here the realist argument is really pointing out a tradeoff between interests narrowly conceived in terms of power, prosperity, and prestige, and a wider conception of interests that includes considerations of moral principle as well. If, as the realist tradition urges, states sometimes sacrifice moral principles for the sake of narrowly-defined interests, the opposite is also true: they sometimes sacrifice their material interests for the sake of moral principles. A valuable contribution of the realist tradition is to lay bare the full extent of this tradeoff. Realism insists on counting the projected cost of acting on moral principle, and rightly points out that often this cost may be very high.

The shortcoming of the realist tradition is its apparent unwillingness to admit that sometimes moral principles are so compelling that they demand the sacrifice of other interests. Realism thus defines human interests too narrowly. In addition to power, prosperity, and prestige, states also have a legitimate interest in expressing in policy their deeply held convictions and values.

With respect to the conduct of war, the realist tradition repudiates the *jus in bello* norms and asserts instead that sometimes overwhelming state interests will require intentional attacks on an enemy’s noncombatant population. In Chapter Nine, I will examine the influence of the realist tradition upon the policy recommendations of the military historian and strategist Basil Liddell Hart, who during the 1920s advocated air
attacks on enemy population centers as a means of quickly winning future wars, but during World War II opposed the area bombing and urged a negotiated settlement with Nazi Germany as the policy most in Britain’s national interests. In both cases, realism trumped moral principle in the form of, first, the norm of noncombatant immunity and, second, the overwhelming imperative to defeat the Nazi regime completely.
CHAPTER FOUR

CHRISTIAN REALISM:
AUGUSTINE, LUTHER, AND NIEBUHR

The conversion of Constantine, with the subsequent establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the early fourth century CE, is rightly regarded as a watershed moment in the history of Christian ethics. While the suddenness of the changes can be exaggerated, they were nonetheless momentous. Within a generation, the Church was confronted with a host of new questions and problems that had scarcely been conceived while Christianity remained an illegal and periodically persecuted religion. Now that the Emperor and a growing number of high administrative and military officials were Christians, with the Church occupying a privileged position as the institutional vehicle of the Empire’s new official religion, urgent questions arose that would continue to be debated for centuries. To what extent may bishops and other church leaders intervene in the political life of the state and on what grounds? Conversely, to what extent may emperors, kings, and secular rulers intervene in the life and governance of the Church, to settle theological controversies and reform ecclesiastical abuses?

For many conscientious Church members, the question that presented itself with overwhelming urgency was whether Christians could aspire to, accept, and exercise public office without compromising the basic moral and spiritual requirements of Christian discipleship. The pre-Constantinian Church had been largely pacifist in its convictions. Could Christians now serve as soldiers and officers in the imperial armies?
Jesus in the Gospels had taught his followers an ethic of love, nonresistance, and judging not lest one be judged. Could Christians now serve as magistrates whose duties would include periodically condemning wrongdoers to punishment and death?

Broadly speaking, the answers that these questions received fall into three main categories. First, one could argue that the triumph of Christianity had so sanctified the state that all of its actions, including its wars, were made righteous and holy. This position is more or less that taken by Eusebius of Caesarea in his extravagant paeans of praise of Constantine.¹ (To some extent it remains alive today among those who confuse loyalty to country with loyalty to God and vice versa.) Second, one could take the attitude that the Church had become so corrupted by its identification with the world that those who aspired to be true Christians had no option but to withdraw from society and pursue their own salvation individually or in small, set-apart communities. This was effectively the option taken by many of the first monastics who fled to the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria from the third and fourth centuries on. And third, one could attempt to work out some sort of compromise that upheld not only the most strict moral and spiritual demands of the Gospel but also the perceived need to relax those demands for Christians who believed themselves called to exercise the responsibilities of office in the

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service of the state. The ethical tradition known as Christian Realism emerges from the attempt to put this third option into practice.²

In this chapter, I explore this tradition and its implications for the norm of noncombatant immunity through an in-depth examination of three of its key representatives: the North African bishop Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430);³ the German Protestant Reformer Martin Luther (1483 – 1546); and the twentieth-century American theological ethicist Reinhold Niebuhr (1892 –1971). In Chapter Ten, I will continue with the twentieth-century Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple (1881 – 1944), who was influenced by Niebuhr and during World War II represented the Christian Realist tradition in the British debate over the area bombing of Germany.

**Saint Augustine of Hippo**

Augustine was born forty-one years after the Edict of Milan, which effectively legalized Christianity and began the process by which the Roman Empire officially became Christian. Augustine’s lifetime coincided with a period of crisis and decline in the western part of the Roman Empire: the Visigoths led by Alaric sacked Rome in 410; and as Augustine lay dying the Vandals were besieging his see city of Hippo in North

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² The term “Christian Realism” was first used by theological ethicists in the 1930s and 1940s, including Reinhold Niebuhr, John C. Bennett, D.C. Macintosh, and Walter Marshall Horton. See Robin Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-2.

³ The reader may well question my decision to include Augustine as a representative of this tradition since he is often identified as a key founder of the Christian Just War tradition considered in the next chapter. To some extent, he straddles both traditions. However, his formative influence on Christian realism as a general approach is so great even compared with his legacy to Just War thinking that it seems more appropriate and illuminating to treat him here.
Africa. Attempting to respond constructively to the disillusionment of the times, his writings generally combined a pessimistic outlook regarding the life of the present world with a hopeful outlook regarding the life of the world to come.

Augustine’s political theory cannot be understood apart from his interpretation of the human condition as rooted in the Fall and Original Sin. Created with the freedom to obey or disobey God, Adam and Eve rebelled, and in them the whole human race was condemned. Humans lost their freedom, and are now in bondage to sin. From all eternity, however, God determined to save a fixed number of fallen human beings, a small minority chosen to receive the gift of salvation, without any regard for merits or good works. By his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christ redeems those human beings whom God has predestined to salvation. God’s grace thus liberates some people from bondage to sin and enables them to take pleasure in doing willingly what is good and commanded by God. This freedom remains partial in this life, however, and will be possessed in its fullness only in the next.

The human race is divided into two great camps or cities: those who love God in preference to self; and those who love self in preference to God: “We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of contempt for God, the Heavenly by the love of God carried as far as

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contempt of self. In fact, the earthly city glories in itself, the Heavenly City glories in the Lord. The former looks for glory from men, the latter finds its highest glory in God, the witness of a good conscience.\(^6\) Human history is the story of the dialectic between these two cities.\(^7\) Those predestined to salvation, together with the unfallen angels, constitute the heavenly city. The rest of humankind, together with the devil and his angels, constitute the earthly city, doomed to eternal punishment. Both cities extend over the whole earth and continue from its beginning to its end. In this world, however, the two cities are intermingled and cannot be separated. Citizens of the City of God pass through this world as wayfarers and pilgrims whose true home is in heaven.\(^8\) In this life they cannot easily be distinguished from the sinners among whom they live and work. So, to understand social, economic, and political life, the starting assumption must be that one is dealing for the most part with fallen and sinful people.\(^9\)

If love (\textit{caritas}) is the fundamental quality of the redeemed, lust (\textit{libido}) is the fundamental quality of the unregenerate. Lust takes three primary forms: lust for possessions; lust for power and domination; and sexual lust. All three lusts have filled the world with innumerable troubles. The social world of human beings is evil, miserable,


and wretched. This life is a time of sorrow and suffering even for those who are being saved. Their only consolation is a hope that the damned lack.\textsuperscript{10}

Augustine holds that human beings are naturally social animals. Society and social life – but not the state or political life – are natural to humankind.\textsuperscript{11} Humanity’s social nature requires certain norms to govern people’s relations with one another. Augustine recognizes a natural moral law, written in human hearts, distinct from both human law and divinely revealed law. Implanted in the conscience of every human being, this natural moral law is in principle discoverable through the use of reason, even apart from divine revelation. The Mosaic Law and the Law of Christ do not contradict this natural moral law, and the Ten Commandments largely summarize its contents. Even though human customs and laws vary widely from time to time and place to place according to differing needs and circumstances, underneath them the natural moral law remains the same in all times and places. But fallen human beings are unable to fulfill the requirements of this natural moral law. Sin has obscured their awareness of it; and people have an extraordinary ability to ignore the voice of conscience. Even among those being saved, the ability to fulfill the moral law remains imperfect and incomplete in this life.\textsuperscript{12}

Then how is society to be maintained? God’s grace cannot be the basis for social organization, since most people do not receive it. So, God has instituted the remedial

\textsuperscript{10} Deane, *Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, 44-60.

\textsuperscript{11} Deane, *Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, 78-79.

\textsuperscript{12} Deane, *Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine*, 85-95.
institutions of private property, the state, and the whole legal and political order to bring a measure of stability and peace into the strife and chaos of earthly life. Not natural to creation, these institutions are both punishments and remedies for humanity’s sinful condition. They bring an imperfect image or reflection of the true peace, order, and justice that will prevail in the kingdom of heaven. So, while true and full peace is unattainable in this world, there is still a peace of sorts. This temporal peace differs from the heavenly peace of which it is the distorted image; it is rarely just, often broken, and maintained only by coercion and the threat of punishment. Yet it is a real blessing to good and wicked alike, for its only alternative is anarchy.  

The origins of the state lie in human greed. Fallen human beings are driven by an insatiable lust for possessions, and this greed inevitably leads to competition and conflict. Without some external restraint, people would soon exterminate themselves in the struggle over the goods all desire. But God allows them the insight that by forming political associations, they can enjoy the goods they like best without destroying one another. The formation of the state thus guarantees some measure of peace so that people may satisfy some measure of their greed. The state is a coercive order, maintained by force and relying on fear as its main sanction. It does not seek to make people good but

13 Deane, Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine, 95-103.

merely to restrain certain outward forms of destructive behavior.\textsuperscript{15} Human beings need the state because they need coercion, in two ways: first, to maintain order and punish crime within the state; and, second, to prevent other states, or bands of armed raiders, from invading their territory and taking their goods.\textsuperscript{16}

Augustine quotes with approval Cicero’s story of a captured pirate’s response to Alexander the Great: “The king asked the fellow, ‘What is your idea, in infesting the sea? And the pirate answered, with uninhibited insolence, ‘The same as yours, in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a tiny craft, I’m called a pirate: because you have a mighty navy, you’re called an emperor.’”\textsuperscript{17} No state has ever been fully just. But without justice, kingdoms are robber bands writ large; and robber bands are little kingdoms. The only essential differences between the state and a robber band are size and a settled territory.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite its corrupt origins, the state is a divine blessing that brings some measure of peace, order, and justice to a fallen world. No matter how wicked or unjust a ruler may be, his authority comes from God; and Augustine allows no scope for disobedience or resistance.\textsuperscript{19} All laws promulgated by the ruler must be obeyed, with the sole exception of laws that violate God’s commandments. But Christians have no right to escape

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  \item \textsuperscript{15} Deane, \textit{Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine}, 117.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Bigongiari, “The Political Ideas of St. Augustine,” 350.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Augustine, \textit{City of God}, 4.4, p. 139.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Deane, \textit{Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine}, 128.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Deane, \textit{Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine}, 143.
\end{itemize}
punishment when they refuse to obey. Their only recourse is to accept their punishment quietly, even joyously.  

Augustine sees the Catholic Church as the visible representation in this world of the heavenly city, and the state as the visible representation of the earthly city. But it is a mistake to identify the heavenly city with the visible Church, and the earthly city with the visible state. The heavenly and earthly cities are moral and spiritual realities, not coterminous with any earthly institution. So, a bishop of the Church may belong to the earthly city, while an official of the state may belong to the heavenly city. Otherwise, Christians could not hold office in the state. Augustine encourages Christians to participate in the legal and political order, and he even offers advice to Christian rulers on how to rule justly and well.  

Active participation of Christians in the political order can only benefit society. Yet even if the ruler is good and wise, the state can never become truly and completely just, because rulers must deal with wicked subjects at home and treacherous enemies abroad. The rough justice that emerges from a well-ordered state is always an imperfect replica of true justice. Even if both the ruler and all the subjects were true Christians, a truly just state would not come into existence. Rather, the state itself would become unnecessary and wither away. The resulting society would be the heavenly city brought 


21 Copleston, *Augustine to Scotus*, 87-88.

down to earth: for Augustine a complete impossibility. The best that a Christian state can do is to restrain anarchy and disorder in this world, giving the Church time and space to fulfill its mission of gathering the elect into a Kingdom that is not of this world.

Dilemmas Facing Christians in Power

Once the Roman Empire had made Christianity its official religion, pagan critics charged that the Gospel ethic contradicted the virtues of good citizenship and effective statecraft. In a letter written to Augustine in about 411, the Christian tribune Marcellinus relays objections to the Christian faith raised by Volusianus, proconsul of Africa:

Furthermore – and this is a common allegation – Christ’s teaching and preaching must be incompatible with the ethics of citizenship. For he told us – it is agreed – to *return to no one evil for evil* (Rom 12:17; I Thess 5:15), to offer the other cheek to an assailant, to give our cloak to someone demanding a tunic, and to go twice the required distance with someone who wants to requisition us (Mt 5:39-41). He alleges that all these commands are contrary to the ethics of citizenship. Who would allow an enemy to steal something from him? Who would be unwilling to inflict evil, in the form of a just war, as recompense for the ravaging of a Roman province?

Volusianus also thinks that “it is obvious that under the Christian emperors the empire is in a very bad way, even though they have on the whole observed the Christian religion.” The criticism echoes the allegations that prompted Augustine to begin writing

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The City of God – that Alaric’s sack of Rome in 410 was the consequence of the Empire’s abandonment of its old gods. The criticism really questions the compatibility of the Gospel ethic with the effective exercise of power in the political realm. Not only pagan critics, but also conscientious Christians – including the multitudes flocking to the monastic life – wondered whether public office and military service were best avoided by those desiring to pursue the way of Christian discipleship.

Much as he admires monasticism, Augustine does not countenance Christian withdrawal from the public sphere. He writes not only that it is possible for kings and rulers to be good and pious, but also that Christians who have a talent for ruling have an obligation to assume its burdens. Discussing the extreme difficulties of rendering just judgment, Augustine rhetorically asks whether a wise person will assume the responsibility of being a judge: “In view of this darkness that attends the life of human society, will our wise man take his seat on the judge’s bench, or will he not have the heart to do so? Obviously, he will sit; for the claims of human society constrain him and draw him to this duty; and it is unthinkable to him that he should shirk it.” Christians may legitimately exercise positions of power and authority, so long as it is for the sake of the benefits one can confer on society, rather than “for the empty gratification of pride and arrogance, and for a superfluous and pernicious triumph of vanity.”

26 Deane, Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine, 130.

27 Augustine, City of God, 19.6, p. 860.

28 Augustine, Letter 130, quoted in Deane, Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine, 150.
Similarly, Augustine affirms that military service can be acceptable to God. In a letter to the military tribune Boniface, he writes that God has approved many soldiers, including King David, the centurion whose servant Jesus healed (Matt. 8:8-10; Luke 7:6-9), and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-33). He mentions the soldiers who came to John the Baptist, asking what they should do; and he quotes John’s reply that they should be content with their wages and refrain from intimidation and false accusations: “If Christian teaching condemned all warfare, then the soldiers in the gospel who were seeking guidance about their security would have been told to throw away their weapons and withdraw entirely from the army. … He instructed them to be satisfied with their due wages, but he didn’t prohibit military service in general.”

It is true, Augustine admits, that those who abandon all worldly activities for a life of celibacy hold a higher place with God. But the monastic and military vocations are mutually complementary and interdependent: “So others are fighting invisible enemies on your behalf by praying, while you struggle against visible barbarians on their behalf by fighting.”

Even good and wise Christians who respond to the call to serve in political or military office will find that they cannot fulfill their duties with true justice and complete righteousness. Since rulers have to deal with populations comprising many sinful and wicked subjects, a large part of their duty involves punishing crime. In the role of judge,

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the ruler can never be totally sure whether the punishments are too light or too harsh, or indeed whether those condemned are innocent. 32 The use of torture multiplies the uncertainties: when innocent accused persons or innocent witnesses are tortured, they suffer unjustly. Worse still, even though the purpose of the torture is to find the truth and prevent wrongful convictions, an innocent person may confess to a crime he has not committed to escape further torture. Thus, “the ignorance of the judge is often a calamity for the innocent.”33 Yet, the wise person will still accept the duty of administering justice, which, however imperfect, is necessary for the maintenance of any social order at all.

Similar considerations apply to the military profession. Herbert A. Deane observes that in none of Augustine’s writings is there any hint of militarism or the glorification of war. All of Augustine’s references to war are bitterly sorrowful; and he pours scorn on those who laud military conquests or victories as noble or glorious achievements. 34 Yet wars are inevitable as long as human beings are moved by avarice, greed, and lust for power. Wars can be just when undertaken in self-defense or to punish egregious wrongdoing, but then the innocent suffer along with the guilty. The justice of just wars is thus always a rough justice. All wars are horrible evils, even if on some occasions they are necessary to prevent worse evils:

32 Deane, Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine, 134-135.

33 Augustine, City of God, 19.6, p. 859.

34 Deane, Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine, 154.
But the wise man, they say, will wage just wars. Surely, if he remembers that he is a human being, he will rather lament the fact that he is faced with the necessity of waging just wars. … And so everyone who reflects with sorrow on such grievous evils, in all their horror and cruelty, must acknowledge the misery of them. And yet a man who experiences such evils, or even thinks about them, without heartfelt grief, is assuredly in a far more pitiable condition, if he thinks himself happy because he has lost all human feeling.\(^35\)

So, in the spheres of both internal justice and external defense, Augustine has set up what seems a contradiction. Some Christians should indeed occupy positions of public office and military service. However, in fulfilling their duties, they will find it impossible to avoid evil actions.

Augustine’s resolution of this contradiction can be broken down analytically into three steps. First, he makes a distinction between what is permissible to Christians when acting on their own behalf in a private capacity, and when acting on behalf of the state in a public capacity. With respect to the former, he takes the view that even though killing in self-defense is permitted by the law of the state, Christians acting as individuals are bound by the law of love literally to turn the other cheek and suffer death themselves rather than take the lives of others.\(^36\) But Christians serving in public office or in the military have the duty of doing in a public capacity what they should never do in a private capacity.


Second, Augustine argues that punishing evildoers at home and waging just wars abroad do not violate the Gospel precepts to “turn the other cheek” and “resist not evil” because these activities aim at protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty. The administration of justice and the waging of just wars are acts of benevolence, correcting offenders for their own good and preventing them from adding to the guilt of their previous offenses.  

In his letter to Marcellinus, Augustine points out that when struck in the face during his trial, Christ challenged his assailant: “If I have said something wrong, then reproach me for the wrong. If I have spoken well, why do you strike me?” (John 18:23). In this instance, Christ did not fulfill his own instruction to turn the other cheek: “Rather, he prevented the person who had injured him from increasing the injury.”  

Similarly, with respect to just wars: “if defeat deprives the beaten side of the freedom of acting wickedly, it benefits them.”  

It follows, third, that the interior dispositions and motives of those acting in a public capacity are absolutely crucial in determining the morality of their actions. Augustine states this position with clarity in his treatise *Against Faustus*:  

What is the moral evil in war? Is it the death of someone who will soon die in any case, that others may be subdued to a peaceful state in which life may flourish? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild

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resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to impose just punishment on them that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars against violent resistance, when they find themselves set in positions of responsibility which require them to command or execute actions of this kind.  

So long as coercive actions such as executing criminals and waging just wars are taken without lust for revenge or pleasure in inflicting pain, they are acts of benevolence which do not violate but rather fulfill God’s commandments. Christ’s teachings require public officials and soldiers to maintain patience and good will in their hearts even as they correct wrongdoers and punish their misdeeds. The precepts in the Sermon on the Mount “are more relevant to the training of the heart within than to our external activity. Consequently forbearance and benevolence should be kept secretly in one’s mind, while publicly we should do whatever seems likely to benefit those we should wish well.”

**Augustine and Jus in Bello**

Augustine is well known for having laid the foundations of the Christian Just War tradition by specifying the three *jus ad bellum* criteria of just cause, lawful authority, and right intention. Later Christian writers would expand the list. Augustine’s views on the lawful conduct of warfare are harder to pin down. In his study of Augustine’s Just War

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theory, John Mark Mattox observes that “Augustine’s *jus in bello* doctrine does not provide anything approaching a list of rules either for identifying or, once identified, for safeguarding noncombatants.”

Yet Mattox discerns several features of Augustine’s thought that bear directly on the conduct of warfare. By emphasizing the horror of war, Augustine implies that soldiers should avoid inflicting gratuitous suffering. Since just wars are always fought for the sake of restoring peace, the soldier should strive to be a peacemaker even in war, so that by conquering one’s enemies one brings the benefits of peace even to those who are defeated. In the same passage, Augustine writes: “Therefore it ought to be necessity, and not your will, that destroys an enemy who is fighting you.” On this use of the term “necessity,” Mattox comments:

Augustine may well be the first figure in the just-war tradition to offer a version of what is now known as ‘the doctrine of military necessity’: that armies can justly take such violent actions as may be necessary to accomplish their assigned task, consistent with the aim of restoring peace and order. … His point is that the doctrine of military necessity specifies the upper bounds of permissible violence – not the lower bounds. As a consequence, he urges that the taking of lives in war ought to be minimized to the greatest extent possible.

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44 Helpful background on Augustine’s views on the conduct of war is also provided by Gustav Combès, *La Doctrine Politique de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Plon, 1927), 293-295. Unfortunately, Combès’s source citations are sometimes inaccurate and, even when accurate, do not always support his assertions.


Rulers, judges, executioners, and soldiers are subject to the default moral prohibition on killing, from which they are exempted only when their public duties require them to take human life. Thus, soldiers are justified only in killing that advances the purpose for which a just war has been undertaken: “taking those lives whose loss will facilitate the restoration of peace and order.”

Augustine urges mercy to those who have been defeated or taken prisoner: “And just as you use force toward the rebel or opponent, so you ought now to use mercy towards the defeated or the captive, and particularly so when there is no fear that peace will be disturbed.” Mattox points out that in Book I of *The City of God*, Augustine praises the mercy extended by Alaric and the Visigoths to those inhabitants of Rome who took refuge in the city’s Christian basilicas. Here, Mattox suggests, Augustine implies that churches are not legitimate targets for military destruction, and that those who take refuge in them have effectively taken themselves out of combat and are claiming the status of noncombatants: “Augustine’s clear implication is that a special status should be accorded to those so classified.”

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49 Mattox, *Theory of Just War*, 154. In this part of *The City of God*, Augustine’s primary focus is on contrasting the respect shown by Alaric for those taking refuge in churches with the massacres perpetrated by previous generations of Greeks and Romans against defeated populations who took refuge in the temples of their gods – and Augustine regards such massacres as the universal practice of the nations before the coming of Christ. This emphasis is not inconsistent with Mattox’s interpretation, even though Augustine is not directly addressing the moral question of how defeated populations should be treated. See Augustine, *City of God*, 1.1-7, pp. 6-12. Combès also points to Augustine’s approval of the Emperor Theodosius in *The City of God*, 5.26: “Fidèle à la loi chrétienne, il a su corriger sa brutalité native et se montrer pitoyable aux vaincus” (*La Doctrine Politique*, 293).
Finally, Mattox adduces Augustine’s commentary on Pilate’s condemnation of Jesus in John’s Gospel as expressing his view of the sin of unjustly killing the innocent. Pilate, Augustine notes, acted out of fear of Caesar, yet “not even through the impulse of fear ought one man to slay another, especially the innocent; nevertheless to do so by an officious zeal is a much greater evil than the constraint of fear.” It is reasonable to infer that Augustine would regard the killing of the innocent in war as equally sinful.

A different view of the implications of Augustine’s thought for the conduct of war is taken by Richard Shelley Hartigan, followed by Colm McKeogh. By emphasizing the wickedness of the enemy who must be punished in a just war, Hartigan writes, Augustine’s position “ascribes a condition of communal guilt and universal evil to the enemy, which, when carried to its logical conclusion, precludes any necessity to act mercifully toward the enemy population.” Hartigan points out that while Augustine follows certain classical writers in urging mercy to enemies after they have been defeated, he fails to address the question of noncombatant immunity while warfare is still underway and the outcome uncertain:

To complicate the matter, however, in logic his theory of just war cannot comfortably accommodate the notion of innocents among the enemy who deserve to be protected during the hostilities, that is, while victory may still be in doubt. It

50 Augustine, On the Gospel according to John, 116:5, quoted in Mattox, Theory of Just War, 154.


52 Hartigan, Civilian Victims, 31.
was Christian to be merciful towards a beaten foe who could no longer cause harm, but what of one’s conduct toward members of the enemy population who meant no harm in the first place? Augustine’s failure to address himself to this question is all the more remarkable when his great sensitivity and private ethical pacifism are recalled.\textsuperscript{53}

Hartigan suggests two reasons for Augustine’s omission in this regard. First, while Augustine admits that there may be innocent persons among the enemy population, he believes that this will not regularly be the case. Given the intimate relationship between personal and social morality, it is unlikely that an unjust nation will be populated by good or just citizens. While Hartigan does not offer evidence to substantiate this assertion, it could be consistent with Augustine’s overall view that the majority in any nation are unregenerate sinners, members of the earthly city, and hence not innocent.

Second, Augustine frequently expresses the view that death is not the greatest evil to be shunned in war: “If guiltless people were slain in a just war that would be lamentable but not condemnable, for God often permits the innocent to be scourged with the guilty in this life, ‘though in eternity they quite escape punishment’.”\textsuperscript{54} Augustine condemns those who kill during war only when they are motivated by passion, or if they continue to kill when it is no longer necessary – and not on the basis of the innocence or guilt of those attacked. So, Hartigan concludes, given the influence on Christian thought for the next thousand years of Augustine’s view of war as moral retribution, “An overly

\textsuperscript{53} Hartigan, \textit{Civilian Victims}, 32.

\textsuperscript{54} Hartigan, \textit{Civilian Victims}, 33, quoting Augustine, \textit{City of God}, 1.9.
rigid interpretation of Augustine’s moralistic and subjective views on just war by later writers had a retarding effect on the application of the Christian ethic of mercy to war’s conduct.55 Yet Hartigan proceeds to qualify this judgment by the further thought that Augustine’s specification of the *jus ad bellum* criteria established the context within which later Christian thinkers would begin to address the question of how war should be conducted if it is to remain consistent with the purposes for which it has been undertaken in the first place.56

What Hartigan seems to overlook is that Augustine’s approach to the just war represents an ethic of rough justice for a fallen world. Christian Realism as developed by Augustine consists in the attempt to specify principles of conduct for Christian officials and soldiers whose public duties prevent them from literally following the Gospel ethic of nonviolence and nonresistance of evil. Hartigan suggests that Augustine substitutes an ethic of justice in public conduct for an ethic of love in private conduct;57 but here he misses the point that for Augustine the realization of true and full justice is impossible in the earthly city.58 In attempting to resolve the tension between the ideals of the Gospel ethic and the exigencies of public office, Augustine endorses the state’s use of force to punish wrongdoers at home and enemies abroad. Such use of force is to be limited, first,

55 Hartigan, *Civilian Victims*, 33.
57 Hartigan, Civilian Victims, 29.
by necessity; and second, by the requirement that it be undertaken dispassionately and without motives of hatred, revenge, cruelty, or lust for violence. As Mattox points out, these limits do contain the seeds of a rudimentary *jus in bello* ethic. Killing should be limited to that necessary to achieve a just war’s legitimate objectives; prisoners of war and defeated populations should be shown mercy. At the same time, as Hartigan points out, these same limits seem to permit intentional attacks on noncombatants while the war is underway, especially if such attacks are deemed militarily necessary, and if they are carried out dispassionately. (Ironically, during World War II, not only did many deem the area bombing of German cities militarily necessary, but new developments in the technology of warfare also made attacks on civilians possible from great distances and with great dispassion.)

**Martin Luther**

The German Reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) started his ecclesiastical career as a member of the Augustinian Order, or Canons Regular, and was highly influenced by Augustine’s theology. Luther’s political thought develops the Augustinian tradition in some respects but breaks with it significantly in others.

A good starting point for understanding Luther’s ethics is a passage in his early treatise *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), in which he writes of human nature as twofold, comprising an inward spiritual dimension and an outward bodily dimension. In

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his inward spiritual nature, the human being finds freedom when he is justified by faith in Christ. The Christian is made righteous solely on the basis of this inward experience of God’s grace. Yet living in the body, he is obligated to perform certain outward good works. These good works are not a means to righteousness, but neither are they to be rejected: “In this world, we are bound by the needs of our bodily life, but we are not righteous because of them.”⁶⁰ This distinction between the human bodily and spiritual natures lays the foundation for Luther’s further distinction between the spiritual and temporal kingdoms, with their corresponding forms of government and law.

Christians undertake good works, then, not as a means of earning salvation but as an expression of gratitude for the salvation that they have already received by grace through faith. The form of God’s will for individuals becomes specific in the context of the station in life (Stand) in which God has placed them, which in turn becomes their calling or vocation (Beruf). One’s calling to a particular station in life locates one in a matrix of social relationships, in which one’s duty to love and serve one’s neighbor takes on a very specific form. God has established a variety of stations with innumerable distinctions and differences among them, so that all the individual stations need one another.⁶¹ By performing the duties of one’s station, one becomes Christ to one’s neighbor. The Christian’s assurance of salvation affords the freedom to perform joyfully

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every work required by the station to which one has been called. One is not compelled to try to earn salvation by means of special holy works that differ from ordinary works.⁶²

Luther emphasizes this point in his address To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate (1520). Here, against the traditional Catholic claim that the spiritual power is above the temporal power, Luther writes that on account of their common baptism and faith all Christians belong to the spiritual estate, with no differences except those of office. There is thus no basic distinction between laity and priests, princes and bishops, or religious and secular vocations.⁶³ Here Luther has already moved significantly beyond Augustine, who continued to affirm the spiritual superiority of the clerical and monastic states even as he encouraged lay Christians to serve the state in positions of political and military leadership.

Luther sets forth his understanding of the vocation of the secular ruler in his treatise On Temporal Authority: To What Extent it should be Obeyed (1523). In response to the question of whether Christians may wield “the temporal sword,” he begins by noting two types of statement in the Bible. Some seem to affirm the divine institution of temporal power. Here he cites Romans 13:1, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist

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⁶² Althaus, Ethics of Martin Luther, 9.

⁶³ Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 40–41.
have been instituted by God” – and I Peter 2:102 – “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as those sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right.”

Moreover, Luther continues, the “temporal sword” has existed almost since the beginning of the world, when God authorized the law of punishment: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Genesis 9:6). Luther interprets the words of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane as reaffirming this law of retribution: “all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52).⁶⁴

At the same time, however, a number of other biblical texts seem to present powerful arguments to the contrary. The most obvious is the section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus exhorts the multitudes not to resist evil:

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. … You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you … (Matthew 5:38-42, 44)

Similar passages include Romans 12:19 – “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” – and I Peter 3:9 – “Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary

bless . . .” These passages, Luther observes, make it appear that Christians have no temporal sword.

Luther resolves the apparent contradiction by his doctrine of the two kingdoms. Humankind, he writes, is divided into the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world. The biblical passages enjoining nonviolence and nonresistance apply to the former; those upholding temporal authority apply to the latter. Hence, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ does not abrogate the law when he says, “You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye’ . . . But I say to you, ‘Do not resist one who is evil.” The former law remains in force for the wicked, who do not belong to God’s Kingdom, while the Lord’s saying is addressed to Christians only.65

The Kingdom of God comprises all true believers in Christ. If the world consisted of such, there would be no need for prince, king, sword, or law. But there are few true believers; and still fewer who live a fully Christian life. God has thus subjected the vast majority of human beings to the sword of temporal authority to restrain their wickedness: “If this were not so, men would devour one another, seeing that the whole world is evil, and that among thousands there is scarcely one true Christian.”66 Emphasizing the need for coercive government, Luther continues: “If anyone attempted to rule the world by the gospel and to abolish all temporal law and the sword on the plea that all are baptized and

65 Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 58.

66 Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 55.
Christian … He would be loosing the ropes and chains of the savage wild beasts and
letting them bite and mangle everyone.”

Corresponding to the two kingdoms, God has instituted two governments, the
spiritual and the temporal, each with its own kind of law. The spiritual government
exercised by the Church produces righteousness; the temporal government exercised by
the civil authority secures external peace. Neither is sufficient in this world without the
other. Yet each must respect its own proper limits. Temporal government enacts laws
extending to life, property, and external earthly affairs. But when temporal authority
presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon the sphere of the spiritual
government. Neither princes nor temporal rulers have authority to coerce in matters of
religion and conscience. Combatting false teaching falls to the office of bishops and
priests; but heresy cannot be restrained by force: “Here God’s Word must do the
fighting.” The spiritual authority of the Church may not use coercive power, but only
preaching, teaching, and persuasion. The spiritual government inculcates God’s Word, to
be received and responded to by Christians in faith. In Paul Althaus’s neat summation:
“Secular government rules with the sword; spiritual government rules with the Word.”

67 Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 56.

68 Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 63.

69 Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 61-64.

70 Althaus, Ethics of Martin Luther, 58.
Althaus shows that at the time of the Reformation, Luther was confronted with two competing visions of the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. The medieval Western Catholic interpretation held that no-one can fulfill these teachings while living in the world; the Sermon’s strictest requirements can only be fulfilled by those who withdraw from the life of the world into monastic communities. Its precepts are thus not commandments intended for all Christians, but *counsels* for those who seek perfection. But there is also room in the Church for secular Christians who obey only the commandments but not the counsels. The distant origins of this idea can be seen above in Augustine’s suggestion to Boniface that while monks are closer to God than soldiers, both vocations are not only necessary but also complementary and interdependent in the life of the Church in this world.

At the opposite extreme from this traditional Catholic view was what Althaus calls the “Enthusiastic” view, associated with Radical Reformers, such as Conrad Grebel and Thomas Müntzer, who rejected the social vision of such mainstream Reformers as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli as too conservative and accepting of the social *status quo*. They asserted that the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount stand in irreconcilable contradiction to life in the world as it now is. Those who would follow Jesus must leave the world and refuse to participate in such activities as property-ownership, legal proceedings, oath-taking, police work, and war. Some Radical Reformers, such as

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71 Althaus, *Ethics of Martin Luther*, 64.
Grebel, were pacifists; others, such as Müntzer, advocated armed Christian revolution to conform the world to “the Evangelical Law.”

Luther opposes the common supposition of both the traditional Catholics and the Radical Reformers that the demands of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount cannot be fulfilled by Christians living in the world as it is. He does not weaken the demands of the Sermon on the Mount; moreover, he closes off the option of withdrawal from the world to pursue a monastic vocation. How, then, does he reconcile the apparent contradiction between the Evangelical ethic and the exigencies of political office in a fallen world? Following Clement of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo, he falls back upon the distinction between outward actions and inner dispositions. Even with great possessions, for example, people can remain inwardly free of them. They must be ready to abandon everything when obedience to the Gospel is at stake. Yet this sacrifice can never be a human choice, but a necessity brought about by God alone.\(^\text{72}\)

Luther’s doctrine of the two kingdoms differs from Augustine’s image of the two cities in one important respect. Where Augustine posits a dichotomy between those who belong to the heavenly city and those who belong to the earthly city, Luther considers the Christian a citizen simultaneously of both kingdoms.\(^\text{73}\) Although Christians require no external restraint themselves, they submit gladly to the rule of the sword, pay taxes, and honor those in authority – precisely for the sake of those others who do need such

\(^{72}\) Althaus, *Ethics of Martin Luther*, 64-65.

\(^{73}\) Althaus, *Ethics of Martin Luther*, 61.
restraint. Moreover, Christians may find themselves called to the station or office of temporal authority, and they may indeed wield the temporal sword to restrain wickedness and punish wrongdoing. Hence, Christians in a state of salvation may legitimately function in the offices of constables, magistrates, judges, lawyers, and hangmen, so long as they do so with the intention not of seeking their own personal ends but of helping the governing authority, just as Christian princes are called to use their authority not for their own benefit but for the benefit of their subjects.74

The Christian is a double person living under a double law.75 The two cannot be harmonized; the Christian acts one way in one sphere and another way in the other sphere. The basic distinction – again following Augustine – is between acting in one’s own behalf and acting on behalf of others: between functioning as individuals in a private capacity and functioning as officials in a public office. In these two spheres, the same person must do things that are different, even diametrically opposed. Acting in his own behalf, the Christian seeks to serve his neighbor, even if his neighbor is his enemy, and he is prepared to suffer injustice without protecting or avenging himself. Acting in a public office with responsibility for others committed to his care, the Christian must oppose, resist, and punish evil, using force as necessary. To be meek and mild runs counter to the authorities’ God-given task. Yet even while performing outwardly coercive


75 The rest of this paragraph follows Althaus, Ethics of Martin Luther, 66-78.
and violent actions, the Christian public official is called to fulfill the teachings of Jesus inwardly, in the heart.

Even though the form of a Christian’s activity differs between the private and public spheres, the meaning in both cases is the same: love. If a judge sentences a lawbreaker to death on the basis of his own subjective and personal anger, he becomes a murderer. But when his office as judge requires him to condemn someone, he keeps a Christian heart by acting out of love for those he is called to protect while grieving inwardly that the condemned must die. As Althaus summarizes: “The Christian acts in one way in matters that affect only his own person and in another way when he fulfills his official responsibilities in behalf of others. However, it is one and the same love that works in both realms; and it must act differently, precisely because it is love.”

Luther on War

Luther sets forth his developed teaching on war in the treatise Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved (1526). He begins with the question of whether Christian faith is compatible with being a soldier, “going to war, stabbing and killing, robbing and burning, as military law requires us to do to our enemies in wartime.” He answers that even killing can be a work of love; and he introduces the analogy of the doctor who amputates a limb to save the body. From the viewpoint of the diseased limb, the amputation is an

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76 Althaus, Ethics of Martin Luther, 78.

77 Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 102.
unmitigated evil; but from the viewpoint of the body, it is necessary evil to prevent the
even greater evil of bodily death. Just so, while war is a great plague, sometimes it is
justified as preventing even greater plagues.

Luther considers the question of just cause and legitimate authority under the
threefold heading of wars waged against equals, of lords against their subjects, and of
subjects against their lords. In wars between equals, Luther categorically affirms that
whoever starts a war is in the wrong. No-one has a just cause for war who cannot say
“My neighbor compels and forces me to fight, though I would rather avoid it.” But even
then, one must still fear God. Having a just cause does not guarantee that one will win.
Before going to war with an equal or an inferior, a prince should offer terms of justice
and peace; and only then, if the enemy refuses, defend himself against force by force.

Justification for going to war is limited to temporal causes. In line with his
doctrine of the two kingdoms, Luther resolutely rejects religious war. In his treatise On
War against the Turk (1529), he writes that the only just cause for war against the Turks
is to repel their unjust invasions of the lands of others. Such a war should be conducted
by the Emperor in his capacity as a secular ruler. To purport to conduct a holy war

78 Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 113.
79 Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 114.
against the Turks as enemies of Christ is absolutely contrary to Christ’s own doctrine; legitimate war with the Turk is aimed not against his religion but against his aggression.\textsuperscript{81}

A recurring question in Luther’s writings is the position of the subject who is commanded to go to war. If secular rulers call upon their Christian subjects to fight, they must fight, not as Christians but as members of the state and as obedient subjects – and not as individuals fighting for their own ends but as servants of the authorities under whom they live.\textsuperscript{82} If the ruler is wrong in going to war, however, the people are not obliged to follow.\textsuperscript{83} But they must be sure. If a subject knows that the war is unjust, then one must fear God rather than serve human beings (Acts 5:29), and then be prepared to suffer the temporal consequences of disobedience.\textsuperscript{84} But if the subjects are not sure and cannot easily find out whether the war is just, they may obey the ruler without peril to their souls.\textsuperscript{85} Indeed, they should not weaken certain obedience for uncertain justice, and should instead think best of their lord.\textsuperscript{86}

While Luther condemns rebellion against lawful authority in a number of his writings, his strongest language comes out as he addresses the German Peasants’ Revolt


\textsuperscript{82} Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 104.

\textsuperscript{83} Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 66.

\textsuperscript{84} Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 117.


\textsuperscript{86} Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 117.
of 1525. In his *Admonition to Peace* (1525), written before hostilities broke out, he declares that if the peasants claim to be Christians, they must follow the Christian law vis-à-vis temporal authority – resisting not evil, turning the other cheek, and going the extra mile.\(^{87}\) In *Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants* (1525), he calls upon the secular rulers of Germany to take up the sword and suppress the revolt without patience or mercy.\(^{88}\) And in *An Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants* (1525), he defends himself against charges that he has incited cruelty and bloodshed by his calls for decisive suppression of the revolt, reiterating that it is a mistake to try to govern the temporal kingdom by the Gospel values of mercy and forbearance.\(^{89}\) Six years later, however, he appears to soften his stand against rebellion in his *Warning to his Dear German People* (1531), where he writes that if the forces of the Holy Roman Empire attempt to suppress the Reformation, he will not condemn those who resist, for such action will constitute self-defense rather than sedition.\(^{90}\)

Throughout his writings, Luther expresses his conviction that war, and especially defeat in war, represents God’s active judgment on human sin. Victory does not necessarily go to the side with the just cause. The side suffering defeat, whether in the

\(^{87}\) Luther, “Admonition to Peace,” in Porter, *Selected Political Writings*, 77.

\(^{88}\) Luther, “Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants,” in Porter, *Selected Political Writings*, 86-88.


\(^{90}\) Luther, “Dr. Martin Luther’s Warning to his Dear German People,” in Porter, *Selected Political Writings*, 134-147.
right or in the wrong, must accept it as a punishment from God.⁹¹ As he urges forcible suppression of the rebellious peasants, he also exhorts the German princes to confess to God that “we have deserved these things,” and that God may have thus aroused the devil as a punishment upon all Germany.⁹² The princes must remember that in taking up the sword against the peasants they are God’s ministers and instruments of his wrath against a rebellious people. Similarly, while the Turk has no right to attack lands that are not his, his outrages are an instrument with which God is punishing the world. For this reason Christians must help turn back the Turk by repentance and prayer.⁹³ Largely foreign to twenty-first century Christian sensibilities is Luther’s neat summation of his view of wars and catastrophes as punishments wrought by God: “It is not man, but God, who hangs, tortures, beheads, kills, and fights. All these are God’s works and judgments.”⁹⁴

**Luther and *Jus in Bello***

Like Augustine before him, Luther does not explicitly address the classical *jus in bello* principles. Scattered through his writings, however, are some clues to his attitudes on the conduct of warfare. As noted above, he writes that a Christian ruler should only go to war as a last resort, having exhausted all possibilities of negotiation and peaceful

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⁹² Luther, “Against the Robbing and Murderous Hordes of Peasants,” in Porter, *Selected Political Writings*, 87.


settlement. But then, he writes, war should be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible, though within certain limits: “In a war of this sort it is both Christian and an act of love to kill the enemy without hesitation, to plunder and burn and injure him by every method of warfare until he is conquered (except that one must beware of sin and not violate wives and virgins). And when victory has been achieved, one should offer mercy and peace to those who surrender and humble themselves.” Once the line separating peace from war has been crossed, Luther advocates almost unrestricted warfare to achieve victory. He endorses a rudimentary form of noncombatant immunity extending to “wives and virgins,” but for reasons that have more to do with avoiding sexual sin than with respecting the rights of the innocent. And he advocates mercy for those who surrender—which, as with Augustine, leaves open the question of what cruelties may be perpetrated against civilian populations while hostilities are still under way.

Luther returns to the question of mercy and cruelty in his Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants. Here, defending himself against the charge that he incited bloodshed, he argues that he did not advocate cruelty against those peasants who surrendered, but only against those who were “obdurate.” He did not advocate “the merciless slaughter of the poor captured peasants,” but he did urge that no mercy be

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95 Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 66.
shown the “obstinate, hardened, blinded peasants who refuse to listen to reason.”\textsuperscript{96} Then, he seems to go to the heart of the matter:

I was writing only for rulers who might wish to deal in a Christian or otherwise honest way with their people, to instruct their consciences concerning the matter to the effect that they ought to take immediate action against the bands of rebels both innocent and guilty. \textit{And if they struck the innocent, they were not to let their consciences trouble them}, since they were by the very act confessing that they were bound to do their duty to God. Afterward, however, if they won, they were to show grace, not only to those whom they considered innocent, but to the guilty as well.\textsuperscript{97}

It is not entirely clear in this passage what criteria Luther has in mind to distinguish the “innocent” from the “guilty” among the rebels. Nonetheless, he seems to advocate indiscriminate slaughter without attempting to distinguish the innocent from the guilty while the hostilities are still under way. Conversely, once the hostilities are over, he advocates indiscriminate mercy to those who have surrendered, likewise without attempting to distinguish the guilty from the innocent. Before the rebellion, he continues, he tried to quiet the peasants, but they were unwilling to listen; and now the lords will not hear him either: “these furious, raving, senseless tyrants, who even after the battle cannot get their fill of blood.”\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{96} Luther, “Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 94.


\textsuperscript{98} Luther, “Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 94.
Due caution should be exercised in extrapolating a full-blown denial of noncombatant immunity from these remarks. The view typical of the time would have been that as rebellious subjects the peasants had no legitimate authority to wage war, and so lacked the legal protections accorded to legitimate combatants.\textsuperscript{99} Thus, Luther writes: “rebellion is a crime that deserves neither a court trial nor mercy, whether it be among heathen, Jews, Turks, Christians, or any other people; the rebel has already been tried, judged, condemned, and sentenced to death and everyone is authorized to execute him. Nothing more needs to be done than to give him his due and to execute him.”\textsuperscript{100}

Overall, Luther seeks to restrict the violence of warfare, first, by limiting the occasions for going to war: justifiable wars are fought out of the necessity of self-defense, and only as a last resort. Second, Luther urges mercy towards defeated enemies. And third, like Augustine before him, Luther qualifies the attitudes and dispositions that may accompany warfare itself: “Take my advice,” he writes to princes and soldiers, “Make the broadest possible distinction between what you want to do and what you ought to do, between desire and necessity, between lust for war and willingness to fight.”\textsuperscript{101}

War is to be fought in the fear of God: “You ought not to think that [a just cause] justifies


\textsuperscript{100} Luther, “Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 98.

\textsuperscript{101} Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 113.
anything you do and plunge headlong into battle.”102 Even in a justifiable war, killing motivated by lust for violence becomes murder. War must be fought instead out of duty and obedience, motivated by the desire to serve God and one’s neighbor in love. While soldiers are entitled to their wages – as John the Baptist affirms in Luke 3:14 – a soldier who fights only for the sake of acquiring wealth “strays from the path and belongs to the devil, even though he fights out of obedience to his lord and at his call.”103 Likewise, one who goes to war to gain temporal honor “earns hell for himself. We should leave and give all honor to God alone and be satisfied with our wages and rations.”104 (If taken seriously, these qualifications would very likely limit the passions of cruelty, revenge, and lust for violence that lead to indiscriminate massacres and other wartime atrocities.)

On the other side of the equation, three factors in Luther’s thought may tend to inhibit a commitment to noncombatant immunity. First, Luther shares with Augustine the conviction that temporal suffering and death are not the worst fates that can befall people in war. Even unjustly inflicted temporal suffering paradoxically represents God’s just judgment on human sin. Thus, defeat in war must be accepted as a punishment from God: “It is all the same to God whether he deprives you of life and property by a just or an unjust lord.”105 He forbids subjects from rebelling against tyrannical rulers on the same

102 Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 114.
103 Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 117.
104 Luther, “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can be Saved,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 118.
105 Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, Selected Political Writings, 66.
grounds: “what does it matter to you if they ruin your property, body, wife, and child? They cannot hurt your soul, and they do themselves more harm than they do you because they damn their own souls.” One implication could be that suffering and death inflicted on civilian populations under pressure of perceived military necessity could be discounted as regrettable but not totally catastrophic since the souls of genuinely innocent victims remain unscathed. This position is not far from the thinking underlying the putative remark of the papal legate at the siege of Bezières, “Kill them all; God will know which are his.”

The second factor concerns the relative autonomy of the secular ruler implied in the two kingdoms doctrine. In Luther’s scheme, as seen previously, the two governments are separate but complementary and interdependent. The secular ruler wields the temporal sword to punish wickedness at home and to defend against enemies abroad; and in a Christian state the godly prince has a special responsibility to protect and order the Church. The leaders of the Church exercise, in turn, a ministry of the Word to inculcate saving faith among the people; and they also instruct the consciences of the rulers concerning their temporal responsibilities. Yet the Church’s only weapons are spiritual ones of prayer and teaching. In *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches*, Ernst Troeltsch observes that Lutheranism relied completely on the government to be the agent

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that would mold society according to Christian ideals. This meant that problems arose when governments no longer subscribed to Christian concepts of natural and divine law:

[T]hen the social theory of Lutheranism was in a position of great embarrassment; henceforth it could only preach its doctrine, with scarcely a hope of realizing it, since, unlike Catholicism and Calvinism, Lutheranism possessed no organ by which it could put its theories into practice apart from the State, and the modern State, for its part, no longer feels itself—as in early Lutheranism—to be the secular aspect of the organism of Christian Society. This was the beginning of the social impotence of Lutheranism.\(^\text{107}\)

While Troeltsch is writing of a later stage in the development of Lutheranism, the situation he describes is anticipated in places where Luther expresses frustration with many of the secular rulers on whose protection his Reformation depends. For example:

“You must know that since the beginning of the world a wise prince is a mighty rare bird, and an upright prince even rarer. They are generally the biggest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth; therefore, one must constantly expect the worst from them and look for little good, especially in divine matters that concern the salvation of souls.”\(^\text{108}\) Again, in his *Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants*, Luther emphasizes that he has undertaken to advise only “Christian and pious rulers, as befits a Christian preacher,” but not “these furious, raving, senseless tyrants who … in all their lives ask scarcely a question about Christ …”\(^\text{109}\) In short, Luther’s two kingdoms doctrine opens up a


situation in which secular rulers are entirely free to ignore the efforts of Church leaders and theologians to deploy Christian ethical teachings to influence social policy. Conversely, Luther’s emphasis on obedience to the ruling authorities as instituted by God may tend to inhibit criticism of their actual policies by Church leaders. (While the Church of England is not Lutheran, its relations with the state do largely follow the Lutheran pattern, and one question that arose during World War II concerned the ability of its leaders to present an effective Christian witness against the area bombing.)

The third consideration involves Luther’s teaching concerning the Christian as simul justus et peccator – “simultaneously just and a sinner.” As discussed above, Luther resolves the apparent tension between the demands of fidelity to the Gospel and the exigencies of political life in a fallen world by sharply distinguishing the different types of government and law operative in the two kingdoms. This solution seems to leave little unresolved tension in the life of the Christian who must simply obey one set of rules in one sphere and another in the other sphere. Luther has little explicit sense that fulfilling the duties of the office of a ruler or soldier might inescapably require the commission of objectively sinful actions. This tension was certainly present in traditional Catholicism, where soldiers performed penances and sought absolution for sins they had unavoidably committed in fighting even what they considered just wars. But it was less present for Luther who, for example, rejected the custom of his time which required an executioner to do penance and to request the condemned to forgive him for carrying out the death sentence; in Luther’s view the executioner needed no forgiveness since he was only
fulfilling the office to which God had called him.\textsuperscript{110} The doctrine of \textit{simul justus et peccator} holds that when a sinner turns to God in faith, God accepts the sinner by grace as righteous even though he remains a sinner, and also accepts his works as righteous even though they remain contaminated by sin.\textsuperscript{111} Luther famously teaches that law, both natural and divine, has two “uses” or functions: to restrain outward disorder in the sphere of social life; and to reveal to people the extent of their sinfulness in their failure to live up to its demands.\textsuperscript{112} Here again, the implication could be that even one who has been justified by faith still needs the Law as a reminder to rely continually on the grace of God’s forgiveness for the sins one continues to commit. For Luther, to say that even the works of those justified by faith remain contaminated by sin characteristically means that they are the right things done for the wrong reasons. A Christian ruler will perform the duties of his office for a variety of motives, some good and some bad. Political office affords the opportunity for noble service; but it also brings great temptations to exploit one’s authority for personal gain.\textsuperscript{113} It is not clear that Luther would admit that a ruler or soldier might find it inescapably necessary to do something objectively wrong in the discharge of the positive duties of his office, and then rely on God’s forgiveness to cover

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] Althaus, \textit{Ethics of Martin Luther}, 74.
\item[111] Althaus, \textit{Ethics of Martin Luther}, 5.
\item[112] Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in Porter, \textit{Selected Political Writings}, 55.
\item[113] Althaus, \textit{Ethics of Martin Luther}, 121.
\end{footnotes}
the sin thereby committed. Yet the very term *simul justus et peccator* hints that this tragic possibility would remain open for later Christian thinkers to take up.

**Reinhold Niebuhr**

Reinhold Niebuhr served as Pastor of Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit from 1915 until 1928, when he became Professor of Applied Christianity at Union Theological Seminary in New York, a post he held until his retirement in 1960. A committed Christian socialist, he became convinced during the 1920s that what he saw as the naive moralism and sentimentality of liberal religion were inadequate to meet the challenges of social justice in a world in crisis. Langdon Gilkey writes that well into the 1930s, liberal culture in America remained profoundly optimistic about history. Belief in progress remained strong. As science, technology, and education advanced, it seemed that “people were becoming more moral, society was becoming almost Christian, and the task of the churches was building the Kingdom of God upon earth.”

But as Karl Barth had challenged this fundamental faith in Europe after World War I, so Niebuhr challenged it in America in the early 1930s. Despite the residual optimism of the age, the 1930s were marked by widespread suffering and mounting anxiety. To many, the Great Depression seemed to signal that capitalism was in the process of self-destruction. Overseas, a militarist Japan had invaded Manchuria in 1931; a Fascist regime was in place in Italy;

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and the Nazi Party was about to seize power in Germany. Niebuhr thus wrote *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in 1932 to offer a more realistic appraisal of the human condition and its prospects. According to Gilkey, its publication had “an amazing impact in American social thought and on liberal religion.”

**Moral Man and Immoral Society**

Niebuhr’s basic premise is that human beings are divided into groups, classes, and nations on the basis of different interests. Humans are both selfish and social. They seek their own life and welfare; they also seek harmony with others. Yet, on account of overwhelming egoism and selfishness, they are unable to understand the interests of others nearly as clearly as they understand their own. The politics of different groups are rooted in economic interests; and the inevitable conflict of these interests can never be fully resolved. Coercion is thus an inescapable instrument of social cohesion. The coercive resolution of conflicts makes for peace but also injustice, as privileged groups oppress the underprivileged. In pursuit of justice and equality, irresponsible power can only be countered by coercive methods. But such methods always run the risk of introducing new forms of injustice.

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115 Gilkey, “Introduction,” xii.


Ironically, the same coercive force that makes for peace within social groups aggravates conflicts between groups.\textsuperscript{119} Even when egoism is defeated at the individual level, it asserts itself in the transferred egoism of the group.\textsuperscript{120} Especially at the national level, individual unselfishness is sluiced into loyalty to the state and tends to increase the state’s selfishness. The nation thus becomes both a check upon and a final expression of individual egoism.\textsuperscript{121} The security that nations achieve is unstable. International peace is precarious, first, because it is unjust: a mutual accommodation of conflicting interests rather than a rational and moral adjustment of rights.\textsuperscript{122} Nations tend to overreach themselves. No sharp line separates the will-to-live from the will-to-power. Means of defense quickly become means of aggression. Power, once attained, seeks security by expanding itself. Unlike beasts which cease hunting their prey when their hunger is satisfied, the human lust for power is fed by the human imagination, which is unlimited.\textsuperscript{123} The exercise of power tends to undermine its own raison d’être by provoking new and greater threats to the interests that it originally sought to protect.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{119} Niebuhr, \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society}, 16.

\textsuperscript{120} Niebuhr, \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society}, 42.

\textsuperscript{121} Niebuhr, \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society}, 91-93.

\textsuperscript{122} Niebuhr, \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society}, 19.

\textsuperscript{123} Niebuhr, \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society}, 42-44.

\textsuperscript{124} Niebuhr, \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society}, 11.
Echoing Hobbes, Niebuhr sums up his diagnosis with the dictum that “society is in a perpetual state of war.”

But humanity is also rational and moral. Especially at the individual level, reason helps people understand the needs of others. Moral and especially religious ideals help counter selfishness. At the group level, one result is universal hypocrisy: the “tribute which morality pays to immorality.” Groups, and especially nations, attribute universal value to their own particular ends. In wartime, the nation claims the passionate and uncritical emotional loyalty of its citizens by means of the conscious or unconscious deception that identifies the nation’s special interests with universal values such as civilization, culture, and freedom. No imperial power has ever frankly avowed its motives, but has always claimed to be primarily concerned with the peace and prosperity of the people it subjugates. Likewise, within nations, the privileged classes exhibit extreme self-deception and hypocrisy, equating their special privileges with universal

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justice, law, and order.\textsuperscript{131} And even without defending special privilege, Marxist workers likewise attribute universal value to their own particular class interests.\textsuperscript{132}

Thus far, Niebuhr’s diagnosis of the human condition – its egoism, selfishness, will-to-power, and hypocrisy – stands in line with classical realist political thought in the tradition of Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes. The typical realist recommendation at this point is to shed moral illusions in favor of naked power politics, and to pursue coldly calculated group interests without regard for moral scruples. But Niebuhr does not make this move. As a Christian realist, he concurs with the classical realist diagnosis but not its prescription. John Howard Yoder points out that Niebuhr’s realism represents an empirical analysis of the human condition designed to show the contemporary relevance of the traditional Christian doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin.\textsuperscript{133} Lisa Sowle Cahill remarks that Niebuhr effectively combines Barth’s conviction of human sinfulness with the activism of the Social Gospel.\textsuperscript{134} That is, in light of his pessimistic analysis of the human condition, the question that concerns him is how to subject human affairs to some measure of moral influence in the pursuit of social justice.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{131} Niebuhr, \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society}, 117.\\
\textsuperscript{132} Niebuhr, \textit{Moral Man and Immoral Society}, 153, 156-157.\\
\textsuperscript{133} John Howard Yoder, \textit{Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution}, ed. Theodore J. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 288-289.\\
\textsuperscript{134} Lisa Sowle Cahill, \textit{Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 187.
\end{flushright}
What role, then, does Niebuhr see for morality in building a just society?

Niebuhr’s program in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* can be summarized in the following three steps:

1. **Acknowledge the difference between individual and group morality.** Niebuhr develops this theme most fully in the concluding chapter, “The Conflict between Individual and Social Morality.” Society must struggle for justice even when it is forced to employ means that offend individual moral sensibilities. Individual morality – particularly religious morality – makes unselfishness the criterion of the moral act. Yet the highest moral ideals of, say, the Sermon on the Mount make no claim to be socially efficacious. Unselfishness leads to self-sacrifice. But while an individual may sacrifice his own interests – by turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, etc. – one cannot legitimately sacrifice the interests of others for whom one is responsible.

2. **Work for justice by means of a combination of coercion, rational argument, and moral persuasion.** Appeals to reason and moral ideals are insufficient in themselves to effect social change. The power of entrenched interests can only be opposed by power. Yet rational argument and moral suasion do have a legitimate role to play. While they can never *eliminate* conflicts of interest between groups, they can *mitigate* their destructiveness by helping people better understand each other’s interests, and by

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expanding the scope for conciliation, compromise, and co-operation.\textsuperscript{138} Nations will always pursue their narrow interests, but may be able to learn also how to do justice to wider interests, thus dampening the endless cycle of new wrongs avenging old wrongs.\textsuperscript{139} Reason and morality can help discriminate between the ends for which coercion is used, justifying it in the service of morally acceptable ends such as equal justice, and condemning it in the service of momentary passions or the perpetuation of privilege.\textsuperscript{140}

3. *Approximate justice by means of the dialectic between idealism and realism.* A key theme of the book is that the dream of perpetual peace and brotherhood can never be fully realized but may be *approximated* in history.\textsuperscript{141} Niebuhr repeatedly argues that religious and moral idealism is necessary to inspire people to attempt the impossible. The vision of a just society is an impossible ideal which can be approximated only by those who don’t believe that it is impossible: “The truest visions of religion are illusions, which may be partially realized by being resolutely believed.”\textsuperscript{142} Thus, Niebuhr posits an irreconcilable but indispensable creative tension between idealism and realism, between ethics and politics.

\textsuperscript{138} Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 272.
\textsuperscript{139} Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 110.
\textsuperscript{140} Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 234-235.
\textsuperscript{141} Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{142} Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 81.
The Relevance of an Impossible Ideal

Niebuhr develops the third point discussed above in his subsequent work, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (1935). Here he identifies love – more specifically, the “love commandment” articulated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount – as the ideal to which all human moral effort in history aspires, and by which it is judged and found wanting. In the chapter entitled “The Relevance of an Impossible Ideal,” Niebuhr describes two rival schemes of religion, which he labels “orthodox Christianity” and “liberal Christianity.” Orthodox Christianity denies the relevance of the ideal of love to the problems of everyday existence. (Niebuhr may have in mind here versions of traditional Catholicism which suggest that the highest ideals of Christian perfection are attainable only by those who withdraw from the world.) Meanwhile, liberal Christianity asserts that the teachings of Jesus – which Jesus himself embodied in his life – are entirely realizable in history: “For liberal Christianity Christ is the ideal man, whom all men can emulate, once the pervasive charm of his life has captured their souls.”

Against both orthodox and liberal Christianity thus defined, Niebuhr proposes the alternative of “prophetic Christianity,” which paradoxically asserts both the absolute relevance and the impossibility of the love commandment. This ideal, which entails “the

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obligation of affirming the life and interests of the neighbor as much as those of the self,”¹⁴⁷ is impossible because selfishness is built into human nature at the level of both individual existence and even more so of group existence. The human creature, Niebuhr writes, “will never be able to escape the sin of accentuating his natural will-to-live into an imperial will-to-power by the very protest which his yearning for the eternal tempts him to make against his finiteness.”¹⁴⁸ Without explicitly admitting that he was doing so, then, Jesus made demands in his teachings which no finite human being can fulfill.

Yet the love commandment remains absolutely relevant, for two reasons. First, it reveals the extent of human sin by holding up an ideal that people know they cannot fulfill, and thus drives them to acknowledge their need for God’s forgiveness for their shortcomings in all they do. In this sense, Niebuhr is echoing Luther’s second use of the law.¹⁴⁹ Second, the love commandment represents the ideal towards which all human moral endeavor implicitly strives. Niebuhr writes that “the prophetic tradition in Christianity must insist on the relevance of the ideal of love to the moral experience of mankind on every conceivable level.”¹⁵⁰ Some level of implicit awareness of the love commandment is built into the structures of human consciousness: “all human life is informed with an inchoate sense of responsibility toward the ultimate law of life—the

¹⁴⁷ Niebuhr, Interpretation of Christian Ethics, 110.
¹⁴⁸ Niebuhr, Interpretation of Christian Ethics, 119.
¹⁴⁹ I am indebted to John Howard Yoder for clarifying this point in his discussion of Niebuhr in Christian Attitudes to War, Peace and Revolution, 290.
¹⁵⁰ Niebuhr, Interpretation of Christian Ethics, 104.
Moreover, the love ideal is involved in every human moral aspiration and achievement. All human moral codes, from the most primitive to the most sophisticated, “stand in an ascending scale of moral possibilities in which each succeeding step is a closer approximation of the Law of Love.”

D.B. Robertson writes that “The relationship between love and justice has been the major problem for Niebuhr in his elaboration of a social ethic,” and Cahill describes Niebuhr’s resolution of the question of the relevance of the Gospel for history as the “love-justice dialectic.” It seems more helpful to me, however, to describe Niebuhr’s dialectic as between the law of love and the sinful reality of the human condition. From this dialectic emerge norms of justice that simultaneously aspire to and fall short of the ideal. A key point is that justice for Niebuhr is not an absolute standard, but an ongoing process of adjustment of conflicting claims and interests aiming at but never fully realizing the ideal of love. All structures of justice retain some sinful elements. Justice is thus an approximation of love under conditions of sin.

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156 Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, 188.
Niebuhr’s Rejection of Pacifism

According to Yoder, during World War I “Reinhold Niebuhr was a pacifist, on and off.” After supporting Woodrow Wilson’s taking the United States into World War I as the war to end all wars, Niebuhr returned to pacifism in the 1920s. A series of short pieces collected in the volume *Love and Justice* chronicle his growing disenchantment with pacifism beginning in the late 1920s, with the turning point marked perhaps by his article “Why I Leave the F.O.R. (Fellowship of Reconciliation),” published in *The Christian Century* on January 3, 1934. Another significant essay, “Must We Do Nothing?” was published in *The Christian Century* on March 30, 1932, as an invited response to his younger brother H. Richard Niebuhr’s “The Grace of Doing Nothing,” at the time of Japan’s invasion of Manchuria. This dialogue, including Richard’s counter-response “The Only Way into the Kingdom of God,” has been reproduced in several anthologies of Christian ethics.

Niebuhr’s most developed statement of his rejection of pacifism in anticipation of American involvement in the Second World War is perhaps found in his essay “Why the Christian Church is not Pacifist,” originally published as a pamphlet in Britain by SCM

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158 Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 287.


Press in 1939 and subsequently included in his book *Christianity and Power Politics* (1940).\(^{161}\) He begins by noting a conflict between those Christians who regard pacifism as a heresy and those who regard the Church’s failure to embrace pacifism as a sign of apostasy.\(^{162}\) But not all Christian pacifism is heresy. As a form of Christian perfectionism, the non-heretical type of pacifism aims to take the law of Christ seriously, *without* regarding it as a viable political strategy. It does not succumb to the illusion that it has found a method for eliminating conflict from political life; instead, it regards the mystery of evil as beyond its power to solve. By disavowing political responsibility for social justice, it is “content to set up the most perfect and unselfish individual life as a symbol of the Kingdom of God.”\(^{163}\)

Yet, Niebuhr continues, most modern forms of Christian pacifism *are* heresy. They have absorbed the Renaissance faith in human goodness, rejecting the doctrine of Original Sin as outmoded pessimism. Moreover, modern pacifists dilute the ethic of Jesus. Since an ethic of pure nonresistance can have no immediate relevance for any political situation, they reinterpret the ethic of Jesus not as nonresistance but as nonviolent resistance. That is, one is allowed to resist evil provided that such resistance does not entail the destruction of life or property. While Jesus uncompromisingly enjoins

\(^{161}\) Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940), 1-32.

\(^{162}\) As will be seen below in Chapter Ten, in using these terms Niebuhr may have been referring to a controversy of 1935 between William Temple and Charles Raven.

\(^{163}\) Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 1-5.
nonresistance to evil and not just nonviolent resistance, contemporary pacifists instead commend nonviolent resistance, as exemplified by Gandhi, as the best method of overcoming and defeating one’s foe.\textsuperscript{164}

The Gospel, Niebuhr continues, is more than just the law of love. It deals with humanity’s violation of the law of love. The grace of Christ is “primarily the assurance of divine mercy for a persistent sinfulness which man never overcomes completely.”\textsuperscript{165} Modern pacifism has reinterpreted the Christian Gospel in terms of the Renaissance faith in humanity, treating world history “as a gradual ascent to the Kingdom of God which waits for final triumph only upon the willingness of Christians to ‘take Christ seriously.’”\textsuperscript{166} The New Testament does not, however, envisage a simple triumph of good over evil in history, but rather anticipates the persistence of the contradictions of sin in history until the end. The coming of the Kingdom of God will finally resolve these contradictions; but it is a divine reality and not a human possibility.\textsuperscript{167}

 Nonetheless, Niebuhr admits, the pacifists are right in asserting that love is the law of life: “The law of love therefore remains a principle of criticism over all forms of
community in which elements of coercion and conflict destroy the highest type of fellowship." Viewing human communities from the perspective of the Kingdom of God reveals a sinful dimension to all the expedients the political order uses to establish justice. One’s enemy’s injustice is partially the consequence of one’s own injustice; and conflicts are always between sinners and never between sinners and the righteous – an important point for countering the self-righteousness and spirit of vengeance that constituted a notable failure of the Churches in the Great War.

These admissions do not, however, justify a posture of “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.” For the ideal of love is not merely a principle of indiscriminate criticism upon all approximations of justice, but also a principle of discriminate criticism between different forms of community and various attempts at justice. All political and social systems attempt to achieve a balance between anarchy and tyranny, and some systems end up being more tyrannical than others. Moreover, the justice of the democratic nations represents a higher achievement, a closer approximation of love, than the tyranny and other evils into which other forms of social organization, particularly fascism and communism, have fallen. By refusing to recognize that sin introduces conflict into the world, and that resistance to evil entails the risk of conflict, Niebuhr writes, pacifists effectively give preference to tyranny over war. Tyranny is a peace which has nothing to do with the peace of the Kingdom of God. Some pacifists insist that

168 Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, 22.

the tyranny of Nazi Germany is not worse than that practiced in the so-called democratic
countries. But such an equation, says Niebuhr, is sheer moral perversity.\textsuperscript{170}

So, Niebuhr writes, defeating Nazi Germany is a task that cannot be avoided. A
simple Christian moralism is senseless and confusing when it identifies the cause of
Christ with the cause of democracy, as in World War I. But equally senseless is a
moralism which seeks to purge itself of this error by an uncritical refusal to make any
distinctions between relative values in history. By the grace of forgiveness, the Christian
is freed to act in history in defense of the highest values he knows; yet that same grace
persuades him to acknowledge the moral ambiguity of even his best actions.\textsuperscript{171}

Niebuhr concludes the essay with a tribute to the pacifism he has rejected. It is a
cause for gratitude, he writes, that the Christian Church has learned to protect its pacifists
and to value their testimony. It is a terrible thing to take human life: “We who allow
ourselves to become engaged in war need this testimony of the absolutists against us, lest
we accept the warfare of the world as normative, lest we become callous to the horror of
war, and lest we forget the ambiguity of our own actions and motives.”\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{170} Niebuhr, \textit{Christianity and Power Politics}, 15-16.

\textsuperscript{171} Niebuhr, \textit{Christianity and Power Politics}, 29-30.

\textsuperscript{172} Niebuhr, \textit{Christianity and Power Politics}, 31.
Niebuhr on War with Nazi Germany

In the December 18, 1940, issue of *The Christian Century* – almost a year before the United States entered World War II – Niebuhr declared his commitment to supporting American involvement in the war against Nazi Germany should such involvement become unavoidable: “[I]f our nation should be involved in the world conflict, I will have no hesitancy in supporting the war effort of the nation.”\(^{173}\) The Nazis, he continued, “represent a peril to every established value of a civilization that all Western nations share and of which we are all the custodians.”\(^{174}\)

Niebuhr proceeds to explain his view of the necessity of defeating Nazi Germany on both strategic and moral grounds. German ambitions must reach beyond Europe, because Europe is not self-sufficient. Contrary to the American Isolationist belief that the United States can enjoy peace and security no matter what happens in the rest of the world, if Britain should fall, “we could do nothing but spend all our energies in the next decades arming against all possible perils and attacks and contriving to outwit a resourceful and ingenious foe.”\(^{175}\) Alternatively, it would be possible to become the accomplices of such a victor. But that would be intolerable. Niebuhr’s eloquent denunciation of the Nazi regime is worth quoting at length:


\(^{175}\) Niebuhr, “To Prevent the Triumph of an Intolerable Tyranny,” 274.
We have allowed ourselves to forget as much as possible that this resurgent Germany not only shares imperial ambitions with all strong nations, but that its fury is fed by a pagan religion of tribal self-glorification; that it intends to root out the Christian religion; that it defies all the universal standards of justice that ages of a Christian and humanistic culture have woven into the fabric of our civilization; that it threatens the Jewish race with annihilation and visits a maniacal fury upon these unhappy people that goes far beyond the ordinary race prejudice that is the common sin of all nations and races; that it explicitly declares its intention of subjecting the other races of Europe into slavery to the “master” race; that it intends to keep them in subjection by establishing a monopoly of military violence and technical skill so that they will be subordinate in peace and in war; that it is already engaged in Poland and Czechoslovakia in destroying the very fabric of national existence by wholesale expulsion of nationals from their homeland and the forced colonization of Germans in their place; that, in short, it is engaged in the terrible effort to establish an empire upon the very negation of justice rather than upon that minimal justice which even ancient empires achieved.

If anyone believes that the peace of such a tyranny is morally more tolerable than war, I can only admire and pity the resolute dogmatism that makes such convictions possible.176

Lest his readers think that his views are influenced by ties of family and friendship to Great Britain, Niebuhr reminds them that he is an American of “pure German stock,” that he has gained these convictions during the course of many visits to Hitler’s Germany, and that he shares them with many other “pure Germans” such as Thomas Mann.177 To his great credit, Niebuhr understood the character of Nazism – and its designs with respect to the Jews – far more clearly than many of his contemporaries.

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Niebuhr on the Bombing of Germany

In the summer of 1943, Niebuhr addressed the bombing of Germany in a short piece in *Christianity and Society*. The bombing of the industrial region of the Ruhr valley, he begins, has raised religious and moral problems in both Britain and America. Since the Allies are dropping four to ten times as many bombs as fell on Britain during the Blitz, one can only imagine the terrible destruction being wrought in Germany. While the newspapers and sometimes the BBC seem inclined to gloat over the revenge now being taken, common people in both Britain and America have the decency to feel and express sorrow over the necessity of such bombing. Niebuhr relates the touching words of a “simple old elevator operator in a London hotel … ‘I don’t care what the newspapers say; I think the bombing of those cities is terrible, however necessary.’”

Niebuhr goes on to reflect that the bombing of cities vividly reveals the moral ambiguity of warfare. Engaging in collective opposition to collective evil inescapably causes suffering to the innocent along with the guilty. “It is not possible to move in history without becoming tainted with guilt.” The guilt attaching to even the most righteous political cause is antecedent, concomitant, and consequent: antecedent in that one is partly responsible for having helped bring about the evil one opposes; concomitant in that one causes suffering to the innocent along with the guilty; and consequent because

one will almost certainly corrupt the virtues of one’s victory by vindictive passions. Saint Paul understood well what modern moralistic versions of the Christian faith do not:

“There is no escape from guilt in history.”\footnote{Niebuhr, “The Bombing of Germany,” 222-223.}

Once bombing has become an instrument of warfare, Niebuhr continues, it is not possible to disavow it without yielding a decisive advantage to an enemy who refuses to disavow it. While people do not have the freedom to escape from “these hard and cruel necessities of history,” they can express their moral freedom by performing them “without rancor or self-righteousness.”\footnote{Niebuhr, “The Bombing of Germany,” 223.} In response to reports that some bomber crews have refrained from receiving Holy Communion before going on their missions, Niebuhr comments that while their hesitancy does credit to their conscience, they “ought to be helped to understand that the Lord’s Supper is not a sacrament for the righteous but for sinners; and that it mediates the mercy of God not only to those who repent of the sins they have done perversely but also to those who repent of the sins in which they are involved inexorably by reason of their service to a ‘just cause.’”\footnote{Niebuhr, “The Bombing of Germany,” 223.} The peace of the Kingdom of God is not only that of turning from sin to righteousness, but also that of divine forgiveness to the contrite sinner who knows that it is beyond his power to live a sinless life on earth.

\footnote{Niebuhr, “The Bombing of Germany,” 222-223.}
\footnote{Niebuhr, “The Bombing of Germany,” 223.}
\footnote{Niebuhr, “The Bombing of Germany,” 223.}
Niebuhr’s moral assessment of the bombing is entirely consistent with his theological ethics. Yet his understanding of the military context is lacking. He seems to accept official representations that city bombing was aimed primarily at military and industrial targets, with destruction of adjacent residential areas an unintended and regrettable side-effect. His statement that disavowing city bombing means capitulating to an enemy who makes no corresponding disavowal flies in the face of the strategic reality that the most effective way to eliminate such a threat is by gaining command of the skies over one’s own cities while attacking not enemy cities but the enemy’s bomber forces. He could have asked more probing questions about the nature of the area bombing campaign, its military justification, and its effects. Within the terms of his own ethical system, it could be argued that a campaign of precision bombing against specific targets approximates justice more closely than a campaign indiscriminately targeting urban areas. His position that it is impossible to act in history without incurring guilt could encourage too easy an acceptance of immoral actions or policies even when less culpable alternatives are available.

**Conclusion**

Christian Realism rests upon two distinctions. The first is that between private and public morality: that is, between what one may be expected to do on one’s own behalf in a private capacity, and what one may be expected to do on behalf of others in a public capacity. The second distinction is between love and justice. Christian Realism suggests that the Gospel ethic of love and nonresistance articulated by Jesus in the
Sermon on the Mount applies to individuals in their private relations, but not to groups in their social relations. Christian Realism then proposes justice, as opposed to love, as the norm for group relations. The question, then, is how to specify the contents of justice.

Christian Realism typically makes the further suggestion that justice in a fallen and sinful world can only be imperfect. Attempts to achieve justice often involve choices between greater and lesser evils. Augustine sees the best that can be aimed for in this world as a rough justice that is prone to errors and mistakes which, despite the best of intentions, result in needless suffering to the innocent. For Luther, a Christian fulfilling the duties of his station in life becomes Christ to his neighbor through deeds of service, but still remains simul justus et peccator, with no option but to rely on God’s forgiveness for the inevitable corruption of his motives and intentions even when he succeeds outwardly in doing what is right. Niebuhr saw justice as an approximation of love, always standing condemned by the very ideal it seeks to realize in history. As shall be seen in Chapter Ten below, Archbishop William Temple similarly regarded the fallen world as so structured that while even the best courses of action available implicate one in sin, they nonetheless remain one’s duty because all the alternatives are worse – a belief that colored his participation in the debate over the area bombing.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE JUS IN BELLO TRADITION:
FROM THE PEACE OF GOD TO THE HAGUE CONFERENCES

A perennial debate among anthropologists is whether war is endemic to the
human condition.¹ Two broad schools of thought advance competing theses. The first
maintains that warfare was pervasive among primitive cultures. Here the dominant
narrative is that of the progress of civilization as a gradual ascent, punctuated by periodic
setbacks, from barbarism and savagery to more peaceful ways of life. Arthur Nussbaum
writes, for example, that ancient warfare aimed “at extirpating the enemy with no
distinction of age or sex, and with unlimited relish in cruelty.”² This school might be
described as Hobbesian, looking back to a “state of nature” in which human life is
“solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”³ At the opposite end of the spectrum, an
opposing school maintains that the life of primitive cultures was innocent and peaceful,
before the corrupting influence of civilization introduced wars, conquests, slavery,
oppression, and domination. One version of this view was popularized in the twentieth
century by Margaret Mead, who believed that she had found in Samoa a peaceful society,
where free love reigned, uncontaminated by the sexual repressions of Western culture.

¹ Except where otherwise noted, this paragraph and the following one draw on John Keegan, A


13, p. 186.
War, Mead contended, was not natural to the human condition but a cultural invention. This type of thought might be described (with some degree of caricature) as Rousseauian, looking back to an idyllic world once populated by “noble savages.”

The balance of evidence suggests that the truth lies somewhere between these two extremes. In 1949, the American anthropologist Harry Turney-High published *Primitive War*, based on extensive fieldwork among American Indians. He advanced the thesis that primitive societies emerge into modernity when they rise above the “military horizon” separating primitive war from what he called “true war” – purposive wars of territorial conquest and political consolidation conducted by organized armies led by professional officers. Below this military horizon, he insisted, war was a “timeless universal activity” of a highly ritualized and symbolic character. Elaborate ceremonies and codes of combat tended to restrain the death, destruction, and suffering caused by war. Following Turney-High on this point, British military historian John Keegan suggests that in all societies, at whatever stage of development, the conduct of warfare always reflects the cultural values of its practitioners, like any other organized human endeavor. There is no such thing as

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5 Contrary to popular belief, Rousseau never used the term “noble savage” (*le bon sauvage*) which was first used in English by John Dryden in his play *The Conquest of Granada* (1672), and became common currency in the nineteenth century to describe idealistic views of life in primitive societies, or the pre-civil “state of nature” as envisioned by social contract theorists such as Locke and Rousseau. Charles Dickens ridiculed the term in a scathing 1856 review of an exhibition of paintings of American Indian life by artist George Catlin.

“absolute” or “pure” war transcending all cultural constraints. Its conduct is always channeled in certain directions by values expressed in religious teachings, warriors’ codes of honor, laws of war, and societal customs. The content of the norms governing warfare varies from culture to culture, but their existence is universal, even when they are honored more in the breach than in the observance. Keegan thus concludes that it is nonsensical to talk of war as an inherently lawless or amoral activity, for its conduct always reflects a society’s cultural values in one way or another.

The norms associated with the Western jus in bello tradition extend back to the Old Testament and classical antiquity. In Deuteronomy 20:11-14, for example, Moses instructs the Israelites that when they go up against a city to besiege it, they shall first offer terms of peace. If the inhabitants accept the terms, they are to be spared, and put to work as servants of the Israelites. If the inhabitants do not accept the terms, then upon victory all the males in the city are to be put to the sword, but the women, children, and cattle are to be spared and taken as booty by the victors. (These rudimentary restrictions on violence contrast with wars fought at the Lord’s command, in which everything alive within the city is to be put under ḥērem, or the ban.) Verses nineteen and twenty further limit the long-term destruction to be wrought by adding that during long sieges the Israelites may eat from but not cut down the fruit trees around the city.

Similar restrictions on warfare are found in classical authors. In the second century BCE, the Greek historian Polybius wrote, “It becomes good men not to wage a

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7 On the ban, see Deut. 7:1-6; Joshua 6:18-19; Joshua 7; I Sam. 15.
war of annihilation even with the wicked, but to proceed only so far that crimes may be remedied and corrected; and not to involve the innocent in the same punishment as the guilty, but even to spare those who are guilty for the sake of the innocent.”

Likewise, the first-century Roman philosopher Seneca is reported to have written that “in the calamities of war children are exempted and spared, on the score of their age, and women from respect to their sex.” Parallels can be found in non-Western cultures; in ancient India rules to be observed on the battlefield include the admonition, “Aged men, women, children, the retreating, or one who holds a straw in his lips as a sign of unconditional surrender, should not be killed.” Assessing this evidence, Richard Hartigan concludes that in the ancient world such sayings pointed towards but fell short of a full-blown doctrine of noncombatant immunity: “What had not developed was a consistent, coherent theoretical justification for such immunity, nor a precise definition of who should be considered immune, nor a practical apparatus to provide such immunity.”

While the Christian Just War tradition is generally reckoned to have received its first major exposition by Augustine of Hippo in the fourth and fifth centuries, articulation of the *jus in bello* norms of discrimination, noncombatant immunity, and proportionality

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only got underway in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In this chapter, I take this period as my starting point, beginning with the disparate medieval sources of the tradition in theology, canon law, chivalry, and civil law. Then, after considering the systematic development of the *jus in bello* norms by three pre-eminent Just War theorists of the early Modern period – Francisco de Vitoria, Hugo Grotius, and Emer de Vattel – I conclude by looking at the codification of the laws of war in the context of nineteenth and early twentieth-century international law. Subsequently, in Chapter Eleven, I will examine the life and witness of the Anglican Bishop George Bell of Chichester, who publicly opposed the area bombing of German cities during World War II on the basis of his commitment to the principles of the Just War and *jus in bello* traditions.

**Noncombatant Immunity in the Medieval Period**

Though the Just War tradition can be traced back much further, its “formal coalescence” was a product of medieval culture.¹² During the Middle Ages, Church law regulated many aspects of life today considered matters for the state. But with respect to the laws of war, the medieval Church initially had nothing in the way of a *jus in bello* to set alongside the *jus ad bellum* it had inherited from Saint Augustine. By the end of the medieval period a cultural consensus on the norm of noncombatant immunity had emerged from the interplay of four streams of thought and practice: theology, canon law,

chivalry, and civil law. The former two were ecclesiastical in orientation; the latter two reflected secular culture.

Christian theological reflection during the medieval period initially took place largely in monasteries; then, from the eleventh century, in cathedral schools such as Chartres; and finally, from the twelfth century, in universities such as Paris and Oxford. However, theology as such contributed little to the development of the *jus in bello* norms. Much more influential was the parallel tradition of canon law, which began to be studied systematically with the publication of Gratian’s *Decretum* in about 1140. Commentators on the *Decretum* were known as the Decretists; and commentators on subsequent collections of papal decrees were known as the Decretalists. Both helped preserve the canons and decrees associated with the Peace of God movement, dating back to the late tenth century, which had specified that certain classes of people, beginning with the clergy, should be immune from attack during war. Similar standards came from the tradition of chivalry, which developed a code of knightly conduct requiring protection of the weak and vulnerable members of society. Finally, distinct from ecclesiastical canon law was a tradition of secular scholarship on the Roman civil law as preserved in the *Corpus Juris Civilis* compiled under the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in the sixth century. Commentators on this body of law, known as the legists, are divided into the Glossators, whose work was compiled in the *Glossa Ordinaria* of Accursius in about 1230, and later commentators known as the Post-Glossators.

13 Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 122.
The Canon Law Tradition

Beginning in the late tenth century, the Church tried to restrict the destructiveness of medieval warfare by means of three types of legislation: the Peace of God, the Truce of God, and a brief attempt in the twelfth century to ban certain types of weapons. The canonical texts of the period often blend measures characteristic of all three types.

In 975, Bishop Guy of Anjou consulted with the knights and peasants of his diocese about how to keep the peace. As a result of this meeting, he imposed on the knights the obligation to respect the property of the Church and peasants. Subsequently, in 989, an assembly of bishops and laypeople at Charroux officially proclaimed the “Peace of God” (Pax Dei). The assembly forbade under pain of anathema violation of churches, despoliation of the poor of their livestock, and assault of unarmed clergy.14 The Archbishop of Bordeaux and the Bishops of Poitiers, Limoges, Perigueux, Saintes, and Angoulême all signed the statement.15 A series of subsequent local councils enacted similar legislation. The movement spread from the south of France into the north of France and parts of Germany and Catalonia, where local councils enacted measures defining certain classes of people who were to be immune from attack: particularly the clergy, monks, pilgrims, and peasants working the land.


15 Hartigan, Civilian Victims, 66.
Papal endorsement of the Peace of God was soon forthcoming. At the Council of Rheims in 1049, Pope Leo IX declared that clerics and poor people should be immune from attack. In 1059, Pope Nicholas II issued a bull extending immunity to pilgrims.\[^{16}\] A good example of Peace of God legislation in its developed form is found in Canon 11 of the Second Lateran Council, 1139: “We command also that priests, clerics, monks, travelers, merchants, country people going and returning, and those engaged in agriculture, as well as the animals with which they till the soil and that carry the seeds to the field, and also their sheep, shall at all times be secure.”\[^{17}\]

The second major type of legislation, the Truce of God, aimed to prohibit warfare on certain holy days and during certain seasons of the Church calendar. In 1027, a synod in the Diocese of Elne in southern France proclaimed that “no one should attack his enemy from the ninth hour on Saturday until the first hour on Monday, so that everyone may perform his religious duties on Sunday.”\[^{18}\] In 1054, the Council of Narbonne extended the prohibition on combat from sunset on Wednesday until sunrise on Monday,

\[^{16}\] Hartigan, Civilian Victims, 69.


\[^{18}\] Quoted in Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, The Ethics of War, 95. The hours are counted from sunrise.
and during the seasons of Advent through the octave of Epiphany, Lent through the octave of Easter, and from the Sunday before Ascension until the octave of Whitsunday (Pentecost), as well as on a number of major feasts and their vigils.¹⁹ With the support of Pope Urban II, the Council of Clermont reiterated these measures in 1095, as did the First, Second, and Third Lateran Councils in 1123, 1139, and 1179 respectively. Most of these councils enacted canons blending Peace of God and Truce of God measures in the same legislative texts. By all accounts, however, the Truce of God was largely ineffective. Johnson writes that “in attempting too much, [it] gained too little.”²⁰ Much medieval warfare, he continues, consisted of drawn-out sieges that were not much inconvenienced by prohibitions on fighting during certain days and seasons. Few if any medieval battles were ever postponed because of the day or season. After the publication of Gratian’s Decretum in 1140, the canonists did not attempt to build further upon this type of restriction upon warfare.²¹

A third canonical attempt to regulate the conduct of warfare was the ban enacted by the Second Lateran Council in 1139 on certain types of weapons: particularly crossbows, bows and arrows generally, and siege machines.²² Two points need to be noted. First, the use of such weapons was prohibited only against fellow Christians, and

¹⁹ Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, The Ethics of War, 95-96.
²⁰ Johnson, Just War Tradition, 125.
²¹ Johnson, Just War Tradition, 124-127.
²² Johnson, Just War Tradition, 128.
remained acceptable in warfare against infidels and heretics. Second, crossbows and bows and arrows were generally used by soldiers below the rank of knight; the nobility opposed these weapons because they made mounted knights particularly vulnerable. The ban thus served the interests of the knightly class, who would benefit from a mutual renunciation of the use of such weapons, and whose support could be called upon to help enforce the ban. Since heretics and non-Christians could be expected to continue to use these weapons, and would not follow the Church’s directives in any case, it did not seem in anyone’s interests to extend the ban to warfare against all enemies. Despite being based on a realistic appeal to the interests of the knightly class, this early attempt at arms control was ineffectual. In the following century, the canonist Hostiensis articulated the general canonical opinion that all weapons are licit in a just war.  

Unlike the Truce of God and attempts to ban certain types of weapons, the Peace of God continued to grow in influence throughout the medieval period. By listing certain classes of people who should be secure from attack – clergy, religious, pilgrims, travelers, merchants, and peasants tilling the soil – it articulated an early version of the norm of noncombatant immunity. Even though it expressed the self-interest of the Church in singling out the clergy in particular for protection, it exerted a wide appeal. Some recent theorists, such as Paul Ramsey, have argued that the norm of noncombatant immunity is implicit in the Just War doctrine itself.  

23 Johnson, Just War Tradition, 128-129.

24 See Johnson, Just War Tradition, 145-146.
permits war for the purpose of defending the innocent from unjust attack, it would seem that attacking the innocent even among the enemy undermines one’s rationale for going to war in the first place. On this reading, the Peace of God was making explicit the *jus in bello* norms already implicit in the Christian *jus ad bellum* tradition.

Johnson plausibly suggests that a more immediate reason for its appeal lay in its implicit relation to canons forbidding the clergy to bear arms. The long-standing ecclesiastical prohibition on clerical participation on warfare was reaffirmed in Gratian’s *Decretum* in 1140, and commented on in the following century by Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*.\(^{25}\) The Peace of God presupposed the reasoning that since clergy were forbidden to take up arms or participate in war, they should be treated as noncombatants and granted immunity on account of their peaceful function in society.\(^{26}\) The Peace of God, Hartigan writes, “attempted to formalize in rules the shared moral intuition that some members of society ought not to suffer in wartime.”\(^{27}\) The relevant moral intuition may be further specified as a matter of simple justice. As Johnson puts it, the categories of protected persons consist of those who should not have war made

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\(^{27}\) Hartigan, *Civilian Victims*, 67.
against them because they do not make war. Immunity from attack is thus a *right* which they relinquish only if they take up arms or allow soldiers to hide among them.\textsuperscript{28}

The Peace of God fell short of providing a comprehensive approach to noncombatant immunity in two respects. First, it omitted several seemingly obvious categories from its classes of protected persons, such as women, children, the aged, the sick, and the blind. Johnson speculates that one reason for this omission may have been that these categories already enjoyed considerable protection under the code of chivalry, to be discussed further below. Second, the immunity accorded to noncombatants extended only as far as fellow Christians and did not apply to non-Christians or heretics. Even so, its basic moral intuition, that those who do not make war should not have war made upon them, laid the foundations for a fuller and more comprehensive approach to noncombatant immunity that would ultimately remedy these deficiencies. The reason is likely that in contrast to the Truce of God and attempts at arms control, the enduring appeal of the Peace of God lay in its fundamental moral intuition, which, it can be argued, expresses a universal moral truth.

The Tradition of Chivalry

Robert C. Stacey writes that “the Age of Chivalry” is an appropriate label for the period from about the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. The roots of chivalric custom stretched back to ancient Frankish and Germanic warrior codes, mixed with the legacy of

\textsuperscript{28} Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 138-139.
classical Greece and Rome: figures such as Hector, Alexander the Great, Scipio, and Julius Caesar were regarded as exemplars of knighthood. The De Re Militari of the fifth century Roman author Vegetius was the age’s most authoritative work on the strategy and tactics of battle.  

Some authors, such as Hartigan, emphasize the Church’s influence in transforming “feudal chivalry” into “religious chivalry” between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, implying that the chivalric values of protection of the innocent, weak, and vulnerable emerged in part from the influence of the Christian peace movements discussed in the previous section. Others, such as Johnson, argue that for internal reasons the chivalric tradition produced its own version of noncombatant immunity, which exhibited not only affinities with but also differences from the canonical conception. On balance, the latter argument is more persuasive. As Stacey puts it, “the laws of war in the Age of Chivalry were an almost entirely secular creation.”

According to Johnson – who draws on the work of Sidney Painter on French chivalry – the four principal chivalric virtues were prowess, loyalty, courtesy, and prestige (or glory). These virtues were indigenous to the chivalric tradition and not


30 Hartigan, Civilian Victims, 71-73.


32 Johnson, Just War Tradition, 133-134.
imported from religious sources. The virtue of courtesy involved the mutual recognition of knight by knight. If one knight extended quarter to another in combat, it was because in reversed circumstances he would expect the same treatment. The code emphasized the separation of knights from other classes of persons, while defining the obligations of knights both to knights and to the rest of society. The knight’s stance towards non-knights could take the form of either condescension or rejection: “The condescension of the knightly code required that knights should protect, not harm, the weak and innocent: women, children, the aged, the sick, clergy and monks, peaceful persons everywhere.”

This posture of condescension reflected a position of social dominance, and a relationship of protector to those protected. One dark side of this picture, Johnson notes, concerned the treatment of non-knights on the battlefield. Defeating a fellow knight, the norm was to give quarter, take the foe prisoner, set a ransom within the prisoner’s ability to pay, and even release the prisoner on his own parole. But no such courtesies were extended to defeated soldiers of non-knightly rank, who could expect only to be massacred by the knights of the victorious party. In the chivalric world view, they were commoners who had become separated from their natural non-military occupations, which alone allowed them to live unmolested in the world.

The chivalric version of noncombatant immunity reversed the canonical idea that certain classes of persons deserve to be spared and protected as a matter of simple justice.


The immunity extended by the knight to the weak and the innocent was not a right but the knight’s *gift*, offered by a superior to inferiors. The knight’s virtue of glory or prestige depended on the extent of favors and protections he could spread around himself. But since such protection was a gift, he controlled it, and was free to modify or withdraw it in accordance with his own interests.³⁵ Stacey points out that the medieval laws of war recognized two different types of conflict: *bellum hostile*, in which all the rules of courtesy described above applied; and *guerre mortelle* (also known as *bellum Romanum*) in which no quarter was given, there was no privilege of ransom, prisoners could be massacred, the conquered could be slain or enslaved, and no distinction was made between combatants and noncombatants. The universally recognized sign of *guerre mortelle* was a red flag, by which a force signified before and during battle that it would take no prisoners. The most common examples of *guerre mortelle* occurred in wars against Muslims in Spain and the Holy Land. But while rare among Christians it was not unknown: the French at Crécy and Poitiers were under orders to give no quarter, as were the forces under Joan of Arc at Orléans.³⁶

This difference, between the canonical and chivalric conceptions of noncombatant immunity – as a right versus as a gift – introduces a key theme. When immunity from attack is seen as a natural right enjoyed by certain people because of their status as noncombatants, it stands on a firmer theoretical foundation than when it is seen as a

³⁵ Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 138-139.

privilege or gift that potential attackers can modify or withdraw according to their interests. The difference between the two conceptions corresponds to that between natural law and positive human law. If such a thing as natural moral law exists, it simply inheres in the nature of things. While it can be violated, it cannot be changed or set aside by human action. By contrast, positive human law can be altered or revoked according to changing circumstances by human decision. In debates about noncombatant immunity, then, much will turn on whether one believes it to be rooted in natural moral law, or simply in human legislation.

The Theological Tradition

Theologians contributed little to *jus in bello* ideas during the medieval period, and concentrated instead on developing the *jus ad bellum* criteria for determining when war itself was licit or illicit. Their efforts were intended to restrain war not by regulating how it was fought, but rather by reducing its frequency by strengthening such criteria as legitimate authority and last resort. By the sixteenth century, for example, the right to wage wars had been effectively taken away from feudal lords and restricted to national sovereigns. However, a passage in Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* (written 1268-1271) lays the foundations of what would become known in the *jus in bello* tradition as the doctrine of double-effect.

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As seen in the previous chapter, Augustine drew a sharp distinction between what a Christian could do as an individual acting in a private capacity, and as an official bearing responsibility for others in a public capacity. With respect to the question of whether killing in self-defense was licit, he argued that Christians acting as individuals are bound by the law of love to suffer death themselves rather than take the life of another.\(^{38}\) But in the *Summa*, in the Question “On Murder,” Aquinas reverses this position, proposing first that “Nothing hinders a single act from having two effects, only one of which is intended, while the other is beside the intention.”\(^{39}\) Acts derive their moral character from what is intended, and not from what is beside the intention. So, the act of self-defense may have a double-effect: the saving of one’s own life, and the slaying of the attacker. When one directly intends to save one’s own life rather than to kill the attacker, the act of killing in self-defense is licit. Yet, Aquinas continues, the act may be rendered illicit if it is out of proportion to its intended end. Self-defense is licit only to the extent that the person defending himself uses no more than necessary violence to repel the attack. Later thinkers were to substitute the term “destroy a military target” in the category of intended aim, and “kill innocent civilians” in the category of foreseen but unintended effect. By incorporating Aquinas’s doctrine of double-effect, the *jus in bello*

\(^{38}\) Augustine, *The Problem of Free Choice*, 1.5.12, quoted in Hartigan, *Civilian Victims*, 27.

tradition came to accept that noncombatants may be killed in attacks aimed at military targets, provided that the noncombatant deaths are not intended even if they are foreseen, and that no more than necessary violence is used to destroy the target.

Although Aquinas does comment extensively on the ethics of war, he does not appear to address directly the question of noncombatant immunity. In an essay on the natural law tradition in the ethics of war and peace, John Finnis argues that while in the Question dealing with war Aquinas makes no explicit reference to “the exceptionless moral norm that innocents may not be deliberately killed,” nonetheless, elsewhere in the Summa he affirms and defends that very norm. Finnis is referring to an Article in the Question “On Murder,” entitled “Whether it is lawful to kill the innocent?” to which Aquinas indeed gives a negative answer admitting of no exceptions. But this formulation leaves open two questions: first, would Aquinas regard enemy noncombatants in a just war as necessarily innocent? And, second, would he admit that the logic of the doctrine of double-effect allows for the unintentional killing of noncombatants (as later commentators affirmed)? It is perhaps relevant that the last Article in the Question asks “Whether one is guilty of murder through killing someone by chance?” Aquinas answers in the negative, on the grounds that chance effects are not intended, and again it is the intention that gives an action its moral character.

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40 Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Vol. 3, Iia-IIae, Q. 64, Art. 6, pp. 1464-1465.

41 Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Vol. 3, Iia-IIae, Q. 64, Art. 8, p. 1466.
In short, while Aquinas did not directly contribute to the development of the norm of noncombatant immunity, he did set forth some ethical principles that later writers would use to do so. However, his major contribution, the doctrine of double-effect, ultimately provided for exceptions to the norm rather than strengthening its force.

The Roman Civil Law Tradition

The dominant Christian view from the time of Augustine forward was that a just war was essentially a unilateral proceeding against a wrongdoer with justice only on one side. This presupposition encouraged a view of war as punishment which, according to various critics, militated against the development of *jus in bello* principles. Johnson points out, however, that in the medieval period a certain overlap existed between the concepts of *bellum* (public war) and *duellum* (private combat). Especially in the chivalric tradition, this overlap facilitated the extension of knightly ideals of courtesy, fair play, and respect for noncombatants from the sphere of individual combat into that of public warfare: “the overlapping of *bellum* and *duellum* implied that the moral regulations applying to behavior between individual knights be extended to govern the conduct of groups of knights and their retainers in conflicts with one another.” By a further extension of the same principle, war could be conceptualized not as a unilateral punitive action against a wrongdoer but as a contest between equals, both enjoying sovereign

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42 See Hartigan’s criticism of Augustine’s just war doctrine in the previous chapter.

status and having the same rights regardless of the cause that prompted the conflict.\textsuperscript{44} As in a duel, both sides would be entitled to the same legal prerogatives, and the issue would be decided, if at all, by the outcome.

The Italian Post-Glossator Raphaël Fulgosius (1367 – 1427) was the first author in the medieval period to point out that the Roman civil law made no distinction between just and unjust wars, and instead saw the rights of war as applying indifferently to both sides insofar as both were independent peoples or kings. In the absence of a common judge, war was the final arbiter of their conflict, and the victory of one side over the other became the source of a new legal situation.\textsuperscript{45} Thus, in answer to the question of how one who wages an unjust war acquires ownership of the things he captures through his unjust action, Fulgosius answers that “as it was uncertain which side waged war rightfully, and as there was no common judge above the parties by whom this could be ascertained in terms of civil law, the nations with the best of reasons decided that war would be the judge in this matter; i.e., that whatever would be captured in war should become the property of the capturing party, as if it had been adjudicated by a judge.”\textsuperscript{46} In this way, Fulgosius proposed to replace the category of unilateral just war with that of bilateral “public war,” in which the key question is not which side has the just cause but whether war has been publicly declared by those with the legal right to do so.

\textsuperscript{44} Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, \textit{The Ethics of War}, 227.

\textsuperscript{45} Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, \textit{The Ethics of War}, 227-228.

\textsuperscript{46} Quoted in Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, \textit{The Ethics of War}, 229.
While the Christian Just War tradition persisted in adhering to its traditional punitive categories despite such challenges, later Just War theorists – such as Francisco de Vitoria in the sixteenth century – were more open than their predecessors to the question of whether war could be just on both sides simultaneously. This point is important for the development of the *jus in bello* norms because the more the *jus ad bellum* question of which side has just cause fades into the background, the more room there is for focusing on how to regulate the conduct of warfare itself.

The Late Medieval Consensus

Even though the two principal medieval sources of the norm of noncombatant immunity – canon law and chivalry – had different emphases and sometimes contradicted each other, by the end of the fourteenth century they had effectively coalesced and merged.47 Two fourteenth century French writers, Honoré Bonet (c. 1340 – c. 1410) and Christine de Pizan (1364 – c. 1430), draw on both traditions and treat them as a unity. Bonet writes as a Benedictine monk who knows a great deal about both canon law and chivalry, while Pizan is closer to the chivalric ideals of the nobility to which she belongs. Yet in enumerating the classes of people to be protected from harm in war, both Bonet and Pizan jumble together the canonical and chivalric categories according to no particular logic: bishops, abbots, monks, doctors of medicine, pilgrims, women, blind

47 Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 139-140.
persons, all other men of the Church not previously named, the deaf, the dumb, woodsmen, and farmers.\textsuperscript{48}

Bonet wrote his book \textit{l’Arbre des Battailes} (The Tree of Battles) between 1382 and 1387. Unlike Augustine, Gratian, and Thomas Aquinas, who regarded war as a regrettable but sometimes necessary evil, Bonet, perhaps more in line with the chivalric tradition, sees war as a positive good. God has ordained war to secure the right government of a world infected by sin. War is virtuous because it seeks to right wrongs and to turn dissension into peace, in accordance with the Scriptures. Evils in war, such as the rape of women and the burning of churches, come not from the nature of war itself but from “false usages” of war committed by bad men. War’s goodness becomes apparent when it is conducted by virtuous men.\textsuperscript{49} With respect to noncombatant immunity, Bonet begins with what might seem the rather odd question of whether the ass is due the same protection in war as canon law accords the ox. He answers in the affirmative: insofar as the ass is used to plow and perform other agricultural tasks like the ox, the ass should be protected from attack – and by extension so should anyone who carries on peaceful business analogous to the plowing of these animals. To violate this norm removes from war the virtue which comes from “the ancient custom of noble warriors who upheld justice, the widow, the orphan, and the poor.” This reasoning

\textsuperscript{48} Johnson, \textit{Just War Tradition}, 141.

derives from the concern of the chivalric tradition to protect the innocent and vulnerable. Yet Bonet happily mixes the classes so identified with those named in canon law.⁵⁰

A prolific and accomplished writer of considerable importance in the history of early French literature, Christine de Pizan wrote *Les Faits d’Armes et de Chivalrie* (Feats of Arms and Chivalry) in 1408 – 1409. Pizan makes clear from the start that she is addressing her book not to learned scholars, but to military practitioners. As such, it is a work of popularization of ideas drawn from previous sources, including especially Bonet’s *l’Arbre des Battailes*. However, she departs from Bonet in one important respect: although she praises the good deeds done by chivalrous knights and soldiers, and repeats Bonet’s admonition that the evils of war do not condemn war as such, she is nonetheless more skeptical than Bonet of the good that can be expected from the use of military force, and more inclined to lament the sufferings caused by war.⁵¹ *Les Faits d’Armes et de Chivalrie* exerted great influence on subsequent thought about the laws of war, receiving wide distribution towards the end of the fifteenth century and in the early part of the sixteenth, a hundred years after it was written.⁵²

A key theme of the book is the necessity for good military leadership, organization, and discipline – over and against the individualistic exploits of knights errant who serve only their own interests. In the last two chapters, Pizan makes extensive

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⁵¹ Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, *The Ethics of War*, 211.

use of Bonet’s work, in the form of an extended dialogue with the master. She stresses the importance of paying soldiers regularly so that they have no excuse to pillage the territories they traverse. With respect to the rights of noncombatants, she asks whether it is right in enemy territory to seize simple peasants who are not engaged in warfare:

I ask you whether, whenever a king or prince is warring against another, even though it be just, he has the right to overrun the enemy land and take prisoner all manner of people, common people, that is, peasants, shepherds, and such like; it would appear not. Why should they bear the burden of profession of arms, of which they know nothing? It is not for them to pass judgment about war; common people are not called to bear arms; rather it is distasteful to them for they say they want to live in peace and ask no more. They should be free, it seems to me, just as all priests and churchmen are, because their estate is outside military activity. What honor can accrue to a prince to kill, overrun, or seize people who have never borne arms nor could they make use of them, or poor innocent people who do nothing else but till the land and watch over animals?

Here is apparent the synthesis of canonical and chivalric versions of noncombatant immunity: poor peasants and shepherds enjoy the same rights as clergy and religious because they fulfill peaceful social functions; and there is no honor in killing or seizing poor innocents. Yet Pizan does not leave matters there. The master responds to her question, pointing out that if the subjects of the English king were to give him aid and comfort in pursuing a war against the French, according to military right the French would be justified in overrunning their country, seizing what they find, and taking prisoners of all classes. Pizan acknowledges the problem of distinguishing the innocent

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53 Willard, *Christine de Pizan*, 186.

among enemy noncombatants: “And occasionally the poor and simple folk, who do not bear arms, are injured—it cannot be otherwise.” Yet despite this difficulty, Pizan reaffirms that “it is right that the valiant and good gentlemen-at-arms must take every precaution not to destroy the poor and simple folk, nor suffer them to be tyrannized or mistreated. For they are Christians and not Saracens.” That last sentence highlights one persisting limitation of the late medieval consensus represented by Bonet and Pizan: noncombatant immunity, however well established as a norm, was still understood as extending only to fellow Christians and not to fellow human beings as such.

Assessments vary as to the effectiveness of the doctrine in actually restraining war. Stacey writes that the failures of laws of war in the age of chivalry include “their complete ineffectiveness in protecting noncombatants, in limiting weaponry, and in protecting the common soldier from indiscriminate slaughter.” Yet, he continues, these failures should not be judged too harshly, because “all succeeding systems of international law have also failed to limit effectively the conduct of war by soldiers and nations.” Johnson offers a more positive assessment. The fourteenth-century version of noncombatant immunity, he writes, was “not a moral absolute, demarcating the limits of that which is ideally, inflexibly, and eternally just, but a timebound and culturebound formulation of a moral floor upon human conduct in war.” It must be judged, he continues, in terms of whether it was the best that the culture that produced it could do in

55 Willard, *Writings of Christine de Pizan*, 299.

terms of articulating its ideals in relation to the realities of its own political and military structures – and in terms of whether it provided workable restraints on the conduct of war. On these criteria, he concludes, the medieval consensus “must be rated relatively high on the scale.” Because it expressed the consensus of an entire culture, rather than the partisan interests of one part of the culture, it did actually affect how warfare was conducted. Quoting Sidney Painter, Johnson writes: “The knights of the twelfth century had conducted their martial games like battles—their descendants (in the fourteenth century) made their battles resemble tourneys. … War became a martial sport.”

Time-bound and culture-bound as the fourteenth-century version of noncombatant immunity may have been, its staying power in comparison with parallel efforts to restrict medieval warfare resulted not only from its appeal to the self-interest of the Church and the knightly nobility, but also from the fundamental moral intuition it expressed. In this respect, its effectiveness in restraining medieval warfare is only part of the point. Formulation of the norm helped people articulate their basic sense that it was wrong for soldiers to massacre innocent people during war – a wrong that both violated the rights of the victims and brought dishonor upon the perpetrators. It remained for subsequent periods to take up that basic insight and adapt it to changing historical circumstances.

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57 Johnson, Just War Tradition, 150.
Francisco de Vitoria

Francisco de Vitoria was born in Spain in 1492, the year of Columbus’s first voyage to the New World. A member of the Dominican order educated at Burgos and Paris, he taught theology at the University of Salamanca until his death in 1546. Although in Paris he had come into contact with the Nominalism of Jacques Almain and John Mair, and was familiar with the Humanism associated with Erasmus, he nonetheless became an exponent of the Neo-Scholasticism that aimed to retrieve and demonstrate the contemporary relevance of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Vitoria is best known for his opposition to the injustices perpetrated by Spanish settlers against the indigenous inhabitants of the New World. In 1539, he delivered his famous reflectios, or lectures, De Indis (On the American Indians) and De Jure Belli (On the Law of War). Both dealt with the Just War tradition: the former examined the causes or “titles” advanced by apologists for the Spanish conquests and found most of them wanting; the latter undertook a further exploration of theoretical issues associated with the Just War tradition itself. Johnson aptly comments that Vitoria drew into a coherent whole the various strands of Just War theory that he had inherited from the medieval period: “it was through Vitoria that subsequent theorists knew the medieval just war doctrine in its classic expression: both a jus ad bellum and a jus in bello.”

Central to Vitoria’s method is use of the natural law and the jus gentium or law of nations. Martin C. Ortega comments that Vitoria was the first European thinker to

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58 Johnson, Just War Tradition, 175.
conceive of the community of nations in global terms, not limited to Christendom but comprising *totus orbis*, the whole world. Johnson notes that Vitoria made the first serious attempt to apply Just War concepts across cultural boundaries; by means of natural law he sought to bridge the gulf between European culture and the cultures of the American Indians. In the thought of Aquinas, knowledge of the Divine Law is made available to humanity both through Revelation, recorded in the Scriptures, and through the natural law known by the correct use of human reason. Thus, apart from Christian faith, the American Indians could be expected to have a working knowledge of the contents of natural law, reflected in turn in the *jus gentium*, consisting of the formally unlegislated but customary common practices among nations. The natural law and *jus gentium* could thus supply the foundation for harmonious relations and concourse between Christian and non-Christian peoples. Johnson criticizes Vitoria for setting up a vehicle for extending Western hegemony over non-Western cultures on the supposition that European values expressed the natural law while American Indian values did not. While the criticism is valid, this was not Vitoria’s intention. His aim, instead, was to counter exploitation and oppression of the Indians by showing that the actions of the Spaniards were in direct violation of the natural law, especially in relation to the just causes for war. In particular, Vitoria rules out the possibility that either the Pope or the

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60 Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 75-77.
Emperor can authorize wars undertaken for the purpose of forcing the Indians to convert to Christianity: “difference of religion cannot be a cause of just war.”\textsuperscript{61} He continues: “the sole and only just cause for waging war is when harm has been inflicted.”\textsuperscript{62} As Johnson comments, a Just War doctrine based in natural law applies to all human beings; wars are justified only when fault exists that can be known by natural reason.\textsuperscript{63}

In Vitoria’s scheme, relations among nations are regulated by natural law as reflected and expressed in the \textit{jus gentium}. In certain circumstances, when one nation violates the rights of another, war may be the means of redress, subject to the traditional \textit{jus ad bellum} criteria of just cause, legitimate authority, and right intention. To these, Vitoria adds a fourth: \textit{debitus modus} or proper procedure, thus giving the \textit{jus in bello} tradition a profile it had lacked in previous theological treatments of the Just War.\textsuperscript{64} Vitoria considers \textit{jus in bello} principles in Question Three of \textit{De Jure Belli}, “What may be done in a Just War?” The first is that “it is never lawful in itself intentionally to kill innocent persons.”\textsuperscript{65} Just cause for war comes from harm or injury inflicted by the enemy, but the innocent have done no such harm. In marked contrast to Christine de

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{62} Vitoria, \textit{De Jure Belli}, 1.3.4, p.304.
\bibitem{63} Johnson, \textit{Just War Tradition}, 97.
\bibitem{64} Hartigan, \textit{Civilian Victims}, 82.
\bibitem{65} Vitoria, \textit{De Jure Belli}, 3.1.1, p. 314.
\end{thebibliography}
Pizan’s admonition that the “poor and simple folk” are to be spared in war because “they are Christians and not Saracens,” Vitoria extends the prohibition on killing the innocent – because it is a precept of the natural law – to all human beings:

It follows that even in wars against the Turks we may not kill children, who are obviously innocent, nor women, who are to be presumed innocent at least as far as the war is concerned (unless, that is, it can be proved of a particular woman that she was implicated in guilt). It follows also that one may not lawfully kill travelers or visitors who happen to be in the enemy’s territory, who are presumed innocent. And the same is true of clergy and monks, unless there is evidence to the contrary or they are found actually fighting in the war.66

The references to women being implicated in guilt, and to clergy and monks being found fighting, highlight the point that for Vitoria and his successors the terms “guilt” and “innocence” refer specifically to participation or non-participation in hostilities.67 Vitoria implicitly rejects any idea that the population of the state with an unjust cause is subject to punishment because it shares in that state’s war guilt. The terms “guilty” and “innocent” in this context mean “combatant” and “noncombatant,” and are well on their way to being replaced by those terms.

Vitoria then proceeds to consider exceptions to the norm that he has laid down, invoking in so many words the principles of double effect and proportionality. “It is occasionally lawful,” he writes, “to kill the innocent not by mistake, but with full

66 Vitoria, De Jure Belli, 3.1.1, p. 315.
67 Johnson, Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War, 196; Hartigan, Civilian Victims, 84, 90.
knowledge of what one is doing, if this is an accidental effect." For example, during the storming of a fortress or city, it may be impossible to fire artillery, or set fire to buildings, without crushing and burning noncombatants along with combatants. But one should do so anyway, he argues, because otherwise it would be impossible to prosecute just wars. Then he immediately issues a caution:

Nevertheless … care must be taken to ensure that the evil effects of the war do not outweigh the possible benefits sought by waging it. If the storming of a fortress or town garrisoned by the enemy but full of innocent inhabitants is not of great importance for eventual victory in the war, it does not seem to me permissible to kill a large number of innocent people by indiscriminate bombardment in order to defeat a small number of enemy combatants. Finally, it is never lawful to kill innocent people, even accidentally and unintentionally, except when it advances a just war which cannot be won in any other way. In the words of the parable: “Let the tares grow until the harvest, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them” (Matthew 13:24-30).

The converse of the next-to-last sentence is that it is lawful to kill innocent people accidentally and unintentionally when doing so advances a just war that can only be won in that way. Johnson raises the question of whether here Vitoria inadvertently opens a door for arguments that could be used to justify, say, a nuclear attack on a city provided that the harm done was not disproportionate to the expected good to be achieved. He concludes: “Here it is sufficient to note that the position taken by Vitoria and Suárez, though it embodies restraining factors, opens the way for erosion of restraints in the name

69 Vitoria, De Jure Belli, 3.1.2, pp. 315-316.
of military necessity.”\textsuperscript{70} Johnson’s critique perhaps highlights the need for a more explicit articulation than Vitoria provides of the obligation to take positive steps to avoid, reduce, and minimize noncombatant casualties in warfare. Nonetheless, it is clear from the passion with which Vitoria writes on the subject that while he is willing to allow certain exceptions on the basis of genuine necessity, he wants to see noncombatants protected to the greatest extent possible in all circumstances.

A final contribution of Vitoria to the tradition concerns the question of what Johnson calls “simultaneous ostensible justice,” that is, whether a war can be just on both sides at once. Hartigan comments that a crucial difference between Vitoria and most medieval authors was his insistence that an objective violation of a right does not necessarily entail subjective moral guilt on the part of the violator.\textsuperscript{71} In other words, the party objectively at fault in the dispute may honestly believe himself to be in the right. Vitoria addresses this question in Question Two, Article Four of \textit{De Jure Belli}, where he states that war cannot be just on both sides, but then goes on immediately to add the qualification that “where there is provable ignorance either of fact or of law, the war may be just in itself for the side which has true justice on its side, and also just for the other side, because they wage war in good faith, and are hence excused from sin. Invincible


error is a valid excuse in every case.” As Johnson summarizes the matter, the causes of war can be so complex that it is impossible to sort them out and achieve a truly objective judgment of just and unjust causes. When neither side can be sure of the justice of its cause, however, it is that much more bound to observe the limits of the *jus in bello*.73

Vitoria’s successors in the Spanish School of Neo-Scholasticism include Luis de Molina (1535 – 1600) and Francisco Suárez (1548 – 1617). Hartigan writes that Suárez is rightly considered the last of the Scholastics, with his vast works constituting a final statement of the Medieval-Renaissance synthesis of philosophy and theology.74 Although Suárez expanded and refined Vitoria’s Just War theory in considerable detail, he added little new to Vitoria’s exposition of noncombatant immunity. Hartigan concludes ruefully that the writings of Suárez mark the end of Scholastic thought – and perhaps for the time being of Catholic theology generally – on the Just War and its proper conduct: “It is almost as though the moralists and theologians left the field by common consent, for nothing of substance is heard from them again until the resurrection of just war theorizing after World War II.”75

72 Vitoria, *De Jure Belli*, 2.4.2, p. 313. Italics in original.

73 Johnson, *Just War Tradition*, 98.

74 Hartigan, *Civilian Victims*, 94.

75 Hartigan, *Civilian Victims*, 96.
Hugo Grotius

Often described as the father of modern international law, Hugo Grotius (1583 – 1645) is best known for his 1625 work *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (Of the Law of War and Peace). Grotius practiced law in The Hague from 1599 to 1607; he then spent eleven years in various government positions in Holland. He was tried and imprisoned for life in 1618 on account of his Arminian religious views. In 1621 he escaped to Paris. After brief sojourns back in Holland (1631 – 1632) and Hamburg (1632 – 1634), he spent the last eleven years of his life in Paris as Swedish ambassador to France, a post to which he was appointed by King Gustavus Adolphus, who admired his work. In addition to being a jurist and diplomat, Grotius was also a philosopher, classicist, and lay theologian. His theological works include *The Satisfaction of Christ* (1617) on the theory of the Atonement, and *On the Truth of the Christian Religion* (1627), a textbook in Christian apologetics. In a time of religious turmoil, he advocated toleration and dialogue. In his writings on natural law, the *jus gentium*, and the Just War, he sought a rational basis for restrictions on warfare just as the religious wars of the Post-Reformation period were reaching their greatest intensity. Moreover, he sought the sources of these restrictions in principles of natural law and the *jus gentium* capable of recognition by adherents of competing Christian confessions among whom it was no longer possible to appeal to commonly recognized theological teachings or readings of Scripture. From its first appearance, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* exerted a profound influence on the development of international law in the modern period.
On the Law of War and Peace

Grotius begins *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* with a *Prolegomena* setting out his philosophy of law. While many have treated the civil law of Rome and other states, few have touched upon that body of law concerned with the relations among different peoples. Grotius proposes to treat it in a systematic and comprehensive manner as no one has attempted before.⁷⁶ Many, from Thucydides to Machiavelli, view this branch of law with contempt, supposing that for a sovereign nothing is unjust which is expedient, that for those whom fortune favors might makes right, and that war is irreconcilable with law.⁷⁷ But Grotius states that this position must be rejected. A basic characteristic of human nature is sociability: the impelling human desire for peaceful community with fellow human beings.⁷⁸ Law arises from the need to achieve and maintain social order. To this sphere of law belong respect for the property of others, restoration of what belongs to them, the obligation to fulfill promises, and the punishment of wrongdoing.⁷⁹ All this would still be valid, Grotius adds, “even if we concede that which cannot be conceded without the utmost wickedness – that there is no God or that the affairs of men are of no concern to Him.” But, he hastens to add, reason, unbroken tradition, and many proofs and miracles disclose that the opposite is true: “Hence it follows that we must without

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exception render obedience to God our Creator, to Whom we owe all that we are and have; especially since, in manifold ways, He has shown himself supremely good and supremely powerful, so that to those who obey Him He is able to give supremely great rewards, even rewards that are eternal, since He Himself is eternal.” 80

Human nature is the “mother of the law of nature.” Civil law, by contrast, derives from mutual consent; but the impulse to give this consent arises from human nature, which may thus be considered the “grandmother” of civil law. Moreover, as the “Author of nature” God has willed that individuals should be weak and lacking in much that they need to live, “to the end that we might be the more constrained to cultivate the social life.” 81 Having laid this foundation, Grotius proceeds to introduce the law of nations: “But just as the laws of each state have in view the advantage of that state, so certain laws could, and obviously did, originate between most states by mutual consent, aiming at the advantage, not of individual nations, but of this great global community. And this is what is called the law of nations, whenever we distinguish that term from the law of nature.” 82

It is in the interest of every state to obey this law of nations because no state is so powerful as to be completely self-sufficient and never need the help of other states for purposes of trade or alliances. 83 Nor does this law fall into abeyance during war: “On the

80 Grotius, Prolegomena, 11, pp. 10-11.

81 Grotius, Prolegomena, 16, p. 13.

82 Grotius, Prolegomena, 17, p. 13.

83 Grotius, Prolegomena, 22, p. 16.
contrary war ought not to be undertaken except in pursuit of what is right and, when once undertaken, it should be conducted only within the bounds of law and good faith.”

Between states at war the written laws of particular states are not in force, but unwritten laws are: “those which nature prescribes, or the agreement of nations has established.”

So, Grotius concludes, there is a “common law among nations … which applies both to war (ad bella) and in war (in bellis),” That this law of war is widely disregarded, especially in the Christian world, is all the more reason for undertaking to write about it.

Grotius divides De Jure Belli ac Pacis into three books. In Book One, he defines the meanings of the terms “law” and “war.” He divides wars into three categories: public, private, and mixed. Public wars are fought on the authority of those who have jurisdiction; and they are divided in turn into those that are “formal” and “non-formal.”

The word “formal,” Grotius explains, is the equivalent of “just.” He continues: “To make a war formal by the law of nations, two things are necessary. In the first place, it must be waged on both sides by the supreme power in the state; and, in the next place it must be accompanied by certain formalities, on which we shall speak later.”

Grotius later explains that these formalities consist of a public declaration of war, so that it is clear that

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84 Grotius, Prolegomena, 25, p. 18.

85 Grotius, Prolegomena, 26, pp. 18-19.

86 Grotius, Prolegomena, 28, p. 21.

the war is “not a private undertaking but [is] to be waged by the will of both peoples or of
the heads of the peoples.”

In Book Two, Grotius addresses the just causes for war. In common with Aquinas
and Vitoria, he considers war to be just only in response to a wrong that the responsible
party refuses to repair. A just war may be undertaken for four principal reasons: defense
of self or property against unjust attack; recovery of things wrongly taken; collection of
outstanding debts; and punishment of wrongdoing. Discussing each of these reasons in
great detail, he aims to enumerate systematically and exhaustively all the various rights
whose violation could justify the resort to force.

In Book Three, Grotius turns to the jus in bello question of the right conduct of
warfare. In Chapter One he enunciates some basic principles. What is permissible in war
is determined by the end in view; only those actions that are necessary to achieve the
war’s just cause are legitimate. Such actions may have indirect and unintended
consequences which by themselves would be wrong to inflict: “So a ship filled with
pirates, or a house with brigands, may be bombarded even though in that same ship or
house there are a few children, women, or other innocent persons, who are endangered by
the attack.” But the decision to take such an action should not be made “unless the good
which is the aim of our act is much greater than the harm we fear.” He concludes with the

88 Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, 3.3.11, p. 292.
89 Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, The Ethics of War, 400-401.
90 Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, 3.1.2, p. 269.
admonition: “in case of doubt we should favor, as safer, that course which protects the other person’s interest more than our own.”  

In the rest of Book Three, Grotius provides two very different outlines of what is lawful in war, based on two different sets of assumptions. The difference turns on the meaning of the word “lawful.” In one sense, something is said to be lawful insofar as it is right, just, or indifferent in itself. But in another sense, something is said to be lawful insofar as it can be done with impunity, not being subject to punishment according to enforced human laws and customs. The customary law of nations (jus gentium) permits much that law of nature forbids. Here, it seems that Grotius breaks with previous natural law theorists such as Vitoria who conceived the jus gentium as reflecting, expressing, and extrapolating from the natural law. In line with the classic Just War tradition, Grotius maintains that by natural law both sides in a war cannot be just, and only the side with the just cause may legitimately exercise the rights of war: self-defense, attacking the enemy, attempting to recover what is one’s own, inflicting punishments, and taking restitution for wrongs received. The side without just cause does not even have the right of self-defense. Nonetheless, since it is often impossible for third parties to determine which side’s cause is just, the jus gentium recognizes both sides in a publicly declared war as having these rights. As noted above, the fourteenth-century legist Fulgosius pointed out that this was the view of Roman civil law; Grotius was, in turn, well familiar with Roman law, which

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91 Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, 3.1.4, p. 271.

92 Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, 3.4.2, pp. 294-295.
supplies much of what he presents as the *jus gentium*. “This law of license,” he continues, “extends very widely.” Going to war, one may kill or injure not only all among the enemy who bear arms, but all the enemy’s subjects, and even all persons found in the enemy’s territory, including foreigners.  

Subjects of the enemy may be slain in their own land, in the lands of other enemies, in lands belonging to no one, and on the sea. This right extends even to women and infants, captives, those who wish to surrender, and those who have surrendered unconditionally. According to the *jus gentium*, all may be slain with impunity on the principle that everything belonging to the enemy is at the disposition of the victor.  

Reading through this chilling list of permissible actions, it is crucial to remember that Grotius does not consider them right in themselves but simply, in effect, what one can get away with under the customary law of his time.  

Grotius then turns from what the *jus gentium* permits to what the natural law forbids, noting with wry humor: “I must now retrace my steps and deprive the warmakers of almost all the privileges I may seem to have conferred, but did not confer, on them.” Many things are said to be “lawful” or “permissible” because they can be done with impunity, which either deviate from the rule of right or “at least, with more piety and more applause from good men … would be left undone.”  

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93 Grotius, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, 3.4.6, p. 296.

94 Grotius, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, 3.4.8, p. 297.

95 Grotius, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, 3.4.9-12, pp. 297-299.

even if the war has been initiated lawfully – with a public declaration by the sovereign authority – if the cause is unjust, then all actions undertaken in prosecuting the war are likewise unjust.\textsuperscript{97} Grotius here reasserts the classic Just War tradition against the idea of a public war with justice on both sides.

Grotius introduces his famous principle of “moderation” in the conduct of warfare in Chapter Eleven. According to “internal justice” – that is, what is intrinsically lawful or right-in-itself as opposed to the “external justice” enforced by human law – in war no one may be killed intentionally “save as a lawful punishment, or when necessary to protect our lives and property.”\textsuperscript{98} In punishing the enemy, distinctions are to be made between those who are responsible for the war and those who followed them, and between those who acted out of wickedness and those who were sincere but misguided. Even in cases where it would be just to put an enemy to death, it is often praiseworthy to be merciful and remit punishment. Similarly, to the extent possible, “mercy, even if not justice, requires that except for grave reasons affecting the safety of multitudes, nothing should be done that may threaten the destruction of innocent people.”\textsuperscript{99} Grotius then enumerates a number of classes of people who should always be protected from attack: children; women (unless they have become combatants); those with religious or scholarly occupations; farmers; merchants; prisoners of war; those who wish to surrender; and

\textsuperscript{97} Grotius, \textit{De Jure Belli ac Pacis}, 3.10.3, p. 344.


\textsuperscript{99} Grotius, \textit{De Jure Belli ac Pacis}, 3.11.8, p. 353.
those who have surrendered unconditionally. The basic principle requiring such distinctions is that it is unacceptable "that by a kind of fiction the enemy may be regarded as forming a single body." With these words, Grotius disposes of the notions of collective guilt and collective punishment.

Assessments of Grotius

Virtually all commentators on Grotius acknowledge his importance as a source for the subsequent development of modern international law. Assessments of his significance tend to divide, however, between those who regard him as an innovator and those who regard him as summarizing and systematizing the tradition he inherited. Johnson, for example, takes the view that while Grotius drew extensively on classical antiquity and on his predecessors Vitoria and Suárez, whom he much admired, he did not attempt to argue from their position to his, but rather reworked the thought of preceding ages in light of changed assumptions about human nature to produce a new conception of international relations for a new age. Figures from the past served only as examples. By contrast, Reichberg, Syse, and Begby write: “Often presented as the founding treatise of the new discipline of international law, De iure belli ac pacis would be more accurately described as a summation of the earlier tradition of just war.” In part, these

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100 Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, 3.10.9-15, pp. 353-357
101 Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis, 3.11.16, p. 357.
103 Reichberg, Syse, and Begley, The Ethics of War, 386.
competing assessments turn on the question of the extent to which Grotius was a religious thinker in the Christian tradition, or the pioneer of a new secular approach to international law. Oliver and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan include Grotius at the end of their collection of writings of classical Christian political theorists, arguing that while a new approach to political thought did emerge in the mid-seventeenth century divorced from theological premises, Grotius remained “a true heir of the theological tradition,” while others, notably Hobbes, “broke with the structure of Christian political thought.”

Many commentators have focused on Grotius’s hypothetical proposition in the *Prolegomena* that the obligations of natural law would still be valid even if God did not exist. As noted, however, Grotius immediately repudiates this proposition to affirm the traditional understanding of natural law as grounded in divine law. Nonetheless, O’Donovan and O’Donovan write, these words were “the cue for Grotius to be claimed by younger figures who really did aspire to found a moral science that would be valid independently of God. But such a thing was not Grotius’s purpose.” They continue: “Far from displacing divine law with an autonomous rational politics, [the *Prolegomena*] aims to demonstrate the comprehensive claim of divine law (in the form of natural Right) upon every variety of human relation. … Grotius was famous as an apologist for natural

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104 Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 787.

105 O’Donovan and O’Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 788.
religion. The universal evidence of natural law was, for him, a proof that God was active, not that God was dispensable.\textsuperscript{106}

Johnson suggests that Grotius radically reworked the traditional Christian understanding of the relationship between nature and grace in a way that laid the foundations for purely secular theories of natural law. Grotius’s imperatives for moderation in warfare are found, Johnson argues, in natural law, the \textit{jus gentium}, and the values of charity and mercy taught by Christianity but also found in less perfect form in Judaism and Islam.\textsuperscript{107} But, Johnson continues, for Grotius charity and mercy represent the perfection of natural justice and are thus in principle accessible to all human beings. This conception, Johnson maintains, differs from that of Aquinas, Vitoria, and Suárez, for whom charity is a supernatural virtue of grace, embodying precepts found in divine Revelation but not in natural law.\textsuperscript{108} Johnson concludes that when prohibitions on cruelty are taken to derive from charity (understood as a supernatural virtue capable of being exercised only by Christians), “the \textit{jus in bello} is weaker than when they are understood as implied by nature or human agreement.”\textsuperscript{109} Hartigan similarly suggests that Grotius marks a break from the Catholic tradition which derived the claims of justice from nature, but of charity or mercy from grace, so that it regarded fellow Christians as eligible for

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{106} O’Donovan and O’Donovan, \textit{From Irenaeus to Grotius}, 790.
\bibitem{108} Johnson, \textit{Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War}, 228.
\end{thebibliography}
merciful treatment that it denied to non-Christians. Hartigan concludes that Grotius signals a widening conception of what it means to be human, so that fellow human beings as such, rather than just fellow Christians, are seen as appropriate recipients of moderation, charity, and mercy in the course of war.\textsuperscript{110}

It seems to me, however, that these interpretations fundamentally misread both Grotius and the Catholic Just War tradition. True, Grotius does suggest that in some circumstances moderation in warfare appropriately consists of showing mercy to those who would otherwise be liable to punishment according to natural justice. Similarly, while the natural law gives people certain rights vis-à-vis their enemies – to restitution, for example – they may still choose on the basis of charity to waive those rights and exercise forgiveness instead. Yet the bulk of the \textit{jus in bello} norms in Grotius as well as in Vitoria and Suárez express not charity or mercy in these forms but \textit{justice} in the form of respect for the natural rights of noncombatants. Johnson and Hartigan seem to miss the point that in Thomism the distinction between natural virtues, such as justice, and supernatural virtues, such as charity, turns not so much on the content of the associated precepts as on the respective \textit{ends} at which those virtues aim. The natural virtues aim at the end of a good and well-ordered life in this world; the supernatural virtues aim at the end of eternal life in the next. Thus, the same action may be motivated by two different virtues. When a soldier in combat encounters a woman and children and protects their lives with a view to safeguarding their rights as noncombatants – just as perhaps he hopes

\textsuperscript{110} Hartigan, \textit{Civilian Victims}, 101-102.
that an enemy soldier would protect his wife and children if the circumstances were reversed – he exercises the virtue of natural justice. When he performs exactly the same actions out of love for God and for human beings created in God’s image, he exercises the supernatural virtue of charity. So, for Vitoria and Suárez, most if not all of the *jus in bello* norms articulate the requirements of natural justice, although one may be motivated to obey them by the supernatural virtue of charity as well. Because the virtue of charity addresses the motivations and dispositions more than the actual content of actions, Vitoria and Suárez did not likely envision a wide range of potential restrictions upon warfare enjoined by charity alone and hence only applicable to Christians. With respect to noncombatant immunity, Grotius does not mark as great a break with Aquinas, Vitoria, and Suárez as Johnson and Hartigan suggest. The Spanish Neo-Scholastics were just as concerned to protect noncombatants. Far from making a break in the direction of a purely secular natural law ethic, Grotius stands squarely in the Christian Just War tradition of his predecessors, albeit as possibly its last great exponent before the twentieth century.

**Emer de Vattel**

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment did not find war attractive or exciting. Its basic consensus included the convictions that in some sense all humankind was one, and that all nations were capable of harmonious collaboration and exchange. But inordinate passions and mistaken views of their self-interests prevent peoples and nations from recognizing their true interests as citizens of the world and members of the human family,
and thus make wars unavoidable for the time being.\textsuperscript{111} Some thinkers of the period, such as Kant, looked forward to the eventual abolition of war, but the more pressing question was how in the meantime to limit, restrict, humanize, and civilize war.\textsuperscript{112} A writer who well expressed the spirit of the times was the Swiss diplomat Emer de Vattel (1714 – 1767). His 1758 book \textit{Le Droit des Gens} (The Law of Nations) was widely influential. According to Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, it remained “a basic handbook for diplomats up until World War I, and articulated the main presuppositions which underlie the later codification of humanitarian law in the Hague and Geneva Conventions.”\textsuperscript{113} Pointing to a profound transformation of the place of Just War theory in relation to natural law and positive human law; Vattel’s work “stands at the crossroads between the centuries’ old tradition of just war and the newly emergent discipline of international law.”\textsuperscript{114}

Vattel writes in his Introduction that a nation or state is a body of people who have joined forces to procure their mutual welfare and security. Such a body becomes “a moral person” with its own understanding and will, as well as its own obligations and rights.\textsuperscript{115} Regardless of its size and strength, nations are by nature equal with respect to


\textsuperscript{112} Best, \textit{Humanity in Warfare}, 35-37.

\textsuperscript{113} Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, \textit{The Ethics of War}, 505.

\textsuperscript{114} Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, \textit{The Ethics of War}, 504.

their obligations and rights: “A dwarf is as much a man as a giant; a small Republic is no less a sovereign state than the most powerful kingdom.” Since nations are free, independent, and equal, and each has the right to decide how best to fulfill its duties, a perfect equality of rights obtains among them in the conduct of their affairs and the pursuit of their policies. The intrinsic justice of their conduct is not for others to judge.117

Vattel adheres closely to the traditional *jus ad bellum* principles with respect to the justification for war. Nations are bound to seek their own preservation. This duty carries with it the right to do whatever is necessary for that purpose, “For the Law of Nature gives us a right to every thing, without which we cannot fulfill our obligation.”118 War is that state in which a nation prosecutes its rights by force. *Public war* is the form of war which takes place between nations or sovereigns, carried on in the name of the public power and by its order. The sovereign power of a nation is alone entitled to make war. Such wars can be either *defensive* or *offensive*. A nation which takes up arms to repel the attack of an enemy is fighting a defensive war; a nation which attacks another nation with which it has been living in peace undertakes an offensive war. The purposes of offensive war generally involve obtaining something to which the attacking nation lays claim, administering punishment for an injury received, or preventing an injury which is about

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to be inflicted.\textsuperscript{119} Vattel here departs from some of his predecessors in allowing preventive war. Still, a nation must have received an injury, or be clearly threatened with one, before it has a just cause for offensive war.\textsuperscript{120}

A just cause for war gives a nation the right to use all the means necessary, but no more, to obtain the war’s aim or end. But since it is difficult to estimate what the actual situation demands, nations should conform to certain general rules on what means are permitted them. Those who knowingly take advantage of the opportunity to do everything that such rules permit, when less severe measures would work as well, remain guilty before God and in their conscience: “In this, lies the difference between what is just, equitable, irreprehensible in war, and what is only allowed between nations, and suffered to pass with impunity.”\textsuperscript{121} This distinction between what is extrinsically permissible and what is intrinsically right is of crucial importance, as shall be seen below in connection with Vattel’s theory of the voluntary law of nations.

An enemy’s unjust attack gives a nation the right to repel his attack; likewise, the enemy who takes up arms to resist one’s just demands becomes the aggressor by his unjust resistance. But this argument for the right to kill one’s enemies in war sets limits to itself: “On an enemy’s submitting and laying down his arms, we cannot with justice take

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{119}] Vattel, \textit{Law of Nations}, 3.1.1-5, pp. 469-471.
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] Vattel, \textit{Law of Nations}, 3.3.42, p. 491.
\item[\textsuperscript{121}] Vattel, \textit{Law of Nations}, 3.8.137, p. 542.
\end{itemize}
away his life. Thus, in a battle, quarter is to be given to those who lay down their arms; and, in a siege, a garrison offering to capitulate are never to be refused their lives.”

With respect to noncombatants, Vattel writes that women, children, feeble old men, and sick persons do fall into the category of enemies if they belong to the enemy nation. But since they are enemies who make no resistance, one has no right to maltreat or attack them: “This is so plain a maxim of justice and humanity, that at present every nation, in the least degree civilized, acquiesces in it.” Here it becomes clear that Vattel is describing not only how war should be conducted but also how he believes it actually is conducted by the civilized nations of his day. When “furious and ungovernable” soldiers rape women or massacre women, children, and old men, their officers generally try to stop them and punish them. But women must confine themselves to the occupations of their own sex, and not “meddle with those of men” by taking up arms. Likewise, public ministers of religion are entitled to immunity so long as they do not take up arms. In former times, Vattel writes, everyone capable of bearing arms became a soldier when his nation was attacked, but this is no longer the case: “At present, war is carried on by regular troops: the people, the peasants, the citizens, take no part in it and generally have nothing to fear from the sword of the enemy” – provided that they submit to the occupiers, pay the imposed contributions, and refrain from all hostilities. Vattel recommends this policy on pragmatic as well as moral grounds: “By protecting the unarmed inhabitants, keeping the soldiery under strict discipline, and preserving the

country, a general procures an easy subsistence for his army, and avoids many evils and dangers.”\(^{123}\) Except when their destruction is necessary to the war’s operations, fine buildings should be spared “which do honor to human society, and do not contribute to increase the enemy’s strength—such as temples, tombs, public buildings, and all works of remarkable beauty.”\(^{124}\)

So far, most of the normative content of what Vattel has written stands in continuity with the traditional Just War tradition. Previous writers in the tradition had generally grounded the belligerents’ rights and duties in natural law. But here Vattel introduces a new source of standards of conduct, which he calls the “voluntary law of nations.” Since each nation claims to have justice on its side, in times of conflict it will arrogate to itself the rights of war and claim that its enemy has none. When both sides do this, however, a rightful determination of which side has just cause is never reached, and the conflict becomes more cruel and disastrous. Vattel’s solution is to make questions of just cause a private concern for the consciences of the respective ruling authorities:

Let us then leave the strictness of the necessary law of nature to the conscience of sovereigns; undoubtedly they are never allowed to deviate from it. But as to the external effects of the law among men, we must necessarily have recourse to rules that shall be more certain and easy in the application, and this for the very safety and advantage of the great society of mankind. These are the rules of the voluntary law of nations.\(^{125}\)


Whereas according to natural law only one side can have just cause, according to the voluntary law of nations the war is to be treated as just on both sides. The idea of war for a just cause is thus replaced with that of “war according to due form,” or “regular” war:

Thus, the rights founded on the state of war, the lawfulness of its effects, the validity of the acquisitions made by arms, do not, externally and between mankind, depend on the justice of the cause, but on the legality of the means in themselves—that is, on every thing requisite to constitute a regular war. If the enemy observes all rules of regular warfare, we are not entitled to complain of him as a violator of the law of nations. He has the same pretensions to justice as we ourselves have; and all our resource lies in victory or an accommodation.¹²⁶

This voluntary law of nations has been established from necessity and for the avoidance of greater evils. It does not give the sovereign with the unjust cause any way of justifying his conduct or appeasing his conscience, but merely provides an external legality and impunity. Thus, the unjust side is no less guilty of violating the law of nature merely because that same natural law, in seeking to reduce the evils of human society, “requires that he be allowed to enjoy the same external rights as justly belong to his enemy.”¹²⁷

Vattel’s approach lays almost total emphasis on the jus in bello rules of warfare at the expense of the jus ad bellum criteria. Johnson writes approvingly that Vattel carries through the secularization of Just War doctrine to the point where it is based unequivocally in nature and not in grace.¹²⁸ The point that Johnson seems to miss is that

Vattel is already beginning the process of decoupling the *jus in bello* norms from natural law itself. Both Grotius and Vattel perceive a disjunction between what the *jus gentium* permits and what the natural law forbids. But where Grotius uses the natural law to bolster the *jus in bello* claims over and against the permissiveness of the law of nations, Vattel does the reverse by treating the voluntary law of nations as the source of norms of right conduct in warfare over and against what he sees as the *jus ad bellum* concerns of the natural law. At one level, Vattel’s doctrine of the voluntary law of nations promises to strengthen the norms of discrimination and noncombatant immunity by treating each side’s cause as equally just and focusing instead on the right conduct of warfare. The just war thus becomes not war with a just cause but war fought justly. At another level, however, his approach weakens the *jus in bello* norms by making them a function of the voluntary law of nations without the backing of natural law. Vattel effectively privatizes natural law by making it binding in the consciences of sovereigns but nowhere else. The only publicly enforceable standards are those to which the nations have at least implicitly agreed. Vattel’s theory thus anticipates a time when international law will be regarded as nothing more than a body of positive law consisting of treaties and conventions which the nations have negotiated, agreed, and ratified among themselves. But when international law is no longer seen as reflecting natural law, let alone divine law, then it becomes *in principle* infinitely malleable and subject to constant renegotiation according to changing historical circumstances. Indeed, when the *jus in bello* norms are regarded as nothing more than the human product of a consensus of international opinion at a particular time,
then in certain extreme cases they may be set aside unilaterally by a nation believing itself to be facing a crisis not anticipated by those who legislated them.

The Nineteenth Century

Vattel’s theory of war according to due form went hand-in-hand with the military practices of an age of relatively limited warfare. That age came to an end with the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. The *levée en masse* decree of August 23, 1793, with the attendant idea of the “nation in arms,” undermined one of the key presuppositions of noncombatant immunity by making every citizen a soldier. The ensuing wars caused enormous suffering to civilians, mainly because the massive French land armies could not operate effectively without constant plundering. The British navy regularly bombarded enemy harbors and coastal cities. In Spain between 1808 and 1813, popular resistance to French occupation took the form of near total war and gave birth to the term *guerrilla*. Napoleon’s Spanish War became notorious for the atrocities and brutalities committed by both sides, and the suffering caused to civilians, not for the last time, by the occupying forces’ inability to distinguish guerrillas from the general population.\(^{129}\)

In *Humanity in Warfare*, Geoffrey Best gives a good account of the subsequent development of the laws of war. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the conventional foundations – that is, foundations formally embodied in conventions and treaties – of the laws of war were laid: “This decisive transposition into a modern and

\(^{129}\) Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, 87-119.
contemporary mode was part and parcel of international law’s ‘positive swing’, and to some extent indicated a rejection of the idea that anything helpful and ‘relevant’ might be learned from the past. The accompanying neglect of classical and medieval natural law may well be reckoned rather tragic.”

By contrast, the present was taken very seriously. The laws of war entered a period of their highest repute, being more enthusiastically studied and talked about than ever before.

Several schools of thought regarding war and peace competed for influence during the nineteenth century. Acknowledging some oversimplification, Best describes them as the “War Movement” and the “Peace Movement.” The ideology of the Peace Movement was closely allied with that of laissez-faire capitalism, exalting commercial and industrial progress as ipso facto making for peace rather than war. The “non-identical twin” of the Peace Movement was Internationalism – a philosophy which held as a matter of faith that increased contacts among peoples of different countries and cultures would increase their mutual liking and understanding, thus making wars less likely. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the War Movement was not explicitly identified or named as such; the label designates a general trend among certain currents of thought to idealize and glorify war. To earlier juridical justifications of war more were added from diverse sources, including Nationalism, Romanticism, the cult of Napoleon, Darwinism, and

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130 Best, Humanity in Warfare, 129
131 Best, Humanity in Warfare, 131-134.
“anti-rationalism.” Advocates of war lauded its supposedly ennobling effects on human character, and attacked the decadent “materialism” of bourgeois culture.\textsuperscript{132}

International negotiation of the laws of war took place within the interplay of both movements. Diplomats at the Hague Conferences appear to have wanted to satisfy the expectations and longings of the Peace Movement while sacrificing none of the essential demands of the War Movement.\textsuperscript{133} The perceived self-interests of the military played a crucial role in the codification of the laws of war, since governments needed the support of their military establishments to sign on to the various treaties and conventions under discussion.\textsuperscript{134} By the 1870s, international lawyers had become well-organized members of a prestigious profession, and were offering advice not only to the military on how to control warfare but also to governments on how to control the military.\textsuperscript{135}

The greatest achievements in the codification of the laws of war during this period involved new protections not so much for noncombatants as for combatants. In an age of conscription and large armies, public opinion was concerned most about alleviating the often horrendous sufferings of soldiers in the field.\textsuperscript{136} In August 1864, fifteen countries sent representatives to the first Geneva Convention, which resulted in an international

\begin{footnotes}
\item[132] Best, \textit{Humanity in Warfare}, 135-139.
\item[133] Best, \textit{Humanity in Warfare}, 139-140.
\item[134] Best, \textit{Humanity in Warfare}, 147.
\item[135] Best, \textit{Humanity in Warfare}, 144.
\item[136] Best, \textit{Humanity in Warfare}, 147.
\end{footnotes}
agreement on bettering the conditions of wounded soldiers, who were henceforth to be
cared for regardless of nationality on the grounds that they were no longer combatants but
human beings in need. Ambulances, military hospitals, and medical workers were to be
considered neutral and identified by a distinctive insignia: a red cross on a white
background.  

By the end of the 1870s, national Red Cross societies were to be found all
over Europe. The second Geneva conference in 1906 augmented these regulations by
requiring victorious commanders to protect enemy wounded, to furnish lists of captured,
wounded, and dead enemy soldiers, and to put personal belongings of the dead on the
way to their next of kin. Meanwhile, the treatment of prisoners of war was specified in
the Lieber Code, U.S. Army General Order 100, in 1863. The first comprehensive
statement of the laws of war in the form of a field manual for military officers, the Lieber
Code became the prototype for a number of European countries, who soon published
similar manuals. One of its key principles is that a prisoner of war is not a criminal to be
punished, but a lawful enemy to be treated with humanity.

The question of the treatment of civilians was subject to greater contention.
Arguments developed between advocates for invaders and occupiers and advocates for
the invaded and occupied. The former proposed ideas of “occupiers’ rights,” arguing that

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138 Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, 141.
140 Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, 155-156.
civilian populations under occupation were effectively “prisoners of war on parole” and justly liable to drastic treatment if they did not do as they were told. Their interests would be best served if they stayed in their homes, kept apart from continuing hostilities, and stood ready to comply with orders from the occupying forces. Some of the bitterest arguments concerned whether occupiers had the right not only to docile acquiescence but also to positive assistance from enemy populations in their power. Other disputes concerned the extent of restraint to be exercised by occupying forces in encounters with irregular and guerrilla forces. These debates eventually issued in the definition of a “lawful belligerent” at the Hague Conference in 1907.  

Up to 1914, the international law of war was codified principally at the Geneva Conventions of 1864 and 1906, and at the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907. Everything agreed at Geneva and The Hague appealed as much to military self-interest as to civilian humanitarian zeal. Protection of noncombatant civilians was relatively underemphasized. Consequently, when the cycle of two World Wars began in 1914, “the number of sentences in the Conventions devoted to civilians was small and relatively negligible compared with the numbers concerning soldiers, sailors, and the medical personnel looking after them … which partly explains why civilians emerged from these thirty bad years as the category of human beings most in need of protection in war.”

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142 Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, 220-221.
The Hague Conferences addressed aerial bombing of civilian populations, Best writes, with only a few specific prohibitions and one general principle. The articles containing the specific prohibitions are discussed in Chapter Seven below. The “general principle” was the Martens Declaration, in the Preamble to the Convention on Land Warfare, which reads in part:

It could not be intended by the Conference that the cases not provided for should, for want of a written provision, be left to the arbitrary judgment of military commanders. Until a perfectly complete code of the laws of war is issued, the Conference thinks it right to declare that in cases not included under the present arrangement, populations and belligerents remain under the protection and empire of the principles of international law, as they result from the usages established between civilized nations, from the laws of humanity, and the requirements of the public conscience.”

Here was a welcome limitation to legal positivism: where the current law is silent, recourse is to be had to the customary laws of war as received from the past. Yet in an age that tended to disregard the past and that had largely forgotten the classical and medieval conceptions of natural law, it remained an open question how well the old usages were remembered or how much authority they could be accorded.

Conclusion

The *jus in bello* norms coalesced during the Middle Ages from Christian theology, canon law, chivalry, and civil law. They subsequently received comprehensive and systematic articulation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the writings of

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143 Quoted in Best, *Humanity in Warfare*, 166.
such Just War theorists as Vitoria, Suárez, and Grotius. For these Christian thinkers, the
*jus in bello* norms were part of a synthesis of divine law, natural law, and the *jus gentium*. 
After Grotius, however, this synthesis began to unravel in at least two ways.

First, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, certain philosophers sought to construct a purely secular natural law ethic. Traditional understandings of natural law presupposed an epistemology in which the human conscience could perceive first principles of intrinsically right conduct and deduce secondary moral precepts from them. While retaining the vocabulary of natural law, eighteenth-century ethical systems began with rational reflection on human nature as such – often conceived in terms of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain – and thence attempted to discern principles of conduct according to enlightened self-interest. As Brian Tierney writes, an ethic of natural law and natural rights “was not necessarily dependent on divine revelation, and later it proved capable of surviving into a more secular epoch.”

Second, international law itself came to be seen more and more as positive human law, without any necessary grounding in natural law. Where Vitoria appears to have regarded the *jus gentium* as a reflection and expression of natural law, with Grotius a disjunction between the two has appeared, which with Vattel has widened to the point that the *jus gentium* is on the way to becoming autonomous public law while natural law is relegated to the realm of private conscience. This transposition of international law

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from the realm of natural moral law into that of positive human law becomes nearly complete in the nineteenth century. Again, Tierney sums up the situation with respect to the idea of natural rights: “During the post-Enlightenment era natural rights fell into disfavor; by the end of the nineteenth century belief in such rights had almost faded away before the onslaught of historicism, cultural relativism, and legal positivism.”

Paradoxically, then, while the nineteenth century saw unprecedented codification of the laws of war in formal treaties and conventions, by the twentieth century the *jus in bello* tradition itself lost much of its moral authority as an articulation of inherently valid norms. I shall argue in Chapter Eleven that this weakening impeded the ability of its adherents, notably Bishop George Bell of Chichester, to make effective use of the tradition in their arguments against the area bombing of German cities.

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CHAPTER SIX
CHRISTIAN PACIFISM
FROM THE EARLY CHURCH TO INTERWAR BRITAIN

In his essay “Christian Nonviolence: An Interpretation,” Theodore J. Koontz identifies three distinct varieties of this tradition, which he labels pacifism, abolitionism, and nonviolent resistance.¹ He emphasizes that while these three sub-traditions are distinct, with different emphases, they are not necessarily incompatible. One can theoretically adhere to all three simultaneously. In practice, they have often overlapped and intermingled. As far as possible, I follow Koontz’s usages in this chapter, although sometimes it is difficult to avoid using the term “pacifism” loosely to cover all three.

Pacifism, according to Koontz, was the dominant position among the early Church, the Waldensians, the Bohemian Brethren, and the Anabaptists. It is typically rooted in specifically theological claims, focusing on the need to form communities of believers committed to governing their life together according to distinctively Christian standards. It stresses the need for personal conversion if individuals are to live nonviolently, as well as the necessity for participation in a community that undergirds and sustains this commitment. It is often pessimistic about the prospects of peace in a world that does not know Christ. Such pacifists tend to emphasize the need to accept suffering as part of the disarmed life.²


Abolitionism entails the commitment to abolish the evil of war as, say, the evil of slavery was abolished. The moral imperative is to establish a world system that will make war obsolete. Abolitionism tends to combine moral revulsion against war with optimism about the prospects of eliminating war. Unlike pacifists, abolitionists do not necessarily refuse to participate in all wars; their focus is on transforming the world (rather than on living a new life in an alternative society made up of those who have chosen to follow Christ). They are confident in the goodness of human nature and the potential of education for helping people understand the folly of war as a means of settling conflicts. This perspective goes back at least to Erasmus. The Enlightenment’s schemes for perpetual peace also belong to this tradition.\(^3\)

Nonviolent resistance focuses on developing nonviolent ways to resist unjust political power or to defend against aggression. It insists that there are usually pragmatically effective nonviolent means of resistance that constitute viable alternatives to the use of force. What distinguishes this position from pacifism is its stress on the effectiveness of nonviolent action and on the need for active involvement in the pursuit of justice. Gandhi’s independence movement in India and the civil rights movement in the United States led by Martin Luther King, Jr. have been the chief inspirations for this viewpoint. Central to this strategy is the belief that the successful exercise of power effectively depends upon the consent or acquiescence of the governed.\(^4\)

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\(^3\) Koontz, “Christian Nonviolence,” 170-171.

In this chapter, I trace the historical interplay of these three movements of Christian nonviolence – particularly the first two – beginning with the early Church, and continuing with the pacifist movements of the late medieval period and Radical Reformation. I then introduce the abolitionist tradition by discussing Renaissance humanism and Enlightenment plans for perpetual peace. A discussion of the Quakers shows the intermingling of the pacifist and abolitionist strains in the seventeenth century. An examination of nineteenth century pacifism lays the foundations for the study of British pacifism between the two World Wars. Subsequently, in Chapter Twelve below, I examine the life and witness of Vera Brittain, a British pacifist who publicly opposed the area bombing of German cities during World War II.

**The Pre-Constantinian Church**

Christian pacifism is solidly rooted in the first three centuries of Church history. Lisa Sowle Cahill writes that the early Church found it necessary to respond to two questions that have ever since defined the parameters of Christian ethics: (1) What is the way of discipleship established by Jesus? (2) How can Christians, individually and corporately, integrate their religious identities with their membership in civil societies? The agenda of transforming society was not a feature of early Christian ethics: “The first Christians’ question was rather, How shall the Christian person and community be related to the pagan emperor and government?” An obvious nexus for the struggle with these

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questions, she continues, was the problem of Christian participation in state institutions such as the military, which could well set the participant on a collision course with the requirements of discipleship.

The establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire by the Emperor Constantine in 313 CE signaled vast changes in the Church’s official responses to these questions. At that point, according to pacifist historian Geoffrey Nuttall, everything changed: “When the State accepted the Church and as a consequence the Church accepted the State, in large measure the Church also accepted the world and the ways of the world.”⁶ Before this moment the Church’s teaching was overwhelmingly pacifist. Roland Bainton writes that the age of persecution was the age of pacifism insofar as no known Christian author approved of Christian participation in battle.⁷ Cahill similarly emphasizes that the Christian writers of the first three centuries were adamant that discipleship requires close adherence to the nonviolent and countercultural example of Jesus’ life and sayings.

Nuttall locates the grounds of early Christian pacifism in a perceived dualism between the Church and the world – the world being defined as the entire social and cultural system expressed in all social institutions, especially the state. The early Christian refusal to take part in war was one aspect of a wider refusal to take part in the

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Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder identifies the overarching issue as the polarity between Caesar and God, and identifies three points where military service stood in tension with the Christian life: idolatry, oaths, and bloodshed. First, the early Christian Church made itself the target of persecution by its refusal to participate in the worship of the Roman Empire’s many pagan deities. One reason the early Church opposed Christian membership in the imperial armies was that military exercises and training often required participation in idolatrous worship. Second, following the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 5:33-36), the early Church forbade taking oaths, which entailed the invocation of pagan deities; and, again, military service required such oaths. And third, the early Christians refused military service because Caesar takes life, and life is sacred.

Yoder notes that some historians argue that idolatry and oaths were the determinative factors in the early Church’s refusal of military service, which was thus not based on pacifist principles at all. He counters that if a non-persecuting, non-idolatrous Empire had called Christians to military service, they still would have refused, but in that case they would have been answering a different question than they were actually asked. Similarly, Bainton maintains that the early Christians’ primary reason for refusing military service was the conviction that war is incompatible with love. Following the Sermon on the Mount, patristic writers emphasized the Gospel call to love one’s enemies,

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8 Nuttall, Christian Pacifism in History, 8-9.

and the wrongness of hate and retaliation. Some early Church exegetes read the apostolic decree that Gentile converts should abstain from blood (Acts 15:20, 29) as prohibiting bloodshed in all forms, including capital punishment and war.\textsuperscript{10}

A progressive loosening of the Church’s attitude becomes perceptible towards the end of the second century, when the first evidence appears of the presence of Christian soldiers in the Roman armies. Nuttall sees a gradual falling-off from the Church’s earlier high ideals as marking “the general Christian surrender to the spirit of the world.”\textsuperscript{11} Yoder similarly writes of a “creeping empire loyalty” as Christians sought to commend themselves to the wider culture in the hope that better-informed authorities might be induced to stop persecuting the Church.\textsuperscript{12} The earliest records of Christian soldiers in the army date to about 170 CE; Yoder guesses that these soldiers were converts who stayed in the army to finish their terms of service. Bainton suggests that the Church was willing to sanction peacetime military service restricted to administrative and police functions but not entailing direct bloodshed; he cites the example of Martin of Tours (316-397) who, in the fourth century, resigned his commission in the army when a battle was imminent on the grounds that as a Christian he could not fight.\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, Yoder observes that while the Church authorities did not approve of participation in the military,

\textsuperscript{10} Bainton, \textit{Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace}, 77-78.

\textsuperscript{11} Nuttall, \textit{Christian Pacifism in History}, 7.

\textsuperscript{12} Yoder, \textit{Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution}, 50-52.

\textsuperscript{13} Bainton, \textit{Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace}, 81.
Christian soldiers were not excommunicated. This gradual relaxation of the discipline of church membership in all areas continued through the third century and was made manifest above all in the decision following the Decian persecution of 250 that even those who had denied Christ could be readmitted to communion after suitable penance.\footnote{Yoder, \textit{Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution}, 53-54.}

Two early Christian writers who addressed the question of military service were Tertullian of Carthage (c. 160 – c. 225) and Origen of Alexandria (184/185 – 253/254). Tertullian disapproves of the phenomenon of Christians serving in the Roman military, although he twice tells the story of the Thundering Legion of Marcus Aurelius, whose Christian soldiers saved it from a drought by their prayers.\footnote{Cahill, \textit{Love Your Enemies}, 47.} On the basis of a literal reading of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, Tertullian condemns military service as inescapably entailing participation in violence, idolatry, oaths, and lewdness. Christians should not enlist; and soldiers who convert should not continue to serve.\footnote{Cahill, \textit{Love Your Enemies}, 41-48.} Yet, despite his deserved reputation for moral rigorism, Tertullian’s attitude to the state and its armed forces is not wholly negative. He appeals for tolerance of Christianity on the grounds that Christians pray for the emperor and the stability of the empire. Even if Christians refuse to worship the emperor as divine, they still acknowledge that God has called him to his office.\footnote{Cahill, \textit{Love Your Enemies}, 47.} In one revealing passage in his
Apology (c. 197), he writes: “Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish.”¹⁸ The reference to “brave armies” suggests a double-standard: while Tertullian maintains the traditional prohibition on Christian participation in war, he commends prayers for pagan soldiers whose military service helps secure the peace of the empire. Christians are called to a higher moral standard than pagans; but activities forbidden to Christians, such as fighting for the emperor, may not only be licit for pagans but even worthy of the Church’s prayers.

In Against Celsus (248), Origen appeals to a similar double-standard. In the late second century, the pagan philosopher Celsus had charged Christians with benefiting from the peace of the empire while doing nothing to contribute to its preservation by serving in either the government or the military. Celsus reproached the Christians by asking what would happen if everyone followed their example: “If all men were the same as you, there would be nothing to prevent the king from being left in utter solitude and desertion and the forces of the empire would fall into the hands of the wildest and most lawless barbarians.”¹⁹ In response, Origen reaffirms the traditional Christian refusal to participate in war; Christ has forbidden any sort of killing, even of the greatest

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¹⁹ Bainton, Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace, 68.
wrongdoer. Origen interprets the wars fought by the Israelites at God’s command in the Old Testament allegorically as figures of heavenly realities, souls fighting for God against sin and spiritual evils. This theme of spiritual warfare in turn figures prominently in Origen’s apologetic concerning the ways in which Christians benefit the state. The world dominance of the Roman Empire is the result of God’s providential concern to facilitate the missionary work of the apostles and the growth of the Church. By their prayers, Christians support the emperor even more effectively than the soldiers who fight against his physical enemies. But just as pagan priests are exempt from fighting, and must keep their hands clean from blood so that they may offer sacrifices to the pagan deities, so much more should Christians be exempt, “wrestling in prayers to God on behalf of those who are fighting for a righteous cause; and for the king who reigns righteously, that whatever is opposed to those who act righteously may be destroyed!” Here, again, a double-standard appears along with a division of labor: Christians are forbidden to shed blood, but are nonetheless called to pray for those who “fight for a righteous cause” in the emperor’s service. What is licit for pagans is forbidden to Christians, who are thus enabled to pray all the more effectively for those who fight for the peace of the empire, which in turn establishes the context within which the Church carries out its mission of saving souls.

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20 Cahill, Love Your Enemies, 52.

21 Cahill, Love Your Enemies, 53.

22 Origen, Against Celsus, in Holmes, War and Christian Ethics, 49. My italics.
Bainton suggests that this implied external division of labor – between the pagan emperors and their armies who fight, and the Christians who pray for them – was gradually transposed, after the time of Constantine, into an internal division of labor within the Church between the monastics and clergy who pray, and the laity living in the world whose work may include fighting just wars. Yoder writes that the rigorous standards which applied in the early Church to all Christians were gradually refocused in monasticism. Increasingly, there were two types of Christians: those living in the world, and those living the “religious life” in monasteries. The medieval prohibition against clergy bearing arms or shedding blood is rooted in this division. Thus pacifism did not die out in the medieval Church, but was kept alive by clergy and monastics, who remained vocationally bound to the primitive Christian ideal of nonviolence.

Late Medieval Pacifist Movements

Beginning in the twelfth century, several movements sought to recapture and put into practice the teachings of Christ and his earliest followers. Since they turned directly to the Bible as their sole source of authority, they are often considered precursors to the sixteenth-century Reformation. Pacifism was one aspect of the primitive Christian ideal rediscovered in the scriptures. Nuttall writes: “The outstanding characteristic of these medieval pacifists … is their return to the Bible; within the Bible to the New Testament;

23 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 84.

24 Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 54.
and within the New Testament to the Sermon on the Mount.”

The three most important such movements were the Waldensians, the Lollards, and the Hussites.

The Waldensians took their name from Peter Waldo (c. 1140 – c. 1218), a merchant of Lyons who sometime around 1160 sold his possessions, gave the proceeds to the poor, and went forth as an itinerant preacher of evangelical simplicity and poverty. By 1170 he had gathered many followers who became known variously as the Poor of Lyons, the Poor of Lombardy, or the Poor of God. Waldo’s life and movement may have influenced his younger contemporary Francis of Assisi (1181 – 1226), but unlike Francis, Waldo advocated vernacular translations of the Bible and attacked the Catholic dogmas of Purgatory and Transubstantiation. The Third Lateran Council formally condemned his teaching in 1179. Pope Lucius III excommunicated Waldo in 1189; and the Fourth Lateran Council condemned his movement in 1215. Waldo and his followers took refuge in the high valleys of the French and Italian Alps, where they continued their pursuit of a Christian life based on the New Testament. Identifying the Sermon on the Mount as the “Law of Christ,” they repudiated oaths, military service, capital punishment, war, and all shedding of blood. The Waldensians were subject to violent persecution throughout the medieval period. Subsequently, many were incorporated into the Reformed Churches in the sixteenth century. The Waldensian Evangelical Church still continues in the Italian Piedmont with affiliated branches in South America and the United States.

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The Lollards were followers of John Wycliffe (c. 1320-1384) who, unlike Waldo, was in holy orders and a distinguished scholar. In 1361, he became Master of Balliol College, Oxford. He advocated vernacular translations of the Bible – completing his own translation of the Vulgate into English in 1382 – and the sending out of “poor priests” as preachers of the Gospel without any episcopal license. Wycliffe’s theological agenda was to establish the Bible as the sole authority and source of divine law, which he referred to variously as the Law of God, the evangelical Law, the Law of Christ, and the Law of the Gospel. His repudiation of war sprang directly from his reading of the Sermon on the Mount. 27 Bainton writes, however, that Wycliffe appears not to have been an absolute pacifist: “He held war to be contrary to the teaching of Christ and considered the highest Christian ideal to require complete abstention, but allowed that on a lower level war might be waged for the love of God or to correct a people.” 28 In 1410, John Badby was the first Lollard to be burned at the stake. Wycliffe was posthumously condemned as a heretic by the Council of Constance in 1415. The Lollard movement was driven underground but remained active until the English Reformation.

The Hussites took their name from Jan Hus (c. 1369-1415), a well-known preacher in Prague around 1400. He was condemned as a heretic by the Council of Constance in 1415 and, despite a promise of safe-conduct from the emperor, was burned at the stake there. The result was a Czech national uprising against the Holy Roman

27 Nuttall, Christian Pacifism in History, 22-23.

28 Bainton, Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace, 119.
Empire and the Catholic Church which got underway from 1416 to 1420. The Hussite movement splintered into several distinct groups. 29 The Moderate Ultraquists were led by the nobility, whose chief demand was Communion in both kinds; they attempted to negotiate with the Holy Roman Empire to gain this concession as a symbol of Czech independence. The Militant Utraquists wanted a more thorough reformation; they were led by Jan Žižka and were not defeated until the 1430s. The Taborites went to a mountain they called Tabor and there practiced community of goods and lived in expectation of the imminent return of Christ. They were finally defeated by the Holy Roman Empire with great loss of life at the Battle of Lepany on May 30, 1434. The Unitas Fratrum (Unity of Brethren) followed the lead of Petr Chelčický (c. 1390 – c. 1460), who rejected the violent policy of the Taborites and Militant Utraquists. In the early sixteenth century, however, the main part of the movement relaxed its discipline. Following severe persecutions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Unitas Fratrum reconstituted itself in 1722 in Herrnhut, Germany, with the support of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, as the present-day Moravian Church.

According to Chelčický, the example of Christ is the standard of all human conduct. 30 The essence of Christ’s teaching is the law of love. In addition to the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament and the Two Great Commandments of the Gospel, he identified “Six Minor Precepts” in the Sermon on the Mount, by which Jesus

29 Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 147-149.

30 This paragraph follows Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 150-155.
reinterpreted the Old Testament Law. The apostasy of the medieval Church grew from disregard of this law of love; the Pope and emperor are the “two whales” that have rent the fishing net of the Church. Chelčický maintained that Pope Sylvester should have required Constantine to relinquish his temporal power before receiving him into the Church. No true Christian can hold any state office; princes and rulers who convert to the true faith must resign their authority. Christians should settle disputes among themselves; instead of resorting to the secular courts they should seek arbitration by the congregation. If all other sanctions fail, it may be necessary to expel the offender from the fellowship. The words of Christ forbid the death penalty. Participation in war is incompatible with the Christian way of life. War is natural among the pagans, and in the Old Testament the Jews were permitted to fight against their enemies; but the new law of Christ forbids taking human life under any circumstances. The Church’s weapons are spiritual, not temporal; its aim is to redeem souls, not destroy bodies and souls. Warfare corrupts even the protagonists of a righteous cause. Despite his almost wholly negative view of state authority, however, Chelčický implies something like the division of labor encountered in Tertullian and Origen: the state is ordained of God to restrain sin, and should be administered by sinners; Christians should obey all laws not contrary to the Word of God, but should refuse all political office and military service.32

31 Matthew 5:21-48. Each of the six precepts is introduced with the formula, “You have heard it said … But I say to you …”

32 Bainton, *Christian attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 120.
Several commentators remark that these late medieval pacifist movements framed their approach to nonviolence in a largely legalistic spirit. They read the Sermon on the Mount as a source of laws designed to regulate Christian conduct. Yoder writes that before Luther, with his distinction between law and grace, medieval people typically dealt with all of life in terms of rules: “medieval people wanted to know what God wants, so they asked what God said. The things God said were rules.”

**Erasmus and Renaissance Humanism**

The varieties of Christian pacifism discussed so far tend to view discipleship as requiring separation from the life of political society as well as nonparticipation in war. The pacifist movements of the late medieval period saw themselves as alternative communities, in but not of the world, whose vocation was to remain faithful under persecution until the day when God would judge the world and vindicate his faithful ones. Working to reform the world, or to make it a more peaceful place, was absent from their agenda. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, however, a different vision arose among the Renaissance humanists – figures such as Colet and More in England; Vives in Spain; Clichtove in Belgium; Rabelais and Montaigne in France; Franck in Germany; and, above all, Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466 – 1536) in Holland.

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34 Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 151. I would argue that Yoder’s characterization holds truer of the nominalism of the late medieval period than of the high middle ages. Aquinas certainly framed his moral theology more in terms of virtues than of rules.
Intellectually, Erasmus combined the Renaissance retrieval of classical antiquity with the Reformation’s return to Scripture and desire to purify the Church of corruptions – although he remained a Catholic to the end of his life. O’Donovan and O’Donovan remark that in Erasmus’s mature work “the goals of the brilliant rhetorician and erudite classicist are blended with strong christocentric piety and reforming zeal.” Erasmus read widely in the Greek and Latin classics, and published a translation of the Greek New Testament making use of manuscripts that corrected readings in the Latin Vulgate. Cahill writes that the humanists were “confident that if they could pass over the accumulation of arid commentary and return to the original texts, using the study of languages as a tool, they would succeed in turning the minds of Christian leaders to the true and the good.” Erasmus exemplified Renaissance humanism’s faith in human goodness, its confidence in education, and “its exaggerated trust that scholarship and reasonableness could change the world and eradicate human sinfulness.”

Erasmus presents his thoughts on war and peace in three principal works: *An Essay on War* (1515), in which he reflects on Pindar’s adage, *dulce bellum inexpertis*: “war is sweet to those who have not experienced it;” *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516); and *The Complaint of Peace* (1517). In these works he develops several characteristic themes.

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35 O’Donovan and O’Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 570.


First, war is naturally wrong. Human beings were created to live together in cooperation, friendship, and love. Here, the Christian humanist vision draws on ancient Stoic ideas concerning the harmony of the cosmos. In *The Complaint of Peace*, Erasmus writes: “To all other creatures she assigned their own armor and weapons for self-protection, but man alone she made weak and unarmed and unable to find safety except in treaties and the need of one man for another.” Lack of self-sufficiency is a natural inducement to peace and concord.

Second, Christianity forbids war. Christ teaches love; and all Christians are called to follow his example. The Son of God became incarnate to reconcile human beings to God and to bind them together in love. Christ instructs us: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34), and “Peace I give you; my peace I leave with you” (John 14:27). His gift is peace. But centuries of sophistry have distorted the Gospel message. Erasmus is particularly scandalized by armed struggle among Christians, and he excoriates clergy and prelates who encourage princes to wage war. Especially egregious are wars fought between Christians in God’s name and with the blessing of the Church. He expresses scorn for the bishops of the two opposing sides going about their respective camps administering the Sacrament on the eve of battle: “What is more ridiculous, Christ is in both camps, as if he were fighting against himself.”

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38 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 127-128.


approach “that sacred table … the communion sacrament of peace, if he intends to make war on Christians, and prepares to destroy those whom Christ died to save and to drink the blood of men for whom Christ shed his own blood?”  

Third, while both sides in war always claim just cause, it is virtually always impossible to determine which side is right. The Just War criteria are practically non-functional. 42 “Some princes,” Erasmus writes, “deceive themselves that any war is certainly a just one and that they have a just cause for going to war. We will not attempt to discuss whether war is ever just; but who does not think that his cause is just?” In reality, most wars are fought not for just causes, but for “ambition, wrath, ferocity, lust, or greed.” 43 O’Donovan and O’Donovan remark that Erasmus “does not so much repudiate Just War theory as sideline it, out of his conviction that war is infinitely more a disease of humankind to be cured than a remedy to be administered.” 44

The Renaissance humanists hoped that the newly emerging European nation-states would learn to dwell together in concord. “The program for peace was thus focused on an aristocracy of rulers bound to each other in a code of courtesy and humanity.” 45

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41 Erasmus, The Complaint of Peace, in O’Donovan and O’Donovan, From Irenaeus to Grotius, 576.

42 Cahill, Love Your Enemies, 155.

43 Erasmus, Education of a Christian Prince, in Holmes, War and Christian Ethics, 179.

44 O’Donovan and O’Donovan, From Irenaeus to Grotius, 571.

45 Bainton, Christian Attitude Toward War and Peace, 127.
Erasmus’s approach to avoiding war and promoting peace was to seek the ears of princes and to write books educating them in the ways of reason and Christian peace and love.⁴⁶

In *The Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus writes that a good prince only goes to war when, after exhausting all other means, he cannot possibly avoid it. “If we were of this mind, there would hardly ever be a war.”⁴⁷ Yet Erasmus’s pacifism is not absolute; he does acknowledge occasions when war is genuinely unavoidable. In that case, the prince should take care to wage war with as little destruction and bloodshed as possible, and to conclude the struggle as soon as the opportunity arises.

On other occasions, the prince should always reckon what a contemplated war will cost, and whether the end to be gained is worth it: “Weigh the worries, the expenditures, the trials, the long wearisome preparations.”⁴⁸ After many wars of territorial aggrandizement, the experienced prince will understand that it was useless to extend the territory of the kingdom and that what seemed a gain turned out to be a tremendous loss, while in the meantime many thousands have been killed or impoverished. The Christian prince should consider whether maintaining his right is worth bringing calamity on the world: “Those who are wise sometimes prefer to lose a thing rather than to gain it, because they realize it will be less costly.”⁴⁹ Some will ask:

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Who can be safe if no-one maintains his right? Erasmus responds: What is safe anywhere when everyone maintains his right to the last ditch? Warlike policies accelerate a cycle of violence, while peaceful policies elicit peaceful responses: “What does war cause but war? Courtesy, on the other hand, calls forth courtesy, and fairness, fairness.”

In *The Complaint of Peace*, Erasmus writes that a sound peace does not rest on alliances and treaties, which more often lead to wars. The first remedy is that princes must learn wisdom, and seek the welfare and happiness of all their subjects rather than their own individual gain: “It is royalty’s duty to know nothing of personal inclinations and to judge everything by the common good.” Wisdom consists in understanding the realities of peace and war and their consequences: on one hand, “when a kingdom is prosperous throughout, with its cities soundly established, lands well cultivated, excellent laws, the best teaching, and the highest moral standards”; on the other hand, “towns in ruins, villages destroyed, churches burnt, and farmland abandoned.” Even in a war with a just cause and a successful outcome, victory may not be worth the cost in terms of bloodshed and damage to individual morals and public discipline: “You empty your purse, plunder your people, burden the just, and incite the unjust to commit further crimes, and even when you have ended the war, its legacy remains with you.”

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Beyond educating princes as to the cost and folly of war, Erasmus offers some rudimentary practical proposals for promoting peace. If disagreements arise among princes, they should resort to arbiters – bishops, abbots, scholars, or reliable magistrates – by whose judgment matters could better be settled than by slaughter and despoliation. At a broader level, however, some plan should be devised by which the power to rule does not change hands so frequently. This could be achieved if royal children had to marry within the bounds of their territory. Nor should a prince be permitted to sell or transfer any part of his realm:

There should be agreement between princes once and for all on what each of them should rule, and once territories have been assigned to them, no alliance should extend or diminish these and no treaty tear them apart. Thus each ruler will try to make every improvement he can in his own portion, and by applying all his energies to one territory, he will try to leave it to his children enriched in the best way he can. … It remains for the princes to be bound together not by marriage alliances or artificial associations, but by friendship which is genuine and disinterested, and above all by a like and common desire to be of service to mankind.⁵²

O’Donovan and O’Donovan describe this dismantling of the mechanisms of empire – such as dynastic marriages, alliances, and treaties – as aiming at the creation of a collection of “somewhat insular, territorially static polities, ruled by Christian princes worthy of their high calling and joined together by revitalized bonds of faith, morality,

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⁵² Erasmus, The Complaint of Peace, in O’Donovan and O’Donovan, From Irenaeus to Grotius, 578-579.
and cultural communication.” The broader significance of Erasmus’s recommendations is that they represent one of the first of many attempts to provide a set of practical proposals for avoiding war within human history on the basis of an appeal to reason.

Anabaptists and Mennonites

The principal leaders of the sixteenth-century Reformation – Luther, Calvin, Bucer, and Zwingli – were not pacifists. Whether by conviction or the need to cultivate state support for their programs of religious reform, they largely re-appropriated the traditional Just War tradition as it had developed since Augustine. The chief exceptions were found among the groups collectively known as the Radical Reformation, particularly the Anabaptists. Although some Anabaptists were violent revolutionaries, many rejected warfare and developed a distinctive brand of Christian pacifism.

The first Anabaptist pacifists emerged in Zürich in the 1520s. The leader of the Reformation in Zürich, Ulrich Zwingli, was no pacifist and died in battle in 1531. But he had started a Bible-study group which included two university students, Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel, who admired him until they came to believe that he was conceding too much power to the Zürich city council in matters of church governance. The major issue was infant baptism. In 1525, the Zürich authorities insisted on the baptism of all infants and forbade the rebaptism of adults. Both Grebel and Manz were imprisoned refusing to have their children baptized and for practicing adult rebaptism. Grebel escaped but died

53 O’Donovan and O’Donovan, From Irenaeus to Grotius, 572.
of the plague in 1526, before he was thirty; Manz was tried and executed by drowning in 1527, the first of many Anabaptist martyrs.

The Zürich Bible Study group articulated its pacifism in a letter sent in 1524 to the Reformer Thomas Müntzer, whose advocacy of violent revolution in Germany led to the Peasants’ Revolt in 1524 – 1525. In this letter, Grebel wrote:

The Gospel and those who accept it are not to be protected by the sword, nor are they thus to protect themselves … Truly believing Christians are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter; anguish and affliction, tribulation, persecution, suffering and death must be their baptism; they must be tried with fire, and must reach the fatherland of eternal rest, not by killing their bodily, but by mortifying their spiritual enemies. Neither do they use the worldly sword of war, since by them killing is entirely abrogated.  

Addressing Müntzer directly, Grebel continued: “If thou art willing to defend war, then I admonish thee … that thou cease therefrom. … And if thou must suffer for it, know well that it cannot be otherwise. Christ must yet more suffer in his members. But he will strengthen them and keep them steadfast to the end.” Nuttall notes that in contrast to the legalistic spirit of the late medieval pacifists, the new emphasis here is on the necessity of suffering in the Christian life. Yoder explicitly links this emphasis to union with Christ;

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54 Quoted in Nuttall, *Christian Pacifism in History*, 41.


56 Nuttall, *Christian Pacifism in History*, 41-42.
according to the Anabaptist pacifist vision, Christians are to be in the world as Jesus was in the world, to practice his nonresistance, and to suffer as he suffered.  

Following the deaths of Grebel and Manz, Swiss and south German Anabaptists gathered in 1527 at a meeting chaired by Michael Sattler in Schleitheim, Switzerland, to draw up a statement of their core beliefs and commitments. The resulting seven articles are known as the Schleitheim Confession or the Schleitheim Articles. According to Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, the articles address the key features that most sharply distinguish Anabaptist ecclesiology from its Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Bucerian alternatives. Articles One, Two, Three, and Five address Baptism, the Ban, the Breaking of Bread, and the role of Pastors in the Church. Article Four addresses “Separation from Evil.” Christians must avoid all association with those who remain in disobedience and rebellion against God, including participation in their church services, meetings, and civil affairs. In particular, Christians must renounce the sword of temporal power: “Thus, all the devilish weapons of force will fall from us, too, such as the sword, armor, and the like, and all their uses on behalf of friends or against enemies … by the power of the words of Christ, ‘You should not resist evil’ (Matt. 5:39).”

Article Six, “Concerning the Sword,” addresses war and peace explicitly. The sword of temporal power has been ordained by God “outside the perfection of Christ” –

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57 Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 173, 179-180.

58 Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, eds. *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 631.

59 Schleitheim Articles 4, in O’Donovan and O’Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius*, 635.
that is, outside the true Christian community. Its purpose is to punish the wicked and to protect the good. God has established the secular authorities to wield it. But “in the perfection of Christ” the ban alone is to be used to admonish and expel those who sin.

The article then poses and answers three questions. In each case, the answer emphasizes the Christian’s call to be conformed to Christ: (1) May a Christian use the sword against evil people or to protect the good for the sake of love? No: Christ teaches people to learn from him to be meek and humble. Against evildoers, Christians may use only the admonition spoken by Christ to the woman taken in adultery, “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). (2) May a Christian pass judgment in worldly quarrels and conflicts at law which unbelievers have against each other? No: “Christ did not want to judge between brother and brother concerning an inheritance, and he refused to do so (Luke 12:14f). Thus we should do likewise.” (3) May a Christian hold a position of governmental authority if he is chosen for it? No: “Christ should have been made a king, but he rejected this (John 6:15) … We should do likewise and follow him. For Christ says: ‘Whoever wants to follow me should deny himself and take up his cross and follow me’” (Matt. 16:24).

The article concludes that the authorities’ governance is according to the flesh, but the Christian’s is according to the spirit: “Worldly people are armed with spikes and iron, but Christians are armed with the armor of God—with truth, and with justice, with peace, faith, and salvation, and with the word of God. In sum, what Christ, our head, thought, the members of the body of Christ through him should also think.”

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60 Schleitheim Articles 6, in O’Donovan and O’Donovan, From Irenaeus to Grotius, 635-636.
After Schleitheim, the principal spokesperson for Anabaptist pacifism was the Dutchman Menno Simons (c. 1496 – 1561), from whom the Mennonite Churches take their name. Yoder comments that Simons’s vision was for all practical purposes the same as that of the Schleitheim Articles.\(^{61}\) While the civil authority and the sword have a use outside the Christian fellowship, the Church is called to be a congregation of saints. Christians are not to exercise the magistracy or wield the sword. Conversion, repentance, and adult baptism are to be expressed in a morally regenerated life in community. Yet in this world, the Christian shares in the sufferings and blessings attending “the persecution of the Lamb.” Persecution will not cease as long as the righteous and unrighteous live together on earth. Anabaptists do not embrace suffering for its own sake, however, but for the sake of the imitation of Christ and also for its pedagogical function. Taking up and bearing the cross helps teach, admonish, and chastise both fellow Christians and the world and its rulers.\(^{62}\)

**The Quakers**

The peace witness of the Society of Friends stands within the historic tradition of Christian pacifism but is also influenced by Renaissance humanism. Bainton writes: “The Quakers occupy a median position between Erasmus and the Anabaptists. . . . To a degree they sought peace through politics. While separating the kingdom of Christ from the

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\(^{61}\) Yoder, *Christian Attitudes Toward War, Peace, and Revolution*, 188.

kingdom of the world, they have not utterly despaired of the world.”

Nuttall likewise writes that the Renaissance influenced the Quakers more than they realized: by the seventeenth century the study of the ancient world had brought about a new faith in human capacities; and the Friends’ repudiation of war as unworthy of human dignity was in part a reflection of this humanism.

The origins of Quakerism are unrelated to the Anabaptist or Mennonite movements, and derive instead from English Puritanism. Puritan spirituality was intensely introspective and autobiographical; the spiritual experience of the Puritan was most characteristically expressed in a journal documenting one’s inner struggles. The Puritans found the models for their own experience in the Bible; and they interpreted their lives by comparison with those of, say, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, or Paul. God confronted the individual simultaneously in and through the Bible, one’s own inner experience, and the external events of history. Moreover, the inner struggle to subdue one’s thoughts, emotions, words, and actions to the lordship of Christ reflected the outward struggle of the elect to fight God’s enemies in the public sphere and subdue society and its institutions to God’s rule in history.

The Quakers inherited these characteristics of Puritan spirituality, with the new development of their embrace of pacifism. During the period between the execution of

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63 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 157.

64 Nuttall, *Christian Pacifism in History*, 57.

65 Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 223.
King Charles I in 1649 and the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, George Fox (1624 – 1691) embarked on a ministry of itinerant preaching and gathered a following of adherents who called themselves “Friends,” but were derisively known as “Quakers.” On account of their unorthodox religious views – rejecting, for example, the Creeds and the Sacraments – they were often persecuted and imprisoned, first by the Puritans and then, after 1660, by the government of King Charles II. In 1661, Fox and a group of eleven Quaker leaders definitively committed themselves to a pacifist position that repudiated all war. After the failure of the Puritan Commonwealth to establish God’s kingdom on earth, the Quakers had become disillusioned with the use of force as a means of achieving God’s purposes in history.

Fox objected not so much to war in itself as to warlike attitudes of mind and spirit. He seized hold of the Reformation doctrine that the Holy Spirit is given to every believer; and he taught that this Spirit or Inner Light, given to every man and woman, is the very antithesis of the spirit of the world that engenders war.66 Cahill writes that Fox takes the command of Jesus to be perfect (Matt. 5:48) with utmost seriousness; when God grants the believer the Light of Christ within his or her soul, consciousness is transformed and sin is abandoned. Those whom Christ enlightens are restored to Adam’s original state before the Fall; Christ’s indwelling Spirit returns the believer to the paradise of God.67 The motive for nonviolence is thus the nature of spiritual regeneration. The Lord redeems


human beings from the lusts out of which wars proceed. The Spirit’s guidance is consistent: “Do not kill.” The source of evil is within; the Spirit is experienced within as revealing what Christ teaches and making obedience to his teaching possible. 68

One of the most distinctive features of Quaker spirituality is the conviction that just as the Spirit works within to transform the inner self, so the Spirit uses the transformed self to help transform others. Fox said that his calling was to go around the world witnessing to “that of God in everyone.” 69 The Spirit of Christ or Inner Light has been given to all human beings, whether Christian believers or not, who are thus capable of recognizing and responding to words spoken or signs given by others at the Spirit’s prompting. The seventeenth-century Quakers thus engaged in nonviolent actions that challenged human pride and violated social expectations, such as disruption of worship, refusal to pay tithes, refusal to give common forms of respectful greeting, and – in a few cases – walking through the streets naked, “for a sign.” 70 The Quaker renunciation of force and coercion went hand-in-hand with the conviction that to change others one need only rely on the same Spirit which has changed one’s own life. 71 The Friends taught their members to expect persecution and to suffer it patiently; but they also expected their

68 Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 230-231.

69 Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 233.

70 Cahill, Love Your Enemies, 167.

71 Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 231.
nonresistance to evoke a response in their persecutors.\textsuperscript{72} Those who have received God’s forgiveness are called to forgive their persecutors. Quakers deliberately brought their sufferings to bear on their opponents’ consciences, for by wounding the conscience the Spirit sets people free. Force does not change people’s minds; the witness of suffering patiently under persecution can.\textsuperscript{73}

Another implication of the Quaker appeal to “that of God in everyone” is a universalism that reaches beyond the bounds of Christendom to all people everywhere. Nuttall writes: “Not Christians only, but Jews, Turks, Indians, savages, had something of God in them and something that could appreciate and would respond to truth and justice and good will.”\textsuperscript{74} As Fox put it, “We love all men and women, simply as they are men and women, and as they are God’s workmanship; and so as brethren.”\textsuperscript{75} A good example of this belief in practice is that of William Penn (1644 – 1718) in his relations with the Indians in Pennsylvania. In his “First Letter to the Indians” (1681), Penn writes:

My Friends – There is one great God and power that hath made the world and all things therein, to whom you and I and all people owe their being and well-being, and to whom you and I must one day give an account for all that we do in the world; this great God hath written his law in our hearts, by which we are taught

\textsuperscript{72} Cahill, 	extit{Love Your Enemies}, 167.

\textsuperscript{73} Yoder, 	extit{Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution}, 232-233.

\textsuperscript{74} Nuttall, 	extit{Christian Pacifism in History}, 62.

\textsuperscript{75} Nuttall, 	extit{Christian Pacifism in History}, 63.
and commanded to love and help, and do good to one another, and not to do harm and mischief to one another.”

The example of Penn highlights another distinctive characteristic of Quaker pacifism. While the Quakers embraced nonviolence, they neither withdrew from society nor required their members to refuse public office. Fox accepted the sword as part of the state’s police function; when properly used it responds to the light of Christ as denied by the criminal in his or her violations of the law. Fox assured Charles II: “Our prayers are for them that are in authority, that under them we may live a godly life in peace.” Yoder notes that few Quakers were martyred and not all were socially ostracized or deprived of the opportunity to participate in social and political life. It is thus not surprising that the Quakers were more optimistic than the Anabaptists: God was actively working to save the world through the witness of those who responded to the Spirit’s promptings. Political authority might even be able to do some good in the world.

The Enlightenment and Perpetual Peace

The age of the Enlightenment, roughly the eighteenth century, exhibited a revulsion against the religious wars of the previous two centuries. Writers such as Swift

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77 Cahill, LoveYour Enemies, 169

78 Cahill, LoveYour Enemies, 174.

79 Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 238.

80 Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 226-227.
in *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and Voltaire in *Candide* (1759) satirized the irrational passions and prejudices they saw as engendering warfare and civil strife. By the end of the seventeenth century, various writers were already proposing plans for international peace. Such plans generally followed the logic of social contract theorists such as Hobbes and Locke, who envisioned individuals and small groups in a hypothetical pre-civil “state of nature” giving up the right to use force to protect their interests in return for the protection afforded by a government that would secure domestic peace and defend against external enemies. By an extension of the same reasoning, the peace plans envisioned an agreement among sovereign states to renounce the use of force to settle conflicts by conferring authority on some form of representative world government or “parliament of nations” to keep the peace and mediate disputes among its members.

One of the first such plans was *An Essay towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe* (1693) by William Penn, who was introduced in the previous section. Penn’s arguments for peace, Bainton comments, are largely prudential and even mercantile. The uncertainty and expense of war threatens trade and prosperity. Despite its title, Penn’s scheme transcends the boundaries of Europe to include “the Turks and the Muscovites.” He envisions a parliament of nations who surrender their national sovereignty in international relations but maintain home rule in domestic affairs. Different nations would have different numbers of votes, depending on their size. An international police

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81 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 173-178.
force would discipline the recalcitrant. Above all, war would be eliminated by the exercise of justice, for where justice is practiced there is no occasion for war.\footnote{Bainton, \textit{Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace}, 179-180.}

Another well-known scheme for perpetual peace was that of Charles-Irénée Castel, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, who set forth his ideas in three volumes between 1712 and 1717. His work became widely known through Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s more readable summary and critique, \textit{The Plan for Perpetual Peace}, published in 1761. According to Rousseau’s summary, people live in the civil state with their fellow citizens but in the state of nature with the rest of the world. Human beings have exchanged private wars for public wars, which are a thousand times worse. The only remedy lies in an international confederative government, which by uniting nations by ties similar to those which unite individuals, will submit each one equally to the authority of law. Any society without leaders and without laws must necessarily degenerate into quarrels and dissensions. The interests and rights of the peoples of Europe overlap in so many ways that the slightest movement of some cannot but trouble the others: “their divisions are all the more deadly as their ties are more intimate.” The relative state of the powers of Europe is that of war; all their treaties produce only temporary truces rather than true peace. To form a solid and durable confederation, then, it is necessary to prevent any single member from being able to resist all the others, and to block associations within the confederation that would be harmful to the whole. Thus, a “great armed league” is necessary to intervene against those who would destroy or resist the association. The
confederation would need a judiciary tribunal to establish laws and regulations binding on its members, and have coercive force at its disposal sufficient to enforce conformity to its decisions and prevent secessions.\textsuperscript{83}

On this basis, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre proposes four articles by which the member states would establish the necessary confederative government. By the first article, the contracting sovereigns would establish a permanent and irrevocable alliance, and would name delegates and designate a place where a permanent assembly or congress would subject all differences among the contracting parties to arbitration and judgment. The second article would specify a rotating presidency to be held by each sovereign in turn, and also the relative quota of members’ contributions and the means of levying them. The third article would guarantee all members possession of their current lands and governments, and likewise their elective or hereditary successions as established by the fundamental laws of each country. The fourth article would specify how any member state infringing the treaty would be put under a ban by the rest of Europe and proscribed as a public enemy. The Confederation would be armed and would act at common expense against the banned state until it had put down its arms.\textsuperscript{84}

The motives of war, the Abbé continues, are to make conquests, defend against invasion, weaken too-powerful neighbors, uphold rights which have been violated, settle

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\textsuperscript{84} Rousseau, “Summary of the Abbé de Saint-Pierre’s Project,” in Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, \textit{The Ethics of War}, 494-495.
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differences that cannot be settled amicably, and fulfill one’s responsibilities under treaties. The proposed arrangements would make all these reasons for war redundant.

This perpetual peace is clearly in the self-interest of the contracting sovereigns:

[It] depends solely on the consent of the sovereigns; is useful to them in every way; its advantages far outweigh its inconveniences; all that is required is that their will accords with their self-interests. We are not assuming that they are good but only that they are rational enough to perceive what is useful to them and courageous enough to work toward their own happiness. If, despite all this, the project remains unfulfilled, it is not therefore because it is too idealistic; rather, it is because men are insane and because it is a sort of folly to remain wise in the midst of those who are mad.  

Rousseau criticized the plan on a number of practical grounds – particularly that the Abbé never satisfactorily shows how, if force is necessary to hold the federation together once established, why force is not necessary to institute it in the first place. Still, the significance of Saint-Pierre’s project is that it is one of the first of many blueprints for what diplomats and politicians in the twentieth century came to call “collective security” arrangements along the lines of the League of Nations and the United Nations. The Abbé’s plan is conservative, effectively guaranteeing the existing constitutions and social orders of the member states. In recent years, however, the ideas of human rights and humanitarian intervention have come to stand in tension with the idea of absolute national sovereignty within a state’s own borders. From a traditional pacifist viewpoint, finally, such schemes of collective security are problematic because they continue to rely

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on the threat and use of force – transferred from individual nation-states to an international policing authority – to maintain the peace.

Standing in the same tradition as the Abbé de Saint-Pierre is the essay of Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1824), *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795). Kant begins with six “Preliminary Articles,” describing steps that should be taken immediately or as soon as possible to prepare the way for the perpetual peace arrangements that he will go on to propose. First, no peace treaty should be considered valid if it is made with a mental reservation allowing for a future war. Second, no existing state should come into the possession of another state by “inheritance, purchase, exchange, or gift.” Third, standing armies should gradually be abolished. Fourth, states should not incur national debts with respect to their external affairs. Fifth, no state should intervene in the internal affairs of another state. Sixth, no state at war with another should engage in acts of hostility that would make mutual confidence impossible in a future time of peace, such as the employment of assassins, or incitement to treason, in the opposing state.

Following these preliminary steps, Kant then proposes the formal institution of a state of perpetual peace by means of “three definitive articles.” First, the civil constitution of every state shall be republican. By “republican,” Kant does not mean democratic in today’s sense – he nowhere advocates universal suffrage, for example – but a constitution providing fair representation of the interests of all sections of the people. Such a constitution is conducive to a peaceful foreign policy because the citizens of the country, who suffer the most from war, are more reluctant than hereditary rulers to go to war.
“Under a constitution where the subject is not a citizen, and which is therefore not republican, it is the simplest thing in the world to go to war.”

The second definitive article is “federalism between free states.” Each nation, for its own security, should demand of all the others that they enter along with it into a constitution, similar to the civil one, in which the rights of each can be secured: a “federation of peoples.” Such a federation would not be an international state; it would not aim to acquire its own power but merely to preserve and secure the freedom and security of each state along with all the others. If one powerful and enlightened nation can form a republic, it will become the natural focal point for federal association with other republics, which will join up with it, “and the whole will gradually spread further and further by a series of alliances of this kind.”

The third definitive article specifies that “the law of world citizenship shall be limited to conditions of universal hospitality.” Travelers from one country to another should have the right not to be treated as enemies and to be received with hospitality. Such mutual interchange is conducive to peaceful relations among peoples: “Thus the human race can gradually be brought closer and closer to a constitution establishing world citizenship.” But such hospitality, Kant warns, does not entail a right to remain in another’s country indefinitely; nor does it sanction the conquest, plundering, and exploitation of native peoples by European explorers and settlers.

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86 Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” in Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, The Ethics of War, 523.

87 Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” in Reichberg, Syse, and Begby, The Ethics of War, 526.
In *Man, the State, and War* (1959), Columbia University political scientist Kenneth N. Waltz identifies three “images” of the causes of war and hence of prescriptions for peace.\(^8\) The first image focuses on war as rooted in human nature; the second in the organization of the nation-state and its form of government; the third in the structure of the international system itself. The significance of Kant’s proposal in light of Waltz’s scheme is that it represents an early diagnosis according to the second image: wars are caused by the selfish interests of unrepresentative authoritarian governments; hence, the first step on the road to peace lies in replacing such governments with representative republican governments. Subsequent theorists would substitute other forms of government – such as liberal democratic, nationalist, or socialist – as most inclined towards international peace. At the same time, Kant’s proposal for a global federation of states can be seen as addressing Waltz’s third image, the international system; and his ideas regarding the educative value of universal hospitality and world citizenship as addressing Waltz’s first image, human nature. In any case, Kant’s ideas were enormously influential in the development of liberal internationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to be examined in further detail below.

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\(^8\) Waltz, Kenneth N. *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (1954; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). Waltz found the third image most persuasive and became known as the founder of the “systems realism” school of international relations theory.
Nineteenth Century Pacifism

Pacifism in the nineteenth century becomes more eclectic, comprising such diverse figures as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882) in the United States; John Bright (1811 – 1889) in England; and Leo Tolstoy (1828 – 1910) in Russia. Here a broad overview of some representative figures and themes will help set the stage for the discussion of British pacifism in the years leading up to World War II.

In 1815, businessman David Dodge founded the New York Peace Society. Such societies represented a new development in the Christian response to issues of social concern. The United States had a proliferation of denominations divided by doctrinal issues; so, as new social issues arose, American Christians tended not to look to their denominations as the primary vehicles for addressing those concerns. Instead, they founded issue-specific societies for causes such as promoting Sunday Schools, abolishing slavery, outlawing child labor, and banning alcohol. Through the nineteenth century, peace societies were formed not only in the United States but also in England, Germany, France, Scandinavia, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and the Netherlands, constituting a loosely organized international peace movement. They were divided between those who sought to abolish war through the gradual implementation of international agreements along the lines of the peace plans of the preceding century, and those who renounced war absolutely. In 1838, moderate peace advocates organized the American Peace Society, which sought to abolish war by means of a world government with an international court.

89 Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 253.
and congress of nations, but which in the meantime allowed for the possibility of
defensive war. In the same year, pacifists of a more absolutist bent formed the New
England Non-Resistance Society, led by the clergyman Adin Ballou (1803 – 1890).90

Ballou may have invented the term “nonresistance.”91 He was the author of

*Christian Non-Resistance* (1846), and also a “Catechism of Non-Resistance,” of which
the original text has been lost but a section of which Leo Tolstoy published in *The
Kingdom of God is within You* (1894). Ballou takes an uncompromising line. The
Christian may not fight or kill in self-defense, or enter a complaint with the magistrates
against an offender. One may not participate in wars or preparations for war. One may
not vote in elections, or take part in courts of law or the administration of government, for
to do so is to participate in the violence of government. Responding to evil with evil,
even in the form of self-defense, simply multiplies the evil in the world. By contrast,
“True non-resistance is the only real method of resisting evil. … It destroys and
exterminates all evil feeling.” While doing what is right necessarily entails suffering and
sacrifice – including potentially even the loss of one’s own life – nonetheless, if all were
to follow the path of nonresistance, the world would be a happier place.92

Albert Marrin comments that Ballou and Tolstoy were kindred spirits: “Ballou to
some extent and Tolstoy much more so were both religious anarchists who abhorred


91 Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 254.

Conscience*, 201-206.
government as inherently coercive and therefore hostile to life.”93 Tolstoy was arguably the most important pacifist figure in the nineteenth century;94 and his name became a symbol of pacifism throughout the literate world.95 After the publication of Anna Karenina in 1877, Tolstoy abandoned writing novels and began working on theological and social issues instead. The Russian Orthodox Church excommunicated him for his reinterpretation of the Gospel message, which denied the centrality to the Christian faith of such doctrines as the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the Atonement, and the Resurrection. He reformulated the Decalogue into five new commandments based on the Sermon on the Mount: sexuality purity, the wrongfulness of oaths, love of enemies, nonresistance, and the incompatibility of civic office with the Christian profession. He denied that the Christian can have anything to do with the state. Every social system is wicked because it is coercive. His solution to the problem of evil in the world was simply to affirm that the more individuals loved one another, the more evil would be extinguished, and the closer the Kingdom of God would come to being realized on earth. He maintained that one must do the right thing in any situation, regardless of the consequences. Hence, he rejected the use of force against even a maniac killing a child,

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94 Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 265.

95 Bainton, Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace, 195.
because such violence would only increase the amount of evil in the world, and so delay the coming of the Kingdom.⁹⁶

Both Ballou and Tolstoy combined rigorous adherence to the Sermon on the Mount with the optimistic view that nonresistance constituted a practical program for making the world a better place. When individuals practiced nonresistance and love of enemies, their example would elicit a similar response in others, even if some individuals would have to make costly sacrifices along the way. Such optimism was characteristic of the nineteenth century. According to Yoder, however, pacifism of the type exemplified by Ballou – based on a simple reading of the words of Jesus in the New Testament – was largely a spent force in the United States by the time of the Civil War. Many early nineteenth century advocates of nonresistance, like William Lloyd Garrison (1805 – 1879), also advocated the abolition of slavery; and when the approach of the Civil war made them feel that they had to choose between their pacifism and their abolitionism, they opted for the latter.⁹⁷

In the second half of the nineteenth century, another Christian approach began to take shape in the movement known as “Liberal Protestant Pacifism.”⁹⁸ A late nineteenth-century example is the Congregationalist minister Lyman Abbott (1835 – 1922), who set forth his ideas on war and peace in Christianity and Social Problems (1896). Although he

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⁹⁶ Marrin, War and the Christian Conscience, 206-207.

⁹⁷ Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 255.

⁹⁸ Yoder, Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution, 271.
rejected the label “Darwinian,” he embraced an evolutionary vision of Christianity and human history. Under present international law, war is a public armed struggle between nations to establish justice. Influenced by Christianity, international law has already done much to regulate warfare: “It is, for example, no longer legitimate to make war on a neighbor for the ostensible purpose of robbing him of his territory. It is no longer legitimate to pillage and destroy the property of inoffensive inhabitants who are not contributing to the enemy’s strength. It is no longer legitimate to sell prisoners taken in war into slavery, nor to kill them in cold blood.”99 But such achievements are merely an interim step on the path to abolishing war altogether. The present state of war resembles the now-obsolete “wager of battle” or duel. The difference is that war is a public armed contest between nations, while the duel was a public armed contest between individuals: “If an individual were accused of a crime, he could demand battle with his accuser as a means of determining his guilt or innocence.”100 Just as Christianity influenced states to outlaw trial by battle between individuals, so its object now is to outlaw trial by battle between nations. Today, the individual citizen goes unarmed, submits disputes to an impartial tribunal, and relies on the police for protection. Likewise, the Christian goal is to abolish war as a means of settling disputes among nations in favor of law and arbitration by impartial tribunals. Significantly, Abbott sees the present state of the *jus in bello* norms as a stage in the process of evolution, an intermediate step on the road from


the unmitigated barbarism of the past to a future abolition of war and reign of universal peace. Such an evolutionary vision was typical of liberal Protestant pacifism well into the twentieth century. Like a number of other liberal theologians, however, Abbott ultimately abandoned his anti-war stance to support President Wilson’s prosecution of World War I as “the war to end all wars.”

**British Pacifism in the Interwar Years**

It is often claimed that the horror of the First World War engendered a mood of disillusionment in the 1920s and 1930s with nineteenth-century liberal optimism. In 1919 Karl Barth published his *Commentary on Romans*, followed by the definitive second edition in 1922, considered the opening salvo in the neo-orthodox critique of liberal theology. In 1922, also, T.S. Eliot published his poem *The Waste Land*, which critics hailed as expressing “the disillusionment of a generation,” a claim which Eliot later dismissed as nonsense, but which may have contained more truth than Eliot recognized. All in all, it seems that the prevailing cultural mood in the immediate postwar years and through much of the 1920s combined disillusionment with war with a renewed optimism and determination to build a more peaceful future. From today’s vantage point, Barth and Eliot can be seen, in their different ways, as ahead of their time. The disillusionment they voiced came into its own in the 1930s during the Great Depression and with the approach of another World War – and received initial theological expression in the United States with the publication of Reinhold Niebuhr’s *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in 1932. In
the meantime, liberal Protestant pacifism gained a new lease on life in the years following World War I in both the United States and Britain.

If it is possible to quantify relative levels of suffering experienced by different countries during war, Britain experienced the horror of the First World War more intensely than the United States. The Americans were in the war one year and eight months; the British for the full four years and three months of its duration. The Americans suffered approximately 117,000 battlefield deaths, or three percent of those mobilized; the British suffered approximately 703,000 battlefield deaths, or thirteen percent of those mobilized.\(^\text{101}\) It became a commonplace in Britain to say that the cream of a generation had been lost in the trenches.

Each year on Armistice Day, as people in Britain gathered around the ubiquitous memorials to the fallen for remembrance services, many vowed that never again should young lives be sacrificed in war. The anti-war literature of the 1920s deepened the conviction that there must be “no next time.” The wartime poems of Wilfred Owen, posthumously published in 1919 and 1920, and those of Siegfried Sassoon, published in 1919, vividly depicted the horrors of the war and mocked the jingoism that had accompanied it. About ten years later, the first war memoirs appeared, including Erich Remarques’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (English Translation 1928), and Robert Graves’s *Goodbye to All That* (1929). Arthur Ponsonby’s *Falsehood in Wartime* (1928)

\(^{101}\) Figures taken from the table “Casualties of World War I,” at [http://europeanhistory.about.com/cs/worldwar1/a/blww1casualties.htm](http://europeanhistory.about.com/cs/worldwar1/a/blww1casualties.htm) (accessed on December 18, 2013).
documented how British propaganda had fabricated stories of German atrocities to build support for the war effort – a lesson that would have unfortunate consequences when rumors of Nazi atrocities began to circulate during World War II.  

Writers on twentieth-century British pacifism have coined terms similar to Koontz’s distinction between “pacifism” and “abolitionism,” noted at the beginning of this chapter, to describe the different approaches taken by opponents of war during this period. Martin Ceadel uses “pacifist” and “pacificist;” Alan Wilkinson “pacifist” and “pacifier.” Koontz, Ceadel, and Wilkinson all use the term “pacifist” to describe those who refuse to support or participate in war under any circumstances, regardless of the consequences. The alternative terms, “abolitionist,” “pacificist,” and “pacifier,” describe those who acknowledge an overwhelming moral imperative to abolish the evil of war by political means. If a particular war becomes inevitable, however, they will not necessarily take the pure “pacifist” position of non-participation and may even support their country’s war effort.

The core faith of the “pacifiers” (abolitionists) was in a latent harmony of interests among nations that could be actualized by international organizations. Thus,


104 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 90.

105 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 90-91.
the League of Nations received widespread support in Britain in the postwar years. The League of Nations Union (LNU) became the most influential peace society. The Church of England included a Collect for the League of Nations in the Proposed Prayer Book of 1928. The Locarno Treaty of 1925, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 seemed to point in the direction of lasting peace. The Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in 1930 thanked God for the achievements of the League and the Kellogg Pact, and resolved that war “as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Context of British Pacifism

On February 9, 1933, the Oxford Union – the debating society at Oxford University – debated the motion “that this House will, in no circumstances, fight for its King and country.” The motion was carried by 275 to 153, a result which gained headlines and provoked outrage. Churchill later wrote that this “ever-shameful resolution” helped persuade Hitler and Mussolini that young Englishmen would not fight. Meanwhile, pacifists seized upon the debate as evidence of widespread support for their position, and the outcome does indicate the prevailing mood among educated young people at the time.

106 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 87-89.

107 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 92-93.
According to Wilkinson, five main features of the inter-war period encouraged the growth of pacifism and movements for peace. First, the belief was widespread that the Treaty of Versailles was unjust. By the mid-1930s there was virtually universal agreement that no war should be fought against a Germany seeking to revise such a discredited treaty. Hitler’s claims on the Rhineland (1936), and on Austria and the Sudetenland (1938), could be seen as congruent with the principle of national self-determination enunciated by President Wilson. Not until the invasion of Prague in March 1939 did it become clear that Hitler wanted more than simply the inclusion of all German-speaking peoples in his empire: “So up until the end of 1938 or so, most English people wanted to interpret Hitler’s moves as attempts to redress legitimate grievances.”

Second, in addition to the determination that the horrors of the Great War should not be repeated, most people took it as axiomatic that another war would be even more deadly and destructive. Writers such as H.G. Wells, and politicians such as Stanley Baldwin, described with some accuracy the likely effects of aerial bombing of civilian populations; peace advocates constantly quoted Baldwin’s slogan, “the bomber will always get through.”

Third, liberal theology in the churches largely reinforced a prevailing cultural belief in human rationality and reasonableness: “The evidence provided by the war that underneath the conscious surface of European civilization there seethed dark irrational

108 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 91-92.

109 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 92-93.
forces was largely ignored until the late thirties.” During the 1930s, Barthianism and neo-orthodoxy were beginning to challenge liberal theology in British academic circles, “but little of this reached either the leadership of the churches or the man in the pew until the events of 1939.”

Fourth, some elements of British society took a benevolent view of aspects of dictatorship, and so softened public opinion already disposed to appeasement. The sentiment was periodically heard: “I wish we had a Hitler or Mussolini in this country.” Hitler had reduced unemployment in Germany. Some leading clerics, such as C.F. Garbett, Bishop of Winchester and later Archbishop of York, praised the new Germany as a bulwark against Communism. Anti-Semitic elements in Britain expressed either covert or overt support for Hitler’s anti-Jewish hatred. Many people in Britain were genuinely repentant for the demonization of Germany and the Germans that had accompanied the war hysteria of 1914-1918.111

Fifth, the ecumenical movement influenced the attitudes of British Christians toward peace and war. Many Christians felt guilt for having fought other Christians during the Great War. The ecumenical movement brought together European and world church leaders, among whom a new sense of trans-national allegiance to Christ grew along with personal friendships. A possible war between Britain and Germany came to be seen as a potential conflict among fellow Christians, “a view which was much less

110 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 95-96.

111 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 97-98.
evident in 1914 when ecumenism was still in its early infancy.” By the mid-1930s, however, Nazi persecution of German Christians engendered ecumenical opposition to the Nazi regime as an expression of Christian solidarity.\textsuperscript{112}

**British Pacifist Scholarship**

Yoder criticizes American Protestant pacifism in the interwar period as lacking awareness of the history of pacifism and failing to produce any book-length exposition of Christian pacifist principles.\textsuperscript{113} While this critique may be valid in the American context, it is less so in Britain, where several pacifist scholars engaged in important explorations of the tradition. The first book in England to investigate pacifist origins was *The Early Christian Attitude to War*, published in 1919 by the Congregationalist scholar C.J. Cadoux. This book gave pacifism credibility in Christian circles as representing the authentic teaching of Jesus and the early Church. It supported the conception of pacifism as a conscientious individual stand rather than a basis for political action.\textsuperscript{114}

The most influential British pacifist academic of the time was Charles Raven. At the beginning of World War I, Raven was Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He served as a chaplain at the front lines from 1917, an experience which he said changed him as a human being and as a priest. A liberal modernist in theology, he saw the universe in evolutionary terms: “His cosmic vision anticipated that of Teilhard de

\textsuperscript{112} Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 99-100.

\textsuperscript{113} Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 282.

\textsuperscript{114} Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 102-103.
Chardin. In 1924 he became convinced that the abolition of war was the supreme issue for humanity. He became a thorough-going pacifist in 1930 and joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), becoming its chairman in 1932.

Raven’s first major study of pacifism, *Is War Obsolete?* was published in 1935. The title implied the book’s evolutionary perspective. In the process of evolution there is incessant war among different species; but human evolution has reached a point where war has become an anachronism. It is not legitimate to indulge in easy condemnations of previous generations for not realizing war’s incompatibility with Christianity: “To criticize the Church for the Constantinian settlement is to criticize the method of evolution.” Raven commends Christ and the Apostles for being patient enough to allow people to crawl before they can walk – so that side-by-side with his pacifist absolutism in theory, he allows that in some times and places the use of physical force may still be necessary: the British cannot withdraw troops from Palestine, for example, where armed force is the only practical constraint against worse violence. The internationalization of armed force, while falling short of the ideal, would be a step in the right direction. Nonetheless, on the cross, Christ opened up a new way of overcoming evil: “Martyrdom is the Christian’s ultimate obligation.” The book contains instances of what Wilkinson calls Raven’s “lifelong polemic” against Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr. He attacks Niebuhr in particular for believing that collectives are less moral than the individuals who compose them, and he cannot accept Niebuhr’s distinction between personal and

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115 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 107.
corporate ethics. Overall, Raven’s evolutionary theme is that the tide of pacifism is coming in; one must swim with it for it is God’s tide.\textsuperscript{116}

Another pacifist scholar was G.H.C. MacGregor, Professor of Divinity at the University of Glasgow and President of the [Presbyterian] Church of Scotland Peace Society. A close friend of Raven’s, MacGregor published \textit{The New Testament Basis of Pacifism} in 1938. According to Wilkinson, MacGregor genuinely wrestled with the neo-orthodox critique in a way that Raven did not. He argued that pacifism should be based primarily neither on the Sixth Commandment nor on certain sayings of Jesus taken in isolation, but on certain key biblical principles: (1) love of neighbor; (2) the belief that each person is loved by and of infinite value to God; and (3) the teaching of Jesus as interpreted by his life and his cross. “If these are taken seriously, then war as we know it, violates the Christ’s method of meeting evil.” And again: “Evil can truly be conquered only by the power of truth and goodness and self-sacrificing love.”\textsuperscript{117}

\textbf{Canon Dick Sheppard}

If Charles Raven sought to give pacifism a coherent theological exposition, Hugh Richard Lawrie (“Dick”) Sheppard gave it popular appeal. Both Raven and Sheppard were Anglican priests: a new development, as previous pacifists tended to be Nonconformists or Quakers. Wilkinson notes the influence of the Anglo-Catholic

\textsuperscript{116} Wilkinson, \textit{Dissent or Conform}, 108-110.

\textsuperscript{117} Wilkinson, \textit{Dissent or Conform}, 133.
movement, with its tendency to defy authority and its anti-Erastianism: “Sheppard’s churchmanship owed a good deal to Anglo-Catholicism though he interpreted it in a free-wheeling manner. Both [Raven and Sheppard] were in the broad stream of the mild Christian socialist tradition, with which Anglo-Catholicism constantly interacted.”

In 1914 Sheppard became Vicar of Saint-Martin-in-the-Fields on Trafalgar Square in London. His Sunday evening broadcasts made him famous as “the radio Parson,” and his services attracted record congregations to Saint Martin’s. He made the church crypt a center for the homeless and destitute. According to Wilkinson, he combined romantic idealism with warm compassion and a deep sense of solidarity with the poor and unemployed. He believed that imitating Jesus was the essence of Christian discipleship. The Church of England should demand disestablishment and accept disendowment. A theological liberal, Sheppard was unusual at the time in his readiness to remarry the divorced and give Communion to the divorced-and-remarried. Wilkinson notes with wry humor: “Conservative churchmen were situationalists about war, absolutists about marriage. Christian pacifists tended to be absolutists about war, but situationalists about divorce.”

Sheppard became a pacifist in 1927. He was appointed Dean of Canterbury in 1929, but this assignment was cut short after eighteen months by the recurrence of a

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118 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 104-105.


120 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 115.
severe illness, and he became a Canon of Saint Paul’s Cathedral in London, a position he held until his death in 1937. On October 16, 1934, the press published a letter from Sheppard calling for men to send him postcards making the pledge, “We renounce war, and never again, directly or indirectly, will we support or sanction another.” Up until now, he wrote, the peace movement has “received its main support from women, but it seems high time … that men should throw their weight into the scales against war.”

(The Pledge was subsequently opened to women in July 1936.) By November, Sheppard had received 50,000 signatures. In July 1935, he invited the signatories to a rally in the Albert Hall, which was attended by 7,000 people. Subsequently, he launched the Peace Pledge Union (PPU) in May 1936. The initial sponsors included Storm Jameson, Arthur Ponsonby, Donald Soper, George Lansbury, and Charles Raven; they were soon joined by an array of intellectual, political, and literary luminaries including C.J. Cadoux, Aldous Huxley, Rose Macaulay, A.A. Milne, Bertrand Russell, and Siegfried Sassoon.

Part of the PPU’s appeal was that its only membership requirement was the pledge; and although it was Christian in inspiration it was open to all lovers of peace, as indicated by the presence of the atheist Bertrand Russell on its list of sponsors. Sheppard traveled all over Britain to speak on behalf of the PPU. He became known for the slogan, “Not

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121 Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 354.

122 Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 354.

peace at any price, but love at all costs!” The PPU’s membership reached 87,000 by 1937, and peaked in 1940 at 136,000.\textsuperscript{124}

Sheppard gave an exposition of his pacifism in \textit{We Say ‘No’} (1935). Sheppard wrote that he based his Christian pacifism wholly on the words and example of Jesus, but also pointed out that Bertrand Russell had come to almost the same conclusions through purely rationalist beliefs. In any case, Jesus was against war, and the Christian must repudiate it as well. Sheppard rejects any program for peace based on the idea of a world state, or an international police force under the League of Nations, because all such plans rest ultimately on the use of force. The pledge does not, however, entail a total refusal of cooperation with the state, but simply a commitment not to bear or manufacture arms.\textsuperscript{125}

A book which influenced the PPU for a time was Richard B. Gregg’s \textit{The Power of Non-Violence} (1935). An American social philosopher, Gregg had gone to India in 1925 to seek out Gandhi, and in this book he gave an exposition of Gandhi’s approach to nonviolent resistance. Nonviolence, Gregg wrote, is a form of “moral ju-jitsu” that causes an aggressor to lose his moral balance and feel ashamed, because everyone has the potential for goodness, however dim. Nonviolence enables the ordinary person to act for peace, but it requires spiritual training in organized groups. British pacifists were aware of Gandhi and interested in the implications of nonviolent resistance to aggression as an

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\textsuperscript{124} Wilkinson, \textit{Dissent or Conform}, 119-121.
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\textsuperscript{125} Wilkinson, \textit{Dissent or Conform}, 122-123.
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alternative to war. However, Sheppard and the PPU distanced themselves from “Greggism” when Gregg published a training manual recommending meditation, folk-dancing, communal singing, spinning, and knitting as forms of group preparation: “The whole program began to look too eastern and cranky and the PPU withdrew it as a PPU official manual in 1937.”

Sheppard died on October 31, 1937. A hundred thousand people “including street-cleaners, taxi-drivers, waitresses, charwomen and tramps” queued sometimes for an hour or more to file past his coffin in Saint Martin’s. Crowds lined the streets as his coffin was taken in procession to Saint Paul’s for the funeral, “with police holding the traffic … people standing hatless, the police on point duty saluting; most touching of all, Thames barges and tugs, and the men coming up on board and taking off their hats.” When war broke out in 1939, some British pacifists lamented Sheppard’s absence to provide leadership for the movement.

From about 1936 on, British pacifists tended to place their hopes for peace in the policy of appeasement. When it became clear between 1938 and 1939 that appeasement had failed and that war was inevitable, they were generally forced to choose between “a sectarian interpretation of pacifism as an individual act of dissent,” or support for the

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126 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 130-131.


128 Five months after Sheppard’s death, British Pacifist Max Plowman wrote, “So here we are, very literally as sheep not having a Sheppard.” Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, 266.
nation’s war effort – although some clung to the hope that a negotiated settlement could be reached with Nazi Germany while the war was still under way.\textsuperscript{129} Sponsors of the PPU who withdrew their sponsorship and recanted their pacifism included Storm Jameson, Bertrand Russell, Philip Mumford, Rose Macaulay, A.A. Milne, Maude Royden, Ellen Wilkinson, and Cyril Joad.\textsuperscript{130} Supporters of the war effort who had been pacifists in World War I included Russell and Joad, as well as Labor Politician Herbert Morrison and Kingsley Martin, editor of \textit{The New Statesman}.\textsuperscript{131}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Structurally, the Christian pacifist inescapably faces the question of how to be in the world but not of it, of how to combine discipleship with citizenship. Having decided that the Christian Gospel requires nonparticipation in war, the pacifist must determine how to relate to the civil state that continues to rely on the threat and use of armed force to achieve its purposes. The question becomes particularly acute in wartime, when the state is likely to demand support for, if not active participation in, its war efforts.

Answers to this question cover a spectrum of possible responses. At one extreme is the sectarian option of withdrawing into self-contained communities having as little to do with the wider society as possible. A bit less extreme, but tending in the same direction, is the position staked out by Tertullian and Origen of postulating a double-

\textsuperscript{129} Wilkinson, \textit{Dissent or Conform}, 135.

\textsuperscript{130} Berry and Bostridge, \textit{Vera Brittain: A Life}, 398.

\textsuperscript{131} Wilkinson, \textit{Dissent or Conform}, 248.
standard and division of labor between the nonviolent Christian community and a state
governed by non-Christians who wield the sword on behalf of the wider society. In this
vision, Christians may not bear arms or shed blood, but they support Caesar and his
armies by their prayers. This division of labor represents one early Christian attempt to
reconcile New Testament passages enjoining nonviolence and nonresistance, such as
Matthew 5:38-48 and Romans 12:19-21, with those urging obedience to and prayers for
kings and all in authority, such as Romans 13:1-7, I Peter 2:13-17, and I Timothy 2:1-2.
The medieval church transposed this double-standard into its understanding of the
relationship between clerical and monastic Christians following the way of perfection in
the cloister and lay Christians working in the world. To varying degrees, the pacifist
movements of the late medieval period and the Radical Reformation revived the double-
standard in its original form.

With the Renaissance, a new and more optimistic way of relating to the world
came into focus. Instead of withdrawing from an incorrigibly sinful world, pacifistically
inclined Christians such as Erasmus began seeking ways to engage with it constructively.
Instead of waiting for the inauguration of a reign of universal peace on the Last Day, they
began working to make peace a reality within history. This development marks the
emergence of what Koontz calls the abolitionist tradition. The Enlightenment’s plans for
perpetual peace transposed this tradition into a secular and rationalist mode. The Quakers
blended elements of traditional Christian pacifism with the Renaissance vision, seeking
not only to purify themselves from the ways of the world but also to transform the world by their witness and example.

From the seventeenth century through the Second World War, most varieties of Christian pacifism combined elements of the two sub-traditions, believing that by practicing nonviolence Christians could be both faithful and effective in making the world a more peaceful place. After World War II, pacifist theologians such as John Howard Yoder adopted – or perhaps recovered – the view that Christians are not called to take responsibility “for making history come out right,” but are instead called to do the right thing and leave the results to God, who is really in charge of history. Before then, tension persisted between the two sub-traditions. Pure or absolute pacifists were committed to neither supporting nor participating in war under any circumstances; abolitionists put their faith in political means that incorporated the latent threat of force – usually in the form of international police actions – in their plans for establishing and maintaining world peace. In Chapter Twelve, I shall examine the interplay of the abolitionist and pacifist traditions in the life of Vera Brittain and especially in her witness against the area bombing of German cities during the Second World War.

PART TWO

JUSTICE IN WARFARE IN CONTEXT:

AREA BOMBING IN WORLD WAR II
CHAPTER SEVEN

AREA BOMBING: BACKGROUND, EFFECTIVENESS, AND LEGACY

The British RAF raids on Hamburg described in the Prologue in Chapter One above were an integral component of a comprehensive strategy of area bombing of German cities adopted halfway through the Second World War. Why did the British adopt this strategy? Were there alternatives? What was its military rationale, and was it effective in achieving its stated purposes? A review of the historical background of the area bombing and the debate it engendered is a prerequisite to the in-depth exploration of the arguments concerning its morality in the subsequent chapters. In this chapter, I discuss first the period leading up to the Second World War, looking both at attempts to restrict aerial bombardment of civilians in international law, and at the contrary thrust of British military doctrine, which emphasized air attacks on enemy cities as a means of quickly winning wars. Then, following an account of the wartime development of the British air campaign against Nazi Germany, I survey various assessments of its military effectiveness. Finally, I review the controversies over the morality of the area bombing as they have evolved from 1945 to the present, concluding with the present-day debate in Germany itself.

The International Legal Background

In the first half of the twentieth century, a strong current of international legal opinion had been developing in favor of prohibitions against wartime air attacks on
civilian populations. As early as 1899, when air attack still required the use of balloons, the first Hague Conference had enacted a five year prohibition on the launching of projectiles and explosives from the air.\(^1\) In 1907 the second Hague Conference did not extend this prohibition, but Article 25 of the Land War Regulations prohibited “the attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns, villages, habitations, or buildings which are not defended.”\(^2\) Article 27 added that “In sieges and bombardments all necessary steps must be taken to spare, as far as possible, buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided that they are not being used at the time for military purposes.”\(^3\) The accompanying convention governing naval bombardment defined as legitimate targets “Military works, military or naval establishments, depots of arms or war material [and] workshops or plants which could be used for the needs of the hostile fleet or army, and the ships of war in the harbor.”\(^4\)

After the limited but frightening experience of air raids by German Gotha bombers and zeppelins against England during World War I, the third Hague Conference

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3 Hague Convention (IV), October 18, 1907, Art. 25 in Reisman and Antoniou, *Laws of War*, 94.

4 Hague Convention (IX), October 18, 1907, Art. 2 in Reisman and Antoniou, *Laws of War*, 82.
in 1922-1923 considered a draft set of rules on aerial bombardment supported by the United States. These included the following provisions:

Article 22: Aerial bombardment for the purpose of terrorizing the civilian population, of destroying or damaging private property not of a military character, or of injuring noncombatants is prohibited.

Article 24: Aerial bombardment is legitimate only when directed at a military objective, that is to say, an object of which the destruction or injury would constitute a distinct military advantage to the belligerent.\(^5\)

Article 24 went on to specify types of legitimate military targets, such as factories producing military supplies, and communications and transportation systems used for military purposes. Article 25 specified non-military targets to be avoided to the greatest extent possible, including historic monuments and buildings dedicated to public worship, art, science, and care of the sick.\(^6\) Although no state ever formally adopted the 1923 Hague air rules, which thus remained legally unbinding, they did express the consensus of many jurists and much public opinion, and represented a standard to which political and military leaders might aspire – a form of “customary international law.”\(^7\)

Horrific experiences of city bombing in the 1930s – Addis Ababa by the Italians in 1936, Nanking by the Japanese in 1937, and Guernica by the German Condor Legion the same year – added to the sense of urgency many felt about the need to restrict this

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\(^7\) A.C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan* (New York: Walker, 2006), 243.
form of warfare. In June 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain issued the following instructions to the RAF in the event of war with Germany:

1. It is against international law to bomb civilians as such and to make deliberate attacks on the civilian population.
2. Targets which are aimed at from the air must be legitimate military targets and must be capable of identification.
3. Reasonable care must be taken in attacking those military objectives so that by carelessness a civilian population in the neighborhood is not bombed.

On September 30, 1938, the League of Nations unanimously adopted a resolution on the “Protection of Civilian Populations against Bombing from the Air in Case of War” affirming substantially the same three points. At the outbreak of World War II, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt issued an appeal on September 1, 1939, to all the belligerents not to undertake “bombardment from the air of civilian populations or unfortified cities.” In response, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France each indicated their intention to limit bombing to strictly military objectives, provided that their enemies did so as well.

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8 Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 134.


12 Biddle, “Air Power,” 141.
British Air Strategy between the Wars

Contrary to this growing consensus of international legal opinion, a school of military thought had developed in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s which emphasized air attacks on enemy cities as a means of quickly winning wars. Following the raids by German Gotha bombers against English towns in the summer of 1917, Prime Minister Lloyd George appointed the former Boer general Jan Smuts to study how best to meet this new threat. The Smuts Report, issued on August 17, 1917, not only recommended the formation of a separate air force alongside the army and navy, but also envisioned a new age in which “aerial operations with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centers on a vast scale may become the principal operations of war.”

On the basis of Smuts’s recommendations, the Royal Air Force came into being on April 1, 1918 with Sir Hugh Trenchard as its first Chief of Air Staff.

The first military theorist of air power is generally reckoned to be the Italian General Giulio Douhet. In *The Command of the Air* (1921) Douhet argued that bombing should target the civilian population of an enemy state to break its morale and force its government to sue for peace. In England, Trenchard independently developed similar

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14 Douhet had been in command of a group of nine aircraft in Italy’s war with the Turks in Libya in 1911; there one of his pilots, Lieutenant Giulio Gavotti, had conducted the first bombing from an airplane when, on his own initiative, he dropped four hand grenades on an Ottoman army encampment below. No-one was hurt; and civilized opinion was revolted by such “unsporting” conduct. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 124.
Along with his senior officers in the fledging RAF, Trenchard expounded a doctrine of air power based on the assumption that in future wars there would be no effective defense against air attack; the bomber would always get through. The only effective means of countering this threat would be a bomber force of one’s own capable of inflicting comparable damage on the enemy. Trenchard saw little point in attacking industrial targets. Victory would go to the side whose population could stand being bombed the longest. Trenchard’s views received support from such distinguished authors as the military historian Captain Basil Liddell Hart – discussed in Chapter Nine below – who wrote in 1925 that bombing would make wars shorter and cheaper, and save lives overall. When challenged on the morality of bombing civilians, however, Trenchard qualified the expression of his views in a 1928 memo to the other service chiefs to concede that it was contrary to the dictates of humanity to carry out “the indiscriminate bombing of a city for the sole purpose of terrorizing the civilian population.” But, he continued, air attacks on military and industrial targets within cities would have the same war-winning effect on enemy morale. “Thus was developed,” Grayling notes, “the official fig leaf used throughout the Second World War to justify the area bombing

15 Basil Liddell Hart writes in *History of the Second World War* (New York: Putnam’s, 1971), in a footnote on page 590, that during the interwar period British air power theorists were unaware of Douhet’s views and developed their air power doctrine independently along parallel lines.


17 Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 131-132.

18 Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 133.
campaigns.” Trenchard retired from the RAF in 1929 but as a member of the House of Lords continued to influence British air doctrine through his disciples in the RAF officer corps, such as Charles Portal and Arthur Harris.

In line with Trenchard’s doctrine, British military procurement through the 1930s focused on developing four-engine heavy bombers and twin-engine medium bombers, while relatively neglecting the technology that could have facilitated precision attacks against specific targets – such as navigational aids, bomb sights, and long-range fighter escorts. However, the invention of radar rendered obsolete the assumption that a self-defending bomber formation could strike deep in enemy territory while suffering only minimal casualties. Now, radar operators could direct fighters to intercept and cause unacceptable losses to incoming bomber formations. Indeed, this development made possible the RAF’s defeat of the Luftwaffe during the Battle of Britain. According to Liddell Hart, the fundamental error of British planning during the interwar period was the failure to realize that achieving command of the air by suppressing the enemy’s air defenses – particularly its fighter aircraft – was the prerequisite for an effective strategic bombing campaign.

19 Grayling, Among the Dead Cities, 134.

20 Hastings, Bomber Command, 42-50.

21 Liddell Hart, History of the Second World War, 591.
The British Strategic Bombing of Germany

From the outbreak of war on September 3, 1939, the RAF adhered to Prime Minister Chamberlain’s instructions and attempted to conduct precision raids on specific targets such as naval bases, airfields, and oil refineries. When bombing such targets would endanger adjacent civilian residential areas, the bombers returned to base with full payloads. Respect for international law was only part of the reason, if at all. By the beginning of the war, it had become clear that the German capacity to bomb British cities was about four times the British capacity to bomb German cities, so it would be foolish to provoke such an attack by launching one.\(^{22}\)

In the conditions of daylight and clear weather necessary for precision raids, however, German anti-aircraft guns and fighters were soon causing unacceptably high casualties. In December 1939, Wellington bombers suffered severe losses in raids against naval targets without achieving any effective results.\(^{23}\) After April 1940, Bomber Command operations were confined to the night hours, since daylight operations had proven too dangerous. Yet given the available navigation technology, bombers flying at night often failed to find even the towns near which their targets were located, much less achieve successful precision strikes. Meanwhile, the German bombing of Warsaw in September 1939 and of Rotterdam in May 1940, followed by the Blitz against British cities from September 1940 to May 1941, led many to conclude that retaliation in kind

\(^{22}\) Hastings, Bomber Command, 57.

\(^{23}\) Liddell Hart, History of the Second World War, 593.
was called for. On October 30, 1940, the Air Staff directed Bomber Command to attack oil targets on clear nights, and cities on overcast nights. The first open effort at area bombing by the British appears to have been the raid on Mannheim in December 1940, which was explicitly described as a reprisal for the German raid on Coventry.

Once the RAF had effectively defeated the Luftwaffe in the skies over Britain in May 1941, the threat of German retaliation was no longer a deterrent to British attacks on German cities. In August 1941, a study by D.M. Butt of Churchill’s Cabinet Secretariat revealed that in bombing operations against specific targets in the Ruhr valley, only one tenth of the bombers got within five miles of their assigned targets. A government policy statement of February 14, 1942, Directive 22, officially changed the strategy from precision to area bombing; henceforth bombing operations were to be “focused on the morale of the enemy civilian population and in particular of the industrial workers.” In a memo dated March 30, 1942, Lord Cherwell, Churchill’s principal scientific advisor, recommended a bombing campaign against fifty-eight German cities with the aim of rendering one-third of the German population homeless by 1943: “There seems little doubt that this would break the spirit of the people.” Sir Arthur Harris was appointed head of Bomber Command on February 23, 1942, and worked until the end of the war to implement the area bombing policy. The Baltic port cities of Lübeck and Rostock were bombed in March and April respectively. Seeking a truly spectacular operation that would consolidate government support for the policy, Harris mounted the first “thousand

bomber” raid, codenamed “Millenium,” against Cologne on May 30. During the second half of 1942, efforts to improve targeting accuracy included the creation in August of the “Pathfinder” force, whose planes would lead the bombers to their targets and mark them with flares, and the introduction of the navigational aids Oboe and H2S. At the same time, the buildup of German air defenses – consisting of radar, searchlights, anti-aircraft batteries, and night fighters – further challenged Bomber Command’s previous assumption that attacking bombers could easily evade the enemy at night.25

From 1939 to 1942, precision raids against specific targets had proven operationally impossible, so that Bomber Command’s only real choice was between doing nothing against targets in Germany and undertaking an area bombing campaign. A key question is whether at this point it would have been better on ethical grounds to have done nothing. From a Just War perspective, such a conclusion seems unavoidable. But, for reasons that will be discussed further in Chapter Eight below, in wartime Britain at the beginning of 1942, doing nothing was simply not seen as an option.

At the Casablanca Conference of January 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill agreed on a “Combined Bombing Offensive,” in preparation for an eventual land invasion of Nazi-occupied Europe. In a round-the-clock campaign, the RAF would continue area bombing by night while the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) would conduct selective bombing during daylight hours in accordance with American air doctrine, which emphasized attacks on industrial, communications, and transportation “choke points” in

the enemy’s economic infrastructure. The Washington Conference in May 1943 issued the “Pointblank Directive,” specifying the objective of destroying the Luftwaffe and the German aircraft industry to gain command of the air on the European continent before the coming land invasion. The directive was, however, loosely worded enough that Harris felt free to continue his area attacks on cities.26

Meanwhile, difficulties of cloud cover, and disruptions caused by German fighters and anti-aircraft fire, often resulted in American daylight “precision” bombing having effects little different from those of British nighttime area bombing. A successful precision attack on, say, a factory required a clear run of many miles at the target, which was difficult in actual war conditions in European weather.27 Accuracy problems increased after the introduction in November 1943 of “blind bombing” through the clouds using the H2X airborne radar system to identify and aim at targets on the ground. In practice, such blind bombing was random and indiscriminate.28 After the war, the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS) admitted: “If the specific target was, for example a marshaling yard located in a German city, as often happened, such a raid had a practical effect of an area raid against that city, but on the basis of the declared intention of the attackers it would go into the air force records as a precision attack on the transportation

26 Liddell Hart, History of the Second World War, 599.
27 Grayling, Among the Dead Cities, 141.
system.” Still, the Americans held to the doctrine of precision bombing, and continued to bomb specific military and industrial targets visually whenever they could. Grayling points out that “whereas the Americans wanted to conduct precision bombing and were forced by circumstances to engage in area bombing, RAF Bomber Command wanted to engage in area bombing, and used the rhetoric of attacking industrial and military targets as a conscious cover for what they were really doing.”

In forty-three major raids from March to July 1943, Bomber Command attacked all the major cities of the Ruhr Valley. Then, at the end of July, came the devastating attacks on Hamburg described in the Prologue. After Hamburg, Bomber Command turned its attention to Berlin, which was attacked repeatedly over a period of four months from November 1943 to March 1944. The results of the “Battle of Berlin” were, however, disappointing to those who were hoping for another Hamburg. The city was more spread out, with wider open spaces, so that the bombing wrought less devastation and ignited no firestorms. Moreover, on the long round trip flight from England to Berlin the bombers were subjected to repeated attacks by German night fighters, and incurred such heavy losses that the campaign had to be abandoned.

In March of 1944, Harris was ordered to divert almost all of his aircraft from bombing German cities to attacks on the rail systems in France and the Low Countries to


30 Grayling, Among the Dead Cities, 141-142.

31 Liddell Hart, History of the Second World War, 602.
disrupt the transportation of German reinforcements to the second front to be created by the D-Day landings on June 6. In the two years since 1942, bomb aiming technology had improved to the extent that by June this campaign had reduced traffic on the French rail system to thirty per cent of its January level. Even though these attacks were designed to minimize civilian casualties, however, they did kill 12,000 civilians, thus raising, not for the last time, the problem that would be later come to be called “collateral damage.”

Meanwhile, the Americans continued bombing oil targets. By July, they had hit every major oil installation in Germany, causing severe fuel shortages for the German armed forces. Also, during the early months of 1944, the Americans had introduced the long-range Mustang fighter, faster and more maneuverable than Luftwaffe fighters, which soon gained the Allies effective command of the air over Germany.

By September 1944, the British Combined Chiefs of Staff had reached a consensus that the best use of Bomber Command’s forces for the rest of the war would be selective attacks on the German oil industry and transportation systems. Clinging to his belief that the bombing of cities alone could win the war, Harris threatened to resign rather than accept limitations on the area offensive. He had earlier established a list of sixty German cities the destruction of which he believed would end the war. Putting this plan into effect, Bomber Command dropped more bombs in the last three months of 1944

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33 Liddell Hart, History of the Second World War, 608.
than in all of 1943.\textsuperscript{34} By December, eighty per cent of German urban areas with populations over 100,000 had been devastated or seriously damaged.\textsuperscript{35} The attacks continued into the spring of 1945. The most infamous was undoubtedly the joint British-American raid against Dresden on February 13, which set off a firestorm that killed over 30,000 people. After Dresden, Churchill seems to have entertained second thoughts about the area bombing campaign and wrote to Chief of the Air Staff Sir Charles Portal:

> It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities, simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed. Otherwise we shall come into control of an utterly ruined land. … The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing. … I feel the need for more precise concentration upon military objectives such as oil and communications … rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive.\textsuperscript{36}

Portal objected to Churchill’s suggestion that “terror” had been a goal of British bombing, and the Prime Minister revised the wording of his memo to omit the offending language. Nonetheless, the area bombing continued with raids on Würzburg and Witten in March, and a raid on the Berlin suburb of Potsdam in April. Finally, on April 16, the RAF issued a directive officially ending the strategic air offensive. Harris accepted the directive on the grounds that there were no more cities in Germany left to bomb.

\textsuperscript{34} Liddell Hart, \textit{History of the Second World War}, 609.

\textsuperscript{35} Garrett, \textit{Ethics and Airpower}, 19.

\textsuperscript{36} Garrett, \textit{Ethics and Airpower}, 34.
During World War II, Bomber Command launched 390,000 sorties against Germany, with a total of one million tons of bombs dropped. Area attacks accounted for seventy percent of Bomber Command’s total effort. Of the 125,000 men and women who joined Bomber Command during the war, about 56,000 lost their lives, around half that number were injured, and more than 11,000 were taken prisoner – a casualty rate of seventy-six percent. Approximately 500,000 German civilians lost their lives to Allied bombing, of whom about 100,000 were children. A million were seriously injured. Around three million homes were destroyed.\(^{37}\)

While the USAAF in Europe mostly adhered to American air doctrine by attempting to conduct precision attacks on military and industrial targets, the story was different in the Pacific theater. Beginning in March 1945, under the command of General Curtis E. LeMay, American bombers based in the Marianas Islands conducted nighttime incendiary bombing raids against Japanese cities. The goal was to compel the Japanese to surrender and, failing that, to degrade the Japanese ability to resist the planned Allied land invasion. The first raid on Tokyo, on March 9, ignited a firestorm that killed more than 85,000 people. Over the course of the next five months, LeMay destroyed nearly half the built-up areas of sixty-six Japanese cities, killing another 145,000 people.\(^{38}\)

Various reasons account for the discrepancy between the American strategies of precision bombing in Europe and firebombing in Japan. Racism may have been a factor.

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\(^{38}\) Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 77-78.
Conrad C. Crane writes that “Americans perceived the Germans differently, and many saw ‘the Japs’ as a primitive, cruel race deserving no quarter or compromise.” News of Japanese atrocities against Allied prisoners fueled desires for revenge. American military planners pointed out that since Japanese factories were small and dispersed over wide areas, and buildings were constructed out of highly inflammable materials, the most effective way of destroying war industries would be to scatter large numbers of incendiary devices over wide areas to start uncontrollable fires. LeMay justified the destruction of residential areas on the grounds that much Japanese war manufacturing was taking place in cottage industries: “The entire population got into the act and worked to make those airplanes and munitions of war … men, women, children. We knew we were going to kill a lot of women and kids when we burned that town. Had to be done.”

LeMay believed that bombing the Japanese into surrender would save hundreds of thousands of American lives that would otherwise be lost in a land invasion of Japan. After the war, he reflected: “Killing Japanese didn’t bother me very much at the time…. I suppose if I had lost the war, I would have been tried as a war criminal…. But all war is immoral and if you let that bother you, you’re not a good soldier.”


40 Crane, Bombs, Cities, and Civilians, 126-127.

41 Crane, Bombs, Cities, and Civilians, 133.

42 Grayling, Against the Dead Cities, 171. As Chief of Staff of the US Air Force during the 1960s, LeMay vigorously advocated air strikes against Cuba during the Cuban missile crisis, and he is famous for saying that he planned to bomb North Vietnam “back to the stone age.”
The campaign culminated in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, which killed a further 100,000 people, destroyed half the buildings in each city, and were followed by Japanese surrender.\(^{43}\) The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey for the Pacific calculated that in the case of Hiroshima, the destruction and casualties from a single atomic bomb would have required 220 B-29s carrying 1,200 tons of incendiary bombs, 400 tons of high explosives, and 500 tons of anti-personnel fragmentation bombs.\(^{44}\) Those grim figures demonstrate that the use of nuclear weapons against cities was not a totally new and unprecedented tactic, but rather a logical development – employing terrifyingly destructive new technology – of a strategy of air attacks on cities that the British had used against Germany since December of 1941 and the Americans against Japan since March of 1945.

**The Question of Military Effectiveness**

Evaluations of the area bombing fall into two broad categories: strategic and ethical. Strategic evaluations seek to assess the bombing from a military viewpoint, asking to what extent it contributed to the Allied victory. Ethical evaluations try to determine whether the bombing was morally justified. Both questions are complex, and while distinct they are related. Apologists for the bombing often argue that it was morally justified because it was a military necessity in a just war against an evil adversary.

\(^{43}\) Historians have debated ever since whether the Japanese were already on the verge of surrendering and would have done so anyway without the atomic bombings.

\(^{44}\) Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 78.
Conversely, critics often argue that the bombing was morally unjustifiable because it caused suffering, death, and destruction disproportionate to any military benefit it could have gained. Before beginning to examine the ethical arguments, then, it is necessary to review assessments of the bombing by military historians and strategic analysts.

At the broadest level, the question is whether the enterprise of strategic bombing *per se* was militarily effective. Here “strategic” bombing stands in distinction to “tactical” or “battlefield” bombing. Tactical bombing involves the use of aircraft in coordination with an army or navy to win land or naval battles and thereby extend one’s control of territory or command of the sea. Strategic bombing, by contrast, involves sending aircraft deep behind enemy lines to strike at targets whose destruction promises to weaken the enemy’s ability or will to fight. A few military historians have taken extreme positions on either side of this debate. In the 1970s, A.J.P. Taylor argued that the Allied strategic bombing campaign was a costly mistake that actually delayed victory and prolonged the war by diverting valuable resources from potentially more effective military uses such as anti-submarine warfare and tactical air support of ground forces. More recently, Richard Overy has argued that the strategic bombing made a decisive

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A further debate, among those who believe that the strategic bombing did contribute to the Allied victory, concerns the relative effectiveness of area bombing as opposed to selective or precision bombing. A good number of military historians take the view that while operational constraints afforded Bomber Command no other option than nighttime area bombing from 1941 to 1943, by early 1944 improved navigation and targeting technology, combined with the introduction of long-range fighter escorts, made effective precision bombing possible in a way that it had not been before. Thus, if Sir Arthur Harris had been removed from command when he insisted on resuming area attacks in November 1944, Bomber Command could have made a greater contribution to Allied victory by concentrating together with the USAAF on German oil and transportation targets, while sparing the German civilian population much needless suffering. Basil Liddell Hart estimated that this course of action could have shortened the war by several months.  

In *Among the Dead Cities*, philosopher A.C. Grayling offers a concise summary and evaluation of the military arguments used to justify the area bombing at the time and in the years since. The area bombing was designed to do the following:

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1. Undermine civilian morale and weaken the enemy’s will to fight
2. Reduce the productive capacity and efficiency of the enemy’s war industries
3. Create logistical difficulties for the German economy and administration by having to deal constantly with repairs and refugees
4. Keep soldiers, anti-aircraft weapons, and fighter planes away from the battlefield
5. Distract soldiers at the front with worry about their families at home

With respect to the first and fifth objectives, the area bombing appears to have failed completely. Virtually all histories of the period agree that the bombing simply angered the German population and strengthened their support for the Nazi war effort. Only in the final months of the war did civilian morale collapse, when Allied armies had entered Germany from both the east and the west. Likewise, German soldiers on both the eastern and western fronts fought tenaciously almost up to the war’s end.

With respect to the second and third objectives, the verdict is mixed. German industrial output increased each year of the war through 1944 despite the bombing; the German economy appears to have had more elasticity and reserve capacity than the planners of the strategic air offensive supposed. Factories damaged in area bombing raids were often made operational again within a few days or weeks. The German

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48 However, Richard Overy argues that, contrary to the accepted wisdom, the bombing did have an adverse effect on German civilian morale, as reflected in such measures as rates of absenteeism from factories. See *Why the Allies Won*, 132-133.
administration dealt with such logistical problems as resettling refugees with great efficiency. Also, once the danger from bombing became apparent, the Germans dispersed factories and other centers of industrial production away from major cities to make them less vulnerable. Overy argues, however, that the bombing had an enormously disruptive effect on the German economy, which otherwise would have had virtually unlimited growth potential with the resources of most of continental Europe at its disposal. The bombing, he writes, placed an effective ceiling on German war production and reduced the actual output of tanks and aircraft. Nonetheless, the greatest disruption to German industrial production appears to have resulted not from area bombing but from precision bombing of oil and transportation targets during the final year of the war.

It is with respect to the fourth objective, the diversion of German resources and forces away from the eastern and western fronts, that the bombing appears to have been most effective militarily. Hitler’s Minister of Armaments Albert Speer later wrote:

The real importance of the air war consisted in the fact that it opened a second front long before the invasion of Europe. That front was the skies over Germany. The fleets of bombers might appear at any time over any large German city or important factory. The unpredictability of these attacks made this front gigantic; every square meter of the territory we controlled was a kind of front line. Defense against air attacks required the production of thousands of anti-aircraft guns, the stockpiling of tremendous quantities of ammunition all over the country, and


50 Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 257.

Neillands amplifies this point by noting German air defense required the deployment in cities and near other potential targets of 8,876 eighty-eight millimeter flak guns – which otherwise could have been put to anti-tank use – manned by 900,000 soldiers. Seventy per cent of the Luftwaffe’s fighter aircraft were kept in Germany to defend against the bombers when they could have been deployed to good effect on the eastern front.\footnote{Neillands, \textit{The Bomber War}, 384-385.} Impressive as these figures are, however, Grayling deftly points out that a campaign of precision bombing would have had largely the same effects:

It was not necessary that the bombers were seeking to attack cities; it was sufficient that they were there at all. If a principal aim of the bombing campaigns was to anchor defensive resources to Germany, then however inaccurate the attempts to bomb factories, power stations, railway lines and marshaling yards, airfields, canals, bridges, harbors, dams and coal mines, the mere effort would have been enough to achieve this aim.\footnote{Grayling, \textit{Among the Dead Cities}, 255.}

One reviewer of Grayling’s book has attacked this conclusion as “simplistic,” arguing that such a restriction to military, industrial, and transportation targets alone would have curtailed the bombing campaign to an extent that it would not have tied down nearly so
much German weaponry and personnel at home. But while this may have been true in 1942-1943 – when it seemed that the only meaningful choice was between conducting an area bombing campaign and doing nothing – it was not so in 1944-1945, when the Allies had gained the ability to engage in precision bombing with greater effectiveness and far fewer losses than earlier in the war.

Evaluating the military effectiveness of the strategic bombing is a complex task, and ultimately beyond the scope of a study in ethics. On balance, however, the weight of military scholarship seems persuasive which suggests that while the strategic bombing campaign overall did contribute significantly to the Nazi defeat in World War II, a joint U.S.-British campaign devoted solely to selective bombing of military and industrial targets – particularly oil and communications – would have done more to hasten the Allied victory if undertaken as soon as operational conditions permitted.

The Ethical Debate Since 1945

Upon the surrender of Nazi Germany on May 8, 1945, the British government began distancing itself from Sir Arthur Harris and Bomber Command. Although Churchill did send a letter to Harris thanking Bomber Command for its decisive contribution to Germany’s defeat, he made no mention of the strategic bombing in his victory speech of May 13. Churchill opposed Britain’s undertaking a systematic study

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of the effects of strategic bombing in Europe. When the British Bombing Survey unit was
created over his objections, it received nothing like the funding and resources given to the
United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), and its final report was not made
public. 56 No campaign medal was struck to commemorate those who took part in the
bombing. Unlike other service chiefs, Harris did not receive a baronetcy from the Attlee
government; his final *Official Dispatch* was not published by the Air Ministry. In
Westminster Abbey a plaque lists the names of all the Fighter Command pilots killed in
the war; but despite heavier losses no similar plaque commemorates Bomber
Command. 57 The authors of the official history of the Strategic Air Offensive note: “The
Prime Minister and others in authority seemed to turn away from the subject as though it
were distasteful to them and as though they had forgotten their own recent efforts to
initiate and maintain the offensive.” 58

Such perceived slights engendered a legacy of resentment on the part of both
Harris – expressed to some extent in his 1947 memoir *Bomber Offensive* 59 – and many
Bomber Command veterans. In postwar Britain, public opinion about the strategic
bombing coalesced into two extremes and a broad middle. One vocal minority
condemned the area bombing as an atrocity; another vocal minority vigorously defended


the honor of the air veterans and argued that the area bombing was the decisive factor that made Allied victory possible. Between these two extremes, the mainstream of British opinion seemed content to accept the government’s wartime explanation that the bombing was directed primarily at military and industrial targets, with the attendant civilian deaths a regrettable and unintended side effect.60

During the Cold War, ethicists tended to discuss the morality of the area bombing in the wider context of debates about nuclear deterrence. In the 1950s, U.S. military strategy relied on the threat of massive nuclear retaliation to deter Soviet aggression; in the 1960s, this policy evolved into the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), by which the risk of uncontrolled escalation to global nuclear catastrophe would be relied upon to keep the peace between the superpowers. Some ethicists perceived that nuclear deterrence involved threatening to do on a vastly larger scale what had already been done in World War II, not only at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also in the bombing of German and Japanese cities with conventional weapons. The American Protestant theologian Paul Ramsey argued for a strategy based on the restricted use of nuclear weapons against exclusively military targets on the grounds that threatening counter-city strikes was immoral, and the credible threat of any nuclear use would suffice as an effective deterrent. Whatever the merits of Ramsey’s argument, his strong condemnation of the bombing of German cities, particularly Dresden, was entirely consistent with his nuclear

ethics.\textsuperscript{61} By contrast, in \textit{Just and Unjust Wars} (1977) political philosopher Michael Walzer offered a limited ethical justification for the area bombing on the grounds of what he called “supreme emergency.” After expounding the \textit{jus in bello} norms of noncombatant immunity and proportionality in detail, Walzer argued that insofar as the British believed that the area bombing was militarily necessary to defeat Germany, then the “determinate crime” of killing innocent people – which he said should frankly be owned up to as such – was preferable to the “immeasurable evil” of Nazi victory.\textsuperscript{62} Significantly, Walzer went on to justify nuclear deterrence by arguing that in the conditions of the Cold War reliance on an immoral threat might be preferable to appeasement or surrender: “Supreme emergency has become a permanent condition.”\textsuperscript{63} A third instance of continuity between ethical assessments of the World War II area bombing and Cold War nuclear deterrence is afforded by the Rev. John Collins, who served as an RAF chaplain at Bomber Command headquarters at High Wycombe, where he quietly witnessed against the area bombing policy, much to the consternation of his superior Sir Arthur Harris to whom he was related by marriage. After the war, Collins


\textsuperscript{63} Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}, 274.
went on to become one of the principal leaders of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).64

In 1992, two events fueled renewed controversy. A Canadian Broadcasting Company television film, “Death by Moonlight: Bomber Command” depicted the bombing campaign in a way that many air veterans found slanderous. One group formed the Bomber Harris Trust and sued the filmmakers for $500 million in the Canadian courts. The lawsuit was dismissed at every level up to the Canadian Supreme Court, but a subcommittee of the Senate of Canada sided with the veterans in finding that the film contained substantial historical inaccuracies. Meanwhile, in London, the 7,500 member Bomber Command Association raised $200,000 to erect a statue of Sir Arthur Harris outside the Royal Air Force Church of Saint Clement Danes in the Strand. The unveiling ceremony was presided over by the Queen Mother and attended by a noisy demonstration of protesters. That night, the statue was splashed with red paint, and it was repeatedly vandalized in the months following. The memorial caused consternation in Germany, the deputy mayor of Dresden calling it “the wrong signal at the wrong time.”65

These events may have served in part as the catalyst for the appearance of a number of ethical studies of the area bombing beginning in the 1990s. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, ethical discussions of the area bombing moved beyond the Cold


War context of debates about nuclear deterrence to consider the area bombing in terms of such categories as genocide, war crimes, and terrorism. Two works published in 1993, Stephen A. Garrett’s *Ethics and Airpower in World War II,* and Conrad C. Crane’s *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians,* dealt explicitly with the ethical issues raised by the British and American campaigns respectively. At a time when the world was witnessing the specter of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and tribal massacre in Rwanda, Eric Markusen and David Kopf argued in *The Holocaust and Strategic Bombing* (1995) that the area bombing fit the UN definition of genocide. In *Among the Dead Cities* (2006), British philosopher A.C. Grayling reached the judgment that the bombing of civilians in Germany and Japan amounted to a war crime according to accepted standards of international law. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D.C., some writers began asking whether the area bombing fit into the category of terrorism. In *Terror from the Sky* (2010), Igor Primoratz wrote that the area bombing of German cities represented “a major and historically highly important campaign of state terrorism.”

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70 Igor Primoratz, introduction to *Terror from the Sky,* 5.
During the 1990s, also, the area bombing became a topic of public discussion in Germany in a way that it had not been since 1945. In an essay on the German debate, Lothar Kettenacker writes that in the immediate postwar years most Germans, in a state of collective trauma, wanted to forget the war and get on with the task of starting over and rebuilding. Discussion of the war in the media and schools emphasized the evils of the Nazi regime, its war guilt and criminal responsibility for the Holocaust. In the context of the Cold War, West Germany’s former British and American enemies had now become its chief allies. Open discussion of the horrors the German civilian population had suffered under the bombs could all too easily be misused by neo-Nazis, or by those who wanted to relativize or indeed deny the sufferings of the Jews under Nazi rule. Robert G. Moeller notes that insofar as German suffering in World War II was publicly discussed, West Germans concentrated on the crimes committed by the Russians in expelling German populations from territories given to Poland, whereas East Germans pointed to the destruction of Dresden as an example of capitalist gangsterism.

This state of affairs began to change after German reunification in 1990. There began a time of stocktaking and sharing of memories of how Germans had also been victims of their government. Precisely because the task of re-education was complete and German war guilt unquestioned, the horrors suffered by the German people could now be

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discussed with less inhibition than in the past. Moeller notes that the children of the World War II generation moved beyond blaming their parents for the Holocaust, which they felt had been sufficiently acknowledged to make talk about other suffering no longer appear an attempt to evade responsibility. The publication of two books, Winfried Georg Sebald’s *Luftkrieg und Litteratur* (1999) and Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand* (2002) triggered a nationwide debate. Both authors were born in 1944, had no memory of the war, and reported that they were shocked at what their parents’ generation had not told them of their sufferings. Some critics objected that Friedrich’s use of language hinted at parallels between the bombing and the Holocaust:

Attention has been drawn to certain terms that have hitherto been associated with the deliberate destruction of the Jewish people, such as *Vernichtungskrieg* (for the war on civilians), *Einsatzgruppe* (for Bomber Group 5), or *Krematorien* (for burning cellars). Even the title *Der Brand* (the Fire), I feel, alludes to the Holocaust even though the author has to my knowledge refrained from explicitly making this comparison.

Kettanacker suggests that Friedrich would have been well advised to point out that during the war many Germans saw their fate as a kind of holocaust in which they were being

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73 Moeller, “The Bombing War in Germany,” 57.


punished for what their government was doing to the Jews.\textsuperscript{77} Although further attention to the contemporary German debate is beyond the scope of this study, future ethical discussions of the bombing are likely to take on the character of an international dialogue involving participants from the countries of both the bombers and the bombed.

CHAPTER EIGHT
THE CRUSADING TRADITION: LORD VANSITTART
AND NON-MILITARY JUSTIFICATIONS FOR AREA BOMBING

As noted in Chapter Two above, the carnage of the First World War dampened
the crusading mentality, so that attitudes towards the Second World War in both the
United States and Britain were marked by a sense more of grim necessity than of
crusading zeal. Focusing on the English Churches, Alan Wilkinson describes these
attitudes in detail.¹ A month after the declaration of war, in a radio broadcast of October
3, 1939, Archbishop of York William Temple remarked that the mood in Britain was
very different from what it had been at the outbreak of World War I in August 1914. For
months the public mind had become habituated to the idea that war against Nazi
Germany might become a national duty, albeit a hateful duty to be taken up without
excitement and with profound sadness. In 1914, the failure of many Britons to understand
why the Kaiser should be thought of as a particular enemy resulted in an intense
propaganda campaign designed to stir up anti-German passions; in 1939, few in Britain
needed to be convinced in Nazism was evil. In the First World War conscription had not
been introduced until January 1916, two years into the war; in the Second World War
conscription had been introduced more than six months before war broke out so that there
was no occasion for the rabid jingoism that had accompanied the previous war’s

¹ Alan Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches, 1900-1945 (1986; repr., Cambridge, England: Lutterworth, 2010), 244-250.
recruiting drives. Most political and religious leaders in Britain were determined to avoid a repetition of the war hysteria they had experienced in World War I. In contrast to church leaders who poured calumny on pacifists and conscientious objectors in the First World War, Archbishop Temple in August 1939 honored the pacifist vocation as a calling from God, while saying that it was a mistake to require it of all Christians. In only one respect did the determination to avoid a repetition of previous mistakes cause harm. Arthur Ponsonby’s *Falsehood in Wartime* (1928) had convinced large sectors of the British public that atrocity stories should always be disbelieved as war propaganda. Hence, news of Nazi atrocities on the battlefield and in the concentration camps often met initially with skepticism. In any case, Kingsley Martin, editor of *The New Statesman*, summed up the attitude of many in Britain in 1939: “We never imagined, as so many people did in 1914, that this was a war to end war, or that any good result could come of it. We were just forced into it by Nazi Germany; there was no alternative.” Overall, the British fought in the Second World War without high emotion but with a deep sense of the justice of the cause, which deepened as the war proceeded. This conviction mostly remains unshaken today. According to British historian A.J.P. Taylor, it was a “good war,” even a “noble crusade,” but one that was fought prosaically, without extremes of high idealism, doubt, and disillusionment.

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2 Quoted in Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 248.

3 Quoted in Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 250. Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr. offers a different assessment, showing that in their public statements a number of Anglican bishops and clergy employed rhetoric identifying England’s war aims with God’s will in a struggle of good against evil, pitting the forces
Such a sober approach to war is perhaps more characteristic of the Christian Realist and Just War traditions than the attitudes associated with holy war considered in Chapter Two above. It seems unlikely to encourage calls for violations of noncombatant immunity. The mood that Wilkinson describes certainly prevailed at the outbreak of war in 1939 and through the months of the ensuing Phony War. However, after the fall of France (June 1940), and before the entry of the Soviet Union (June 1941) and the United States (December 1941) into the war made it clear to many that the Allies were ultimately going to win, Britain’s wartime prospects looked enormously grim. For over a year, Britain stood alone. During this time, a cross-Channel German invasion of England seemed a real threat, the Luftwaffe launched its Blitz against British cities, and German U-Boats took an enormous toll in merchant shipping bringing supplies from North America. It is significant that during this period the British policy of bombing German cities took definitive shape.

In his Just and Unjust Wars (1977), Michael Walzer coined the phrase “supreme emergency” to describe the exigencies of the time. The prospect of an enemy victory seemed real enough to be very frightening. Given the operational constraints discussed in the previous chapter, bombing cities was the only available option for direct military action against the enemy homeland. Walzer writes: “The decision to bomb cities was

made at a time when victory was not in sight and the specter of defeat ever present. And it was made when no other decision seemed possible if there was to be any sort of military offensive against Nazi Germany. Why exactly the British leadership considered it necessary to take the war home to the enemy in this way, and what they hoped to achieve by doing so, are questions to be examined further below. For the moment, the point is that the first of the three conditions identified in Chapter Two as making violations of noncombatant immunity likely in conditions approximating total war was fulfilled: the perception of the conflict as a life-or-death struggle in which the possibility of defeat seems real and the stakes are total. Walzer’s term “supreme emergency” conveys something like this perception. The other two conditions, concerning perceptions of the enemy as “other,” and the absence of a perceived moral distinction between the enemy government and civilian population, come into focus in the wartime writings and speeches of Sir Robert (later Lord) Vansittart.

**Perceptions of the Enemy**

During the Second World War, a vigorous debate took place in Britain concerning the nature of the enemy. The question was whether the Nazis really represented the desires and aspirations of the German people, or whether the Germans only grudgingly accepted the Nazi regime and would rise up and do away with it if only they could. The most prominent advocate of the former view was Sir Robert Vansittart, a career diplomat

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5 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 258.
who had served as Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office from 1930 until 1938, and as Chief Diplomatic Advisor to the government until his retirement in 1941. As a student in Germany in the 1890s, where he was a victim of German Anglophobia, Vansittart conceived a lifelong aversion to German culture, which he believed to be inherently militarist and expansionist. In the 1930s, he had warned repeatedly of the threat posed by Nazi Germany and urged rapid rearmament to deal with Hitler from a position of strength. On his retirement he received a peerage, which gave him a voice and vote in the House of Lords. Finally at liberty to express his views openly, he “plunged headlong into the arena of public controversy. A steady stream of letters to newspapers, speeches, pamphlets, articles and books poured out like water long held back by a dam whose gates were finally opened.”

Vansittart’s best known book – which effectively defined the outlines of the ideology that became known as “Vansittartism” – was *Black Record* (1941), containing the texts of a series of radio broadcasts he had made while still Chief Diplomatic Advisor in 1940. Here Vansittart aims to convince his readers of two continuities: that of the present Nazi regime with previous German regimes; and that of the Nazi leadership with

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7 Goldman, “Germans and Nazis,” 158.

8 Goldman, “Germans and Nazis,” 159.

the German people at large. There was nothing new in Hitler; the same perfidy and policies of warlike aggression and expansion could be seen in earlier German leaders, from Frederick the Great, to Bismarck, to the Kaiser. The first-century Roman writer Tacitus had written of the Germanic tribes that “they hate peace.” Vansittart comments: “their whole history is in that phrase.” The German national character, Vansittart writes, is marked by three elements: envy, self-pity, and cruelty. Hitler is not an aberration, but “the natural and continuous product” of a predatory and bellicose people. Again: “Germans, male and female, are content with servitude, on condition that they are provided with enough of their blindly idolized efficiency to inflict servitude on others.” Hitler is thus not an unnatural taste forced upon Germany; on the contrary, he gives to the great majority of Germans exactly what they have liked and wanted. Vansittart sums up his view of the German people in vivid language: “Impregnate a race with militarism, imbue it with a sense of its own superiority, convince it of its mission to enslave mankind for the good of mankind, persuade it that this end justifies any means and every means however filthy; and you produce a race of hooligans which is a curse to the whole

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10 Vansittart, Black Record, 28.
11 Vansittart, Black Record, 43.
12 Vansittart, Black Record, 23.
13 Vansittart, Black Record, 39.
14 Vansittart, Black Record, 41.
world.”\textsuperscript{15} Vansittart later attacks the BBC’s use of such terms as the “Hitlerite Government” and the “Nazi Regime” to designate the enemy, declaring instead that “The enemy is Germany.”\textsuperscript{16}

Vansittart’s critics sometimes denounced his anti-German views as racialist in character and accused him of advocating, by implication, the extermination of the German people. He vigorously denied these accusations; and a careful reading of Black Record suggests that both criticisms were wide of the mark. Rather than seeing the German people as racially flawed, he believed that German culture was corrupt. The basic problem was that while most other nations had outgrown barbarianism to embrace Christian values and liberal institutions, the Germans “never grew up and settled down.”\textsuperscript{17} Vansittart believed that progress towards a more peaceful world is possible, but the lesson of Nazi Germany is that it is easier to revert to barbarism than to move forward.\textsuperscript{18} Germany needed to undergo a “deep, spiritual regeneration … a complete change of heart, mind, and soul; of taste and temperament and habit; a new set of morals and values; a new, a brand new way of looking at life.”\textsuperscript{19} If the world is ever to enjoy lasting peace, he continued, the Germans must be made to abandon their centuries-old

\begin{enumerate}
\item Vansittart, \textit{Black Record}, 33.
\item Vansittart, \textit{Black Record}, 107.
\item Vansittart, \textit{Black Record}, 45.
\item Vansittart, \textit{Black Record}, 29.
\item Vansittart, \textit{Black Record}, 37.
\end{enumerate}
taste for war. He called for the necessary conversion in quasi-millennial terms: “By the grace of God and for the salvation of man, we shall rescue the earth from Germany and Germany from herself.”

An obvious question, then, is whether Vansittart saw the British area bombing of German cities as fitting into a plan, in the proverbial phrase, to destroy Germany in order to save it. To my knowledge, Vansittart never explicitly addressed the bombing apart from some sharp criticisms of Bishop Bell of Chichester for meddling in military matters allegedly outside the scope of his competence as a church leader. Aaron Goldman writes that “While Vansittart never expressed opposition to the air war against Germany, neither did he ever gloat or exhibit any delight publicly or privately over the incineration of civilians in German cities.” Vansittart did believe, however, that Germany’s spiritual rebirth would have to come from the humiliation of defeat followed by “severe justice,” and the creation of conditions in which the militarist “great whole” of the German people could be regenerated by the peace-loving minority. Elements of the severe justice that Vansittart advocated included a prolonged occupation, permanent disarmament, strict controls on German industry – including the elimination of machine-tool manufacturing,

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20 Vansittart, *Black Record*, 43.
23 Goldman, “Germans and Nazis,” 166.
aviation, and oil refining – permanent Allied occupation of the Ruhr, and the breakup of Prussia into smaller states.25

In Chapter Two, I proposed that two conditions are likely to encourage an atmosphere conducive to justifications for wartime attacks on enemy noncombatants: perceptions of the enemy as fundamentally alien or “other,” and the erosion of any moral distinction between the enemy government, including its armed forces, and the civilian population. Vansittart’s writings and speeches promoted precisely such perceptions of the Germans. Thus, to the extent that Vansittart’s ideas influenced British public opinion, as well as those in positions of political and military leadership, they may well have helped create an atmosphere in which justifications for air attacks on the German civilian population would find a receptive audience. Stephen A. Garrett writes that “even though Vansittart had no direct role in the operations of Bomber Command, there is little question that his thesis provided at least intellectual support for those who viewed the area bombing offensive as simply a just punishment for past and present German misconduct.”26 Moreover, while many political, religious, and literary figures argued vigorously in wartime Britain that the real enemy was not the German people but the Nazi ideology and regime, views similar to Vansittart’s appear to have prevailed among

25 Goldman, “Germans and Nazis,” 181. A similar set of proposals was put forward by U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and temporarily adopted by Churchill and Roosevelt at the Second Quebec Conference in September 1944, but was soon dropped in the belief that a restored Germany would be needed to counterbalance the Soviet Union in postwar Europe. See Warren F. Kimball, Swords or Ploughshares? The Morgenthau Plan for Defeated Nazi Germany 1943-1946, The America’s Alternatives Series, ed. Harold M. Hyman (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1976).

key figures in the British political and military establishments. In a June 1942 speech, Lord Beaverbrook, one of Churchill’s closest advisors, criticized the notion that only Hitler and his Nazi accomplices were evil; since the German people had raised Hitler to power and approved of him at every stage along the way, Beaverbrook urged his listeners to cultivate a “stern and righteous hatred” for the Germans.\(^{27}\) Churchill himself was not immune to the temptation to denounce the German people in speeches making use of even harsher rhetoric than Vansittart’s. In April 1941, for example, he said in a radio broadcast: “There are less than seventy million malignant huns – some of whom are curable and others killable.”\(^{28}\)

**Non-Military Justifications of the Bombing**

Following the fall of France in June 1941, the British leadership from Churchill on down saw bombing German cities as the only weapon available for taking the war to the enemy. The question is why this particular goal seemed imperative. What military advantage Churchill expected to derive from the bombing campaign is not clear; he was not always consistent on this question. Early in the war, he appeared to share the view of the strategic air power enthusiasts in Bomber Command that bombing by itself could bring victory. Writing to Beaverbrook on July 8, 1940, for example, he stated that the one thing that would bring Hitler down was an absolutely devastating, “exterminating,” attack

\(^{27}\) Goldman, “Nazis and Germans,” 164.

\(^{28}\) Goldman, “Nazis and Germans,” 165.
upon the Nazi homeland.\textsuperscript{29} Over a year later, however, in the autumn of 1941, he wrote that with the Nazis in control of the entire European continent, bombing alone could not be expected to win the war “even if all the towns of Germany were rendered largely uninhabitable.”\textsuperscript{30} He also expressed the opinion that the bombing was unlikely to amount to much more than an “annoyance” to the Germans.\textsuperscript{31} What does seem likely is that from a very early date Churchill realized that the only way to defeat Nazi Germany was to bring the United States into the war, so that the combined British and American forces could launch a land invasion of the European continent.\textsuperscript{32} As it happened, victory required the land forces of not only the British and Americans but also the Russians, who suffered by far the greatest human and material costs of any of the Allies in defeating the Nazis. In the meantime, Churchill most likely saw bombing German cities as a means of “softening Germany up” in anticipation of the inevitable land invasion.\textsuperscript{33} Bombing alone could not be expected to win the war, but it might degrade the German war-making capacity sufficiently to reduce overall British and American casualties when the D-Day landings finally came.

\textsuperscript{29} Garrett, \textit{Ethics and Airpower}, 47.


\textsuperscript{31} A.C. Grayling, \textit{Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan} (New York: Walker, 2006), 173.

\textsuperscript{32} Max Hastings reports a conversation between Churchill and his son Randolph on May 18, 1940, during the Battle of France, in which Churchill declared that he finally saw the way to beat the Germans: “I shall drag the United States in.” \textit{Winston’s War: Churchill 1940-1935} (New York: Vintage, 2009), 25.

\textsuperscript{33} Garrett, \textit{Ethics and Airpower}, 51.
The bombing may also have served British strategic purposes in a broad sense that comprises diplomatic as well as military objectives. From 1942, both the Russians and Americans were pushing the British to open a second front in Europe. An abiding British concern for much of the war was that the Russians would seek a separate peace if they perceived that their British and American allies were not doing enough to share the effort, cost, and sacrifices of the war against Nazi Germany, content to leave the Russians to bear the brunt of fighting and dying on the Eastern Front. Before the 1944 D-Day landings opened up the second front which the Russians had long been demanding, the air offensive was all that the British and Americans could offer Stalin as evidence that they were doing their part. The British similarly feared that the Americans would shift their principal war effort from the European theatre to the Pacific if they saw their British allies as lukewarm in their campaign against Germany. The bombing was thus a way of demonstrating to both allies that while London was not ready to undertake a premature invasion of Europe, she was still vigorously prosecuting the war.34

Apart from such calculations of military and diplomatic advantages, it appears that other considerations served powerfully to justify the bombing in the minds of Churchill and many in Britain at the time. The first such consideration was boosting morale. From 1940 until well into 1942, the British suffered enormous setbacks, and their situation seemed overwhelmingly bleak. With the entry into the war of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and of the United States in December, Britain was no longer standing alone

against the Axis as it had done since the fall of France in June 1940. Still, the British were suffering a string of humiliating defeats: Greece in April 1941, Crete in June 1941, and Singapore in February 1942. Under these circumstances, Churchill’s government came under intense domestic and international pressure to show that they were doing something to strike at the enemy; in 1942 a campaign of bombing German cities seemed the only weapon at hand.\(^{35}\) Max Hastings suggests that to maintain public support for the war – and to head off calls for peace negotiations with the Nazis – Churchill believed that he needed to demonstrate that British forces were still capable of successful strikes at the enemy, even if such military successes were more symbolic than useful.\(^{36}\) The bombing raids functioned as a kind of “military theatre” giving expression to Churchill’s flair for the dramatic.\(^{37}\) Hastings describes the May 1942 thousand-bomber raid on Cologne as an “extraordinary coup de theatre” whose chief merit lay less in actual injury done to the Third Reich than in the public impression of Britain striking back.\(^{38}\) Hastings concludes that while it might have been militarily more effective to have used the RAF to support the Royal Navy’s efforts to fight the U-Boats, or to provide air cover for the Atlantic convoys, Churchill’s purpose was to demonstrate that Britain could carry the fight to the


\(^{36}\) Hastings, *Winston’s War*, 102, 129.


\(^{38}\) Hastings, *Winston’s War*, 209.
enemy rather than merely survive blockade and air bombardment. Before D-Day not much else could sustain the fighting spirit of the country.

The second principal non-military justification for the bombing of German cities was based on the moral logic of reprisals. One presupposition of the intention to boost morale was the belief that British public opinion wanted retribution for the Blitz. Churchill often remarked, “They began it.”

Ironically, it seems that the British really began the city bombing by a raid against Berlin on August 25, 1940 in retaliation for civilian casualties incurred when the Luftwaffe mistakenly dropped bombs on the London suburb of Croydon while on a mission to attack an aircraft factory in Rochester. Overruling the objections of some senior RAF officers that an attack on Berlin could make little impact and was likely to provoke worse retaliation, Churchill wrote: “They had bombed London, whether on purpose or not, and the British people and London especially should know that we could hit back. It would be good for the morale of us all.”

The Berlin raid provoked Hitler to order the Luftwaffe to bomb London on September 7, thus beginning the Blitz. The Luftwaffe’s shift from attacking RAF installations to bombing British cities was ultimately self-defeating in that it ensured the survival of sufficient RAF fighter aircraft to win the Battle of Britain. Historians still

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39 Hastings, *Winston’s War*, 211.


debate whether drawing the Luftwaffe’s fire away from RAF fighter bases was part of Churchill’s intention in ordering the Berlin raid.\textsuperscript{43}

Whatever the truth of who had started the bombing of cities, the overwhelming perception in Britain was that the Germans had done so. In \textit{Churchill and War} (2005), Geoffrey Best shows that Churchill had grown up in a culture that respected the “laws and customs of war,” expressed partly in international law and partly in military codes of honor.\textsuperscript{44} Personally humane, even sentimental and soft-hearted, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Geneva Conventions for the protection of the wounded and prisoners of war.\textsuperscript{45} In the interwar period, he had condemned violations of civilian immunity, including terror bombing.\textsuperscript{46} At the same time, he shared in the military mindset of the time that made a mental reservation allowing for reprisals to prevent an enemy from gaining an unfair advantage by committing unlawful acts in war. At the beginning of the Second World War, while all the parties stated that they would respect civilian immunity, they also reserved the right to undertake reprisals if their own civilians were attacked

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{43} Hastings, \textit{Winston’s War}, 88-89; Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}, 256. Richard Overy argues, however, that the Luftwaffe plans called in any case for escalation from attacks on RAF fighter bases and other discrete targets to city bombing in preparation for Operation Sealion, the cross-channel invasion of Britain planned for September 1940. See Richard Overy, \textit{The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945} (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 85.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{44} Best, \textit{Churchill and War}, 272.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{45} Best, \textit{Churchill and War}, 274.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{46} Garrett, \textit{Ethics and Airpower}, 44.}
Douglas P. Lackey remarks: “It is interesting that throughout the war, the British under Churchill adhered to legal restrictions except in cases where they had already been broken by the Germans.” Notable in the conduct of all sides in the Second World War, for example, was the non-use of poison gas, which had caused horrendous death and injury in World War I. Churchill did order preparations in 1940 for the first use of mustard gas against enemy landing forces on English beaches in the event of a German invasion; and during 1944 and 1945 he was prepared to order Bomber Command to use gas bombs against German cities in the event that V1 and V2 rockets were used for gas attacks on Britain. Despite almost universal expectations that gas would inevitably be used, however, all sides refrained from first use. But since in Churchill’s mind the Germans had already crossed the threshold of terror bombing in the Blitz, he repeatedly asserted that the British area bombing campaign was justified retribution. In a famous speech before the London City Council on July 14, 1941, he declared:

We ask no favours of the enemy. We seek from them no compunction. On the contrary, if tonight the people of London were asked to cast their vote whether a convention should be entered to stop the bombing of all cities, the overwhelming majority would cry, ‘No, we will mete out to the Germans the measure, and more than the measure, that they have meted out to us’. The people of London with one voice would say to Hitler: ‘You have committed every crime under the sun. … It was you who began the indiscriminate bombing. … We will have no truce or

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parley with you, or the grisly gang who work your wicked will. You do your worst – and we will do our best.'\(^{49}\)

Such sentiments struck a responsive chord among much public opinion in Britain and the United States. Lackey writes: “In the eyes of many British and Americans, the destruction of German cities was just punishment for crimes committed.”\(^{50}\)

A third non-military justification for the area bombing was, to put it bluntly, that it would do the Germans good and teach them a lesson to be made to suffer in this way. It was widely believed that none of the fighting in the First World War had taken place within the borders of Germany itself.\(^{51}\) Some in Britain thought that experiencing the horrors of war firsthand in their homeland would make the Germans less likely to initiate wars in the future. Such thinking would have found a powerful support in the Vansittartist conceptions of a flawed German national character, collective guilt, and the need for a profound and painful process of postwar re-education and spiritual regeneration. The Liberal MP for Norwich, Geoffrey Sinclair, wrote to Secretary of State for Air Sir Archibald Sinclair: “I am all for the bombing of working-class areas in German cities. I am Cromwellian – I believe in “slaying in the name of the Lord,” because I do not believe that you will ever bring home to the civil population of Germany

\(^{49}\) “The Grit and Stamina of Londoners,” July 14, 1941, in *Never Give In! The Best of Winston Churchill’s Speeches*, ed. Winston S. Churchill (New York: Hyperion, 2003), 297. Churchill may here have been referring to the proposal made by Bishop Bell in his April 17 letter to *The Times*, discussed in Chapter Eleven below, for a mutual cessation of night bombing.

\(^{50}\) Lackey, “Four Types of Mass Murderer,” 147.

\(^{51}\) Actually, on the Eastern Front the Russians invaded East Prussia (in what was then Germany, now Poland) before being turned back at the Battle of Tannenberg, August 23-30, 1914.
the horrors of war until they have been tested in this way.”^52 Here the name of Cromwell invokes the holy war tradition explicitly, along with a hint of the apocalyptic belief that the present war is the last war, or at least that re-educating the aggressive Germans into the ways of peace through a painful process of punishment will make future wars less likely. The President of the Trades Union Congress expressed similar ideas in a speech to the annual conference in late 1942: “until the German people, not alone their gangster rulers, have meted out to them what they have meted out to millions of their fellow creatures … the German people will again, if not prevented, make another attempt to enslave Europe.”^53 Max Hastings writes that while the British were not, on the whole, strident in their desire for revenge, they could sometimes express such sentiments as found in the following entry from the wartime diary of Londoner Vere Hodgson:

As I lay in bed the other night I heard the deep purr of our bombers winging their way to Hamburg. … This is a comfortable feeling. I turned lazily in bed and glowed at the thought, going back in my mind to those awful months when to hear noise overhead was to know that the Germans were going to pour death and destruction on us. … One cannot help feeling that it is good for the Germans to know what it feels like. Perhaps they won’t put the machine in motion again so light-heartedly.\(^54\)

Such justifications of the bombing were reiterated after the war was over, and are still made today. The report of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), a

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massive study begun in 1944 and compiled by teams of investigators visiting bombed German cities in the wake of the advancing Allied armies, included among its conclusions that Allied air power “brought home to the German people the full impact of modern war, with all its horror and suffering. Its imprint on the German nation will be lasting.” Robin Neillands agrees, writing that all the wars started by Prussia and Germany from 1860 to 1939 had been fought on foreign soil with the German homeland remaining intact: “The bomber offensive of 1939-45 finally brought war home to Germany. Then the German people discovered that they had no more taste for war than any of the peaceful countries they had themselves so often occupied and despoiled. If the price of European peace and a final freedom from German militarism was the physical destruction of Germany, many may argue that the price was well worth paying.” But was it really a price worth paying? And were there no alternative means of achieving the same end? I take up these questions in the following section.

**Evaluation**

In the foregoing, I have suggested that three principal non-military arguments served to justify the British area bombing campaign from its inception: that it would boost morale; that it was justified retribution for the German bombing of British cities in the Blitz; and that by giving the German population a taste of the horrors of war it would

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56 Neillands, *The Bomber War*, 400.
teach them to be more peaceful in the future. Here I offer some evaluative comments on each of these three justifications.

The aim of boosting British public morale was problematic on several counts. A 1941 poll showed that support for reprisals against Germany for the Blitz was strongest in rural areas of Britain that had been barely touched by the bombing – such as Cumberland, Westmoreland, and the North Riding of Yorkshire, where seventy-five per cent of the population wanted them. In London, by contrast, the figure was only forty-five per cent. As Walzer notes, “Those who had experienced terror bombing were less likely to support Churchill’s policy that those who had not.”\textsuperscript{57} The validity of the appeal to morale was further complicated by the misleading nature of the British government’s public descriptions of what Bomber Command was doing. As late as 1944, the vast majority in Britain still believed that the raids were being directed selectively against military and military-industrial targets. In the conviction that Bomber Command had nothing to hide and nothing to be ashamed of, Harris wanted the government to be more forthright about what was being done. But the government feared that such forthrightness could provoke opposition from religious leaders which would undermine morale and possibly provoke a backlash of public opinion against the policy.\textsuperscript{58} When a government feels compelled in its public statements to distort the nature of its military operations, it signals some degree of

\textsuperscript{57} Walzer, \textit{Just and Unjust Wars}, 257.

\textsuperscript{58} In October 1943 Secretary for Air Sir Archibald Sinclair explained to the Chief of the Air Staff that “the Government had to proclaim that its policy was only to bomb military targets in order to quieten the Archbishop of Canterbury and other religious leaders ‘whose moral condemnation of the bombing offensive might disturb the morale of the Bomber Command crews.’” Wilkinson, \textit{Dissent or Conform}, 256
awareness that these operations may be viewed as ethically questionable. From a Just War perspective, the question that must be asked is whether it is ever right to attempt to augment public morale by actions that are in themselves immoral. Is the resulting surge in morale really worth having? Will it not tend to degrade public morals by propagating the view that retribution and vengeance are legitimate motives for public violence?

The justification of the area bombing as retribution for the Blitz raises the moral problems associated with reprisals. Walzer writes that no part of the ethical code governing the conduct of war is so open to abuse or so openly abused. The doctrine of reprisals legitimates otherwise criminal actions when undertaken in response to crimes previously committed by the enemy. The problem is that in wartime, someone else can almost always be pointed to as having “done it first.” Despite being intended to put an end to the enemy’s illicit actions, reprisals are apt to fuel an escalating chain of counter-reprisals. This dynamic has already been seen in action: Churchill ordered the raid on Berlin of August 25, 1940 in reprisal for Luftwaffe bombs falling on residential areas of London; Hitler then ordered the Blitz against British cities, for which the British area bombing campaign was intended at least in part as retribution. Then, in 1944 and 1945, Hitler justified his use of V1 and V2 rockets against England as retaliation for the British bombing of German cities. It is possible that the intensification of British and American bombing that followed – including Dresden – was partly intended as retribution for the

59 Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 212.
V1 and V2 attacks. This pattern of escalation exemplifies the truth of the saying attributed to Gandhi: “an eye for an eye will make the whole world blind.”

The contradiction inherent in reprisals is that they consist of the very actions that they are designed to condemn and punish. By breaking the rules they are meant to enforce, reprisals create a situation in which those rules are increasingly disregarded. If Britain’s wartime leaders believed that the Luftwaffe’s bombing of British cities constituted a war crime – and a strong case could have been made along these lines – then an alternative to bombing German cities would have been an announcement that upon Allied victory, those responsible would be put on trial – and to have named the key politicians and military officers who stood accused. As it happened, at the Nuremburg War Crimes Tribunal no Germans were ever charged for bombing civilians in Rotterdam, Warsaw, or London – precisely because the prosecutors knew that defense attorneys could argue persuasively that the Allied leadership stood condemned by the same standards. By invoking the logic of reprisals, Britain’s wartime leaders forfeited the opportunity to strengthen the authority of the jus in bello norms by holding the Nazi leadership accountable for their violations of noncombatant immunity.

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60 Lackey, “Four Types of Mass Murderer,” 148.

61 Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 212.

62 My argument here follows one made by Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 212, with respect to a different case.

The third nonmilitary justification, that the area bombing helped secure the postwar peace of Europe by bringing home to the German people the horrors of war, founders on several historical and moral problems. The peace of sorts that obtained in Europe for forty-four years after 1945 was based initially on the division of the continent, including Germany, into Eastern and Western blocs under Soviet and NATO domination. Since 1989, a reunified Germany has sought to get along with its neighbors within the economic and political context of the European Community and the continuing politico-military context of the NATO alliance. But it seems overwhelmingly likely that postwar Germany’s good citizenship within the international community would have come about apart from the World War II area bombing. Germany was occupied by the victorious Allied powers and subjected to a program of political reconstruction and re-education – including the Nuremberg trials at which the Germans were confronted with the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Nazi regime in their name.

Conclusion

The Allied war aim of unconditional surrender comes close to the heart of the issues of holy war, crusade, and total war considered in Chapter Two above. As defined at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, the policy of Unconditional Surrender signified, first, that the Allies would not negotiate with the Nazi leaders, except to instruct them on the details of an orderly capitulation; and, second, that no German government would be recognized as legitimate until the Allies had won the war, occupied Germany, and established a new regime. Walzer suggests that these aims represent the
“outer limits” of what can legitimately be sought in a just war: the complete conquest and political reconstruction of an enemy state. At this point, Walzer continues, just wars verge into crusades in that they aim at the creation of new political orders accompanied by “mass conversions.”

In the case of Nazism, however, such a crusade was justified because the Nazis had demonstrably become a clear threat to the entire international community, bent on war not only against other governments but also against the very existence of entire peoples. The policy of Unconditional Surrender penalized the German people for their support of the Nazi regime by subjecting them to military occupation, the suspension of their political liberties for a time, and a period of political tutelage.

So, despite the relative absence of a crusading mentality in wartime Britain, there is a sense in which the Allies were engaged in what Eisenhower called a “crusade in Europe.” The war aim of Unconditional Surrender was near total; and a war fought for totalistic ends can entail significant pressures to use totalistic means that cast aside traditional normative restrictions on the conduct of warfare. Perceptions of the enemy as comprising not just the opposing state’s government and armed forces but also its entire civilian population only increase these pressures. But Johnson’s critique of the Bainton paradigm, considered in Chapter Two above, is a reminder that neither holy war, nor crusade, nor ideological war leads automatically and inevitably to the abandonment of restraint: “[T]he causes leading to actual warfare of a totalistic nature can be understood rationally and subjected to conscious control by individual moral agents. The general

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64 Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 113-114.
implication of this is that it is in human power to avoid total wars, with all the destruction of persons, property, and values they bring; such warfare is not inevitable, even in our own time.⁶⁵ To apply this principle to the case at hand, even though the war against Nazi Germany fit the description of a kind of crusade, the area bombing of German cities was not inevitable; it was a choice. The non-military aims of the bombing discussed in this chapter – boosting British morale, responding to the Blitz, and re-educating the German people for the post-war peace – could have been achieved as well or better in other ways. Indeed, insofar as one of the Allied war aims was the condemnation and punishment of German war crimes, that aim was undermined by the Allies’ own violations of the jus in bello norms. As Johnson shows, even from within the holy war tradition it can be argued that those who go to war for a righteous cause incur a special obligation to fight in a way that does not discredit that cause. As moral agents, the leaders of wartime Britain bore responsibility for the rhetoric they employed and the decisions they made that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocent German civilians.

CHAPTER NINE

THE AMBIGUITIES OF REALISM:
BASIL LIDDELL HART ON AREA BOMBING

Assessing the realist tradition’s influence on the British debate on area bombing during World War II is something of a challenge. After the early Modern thinkers discussed in Chapter Three above, explicitly realist analysis largely disappeared from European political philosophy. It reappeared in the nineteenth century German school of Realpolitik, and one of its first articulations in the twentieth century was Max Weber’s 1918 lecture on “Politics as a Vocation.”¹ This lecture was not translated into English until 1946, however, and its influence on political thought in the English-speaking world was probably limited before then. Realist ideas next emerged in a modified form in the United States in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr, beginning with Moral Man and Immoral Society (1932),² discussed above in Chapter Four. (Niebuhr’s influence on the British area bombing debate will be considered further in the next chapter.) During the 1930s, the failure of idealistic schemes for permanent peace following World War I led to the emergence of a new realist school in the fledgling academic discipline of international relations, beginning with E.H. Carr’s The Twenty Years’ Crisis (1939).³


influential as Carr’s book was, it did not directly address the question of strategic bombing except in a passing reaffirmation of the rules of war prohibiting the infliction of unnecessary death or suffering. Subsequently, during and after World War II, academic writers in the United States – including Hans Morgenthau, George Kennan, Robert E. Osgood, Robert W. Tucker, and Kenneth Waltz – took up and developed the realist tradition in the context of international relations theory; but their work came too late to influence the British area bombing debate during World War II.

My original plan in this chapter was to consider Sir Arthur Harris, the RAF Chief of Bomber Command from 1942 through 1945, as an implicit spokesperson for the realist tradition in the debate on area bombing. But in my research I discovered in Captain Basil Liddell Hart a much more articulate and prolific representative of the tradition. Not a specialist in international relations theory but a military historian and strategist, Liddell Hart was deeply involved in the discussion of the role of airpower in warfare from the 1920s through the 1940s. His role in that debate reveals that the realist position on the area bombing is not at all clear cut or predetermined. From advocating a strategy of air attacks on enemy population centers in the 1920s, Liddell Hart became one of the most vocal critics of area bombing during World War II. Yet this change of position did not compromise his realist principles. On the contrary, his opposition to strategic bombing was as much an expression of the realist tradition’s key values and commitments as was his earlier advocacy of the idea.

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4 Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis*, 154-155. See especially n. 1, p. 155.
A Realist Argument for Strategic Bombing

Basil Liddell Hart was born in 1895 in Paris, where his father was a minister in an English-speaking Methodist congregation. The family returned to England shortly after the turn of the century. After two years reading history at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge, he volunteered at the age of nineteen for service in the Great War and was commissioned as a lieutenant. He arrived in France in 1915 and saw action on the front lines on three occasions; the third was the Battle of the Somme in July 1916, where the British lost 60,000 men on the first day. Badly gassed in the third week of the offensive, he was repatriated to England where he remained for the rest of the war. A heart condition forced him to retire from the army in 1924 with the rank of Captain. Shortly after the war, he began writing on military matters; and in the 1920s and 1930s he gained an international reputation as a leading military historian and strategic analyst. Since Liddell Hart’s death in 1970, Brian Bond and John J. Mearsheimer have published studies of this thought. Both books are indispensable for an understanding of his ideas, but neither makes fully explicit his significance as a thinker in the classical realist tradition. My aim here is to explore the realist assumptions underlying his changing positions on strategic bombing from 1925 through 1945.

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During the 1920s, Liddell Hart shared in the disillusionment of his generation at the slaughter in the trenches during the Great War. He did not share, however, in the widespread optimism that an era of permanent peace was dawning through the new order of international law, treaties, and organizations centered in the League of Nations. As a military strategist, he sought to identify and recommend ways in which future wars could be made less destructive and costly in human life. His basic proposal was “the strategy of indirect approach,” which involved attacking the enemy’s most vulnerable points behind his lines and away from his main forces. He developed this idea in *Paris, or the Future of War* (1925), *The Decisive Wars of History* (1929), and *The British Way in Warfare* (1932). In 1929, also, he published a biography of William Tecumseh Sherman, whose campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas he regarded as exemplifying this strategy.

In *Paris* Liddell Hart predicted that airpower would be the central weapon in future wars. The opening paragraphs of this short book resemble nothing so much as a tract in classical realist theory. As opposed to those who see dawning a new era of universal peace, he prefers to take his stand on universal experience as contained in history, whose path is “strewn with idealistic tombstones.” To abolish war, it is necessary to remove its cause, which lies in the imperfection of human nature. Universal peace requires a transformation of the human spirit, without which all international legal

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and organizational attempts to restrain war are futile. Unless the transformation is universal, however, those peace-loving nations who renounce war will simply invite aggression by their less scrupulous neighbors.¹⁰

Since war is inevitable, Liddell Hart continues, the top priority must be to limit its ravages. The Great War caused eight million deaths and imposed staggering financial costs on the belligerent nations. Another war on the same scale would portend the breakdown of civilization. To prescribe an alternative, it is necessary first to understand the mistaken thinking that led to the slaughter of 1914-1918. The generals who conducted the Great War were led astray, he argues, by the “Napoleonic theory” which specified, first, that the one true objective in war is direct engagement and destruction of the enemy’s forces in the field and, second, that this objective requires such large forces as can only be supplied by a “nation in arms.”¹¹ The result is that “progressive butchery, politely called ‘attrition’, becomes the essence of war. To kill, if possible, more of the enemy troops than your own side loses, is the sum total of this military creed, which attained its tragi-comic climax on the Western front in the Great War.”¹²

Having offered this diagnosis, Liddell Hart proceeds to lay the theoretical groundwork of an alternative strategy. The aims of any state’s national policy should be

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“an honorable, prosperous, and secure existence.”13 Only when the citizens of a nation believe that the policy of another nation is endangering their honor, prosperity, or security, will they consent to the grave step of going to war. Here, Liddell Hart has given a classical realist justification of war in terms of a response to threats to a state’s vital interests. Ethical considerations such as the *jus ad bellum* criteria do not enter into his account. The aim of war, he continues, should be a resumption of the state’s peace-time policy, with the shortest and least costly possible wartime interruption of the country’s normal life. The obstacle to overcome is the enemy’s opposition to one’s own aims and objectives. The goal of war must thus be to transform the enemy’s adverse will into compliance with one’s own will: “The aim of a nation in war is, therefore, to subdue the enemy’s will to resist, with the least possible human and economic loss to itself.”14

Contrary to the Napoleonic theory – which Liddell Hart mistakenly attributes to Clausewitz15 – the destruction of the enemy’s armed forces in the field is one means, but not the only means, of attaining this goal.

As a complex system of interdependent parts, the modern state is only as strong as its weakest link. The purpose of grand strategy is to discern and exploit the “Achilles’ heel” of the enemy nation, and then to strike not at its strongest bulwark but at its point of

13 Liddell Hart, Paris, 18. Although Liddell Hart does not say so, this triad echoes Thucydides’ security, honor, and self-interest; Machiavelli’s fear, envy, and ambition; and Hobbes’s competition, diffidence, and glory.


greatest vulnerability. Armed force can be used to dislocate the life of the enemy population to such an extent that they will prefer the lesser evil of surrender: “The enemy nation’s will to resist is subdued by the fact or threat of making life so unpleasant and difficult for the people that they will comply with your terms rather than endure this misery.” In previous eras, this was done by direct force: burning, pillage, and rapine. More recently, in the Great War, it was done by naval blockade, cutting off the enemy nation’s food supply. The problem with blockades, however, is that they are slow to take effect and expensive to implement. In the past, military occupation of the hostile country was the ultimate means of subduing the opposing will; the problem is that such occupations are generally not possible without the prior defeat of the enemy’s main army in the field. This difficulty has engendered the delusion that destruction of the enemy’s main army is the real objective of war.

Liddell Hart moves next to his main proposal. Aircraft are able to “jump over” the army shielding the enemy government, economy, and people, and “so strike direct and immediately at the seat of the opposing will and policy.” He asks his readers to imagine two industrial nations at war, one with a superior air force, the other with a superior

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16 The title of the book is a pun on the name of the Trojan hero who killed Achilles by wounding his heel, his one vulnerable point. It also alludes to the Russian occupation of Paris in 1812 as an instance of “indirect approach” that had decisive effects in defeating Napoleon. Liddell Hart, *Paris*, 21-22, 24-26.


army: “Provided that the blow is sufficiently swift and powerful, there is no reason why within a few hours, or at most days from the commencement of hostilities, the nerve system of the country inferior in air power should not be paralysed.”

A modern state is particularly vulnerable to a sudden and overwhelming blow from the air:

Imagine for a moment London, Manchester, Birmingham, and half a dozen other great centres simultaneously attacked, the business localities and Fleet Street wrecked, Whitehall a heap of ruins, the slum districts maddened into the impulse to break loose and maraud, the railways cut, the factories destroyed. Would not the general will to resist vanish, and what use would be the still determined fractions of the nation, without organization and central direction?

Victory will go to the side that strikes first. The side that hesitates will have its civil centers paralyzed. Where an army would take weeks to reach and capture enemy cities such as Essen or Berlin, aircraft could reach and destroy both in a matter of hours.

Liddell Hart next discusses two objections to this proposed use of air power, the first economic, the second ethical. The economic objection is that destroying an enemy’s industry, commerce, and communications, reduces “his post-war value as a potential customer.” But, he responds, such an air war would inflict less total damage than a prolonged conflict like World War I. The ethical objection is based on the “seeming brutality” of an attack on the civilian population. But, he counters, the last war has done much to obviate this objection – the ethical problems with air wars are not greater than

20 Liddell Hart, Paris, 40-41.

21 Liddell Hart, Paris, 42.

22 Liddell Hart, Paris, 42.
the “cannon-fodder wars of the past.” He then enters into a lengthy speculation on the use of gas – including non-lethal gas – instead of conventional explosives to reduce further the destructive effects of, and hence the ethical objections to, air attack.

While the air will ultimately become the sole medium of future warfare, during a short term intermediate period, before aircraft gain the necessary range and “hitting power,” nations will still have to rely on their armies and navies as well as their air forces. Moreover, two states with evenly matched air forces will likely refrain from air attacks on each other for fear of instant retaliation. He devotes the rest of the book to the use of land and sea forces in the strategy of indirect approach; among other things he advocates the development of highly mobile tank forces as a new form of “heavy cavalry” able to manoeuver around enemy armies and attack their command and communications centers in the rear. Liddell Hart is thus sometimes credited with having contributed to the development of the Blitzkrieg tactics used so effectively by the German forces in the early stages of World War II.

Liddell Hart’s moral reasoning in Paris is consequentialist. His implicit rejection of the jus in bello norm of noncombatant immunity is informed by two assumptions: first,

23 Liddell Hart, Paris, 43.
24 Liddell Hart, Paris, 45-53. Having been gassed himself, he spoke from experience.
26 Liddell Hart, Paris, 70-73.
27 The extent of Liddell Hart’s influence on German military strategy in the interwar years is debated. See Bond, Liddell Hart, 215-237; Mearsheimer, Liddell Hart and the Weight of History, 160-167.
that an air war would be limited in duration – taking only days or weeks for one side to subdue the other, whereas another land war would last for years; and, second, that the overall number of deaths resulting from such an air war, while considerable, would still be fewer than those resulting from another protracted conflict like the Great War which claimed eight million lives. Working within the realist tradition which regards war as an indispensable instrument of national policy, Liddell Hart nonetheless exhibits a passionate moral commitment to minimize war’s death and destruction and, above all, to avert any repetition of the slaughter in the trenches of World War I.

By all accounts, Paris was an influential book. Liddell Hart records in his memoirs that it made an immediate impact on the RAF Chief of the Air Staff Sir Hugh Trenchard, who ordered a number of copies and distributed them to his fellow Chiefs of Staff, the First Sea Lord, and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Through Trenchard, the book enjoyed a wide circulation in the RAF and its newly-established Staff College.  

Even though Liddell Hart had abandoned his faith in the war-winning potential of air power by the end of the 1920s, his ideas appear to have taken hold among senior RAF officers and helped shape Bomber Command’s strategy during World War II.

Towards the end of the Second World War, J.M. Spaight, a former official in the Air Ministry, presented a modified form of the realist argument in Bombing Vindicated (1944). Against those who argued before the war that aerial bombing threatened the destruction of civilization, Spaight maintains that in the war so far, the bomber has saved

By 1918, he wrote, war had become “a sheer massacre of boys. The most disastrous calamity that can befall any generation of men is that which strikes down the flower of it. That and nothing else is the destruction of civilization which all efforts should be bent to preventing.” He then compared the casualty figures from some of the great battles in World War I with those from the Battle of Britain. The Battle of the Somme, for example, lasted five months from July to November 1916, and resulted in 630,000 Allied killed and wounded, and 680,000 German killed and wounded, with negligible territorial gains for the Allied forces. The Battle of Britain, by contrast, lasted nine months, from September 1940 to May 1941, and resulted in 90,000 persons killed or seriously injured: “That figure is only half as much again as the loss incurred by the British army on one day alone (July 1) in 1916.” In the first four years of the present war, he continues, “we in Britain have not seen a generation slaughtered and mutilated on the appalling scale to which we became accustomed in 1914-18.” Much of the credit goes to Allied bombing raids which have harmed the German capacity to wage war at least as much as the massive ground engagements of the previous war but at a much lower cost in human lives overall.

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31 Spaight, *Bombing Vindicated*, 11. On the first day of the Somme offensive, July 1, 1916, the British lost approximately 60,000 men, the largest single loss on any day in British military history.

Spaight somewhat counterintuitively characterizes strategic bombing as a defensive measure, since it attacks an enemy’s capacity to wage war:

The justification for air bombardment is that it is essentially *defensive* in purpose. You kill and destroy to save yourself from being killed or destroyed. You can do so not merely on the field of battle, as in older war, but wherever the arms which would have been used in the field are being made or conveyed. That is the case for the bombing of centres of war production and transportation. Is it not possible that the secret of flight was given to man so that the weapons of war should perish?  

In future, aggressive nations are less likely to attack their neighbors because they can no longer expect to escape unscathed: “War was all right when it was waged well away from the war-maker’s homeland. It was a fine adventure then, and often a profitable one. It is such no longer. It is a bad business, a losing game.”  

Still, while Spaight accepts that area bombing of centers of enemy war production will inevitably entail the deaths of many noncombatant civilians, he nonetheless condemns attacks on cities aimed *solely* at terrorizing civilian populations.  

Quoting General Sherman, Spaight agrees that “war is cruelty,” but he immediately adds that “it need not be wanton, brutal cruelty.”

After the war, Sir Arthur Harris offered in his memoirs a brief ethical justification for the area bombing echoing both Liddell Hart’s and Spaight’s arguments. After

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describing the raid of July 24-25, 1943 on Hamburg and the ensuing firestorm, Harris writes: “In spite of all that happened at Hamburg, bombing proved a comparatively humane method. For one thing, it saved the flower of the youth of this country and of our allies from being mown down by the military in the field, as it was in Flanders in the war of 1914-1918.” Harris is here engaging in the same sort of consequentialist moral reasoning as did Liddell Hart in Paris. In Harris’s mind, the area bombing was justified insofar as it shortened the war and saved lives that would otherwise have been lost in defeating Nazi Germany. Ironically, by the time Harris took over Bomber Command in 1941 and began implementing the area bombing strategy, Liddell Hart had become one of that strategy’s most outspoken critics.

A Realist Critique of Strategic Bombing

After Hitler came to power in 1933, Liddell Hart turned his attention to the question of how Britain should respond to the growing threat of Nazi Germany. The British policy during most of the 1930s was appeasement: the attempt to find diplomatic solutions on the assumption that Hitler was a reasonable and even cautious statesman with limited territorial and economic objectives. Corresponding to this diplomatic strategy was a military policy of avoiding a “continental commitment” – that is, refusing any commitment of British armed forces to the European continent. Liddell Hart

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supported both policies. Moreover, in his military writings in the 1930s he largely abandoned his strategy of indirect approach, and instead adopted the argument that in modern warfare the defense would always have an overwhelming advantage over the offense. In the absence of a British continental commitment, the task was to deter the Germans from attacking France by persuading them that effective French defenses would cause any German offensive to bog down in a replay of World War I. Through the 1930s, Liddell Hart maintained that acting alone France could repel a German attack. The events of the spring of 1940 were to prove him completely wrong.

After the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, the British government reversed its policy of appeasement and began attempting to deter Hitler by the threat of armed force. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain committed Britain to the defense of Poland, introduced conscription, and began raising a large army for deployment to France. These developments fulfilled Liddell Hart’s worst fears. During the period leading up to war, he emphasized the reasonableness of Hitler’s demands, while warning that British threats were more likely to provoke than to deter Nazi aggression. Throughout World War II, he maintained that since the British and French in


40 Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History*, 129.

1939 had no effective military capability to defend Poland, their security guarantee had the counterproductive effect of angering Hitler and provoking him to attack. 42

The World War II years were a time in the political wilderness for Liddell Hart, given his outspoken criticism of Churchill’s leadership and war aims. 43 He opposed conscription, and worried about the effects of total war on civil liberties and freedom of expression at home. 44 Militarily, he advocated a defensive strategy of demonstrating to the Germans that they could not win and then offering to negotiate for peace. In the conditions of modern war, he believed, a decisive victory by one side over the other was impossible. Once the Soviet Union and the United States entered the war, he recognized that Allied victory had become possible, but he believed that its costs would be unacceptable. He foresaw that much of Europe would come under Soviet domination; and he feared that Britain would be reduced to a second-grade power, dependent militarily and financially on the United States. 45 He resolutely opposed the policy of unconditional surrender, advocating instead conciliation and a negotiated settlement, based perhaps on German withdrawal from the occupied territories and Hitler personally resigning from office. 46

42 Mearsheimer, Liddell Hart and the Weight of History, 145-151.

43 Mearsheimer, Liddell Hart and the Weight of History, 152.

44 Bond, Liddell Hart, 127.

45 Bond, Liddell Hart, 135; Mearsheimer, Liddell Hart and the Weight of History, 154.

46 Bond, Liddell Hart, 155.
Liddell Hart’s wartime views stand in striking contrast with the Churchillian position that no peace was possible with a Nazi regime that had to be completely destroyed. Liddell Hart strove to maintain a calm, fair-minded attitude towards Germany and the Germans. He rejected the view that the current enemy was unlike all previous enemies. While taking an unduly optimistic view of Hitler and Mussolini as reasonable statesmen with whom negotiation was possible, he also emphasized the distinction between the German people and the Nazi leadership, and maintained that the Allies should encourage anti-Nazi revolution in Germany. Yet, he argued, the demand for unconditional surrender would have the opposite effect, convincing the Germans that they had no choice but to sink or swim with the Nazi government. What is perhaps most regrettable about Liddell Hart’s views during this period is that he discounted stories of German atrocities and concentration camps as Polish and Russian propaganda. Mearsheimer remarks that while Liddell Hart was neither an anti-Semite nor an anti-democrat – but, on the contrary, a tolerant and decent man – his deep-seated opposition to total war led him to adopt a shameful position.

Brian Bond writes that nowhere was Liddell Hart’s opposition to Churchill’s strategy more pronounced that in his abhorrence of the bombing of German cities. Liddell Hart never explained his reasons for abandoning his earlier advocacy of strategic

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48 Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History*, 156.

49 Bond, *Liddell Hart*, 144.
bomring in Paris, but the change of position is easy to understand. The underlying assumption in Paris is that air strikes against the enemy’s civil centers will produce a quick victory, thus averting a protracted land war. By the 1930s, this assumption no longer seemed credible. Defensive measures could be taken against air attack. An air war would probably not be quickly won, and would more likely become another war of attrition entailing prolonged death and destruction on a vast scale. Liddell Hart maintained his opposition to the British bombing campaign until the end of the war, arguing that attacking German cities while demanding unconditional surrender would only convince the Germans that since the Allies obviously wanted to destroy them they had nothing to lose by fighting to the bitter end.50

Liddell Hart’s This Expanding War (1942) includes an address given on August 6, 1941 entitled “Can We Find a Way of Taking the Offensive against Germany – Now?”51 This address affords an illuminating sample of the thinking underlying his opposition to the bombing campaign. The war was still in its early stages: the Battle of Britain had been over for almost a year; the Germans had invaded Russia a month before; the United States had not yet entered the war. Liddell Hart comments that before Hitler attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, any talk of victory had been wishful thinking uninformed by the strategic balance. But wars are not so often won by one side’s superior strategy as they are lost by the other side’s foolish mistakes. Hitler’s gamble in attacking Russia

50 Bond, Liddell Hart, 144-147.
51 B.H. Liddell Hart, This Expanding War (London: Faber & Faber, 1942), 254-265.
could conceivably cost Germany the war. Under these circumstances, the question has inevitably arisen of opening a second front to relieve German pressure on the Russians. What, then, are the options?

After considering and disposing of the idea of a cross-channel invasion of Western Europe as logistically beyond Britain’s resources, Liddell Hart turns to consider the government’s plan of “bombing Germany into surrender.” In the Battle of Britain, he argues, the Germans demonstrated a capacity to bomb Britain superior to Britain’s capacity to bomb Germany. A bombing campaign against German cities will thus likely provoke further German retaliation against British cities, resulting in a drawn out air war of attrition.\(^{52}\) Implicitly harking back to his argument in Paris, he writes that unless the competitive devastation of cities produces an early collapse of the enemy’s morale and will to fight, it will leave both Germany and England so scarred, materially and morally, that the postwar situation will be worse than the war itself. “For a genuine victory, the issue must be swiftly decided.”\(^ {53}\) But no evidence suggests that air attack can decide a war except in conjunction with a powerful land offensive. With control of most of central Europe, Germany can disperse its industry and move its factories out of the reach of British bombers. On the long-term view, which usually coincides with the moral view, the attempt to gain victory by bombing alone will have a more degrading effect on

\(^{52}\) Although Liddell Hart overestimated German strategic bombing capabilities, to some extent his prediction was fulfilled by German use of V1 and V2 rockets against Britain in the later years of the war.

\(^{53}\) Liddell Hart, *This Expanding War*, 261.
civilized life than has been experienced in any previous modern war. It is ironic to go to war to rescue humanity from Nazi tyranny and then “inflict such limitless misery on millions of innocent human beings, in the occupied countries as well as in Europe, in trying to free them from the rule of a limited group.”\textsuperscript{54} Unlike opposing troops in a land war who have the opportunity to surrender, people being bombed from the air have no way to opt out of being attacked. The British bombing campaign is too much like putting people into a steep-walled pit, telling them you are going to throw stones at them as long as they stay there, while offering them no means of climbing out. It is a poor means of changing the will or heart of the opposing people.

Liddell Hart then offers his own prescription for victory. To win the war in any true sense, Britain needs the help of the German people. Those who lump all Germans together as equally bad and make no distinction between the Nazi leadership and the people as a whole – here he is undoubtedly referring to Lord Vansittart – are blunting Britain’s best weapon. There is already evidence of war-weariness and disillusionment with Hitler among the German people: “The only factor that might check its spread is the fear of defeat, and a peace worse than Versailles, which must inevitably be aroused by our declared intention of seeking absolute victory.”\textsuperscript{55} That fear is Hitler’s best ally; German disillusionment with Hitler is Britain’s best ally. An appeal that will turn the people of Europe and Germany against Hitlerism must begin at home, and by example.

\textsuperscript{54} Liddell Hart, \textit{This Expanding War}, 260.

\textsuperscript{55} Liddell Hart, \textit{This Expanding War}, 263
To present a positive alternative to Hitler’s New Order for Europe, Britain must offer a new order of its own, providing a better life for each individual than is possible in a totalitarian system. This new order should combine a guarantee of economic security for each individual, including the free provision of all the basic necessities of life, with the maximum possible freedom outside the economic sphere. Great social developments are possible if energy is not dissipated in fruitless military operations. The problem is that war diverts attention from the struggle against evil at home and refocuses it on evil abroad, which in turn becomes a scapegoat for evil at home. Victory in the true sense, Liddell Hart concludes, requires that people be better off after the war than before. Real statesmanship looks beyond winning the war to winning the peace to follow.

Two years later, in 1943, Liddell Hart developed these themes in a reflection on the Allied war aims in the context of the history of British strategy. The traditional British approach to warfare in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries was more ruthless than the continental approach; instead of engaging the enemy’s main forces in the field it aimed at the will of the opposing people, making use of such tactics as blockade and naval bombardment, thus striking at the noncombatant population. But in practice it was usually combined with limited objectives and a willingness to accept a negotiated peace. “We did not pursue the fight to the finish.” What is new about the present war, he continues, is the combination of an unlimited war aim (unconditional surrender) with such unlimited measures as total blockade and air bombardment of cities. This combination marks a reversion to barbarism and “a spreading menace to the
relatively shallow foundations of civilized life.” Victory in such a war is an illusion, a mirage in the desert. Britain does not have the resources to pursue victory in a war against a continental power without exhausting itself and being left “in the position of an inherently weaker and seriously weakened buffer state between Russia and America – an awkward situation, fraught with ominous possibilities.”

Liddell Hart and the Realist Tradition

Brian Bond comments that during World War II Liddell Hart’s ideas were well-intentioned but utopian in their failure to recognize that Nazi Germany had to be defeated in the interests of European civilization. Since “utopian” is a word that realist writers typically use to label ideas that they want to dismiss, Bond’s comment raises the question of how well Liddell Hart’s views during World War II cohere with the authentic realist tradition. Martin Wight writes that classical realist thought is marked by the acceptance of unlimited war. He cites as an example of realist thought Sherman’s assertion that war is inherently illimitable and uncontrollable. Superior force should be used with no consideration except military effectiveness; ruthlessness is the ultimate kindness. Moreover, the goal of war is the complete destruction of the enemy. There should be no compromise with the enemy while fighting, and no conciliation after victory is won: “The


57 Bond, Liddell Hart, 159.

twin conceptions of unconditional surrender and a Carthaginian peace are realist.”

On this point, however, Wight is completely wide of the mark. Part of the issue is the question of political control over the military. Soldiers such as Sherman are sometimes prone to assuming that once war has broken out, effective control of national policy is transferred from the political to the military leaders, who will prosecute the war with the goal of total victory. But certain strands of the realist tradition also emphasize the necessity of subjugating the military’s conduct of war to political direction so that the state’s interests may best be served, if necessary, by means that fall short of total war. Classical realists are indeed willing to recommend total war with the goal of complete destruction of the enemy in circumstances of dire emergency when the state’s survival is at stake. But they are typically more prone to criticize total war as the irrational manifestation of idealistic crusades, and to recommend instead policies of limited war, combined with a willingness to negotiate, as better serving the state’s true interests.

Utopian as they may appear, Liddell Hart’s ideas during World War II exemplify the realist tradition. He analyzes the causes of the war in terms of competing territorial and economic interests rather than ethical questions of just and unjust causes. When he states that the long-term view generally coincides with the moral view, he effectively posits an ethical obligation on the part of policymakers to pursue the state’s long-term interests as opposed to its short-term advantages. But conventional moral concerns are not absent from his thought. A recurring theme in classical realism is the moral

59 Wight, *The Three Traditions*, 221.
condemnation of unnecessary cruelty, and more generally of violence that serves no useful purpose or is counterproductive. Thus Liddell Hart morally condemns wars of attrition – whether in the trenches of World War I or in the city bombing of World War II – when the state’s policy objectives could be achieved in less destructive ways. The dark side of this realist tendency to oppose total war is the willingness to countenance any violent measures that seem necessary to the state’s vital interests. Liddell Hart’s shift from advocating strategic bombing in the 1920s to opposing it in the 1940s turned solely on the question of whether it would be an effective means to a quick victory. Where realist assumptions prevail, the debate about the morality of the World War II area bombing of German cities is reduced to a debate about its military effectiveness.

Liddell Hart’s refusal to view the enemy as uniquely evil or unlike any previous enemy expresses characteristically realist commitments. A striking feature of realist thinking since Thucydides has been the refusal to assume a posture of moral superiority over one’s enemies and competitors. The governing realist assumption is that while conflicts of vital interests sometimes lead to war, one cannot morally blame an enemy for opposing one’s interests, because he is only doing the same thing as one is doing oneself by pursuing those interests. This refusal to demonize the enemy opens up possibilities for negotiation, conciliation, and mercy. It reduces the temptation to see the enemy as evil and morally deserving of all violent measures that can be taken against him.

While it is possible to construct a realist argument in favor of the Allied policy of total war and unconditional surrender in World War II, Liddell Hart’s analysis shows that
on purely realist grounds it is difficult to come up with a cause so transcendentally compelling as to justify such extreme measures as the area bombing of innocent civilians. Moving outside the realist world view, and taking into account the sorts of moral considerations that realism normally eschews, makes it easier to recognize Nazi Germany as an evil empire that simply had to be defeated and destroyed at all costs. Then the ethical question becomes whether area bombing and other violations of the laws of war were justified as means of defeating such an evil adversary. The internal contradiction of the realist tradition is that while its assumptions may be used to justify extreme measures in warfare that seem necessary to the goal of total victory, they tend simultaneously to subvert that goal, substituting in its place more limited goals, such as negotiated settlements, which tend to call for more restrained means of waging war.

**Conclusion**

In *Why the Allies Won* (1995), Richard Overy shows that a key factor contributing to victory in World War II was the sense of moral conviction that permeated the societies of the Allied powers, from the top leadership on down, that their cause was just.\(^60\) It may well have been in Britain’s interests, as Liddell Hart argued, to have made peace with Hitler following the fall of France in 1940, and thus to have acquiesced in German domination of the European continent. The reasons for Churchill’s defiance are difficult to explain in terms of strategic considerations alone. It was an issue of moral principle

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that aggression of the sort committed by the Axis should not be allowed to pay, and that
the leaders of regimes guilty of such aggression should be held accountable and punished.
It is difficult for realism alone to justify such totalistic war aims.

The realist tradition rightly points out that strict adherence to the *jus in bello*
norms may in some cases limit the effectiveness of military operations. Even if the
British area bombing of German cities was militarily effective in hastening the Allied
victory, and saving lives overall, it was still a violation of the *jus in bello* norms and an
immoral policy entailing the indiscriminate slaughter of hundreds of thousands of
innocent noncombatants. A compelling moral argument can be made that it is preferable
to fight a just war justly even when doing so entails the sacrifice of military advantages.
Such decisions are never easy; and the realist tradition’s great contribution is to point out
their often agonizing qualities. Suppose that one is faced with the question of whether to
bomb an enemy city in the expectation that doing so will entail the deaths of tens of
thousands of innocent civilians, but will also shorten the war by six months and save
hundreds of thousands of combatant lives. The realist tradition will likely counsel that
course of action, while the Just War tradition will counsel the opposite course. Either
way, the decision itself has an inescapably tragic dimension: a theme taken up and
highlighted by the tradition of Christian Realism, to be considered further in the next
chapter in relation to Archbishop William Temple.
CHAPTER TEN

STRUGGLES IN CHRISTIAN REALISM:
WILLIAM TEMPLE’S RELUCTANT SUPPORT OF AREA BOMBING

Reinhold Niebuhr wrote “The Bombing of Germany” – discussed above in Chapter Four – in connection with a ten-week visit to Britain in the summer of 1943 at the invitation of William Temple, who had become Archbishop of Canterbury the previous year.¹ Niebuhr and Temple had first met twenty years earlier in 1923. Temple was then Bishop of Manchester and already a noted theologian; Niebuhr was pastor of Bethel Evangelical Church in Detroit and beginning to make a name for himself by his writing in The Christian Century.² In the summer of that year, Niebuhr had joined “the American Seminar,” a group of clergy, academics, businessmen, labor leaders and writers, who stayed at Toynbee Hall in East London and discussed contemporary social issues with figures such as Ramsay MacDonald, Gilbert Murray, Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, and Randall Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury.³

Subsequently, by the 1930s, Niebuhr’s writings had become widely read in Britain. Adrian Hastings asserts that Niebuhr was the single greatest theological influence in Britain during the decade. His appeal lay in his rejection of the previous generation’s liberal Protestantism without falling back into fundamentalism, combined with full


³ Fox, Reinhold Niebuhr, 77.
sensitivity to social reality: “He seemed to be just what the age of ideological struggle needed, if Christians were to keep their heads above each incoming wave. Niebuhr provided in theology for the more Protestant-minded much of what Maritain provided for the more Catholic-minded.”

Niebuhr exercised a profound influence on Temple himself. In the 1920s Temple had advocated a mild social radicalism derived from a blend of philosophical idealism, incarnational theology, and evolutionary optimism. As Bishop of Manchester, Temple had convened the Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship (COPEC), which met in Birmingham in April 1924. The conference’s purpose was to develop a Christian approach to contemporary political, social, and economic problems for the Church of England; it issued a call for a program to alleviate unemployment, launch new housing schemes, and extend education. According to Alan Wilkinson, COPEC assumed that all members of society shared in a common interest, which could be discovered and appealed to without much difficulty. However, the crises of the 1930s, combined with Niebuhr’s influence, led to a shift in Temple’s thinking, with a new emphasis on human sinfulness and the inevitability of conflict and struggle in the quest for social change.

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7 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 216-217.
Theology in a Neo-Orthodox Key

Temple gives a semi-autobiographical account of the shift in his thinking in an article, “Theology To-day,” published in Theology in 1939 and reprinted in his Thoughts in War-Time (1940). The outbreak of war, Temple writes, has accentuated a divergence between his generation of theologians and a younger generation of theologians. The problem is that each generation was starting from a very different place. Temple’s generation grew up in a stable world that was at least nominally Christian. The agnostics of that period wanted to jettison Christian dogma but keep Christian ethics along with “a most un-Christian belief” in automatic progress, inherited from the eighteenth century. In this situation, Temple’s generation tried to make a map of the world as seen from the standpoint of Christian faith. He had sought to construct a “Christocentric metaphysic” combining idealist philosophy with Incarnational theology, to persuade people who already accepted one part of the Christian heritage to accept the rest.

The younger theologians, on the other hand, are confronting a world in which Christianity is openly repudiated, Christian standards of conduct are challenged as vigorously as Christian doctrine, and social structures are seen as the accidental result of blind forces. Irrational and unintelligible, the world of today is one of which no Christian

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8 Stephen Spencer identifies these “younger theologians” as Anglo-Catholic neo-Thomists influenced by Maritain – Dom Gregory Dix, V.A. Demant, and E.L. Mascall – as well as Evangelicals influenced by Barth’s rejection of natural theology. William Temple, 89.

9 William Temple, Thoughts in War-Time (London: Macmillan, 1940), 95.

10 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 98. He mentions his debt to Caird, Royce, and Bosanquet in philosophy, and to Westcott and Gore in Anglican Incarnational theology.
map can be made: “Our task with this world is not to explain it but to convert it.” Temple proclaims in thoroughly neo-orthodox language, can be met “not by the discovery of its own immanent principle in signal manifestation through Jesus Christ, but only by the shattering impact upon its self-sufficiency and arrogance of the Son of God crucified, risen and ascended, pouring forth that explosive and disruptive energy which is the Holy Ghost.” To maintain faith in God under the shadow of war, it is necessary to start from the fearful tension between the doctrine of the Love of God and the actual facts of daily experience, and present the Gospel “not as the key to a universal synthesis, but as the source of world-transformation.”

Theology today, Temple concludes, has two main tasks. The first is to think out afresh the standards at which a society must aim if it is to be in any sense a Christian society: “we lack and desperately need an ethic of collective action.” Here he mentions the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, as well as the writings of Jacques Maritain, as hopeful Roman Catholic examples. The second task is to challenge the world in the name of Christ, not trying to make sense out of everything but openly proclaiming that most things as they are make no sense at all: “We shall not say that a Christian philosophy embraces all experience in a coherent and comprehensive scheme;

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14 Temple, *Thoughts in War-Time*, 104.
we shall declare that in the Gospel there is offered to men deliverance from a system of things – ‘the world’ – which deserves the destruction that is coming upon it, a deliverance offered to all so that the ‘the world’ itself may receive it if it will. We proclaim, not general progress, but salvation to them that believe.”

Temple acknowledged his debt to Niebuhr in his address to the Malvern Conference in 1941, which he convened when he was Archbishop of York. This conference, on “the Life of the Church and the Order of Society,” brought together a number of distinguished speakers – including T.S. Eliot and Dorothy L. Sayers – to consider from an Anglican standpoint the shape of the new society that would emerge from the war, and how Christian social thought might assist in postwar reconstruction.

In his opening address, Temple reasserts the right and duty of the Church to offer counsel to the state on social concerns, against the view of the Reformers, whose position led to a complete separation of the two spheres. He describes the Lutheran position as follows: “If indeed the State invades the life of the Church, then the Church must protest and resist; but otherwise the Church has no right to approve or disapprove the action of the State. It is easy to see how Luther prepared the way for Hitler.” Temple rejects that view and

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15 Temple, *Thoughts in War-Time*, 106.


17 William Temple, “Opening Address,” in *Malvern, 1941: The Life of the Church and the Order of Society, being the Proceedings of the Archbishop of York’s Conference* (London: Longmans Green, 1941), 13. Unfortunately, Temple’s caricature completely misrepresents the Lutheran position since Luther himself never hesitated to give counsel and direction to secular rulers; Temple’s comment seems to rest on a misreading of Troeltsch’s observation, noted above, that the Lutheran vision of relations between Church
looks around for alternatives. One possibility is to start with the “great scholastics,” such as St. Thomas Aquinas, but not to stop there. Maritain has much to offer by way of a fresh presentation, but overall the scholastic tradition lacks an adequate appreciation of “the hideous power of sin.” Having recently read both Maritain’s *Scholasticism and Politics* and Niebuhr’s *Christianity and Power Politics*, he concludes, it is Niebuhr’s book and “not the other which gives the impression of a deeply Christian mind grappling with the realities of to-day; and this is due to the fact that Niebuhr’s whole mind is possessed by the sense of that aboriginal sin of man which consists of putting himself in the center where God alone ought to be, thus claiming in effect to be the God of his world. That fact is the source of power politics …”

**The Oxford Conference**

Niebuhr’s influence on Temple is clearly apparent in Temple’s address to the Oxford Conference of 1937. The first great ecumenical “Life and Work” conference had taken place in 1925 in Stockholm. In 1934, the Universal Council for Life and Work decided to hold another such conference on the theme “Church, Community and State.” After three years of intensive preparation, 425 delegates assembled at Oxford on July 12, 1937 for a two-week gathering at which 120 Christian bodies in forty countries were

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officially represented. Absent were representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, which declined to participate, and the German Evangelical Church, which was barred from attending by the Nazi government. The conference laid the groundwork for the eventual formation of the World Council of Churches after the Second World War.

Both Niebuhr and Temple gave addresses with the identical title, “Christian Faith and the Common Life.” Temple begins his address by observing that “the Two Great Commandments,” love of God and love of neighbor, have become separated in people’s minds, so that the first is regarded as “a private affair between a man and his Maker,” while the latter is viewed as capable of fulfillment apart from love towards God. But in the New Testament the two are inseparable. The precepts of Christ, Temple continues, make demands so exacting that they have been dubbed “Counsels of Perfection,” and regarded as binding only on monks and hermits. Moreover, two forces erode the moral appeal of the Gospel: on one hand, a pessimism which regards the world as so utterly fallen and corrupt that it is beyond redemption; and, on the other hand, an optimism which thinks that the increase of knowledge and the spread of education can put right all that is wrong with the human condition. In the modern world, the state has taken responsibility for so many areas that were once the sphere of charity in the personal dealings of individuals. Where then, Temple asks, does the law of love apply now?

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Echoing Luther, Temple answers that one’s duty is shaped by one’s social relationships: “a man’s station, when once he has accepted it, very largely determines his obligations.” People have different gifts and different needs. Their cooperation serves the benefit of all, each doing what he does best, and supplying the needs of others equally with his own: “This is the social expression of the supreme rule of Ethics—Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” This love, Temple hastens to clarify, is not the same as the love spoken of by the Gospel. Even in its perfect form, it is not more than justice. But it is fully in accord with Christian love. One cannot be consistently just unless one is inspired and supported by a love which has its source in God. “Justice, in short, is the true form of love at this level of human activity, and the form will only become actual if the substance of love is present and active.” Even though Temple is speaking in his own unique idiom, the influence of Niebuhr’s idea of justice as the approximation of love in human history is palpable.

Yet the attempt to realize true and full justice fails in a fallen world. Here Temple sounds the Niebuhrian note even more loudly: “The true Christian will judge all he does or attempts by the highest standards, and will pronounce sinful his best achievements, but he will not on that account commit the additional sin of injuring other people for the sake of a conscience which is sensitive about its own consistency but not about their

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In other words, the sin one commits in shirking one’s duty is greater than the sin one inevitably commits in fulfilling that duty. Temple continues: “Our task is to do the best we can; but our estimate of what is best must be reached by standards which still condemn it. Relative terms are absolute in their relations; whatever is best in the circumstances – relatively best – it is my absolute duty to do; yet judged by the absolute standard it is still condemned as sin. For all is sin which falls short of the glory of God.”

In the section entitled “The Church and War,” the Oxford Conference report summarizes the ideas in Temple’s address almost verbatim:

In all situations the Christian has to bear in mind both the absolute command, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;” and the obligation to do what most nearly corresponds with that command in the circumstances confronting him. His action may be but a poor expression of perfect love; the man is caught in a sinful situation, to the evil of which he may have contributed much or little. The best that is possible falls far “short of the glory of God” and is, in that sense, sinful; each man must bear his share of the corporate sin which has rendered impossible any better course; and we all have to confess that “our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.” Yet to do what appears as relatively best is an absolute duty before God, and to fail in this is to incur positive guilt.  

Otherwise, the Oxford Conference Report made a number of urgent recommendations on the looming threat of war, reflecting the concern of Christian theologians and ethicists to avoid the jingoism and war hysteria into which the churches on both sides had been caught up in World War I. The Church condemns war, which can only occur as the fruit

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and manifestation of human sin. Moreover, if war breaks out, the Church is called simply to be the Church, still united as the worldwide fellowship of the Body of Christ, though the nations in which it is planted fight one another. Christians in the warring nations must consciously offer the same prayers for the doing of the Father’s will on earth as it is in heaven: “This fellowship of prayer must at all costs remain unbroken.”

The report goes on to enumerate several different views then current on pacifism and the Just War, focusing on the question of whether and when Christians may legitimately participate in wars. Significantly, however, nowhere does the Conference report discuss the question of the conduct of warfare, legitimate and illegitimate means of fighting, or indeed the specific question of aerial bombardment of civilian populations.

**Temple on Pacifism and War**

Wilkinson writes that of all English church leaders, Temple developed the most comprehensive attitude on the ethics of war and peace, partly due to Niebuhr’s influence. Temple was no pacifist; he had no doubt in either 1914 or 1939 that Britain was right to go to war. In 1935 he caused a minor theological controversy by writing

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28 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 261.

that pacifism is “heretical in tendency.”30 His old friend Charles Raven vehemently protested that it was Temple who was heretical and who had committed the sin of apostasy.31 Temple responded that until the world was converted and war abolished, international relations must aim at justice and not love. (It seems likely that Niebuhr was referring to this exchange in the opening paragraphs of his essay “Why the Christian Church is not Pacifist,” discussed in Chapter Four above.)

Over the years, Temple repeatedly articulated a distinction between “personal” or “vocational” pacifism, which he respected, and “absolute” or “universal” pacifism, which he condemned. Some Christians, he acknowledged, discern a vocation to take no part in war personally: “I have a deep respect for those who take this view; and I believe that God calls some to act upon it, giving them a special vocation to bear this witness to the unity of all God’s family and to the sovereignty of love. Yet if this view be put forward as binding upon all Christian people, I am convinced that it is profoundly mistaken.”32 On several occasions, he likened personal pacifism to the religious vocation of monks and nuns. While the monastic witness represents an invaluable challenge to worldliness and materialism, “it is not to be desired that all Christians should be monks or nuns, leaving

30 Suggate, William Temple and Christian Social Ethics Today, 157-158. Specifically, Temple wrote, pacifism tends towards the heresies, first, of Marcionism, which holds that the New Testament has superseded the Old Testament; second, of Manichaeism, which holds that matter and the material world are intrinsically evil; and third, of Pelagianism, which holds that it is humanly possible to obey the Counsels of Perfection apart from conversion and sanctification

31 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 264.

32 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 7.
the civic life to be controlled by those who are not Christian.”33 Just so, he continues, “the modern pacifist is the modern representative of the monastic impulse. … His witness is invaluable. … But if all Christians took that course, there would be no Christian impulse behind the civic enterprise of justice.”34

Temple’s most basic argument against pacifism aims at what he takes, rightly or wrongly, as the central pacifist tenet: that physiological life is absolutely sacred. But this belief is “Hindu or Buddhist, not Christian.”35 The argument that it cannot be right for a Christian to kill a fellow human being in any circumstances can rest only upon the belief that physiological life is sacrosanct. However, this idea is not Christian at all, “for if it were, the martyrs would be wrong.”36 That is, it would be wrong to give one’s life for a cause as well as to take the life of another. But Christians are taught not to count life dear to themselves, and to be ready to give their lives gladly for their faith or for a noble cause. What is sacrosanct, then, is not “life in the animal sense,” which people must be ready to lose and which will come to an end sooner or later anyway, but rather “the personality” which is capable of “that eternal life which may be won by the readiness to lose the animal life.”37

33 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 28.
34 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 28-29.
35 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 29.
36 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 31.
37 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 32-33.
When two nations go to war, Temple continues, the soldiers and, to a lesser extent, the citizens of both stand over and against each other as representatives and agents of their countries. “A soldier of necessity offers his life to be taken; he does not aim at being killed – he aims at killing; but in the process he offers his life.” If his life is taken, his personality is fulfilled in his self-sacrifice, or at least carried forward towards fulfillment. “For, of course, his death is not the end of him.” But if loss of life is not the greatest injury that one can suffer, it cannot be the greatest injury to inflict.\(^{38}\)

Temple concludes that “it is wrong to forbid Christians to fight on the ground that it is necessarily wrong to take life.” War is horrible, appalling, and evil, and everything possible must be done to end it: “But a Nazi concentration-camp is a horrible thing, and the suppression of a national community is an appalling thing.” The question, then, must always be, “How can I prevent the greatest imminent evil and promote the greatest practicable good?”\(^{39}\) So, while war is always evil, sometimes it is the lesser of evils. Fighting is not self-evidently forbidden by the law of love, and it becomes an expression of love when every other alternative is worse.\(^{40}\)

Temple resolutely opposed the glorification of war. However necessary it may be, war must never be fought in a spirit of hatred but always of love and prayer for one’s

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\(^{38}\) Temple, \textit{Thoughts in War-Time}, 33.

\(^{39}\) Temple, \textit{Thoughts in War-Time}, 35.

enemies. In his radio broadcast of August 27, 1939, he admonished that “If war breaks out we shall be increasingly tempted to hate our enemies; but Christ said, ‘Love your enemies.’” While they must be resisted now, he continued, the time will come to serve God together with them in common efforts to promote the welfare of all people. In a letter of June 27, 1942, he wrote that while he has avoided publicly urging “love” for the Germans because the word is so easily misunderstood, and while no-one has denounced German policies and atrocities more forcefully than he has, “there is an immense difference between the severity undeniably called for and ill will in the sense of desiring evil to befall people.” The controversy with pacifists, he wrote on another occasion, has the unfortunate effect of making those who hold that it may be right for a Christian to engage in warfare to appear as defenders of the institution of war, whereas “Many of us abhor it as completely as do our pacifist friends.”

The form of wartime prayers published by the Church of England occasioned a minor disagreement in 1944 with Archbishop Cyril Forster Garbett of York, who took exception to Temple’s avoidance of direct prayers for victory. Temple wrote to Garbett that while he was perfectly prepared to say, “Grant us victory, if it be thy will,” nonetheless he always tried to draft prayers which did not set British Christians against

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42 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 9.
44 Temple, Thoughts in War-Time, 31.
fellow Christians in Germany: “if we pray as our Lord has taught us, we are never
praying against each other, because we are always praying not that what we want shall be
done, but that what God wants shall be done, and that we may be used for doing it.”
Garbett was unconvinced, noting in his diary that if the Church didn’t think it was God’s
will to go to war against the Nazis, it should have opposed the war; but if it thinks it is
God’s will, then it must pray for victory.

Overall, Temple’s position on war in general, and on the Second World War in
particular, is best summed up in a letter he wrote to a young friend in 1939:

When I say that in the circumstances killing is right, I am not denying that it is
sinful; but we are in a position, as indeed we frequently are in other relations,
where the choice is between two evils. Every available course is in this sense
sinful in that it belongs to an order which has departed from the rule of God, or in
other words, you have moved from the absolute to the relative realm; and then the
important principle comes in that relative terms are within their relations absolute.
… So we are involved in an entanglement due to the sin of mankind, including
our own, in which the best thing we can do is still a bad thing. None the less it is
right to do it, because it is the best possible. And so we have got to do it and be
penitent while we do it. That is the only hope I see of both resisting injustice and
securing that justice comes out of it. … So once again we have to do the best we
can, being what we are, in the circumstances where we are—and then God be
merciful to us sinners!

The weakness of this position is that it fails to provide adequate criteria for distinguishing
between “bad things” that may be a tragic necessity in wartime, such as engaging enemy

45 Temple, Lambeth Letters, 145.
46 Charles Smyth, Cyril Forster Garbett, Archbishop of York (London: Hodder and Stoughton,
1959), 291.
forces in combat, and other “bad things” that the laws of war forbid altogether, such as intentionally attacking noncombatant civilians.

The Bishops and the Bombing, 1939-1942

In May of 1939, Alan Don, Chaplain to Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Gordon Lang, replied to a correspondent that both the government and RAF would recoil from any policy of deliberate attacks on civilian populations. Lang had recently corresponded with Sir Kingsley Wood, Secretary to the Air Ministry, who had advised him that the government accepted the Declaration of the League of Nations of 1938 that “the intentional bombing of civilian populations is illegal.” Lang subsequently disclosed this news to a meeting of the bishops of the Church of England at Lambeth on June 28, 1939, two months before the war broke out.

On June 11, 1940, a delegation from the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship (APF) visited Archbishops Lang and Temple together, and asked at what point they would rather see the war lost than won by methods they deplored. The two archbishops assured them that the Church would protest against reprisals involving direct attacks on civilians. Temple also told the pacifists that if bombing of open towns were adopted as national policy he would probably feel that there was no longer anything worth fighting for.48


48 Chandler, “Obliteration Bombing,” 924-925; Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 266.
Later in the year, as the German Blitz against English cities got under way, the prospect of bombing German cities became a topic of open debate among the Church of England's bishops. On November 14-15, 1940, the Luftwaffe bombed Coventry, gutting much of the town center, including the medieval cathedral, and causing approximately 563 deaths and 863 serious injuries. In December, Bishop Mervyn Haigh of Coventry addressed his diocesan conference on the question of what response the British government might be morally justified in making. Many people, he said, fail to realize that this type of city attack is “the deliberate introduction in deadly earnest of a new method of aerial warfare.” The British government might well be justified in deciding to use this form of attack against German cities if the Germans continue to use it against British cities. Those who object to this idea fail to realize what total warfare may require:

[I]f we are not prepared for that, we might have done better not to have begun resisting Nazi aggression by force. Nor do I believe that a nation need be morally degraded even by doing a horrible thing of a new kind, in a war which it believes itself to be morally right in waging, so long as it does them utterly against its will, only as long as others do them against itself, and only if and as long as it seems necessary to do them in order to avert serious risk of defeat.  

Writing in his Diocesan Gazette the following month, Bishop Haigh clarified his position in response to criticisms that he was advocating reprisals. Many who condemn reprisals, he wrote, fail to distinguish them from “reasonable counter-action.” Owing to the nature of modern war, he continued, “the old distinction between combatants and

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49 The Church Times, December 20, 1940, p. 810.
noncombatants is so largely obliterated.” Giving way to the spirit of revenge is one danger, but the opposite danger is becoming sentimental: “[W]e can all too easily allow indignation to blind us to the sort of action we ought to take to meet new kinds of menace.” Haigh was effectively saying that, much as he deplored city bombing, in conditions of total war a nation that refuses to employ such methods may put itself at a military disadvantage against an opponent who does employ such methods.

While Haigh’s views were atypical at the time, they set off a public debate among the bishops of the Church of England that continued throughout the war. For his part, as will be seen below, Temple later said repeatedly that he had found Haigh’s argument entirely convincing. Temple represented Haigh as having described the German attack on Coventry as a legitimate act of war. In the extant reports in *The Church Times*, however, Haigh did not describe the bombing of Coventry as legitimate in itself but simply as a “new method of aerial warfare” to which the British might have to respond in kind to avoid yielding a significant military advantage to the Germans. It is possible, of course, that as Archbishop of York Temple had access to Haigh’s thinking on the matter beyond what was reported in *The Church Times*.

On October 28, 1941, Percy Hartill, Chairman of the APF, wrote to Lang to protest that the government had adopted the very policy of bombing cities that the archbishops had condemned at their meeting with the APF the previous year. Lang was

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50 *The Church Times*, January 24, 1941, p. 45.

annoined to receive advice on the conduct of warfare from those who objected to war in any form, but with Temple’s help drafted a conciliatory reply asserting that there had been no change in government policy.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Temple and the Bombing, 1942-1944}

Towards the end of 1941, Cosmo Gordon Lang announced his intention to retire from the See of Canterbury. In February 1942, the same month that Sir Arthur Harris was appointed Commander in Chief of Bomber Command, Churchill offered the primacy to Temple. Churchill was less than enthusiastic about Temple’s reputation for social radicalism and his lack of wartime bellicosity. But he had no choice; no other Church of England bishop enjoyed Temple’s stature and authority.\textsuperscript{53} Temple was duly enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury in April.\textsuperscript{54}

Temple’s translation to Canterbury coincided with an escalation of the air war against Germany. In his first address as Primate to the Convocation of Canterbury in May, 1942, Temple observed that while the present war was clearly a duty, war itself remained a hideous evil. The RAF had done “signal service” to the Allied cause in the

\textsuperscript{52} Wilkinson, \textit{Dissent or Conform}, 266.

\textsuperscript{53} Spencer, \textit{William Temple}, 98.

\textsuperscript{54} On June 18, Reinhold Niebuhr wrote from New York to thank Temple for copies of \textit{Thoughts in War-Time} and \textit{Readings in Saint John’s Gospel} and added: “We are all grateful for the clear-sighted Christian statesmanship which you are giving to the British nation. Though calamities have for the moment overtaken the cause of the Allies I feel that what you symbolize on the side of the Christian life of Britain and what Churchill symbolizes on the side of desperate and heroic courage represent the resources of Britain which will save the day.” Niebuhr to Temple, June 18, 1942, Temple Papers, MS. 4515, ff. 76-78, Lambeth Palace Library, London.
recent raids on the cities of Lübeck and Rostock, even though the destruction of historic buildings and “the infliction of misery on multitudes of human beings” were the occasion for profound regret. Such was the “balance” that Christians must seek to preserve in their attitudes towards the war.\textsuperscript{55}

From this point on, Temple maintained a more or less consistent public position with respect to the bombing. Reprisals against civilians would be wrong, but he did not believe they were government policy. Bombing of military targets was licit; and he accepted that incidental civilian casualties would be inevitable as a result.\textsuperscript{56} In a tacit articulation of the principle of double effect, he wrote in a letter dated August 30, 1943, that “there is a very clear distinction between intending something and accepting the inevitable consequences of something else which is unintended.” The Lord Chancellor, he continued, had recently made it clear “that only military objectives could be the right intentional object of bombing. He included a quite definite statement that to drop bombs merely with the intention of killing the general population would not be legitimate.”\textsuperscript{57}

Temple soon found himself effectively caught in the middle between a vocal minority engaging in public questioning and criticism of the area bombing, and a government whose representatives believed they urgently needed him to support their

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\textsuperscript{56} Chandler, “Obliteration Bombing,” 932.

\textsuperscript{57} Temple, Lambeth Letters, 106-107.
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policy. On May 20, 1942, Air Marshall Sir John Salmond wrote to Temple to complain of his regretful language about the necessities of war in relation to the recent raids on Lübeck and Rostock: “The harm that can be done to the public will to victory by the belief that the Primate disapproves of the means is incalculable.” Salmond continued: “Why is it necessary in the name of Christianity to teach [our forces] to look upon with regret the inevitable results of at length putting their training into execution? If you succeed the result will be a sapping of the strength of the offensive will.” Temple responded that “it is of real importance to maintain, as far as one can, sensitiveness to the horrors of war even while one is facing them. I do not the least believe that it diminishes the readiness for endurance or for thoroughness, but it does something to counteract the hardening tendency of war of which the final result is as expressed in Shakespeare’s terrible line ‘All pity choked with custom of fell deeds.’”

Temple nonetheless remained inclined to rely on the assurances of government representatives, especially Minister for Air Sir Archibald Sinclair, that the bombing was aimed only at legitimate military and industrial targets. On October 21, 1943, Sinclair explained to the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Charles Portal, that the government had to proclaim that its policy was only to bomb specific military targets in order “to quieten the Archbishop of Canterbury and other religious leaders ‘whose moral condemnation of the bombing offensive might disturb the morale of bomber command crews.’”

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59 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 265.
At the same time, as will be discussed further in Chapter Eleven below, Bishop Bell of Chichester was leading the opposition from within the Church of England. On May 1, 1942, soon after Temple’s enthronement at Canterbury, Bell wrote to request “in view of some of the hot words being spoken in Parliament” that Temple privately seek new assurances from the Air Ministry that civilians were not being intentionally targeted. Temple declined: “In view of what Sinclair lately said in the House I don’t think there is good ground for approaching the Air Ministry at present, and, as you can imagine, I am very anxious not to begin to live here in a way that makes them feel that I am looking out for chances of butting in on them.”

On December 6, 1942, the Anglican lay theologian Ashley Sampson wrote to Temple on behalf of the theological journal Christendom to enlist his support for a “manifesto” opposing the bombing policy. The proposed statement protested against the “wholesale bombing of civilian populations that is now assumed to be part of total warfare.” Temple replied that he felt incompetent to make a judgment on the matter. Then, implicitly contradicting himself, he wrote that he believed that the Allies were observing a policy of not bombing the residential areas of cities. Attacks on munitions factories and power stations entail great risk to those living around them, however, with

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60 Bell to Temple, May 1, 1942, Temple Papers, Vol. 57, f. 115.
62 Sampson to Temple, Dec. 6, 1942, Temple Papers, Vol. 57, f. 121.
the practical certainty that many will be killed. We have no business being at war, Temple continued, unless we believe that by doing so we are serving the purposes of God. In that case, however, our primary duty is to fight effectively. “I think it conceivable,” he concluded, “that you will find all this very shocking. I know that some good Christians do. But I should not be treating you fairly if I did not express my mind as fully and clearly as I can.”64 In reply, Sampson warned him that the war had entered a phase “when vengeance can be too easily passed off as strategical necessity.” In discussions with airmen, Sampson continued, it had become clear that owing to clouds, darkness, or balloon barrage, the only way to bomb a large city successfully was to get over it and drop as many bombs in as many places as possible. We condemned the Germans, he concluded, when they did this to Coventry.65 Responding in turn, Temple reminded Sampson that the bishop of Coventry, Mervyn Haigh, had described the bombing of his own city as a legitimate and effective method of warfare. Haigh’s statement that the British should do the same to the Germans received more attention, but it was prefaced by his insistence that it was impossible to condemn the method that the Germans had adopted.66 The following May, Temple sounded some of the same notes in a letter to a correspondent. He deplored the gloating in the press over the Germans’

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64 Temple to Sampson, Dec. 8, 1942, Temple Papers, Vol. 57, f. 123.
sufferings, but the bombing itself was a legitimate act of war. “Nothing is so wrong as to fight ineffectively; but to maintain the right spirit while we fight is extremely difficult.”

In the summer of 1943, following a series of devastating raids on the Ruhr, public concern grew that the RAF had changed its previously stated policy of attacking only military and industrial targets and was now indiscriminately attacking whole cities. Archbishop of York Cyril Foster Garbett wrote in the June issue of the *York Diocesan Leaflet* that he had been asked to join in protests against the bombing of German and Italian cities, but had refused to participate: “The real justification of this bombing is that it will shorten the war and may save thousands of lives.” Garbett then deployed a quintessentially Christian realist argument: “Often in life there is no clear choice between absolute right and wrong; frequently the choice has to be made between the lesser of two evils, and it is a lesser evil to bomb a war-loving Germany than to sacrifice the lives of tens of thousands of our own fellow-countrymen who long for peace and to delay delivering millions now held in slavery.”

On July 9, 1943, Temple wrote to Sinclair requesting the assurance that the bombing policy had not changed. He was being bombarded, as he was sure that Sinclair must be also, with letters stating that the policy was now to destroy cities irrespective of military objectives. He had continued to respond that he saw no evidence of such a

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change, but he would be grateful for “a line to assure me that this is correct.”

Sinclair responded on July 17 that there was no change: “it is no part of our policy wantonly to destroy cities.” Sinclair went on to clarify the British bombing policy as aiming to deprive the enemy of weapons, munitions, transportation resources, “and all the complex apparatus without which fighting forces today are powerless.” These military targets “are dotted about in the heart of the built-up areas of the industrial cities. We cannot attack factories without damaging the surrounding buildings.” Sinclair concluded that while it was not part of the government’s policy to make deliberate attacks on historic or cultural centers, “What we cannot undertake to do is to refrain from attacking an important military objective because it is situated near old and beautiful buildings.”

Sinclair’s response satisfied Temple, as becomes clear in a famous exchange of letters with Bishop Bell several days later. On July 22, Bell wrote to Temple asking whether he would be willing to raise the question in the House of Lords whether the government’s policy had changed “with special reference to the effect of such bombing on civilians as well as objects of non-military and non-industrial significance in the area attacked.” Bell wrote that he would be happy to ask the question in the House of Lords himself, but did not want to do so if Temple would be prepared to ask the question

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instead.\textsuperscript{71} In this context, Temple’s response to Bell of July 23 was not nearly as sharp as some commentators have taken it to be. He would leave it to Bell to raise the question in the House of Lords: “I am not at all disposed to be the mouthpiece of a concern which I know exists, because I do not share it.” He had received a response from Sinclair which he could use in answering correspondence. But it would be all to the good if Bell wanted to put the question in the House of Lords himself, taking the line that while the bishops feel sure that the government is holding to its previously stated policy it would be reassuring to have a public statement to that effect.\textsuperscript{72} Four days later, Temple’s chaplain forwarded to Bell a copy of Sinclair’s letter of July 17.\textsuperscript{73}

Temple had effectively given Bell the go-ahead to ask about the bombing in the Lords. However, Bell’s speech of February 9, 1944 (discussed at length in Chapter Eleven below), went far beyond anything Temple had in mind. On February 24, Temple wrote to Bell to express his dismay. The speech was not what he had been expecting. He thought that Bell was simply going to ask for reassurance that the government had not departed from its previously stated policy of directly attacking only military and industrial targets. Instead Bell had denounced the government for departing from this policy. If he had been present, he would have had either to lie low or dissociate himself from Bell’s remarks. As it was, he had to warn Bell that he might still have to say


\textsuperscript{72} Temple to Bell, July 23, 1943, Temple Papers, Vol. 57, f. 142; also Bell Papers, Vol. 370, f. 39.

\textsuperscript{73} Lambeth Palace to Bell, July 27, 1943. Bell Papers, Vol. 370, f. 44.
something, which he would not want Bell to learn about from press reports. For good measure, he added that he agreed with Bishop Haigh that what the Germans did at Coventry was a legitimate act of war, and that the British should do the same when they could. Nonetheless, he had immense admiration for Bell’s courage. Bell responded on February 26 that he was distressed to learn that Temple might feel the need to dissociate himself publicly from his position. In a more conciliatory tone, Temple replied on February 28 that he hoped not to have to say anything more about bombing policy. All he had meant was that he might have to correct any public impression that Bell was speaking on behalf of all the bishops. He then reiterated that he had been entirely convinced by Bishop Haigh’s view of the bombing of Coventry.

Both Wilkinson and Chandler see indications that before his sudden death on October 2, 1944, Temple was beginning to have qualms about his support of the bombing policy. On March 24, 1945, Temple wrote to his friend the pacifist Stephen Hobhouse that, contrary to his earlier views, the bombing was probably sufficient punishment for German aggression so that no other postwar penalties were called for. In February 1944, Liddell Hart wrote to Bell that a senior military commander had told him of a recent conversation with Temple, who had said: “I’ve been thinking a lot about this

74 Temple to Bell, February 24, 1944, Temple Papers, Vol. 57, f. 163.
75 Bell to Temple, February 26, 1944, Temple Papers, Vol. 57, f. 164.
76 Temple to Bell, February 28, 1944, Temple Papers, Vol. 57, f. 166.
77 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 271.
bombed; I get quite a lot of letters about it’. Then, after a pause the Archbishop continued, ‘think its [sic] alright. I am assured that we confine our bombing to military objectives. Those are the instructions given to pilots, aren’t they?’ On June 21, Temple wrote in a letter, ‘As regards the form of our bombing, I am in a good deal of difficulty.’ The most effective method to stop the production of munitions was to destroy the communities which produced them, ‘and I cannot take the view that that is illegitimate … if warfare is legitimate at all. But whether these distinctions are in fact closely followed, I have no means of judging.’

Historians have expressed puzzlement over Temple’s support for the government on this issue. Wilkinson writes: “It is difficult to understand why, throughout the war, Temple trusted government assurances about its bombing policy.” Suggate writes that “Temple satisfied himself too easily with assurances from the Air Ministry that communities were destroyed only if that was necessary to cripple the German war effort, and he was slow to realize the probability of a discrepancy between official directives and practice.” Chandler attributes Temple’s acquiescence to the ambiguities of his role as the leader of the state church, combined with an unfounded trust that the government

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78 Liddell Hart to Bell, February 12, 1944, Bell Papers, Vol. 38, f. 122. Liddell Hart’s informant concluded that Temple’s attitude reminded him of his late wife who used to say, “I want mental comfort, so I am going to wrap myself up in cotton wool and think what I want to.”


80 Wilkinson, Dissent or Conform, 265-266.

would deal honestly with an archbishop: “Temple may have believed that the moralists of the Church were ill-equipped to be strategists, but he still assumed that the politicians and strategists were adequately qualified as moralists.” The result, Chandler concludes, was that the government took advantage of Temple and used him for its own purposes: “while Germany was bombed, a relationship which gave all the appearances of granting the primate a unique source of information ensured simply that he was all the better deceived.”

Spencer suggests that while Temple had no good reason to question the government’s word when it said that the primary purpose of the bombing was not to kill the civilian population, nonetheless he can be criticized for “a lack of imagination” on the issue compared to Bishop Bell who imaginatively grasped what obliteration bombing really meant.

These criticisms miss the point that Temple’s Niebuhrian approach to the ethics of war and peace would likely have predisposed him to accept the area bombing policy in any event. He was not entirely consistent on the issue. He repeatedly affirmed his adherence to the traditional *jus in bello* prohibition of intentional attacks on civilians, while accepting foreseen but unintended civilian deaths according to the principle of double effect. Yet, as also noted above, he wrote in 1939 that often in war all that can be done is a bad thing, which has to be done anyway with all penitence because it is the best that can be done. He argued repeatedly that if the nation is going to fight at all, then it

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must fight effectively; and it is a short step from articulating that principle to accepting area bombing if it is presented as the most effective way of winning or shortening a war. In the tradition of Augustine and Luther, Temple deplored wartime hatred of the enemy and lust for violence, but with the technology available in the 1940s, area bombing could be conducted clinically and dispassionately, or indeed in a spirit of profound regret over its grim necessity. In line with the mainstream of orthodox Christian doctrine, Temple regarded physiological death as not the worst fate that can befall a human being – and while it does not necessarily follow from that belief that it is legitimate to intentionally attack noncombatants for reasons of perceived military necessity, the temptation nonetheless exists to reach such a conclusion.

There are indications in Temple’s own writings that he understood and accepted the reality of area bombing more than is usually supposed. On April 7, 1944, Temple wrote that while the purpose of the bombing was to hinder the manufacture of munitions, “this is more effectively done by the total dislocation of the community engaged in the work than by attack upon the factories themselves, which can be repaired with astonishing rapidity.” Again, when D.R. Davies, an Anglican priest, published an article in The Sunday Express on July 9, 1944, entitled “It’s Time for Reprisals” – arguing that ten Germans should be killed for every English person killed by German flying bombs – Temple wrote to Davies to express his stern condemnation of the very idea of reprisals. Nonetheless, Temple continued, Britain regarded residential quarters in which war work was in progress as legitimate targets, and that every area of Berlin probably contained a
factory or two, “but I don’t think Bomber Command cares whether it does or not. The object is to break up the whole organized life on which war activities depend.” In these statements, Temple comes close to expressing a grasp of the total reality of what was being done. Wilkinson writes that such statements show that Temple had gradually shifted his ground since 1940, but even in 1940 Temple had made the following statement, which has chilling implications for strict adherence to the norm of noncombatant immunity:

All citizens have some measure of responsibility for their country’s policy and action. Warfare is horribly indiscriminate, and it would be absurd to contend that it dispenses suffering or death with any regard to individual justice. This is part of its monstrous evil; but it cannot be said that there is no justice at all in the threat to the civilian population, if the country concerned is in any degree responsible for the outbreak of war.  

None of the scholars who have puzzled over Temple’s too easy acceptance of government assurances seem to have recognized that this passage spells out an ethical view entirely consistent with support for the bombing.

In short, I am suggesting that Temple may not have been the dupe of government deception and manipulation that his critics have alleged him to be. There is no reason not to take him at his word when he writes to Bishop Bell that he has no desire to be the mouthpiece of a concern which he knows exists but which he does not share. On other

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84 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 267.

85 Temple, *Thoughts in War-Time*, 34.
occasions, he was not afraid to oppose government policy publicly when he believed it was wrong. On March 23, 1943, when details of the Final Solution had begun to filter into Britain, Temple spoke in the House of Lords urging immediate measures to give temporary asylum to all Jews able to escape the Nazis. This speech, which according to Hastings was the most important one that Temple ever gave in the House of Lords, was in direct opposition to the government line that the only effective way to help the Jews was to win the war as quickly as possible. Temple may not have been altogether consistent in his support for the government’s bombing policy; and his expressed doubts during the last year of his life suggest considerable inner conflict. But insofar as he did support the bombing policy, he was likely influenced by the Christian Realism that he shared with his friend Reinhold Niebuhr.

**Conclusion**

The weakness of Christian Realism as represented in the twentieth century by Niebuhr and Temple is its failure to recognize that while the Gospel ethic of love is indeed applicable to Christians acting in a private capacity in their interpersonal relations, it does not follow that justice in the public sphere represents a second-best that is always up for negotiation, compromise, and adjustment. Once that path is taken, it becomes difficult to resist pressure to compromise the ordinary norms of justice – such as noncombatant immunity – for the sake of more effectively achieving overarching goals.

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motivated by the highest ideals – such as defeating Nazism. While the Christians Realists are right in their recognition that the ethic applicable to social relations among groups in the public sphere is different from the Gospel ethic of love and nonresistance applicable to individuals in their interpersonal relations, it does not follow that an ethic of justice in the public sphere need conflict with the ethic of love, much less stand condemned by its higher standards. Sustained ethical reflection may be able to discern objective norms of social justice having their own validity and integrity. The Christian natural law tradition, expressed in turn in the Just War doctrine with its jus in bello norms, makes precisely such a claim. Bishop Bell of Chichester, discussed in the next chapter, stands as one of the foremost representatives of this tradition in the World War II debate.
George Kennedy Allen Bell was born in 1883, the son of an Anglican clergyman and the eldest of nine children. After attending the Westminster School followed by undergraduate studies at Christ Church, Oxford, and theological training at Wells Theological College, he was ordained deacon in 1907 and priest in 1908 while serving as curate in Leeds parish church. Here in the industrial north of England Bell gained a deep and abiding concern for social issues. He returned to Oxford as a fellow of Christ Church in 1910, but his prospects for an academic career ended when he was recruited to be the chaplain – in effect, the personal secretary – of Archbishop of Canterbury Randall Davidson in 1914.1

Bell’s ten years with Davidson were highly formative. The Archbishop believed strongly that the Church should be involved in the world, and resisted any attempt to restrict Christian concern to ecclesiastical questions. Bell learned from Davidson the value of the House of Lords as a platform for Christian moral leadership.2 Bell later wrote what remains the authoritative biography of Davidson; in it he relates several incidents during World War I that point to his own future witness. Davidson repeatedly spoke against the hatred engendered by war hysteria. In 1915, he protested to Prime Minister


2 Slack, Bell, 30-31.
Asquith against the idea of reprisals in kind for the German use of poison gas. \(^3\) The next year, he made a speech opposing reprisals for German Zeppelin raids on English cities. \(^4\) In May of 1918, two of Bell’s brothers were killed in France – a loss that engendered in Bell, as in so many others of his generation, a deep and abiding horror of war. \(^5\)

After the war, Bell’s reputation began to grow in international ecclesiastical circles when he took a leading role in organizing the 1920 Lambeth Conference of Anglican Communion bishops. \(^6\) In 1924, Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald nominated Bell to be Dean of Canterbury: “Thus Davidson lost Bell as his chaplain, only to gain him as dean of the mother church of the Anglican Communion.” \(^7\) In this role, Bell worked to re-establish a fruitful relationship between the Church and the arts. He took what was in modern times the unprecedented step of using the cathedral for the staging of religious drama, beginning in 1928 with John Masefield’s play *The Coming of Christ*, for which Gustav Holst composed and conducted the music. \(^8\) He later arranged the commissioning


\(^4\) Bell, *Davidson*, vol. 2, 777-778.

\(^5\) Slack, *Bell*, 32-33, 80.

\(^6\) Slack, *Bell*, 34.

\(^7\) Slack, *Bell*, 35.

\(^8\) Slack, *Bell*, 35-36.
of T.S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*, which was first staged in Canterbury Cathedral in June 1935, six years after he had gone to Chichester.\(^9\)

Bell was consecrated Bishop of Chichester in 1929. He had long been actively involved in the fledgling ecumenical movement, and took a leading role in the Life and Work Conferences held in Stockholm in 1925 and Oxford in 1937. He recognized the evil character of Nazism from the time that Hitler took power in 1933.\(^10\) Through the 1930s, he used his influence in the Life and Work Movement to consolidate support for the German Confessing Church.\(^11\) During this period, he became a close friend of the young German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. However, not all of Bell’s fellow bishops appreciated what seemed his obsession with the German Church struggle: “In some circles he was regarded rather like Churchill in those days, as a scaremonger and a man who had lost all sense of proportion.”\(^12\) Bell lobbied the government to admit refugees of Jewish descent from Germany, and undertook the resettlement of approximately ninety such refugees in his diocese.\(^13\) During the war itself, he turned his attention to the needs of interned enemy aliens – among whom were many of the refugees whose admission to Britain he had previously helped secure – and complained to the authorities of the

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12 Slack, *Bell*, 72.

deplorable conditions in their camps. Later, he chaired the Famine Relief Committee, which aimed to get milk and food to starving mothers, children, and invalids in Nazi-occupied Belgium and Greece, despite the British blockade of the Continent.  

The Church’s Function in Wartime

Bell favored the government’s policy of appeasement at the time of the Munich Agreement, regarding war as a horror to be averted if at all possible. When it became apparent that appeasement had failed, however, he fully supported the British decision to go to war against Germany in 1939. In an article entitled “The Church’s Function in Wartime,” published in The Fortnightly Review in November 1939 and reprinted in his 1946 volume The Church and Humanity, Bell laid out the principles that were to guide him through the war years.

Bell opens by reflecting on how during World War I the Church in each country lined up behind its respective government in a way that prevented any distinctive Christian influence on the conduct of the war and the peace that followed. The question now is whether the Church in the warring countries will likewise “say ditto to the

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16 Slack, *Bell*, 80.

17 George K.A. Bell, “*The Church and Humanity* (London: Longmans Green, 1946).

Even when all the resources of the state are concentrated on winning a war, the Church cannot be considered part of those resources: “It possesses an authority independent of the State” and “is not the State’s spiritual auxiliary.”

The Church best fulfills its responsibilities to the nation by witnessing to God’s moral law regardless of whether its testimony is favorable or unfavorable to its own country. The principles of this moral law include “the equal dignity of all men, respect for human life, the acknowledgment of the solidarity for good and evil of all nations and races of the earth.” And the moral law has specific application to the conduct of war itself: “[The Church] must not hesitate, if occasion arises, to condemn the infliction of reprisals, or the bombing of civilian populations, by the military forces of its own nation. … It should set its face against any war of extermination or enslavement, and any measures directly aimed at destroying the morale of a population.”

The crucial point for Bell is that the Church fails to be the Church if it forgets that its members in one nation have fellowship with its members in every nation. The function of the Church within countries at war is “to maintain brotherly relations with all the Churches it can reach, as within the Universal Church.”

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19 Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 24.

20 Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 24, 26.

21 Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 27.

22 Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 27.

23 Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 28.
only because Christ said ‘Love your enemies,’ but also because those others are members of the same Universal Church.”

The Church’s function in wartime, Bell concludes, is “to be still the Church.”

These words echo the emphasis of the Oxford Conference of 1937 on the Church as a worldwide fellowship of prayer transcending national divisions even in wartime. They also reflect the influence of the Confessing Church in Germany, whose protest was precisely that in being co-opted by the Nazi regime the official German Lutheran Church had failed to be the Church. Bell was determined that the Church of England should follow a different course.

**Christianity and World Order**

Bell subsequently gave a more detailed exposition of his views on war and peace in *Christianity and World Order* (1940). He quotes St. Augustine’s definition of peace as “the tranquility which springs from Order,” and then defines “Order” as “a system of right relations.”

All nations want peace; no-one wants war for its own sake. But some nations find the existing international system so unjust that they seek to gain a better position by aggressive war:

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24 Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 30.

25 Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 31.

26 Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 31.

27 George A.K. Bell, *Christianity and World Order* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1940), 73. Augustine uses the phrase *tranquilitas ordinis* in Book 19 of *The City of God.*
It is when men have broken God’s law and pursued their own interests, and have refused to share their goods with their brothers, that war comes. War descends as the judgment of God. It is not some quite foreign corruption superimposed on a body healthy up to that point. … On the contrary, it is the unescapable consequence of the reign of violence, cruelty, selfishness, hatred among men and nations.”

By the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty, the Allies bear a large share of the responsibility for the rise of Hitler and Nazism. Yet if Hitler were to prevail, the freedom, order, and morality on which European and world civilization depends would be overthrown. The present war is thus a judgment of God on the British people taking the form of the stern duty to resist the aggressor forcibly at the cost of great suffering.

Bell then asks whether there is such a thing as a just war. For an answer, he turns first to Article 37 of the Church of England’s sixteenth-century Articles of Religion, which says, “It is lawful for Christian men, at the command of the magistrate, to wear weapons, and serve in the wars.” For a more detailed exposition of the Just War doctrine, he then turns to a Roman Catholic publication from the University of Louvain entitled A Code of International Ethics. Its authors write that for a war to be lawful, it must:

(a) Have been declared by a legitimate authority.
(b) Have a just and grave cause, proportionate to the evils it brings about.
(c) Only be undertaken after all means of peaceful solution of the conflict have been exhausted without success.
(d) Have a serious chance of success.
(e) Be carried out with a right intention.

28 Bell, Christianity and World Order, 78.
They add further that: –

It is also necessary that moderation should characterize the conducting of hostilities and should keep the demands of the victor within the limits of justice and charity.\(^{29}\)

So far as I am aware, this is the closest Bell ever comes to invoking the classical formulations of the Just War tradition in support of his ethical position. He then adds that while “it would seem exceedingly difficult for a modern war to satisfy all these conditions,” nonetheless a war genuinely fought for self-preservation is a justifiable war, and in the case of the present war the “self” can be enlarged to include the whole of Europe. After considering and rejecting the pacifist position, while affirming an obligation to respect the individual pacifist conscience, he proceeds to state his unequivocal support for the British war effort: “The clash which is now upon us is a clash of moralities. The war is not just the protest of the injured German people against the victors of 1918. It is the war of a barbarian tyrant against civilization, and of violence against freedom. … This is a moment in human history when it is impossible for the just man to be neutral.” And again: “the results of a victory by Hitler would be so disastrous, morally and spiritually, that Christians ought to do their utmost to defeat him.”\(^{30}\)

At the same time, Bell continues, Christians must be clear that war is always the fruit of sin. The Christian cannot regard any war as a “Christian war” or a “holy war” though it may be a just war. Even if the Christian soldier is fighting in the present war to

\(^{29}\) Bell, *Christianity and World Order*, 80.

\(^{30}\) Bell, *Christianity and World Order*, 83-84.
secure the possibility of the Christian faith’s continued existence, “he cannot see in it a crusade, for a crusade means fighting in the name of the Cross.”\textsuperscript{31} Because the object of war is order and peace, the Christian will not let slip any opportunity to secure those aims by nonviolent means such as a negotiated settlement. Bell then recapitulates some of the key themes of his earlier essay “The Church’s Function in Wartime.” The Church must guard the very moral principles that the war is being fought to preserve. It must not hesitate to condemn the bombing of civilian populations by the military forces of its own nation. “It should set itself against the propaganda of lies and hatred.” It should oppose the spirit of militarism and oppression which can result in the suppression of vital freedoms at home, such as occurred when the British government imprisoned thousands of German and Austrian refugees in Alien Internment camps. Most of all, Christians must realize their fellowship with all other Christians in the \textit{Una Sancta}. The claims of the one Lord transcend all other loyalties. Every effort should be made to maintain former contacts between Church people in countries at war. Finally, the Church should pray not only for the nation in which God has placed it, but also for the nation’s enemies.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Opposition to the Bombing}

Through his extensive personal contacts with Germans such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Bell was acutely aware of the existence “another Germany” opposed to

\textsuperscript{31} Bell, \textit{Christianity and World Order}, 85.

\textsuperscript{32} Bell, \textit{Christianity and World Order}, 85-87.
Hitler and the Nazis. He spoke out repeatedly against the Vansittartist tendency to characterize the entire German nation as evil, warlike, and bearing a collective guilt for Nazi crimes. This insistence on a moral distinction between the Nazi regime and the German people was a key factor in his opposition to the obliteration bombing.

Following the German destruction of Belgrade by bombing in April 1941, Pope Pius XII appealed in his Easter message of April 13 to all belligerents to spare noncombatant civilian populations. In a letter published in *The Times* on April 17, 1941, Bell endorsed the Pope’s plea and declared his opposition to the night bombing of cities. “It is … barbarous,” Bell writes, “to make unarmed women and children the deliberate object of attack. … If Europe is civilized at all, what can excuse the bombing of towns by night and the harassing of noncombatants who work by day and cannot sleep when night comes?” He then appeals for the British government to make a solemn declaration that it will refrain from night bombing, either altogether or of towns with civilian populations, provided that the German government gives the same assurance.

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33 Slack, *Bell*, 80. In 1942, the government sent Bell on an official visit to neutral Sweden. There he was unexpectedly contacted by Bonhoeffer, who told him of the plot against Hitler, and asked him to find out if the Allies would be willing to negotiate peace with Germany if the Nazi regime were overthrown. On his return to England, Bell spoke with Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary. Eden responded cautiously, but promised to report the information to Churchill. At length, no encouragement to the German resistance was forthcoming. On July 20, 1944, the plot to assassinate Hitler failed, and the conspirators—whose names Bonhoeffer had accurately identified to Bell—were ruthlessly hunted down and executed. By this time, however, Bonhoeffer was already in prison. He was subsequently hanged on Hitler’s express orders on April 9, 1945. Bonhoeffer’s last recorded message before his death was addressed to Bell and left verbally with a British fellow prisoner.


35 Letter of Bell to *The Times*, April 17, 1941.
for Bell’s position came in letters to *The Times* from George Bernard Shaw and the Oxford classicist Gilbert Murray. One result of Bell’s letter was the formation of the Committee to Abolish Night Bombing, which circulated a petition in support of Bell’s proposal (which will be discussed further in Chapter Twelve below). However, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cosmo Gordon Lang, wrote to Bell indicating his opposition to the proposal for a mutual agreement to halt night bombing: neither Hitler nor the German government were likely to respond to such a suggestion; if they did, their word could not be trusted; and the Germans would regard such a request as evidence that their bombing had been so effective that the British government was afraid of them. 

The following month, Bell proposed to move a resolution against night bombing at the meeting of the Canterbury Convocation of Bishops. Lang persuaded Bell to withdraw this motion on the grounds that it was unlikely to be passed and regrettable statements might be made in the debate. Lang also promised to make a statement himself condemning the growing demand for reprisals. Bell reluctantly substituted an innocuous motion expressing sympathy for the British victims of German air raids. Subsequently, in his presidential address to Convocation on May 27, Lang suggested that perhaps bishops were not the best qualified judges of such questions. He nonetheless affirmed his belief that reprisals from the air would be wrong, and that the intentional bombing of civilians was indefensible. Any such policy would not shorten the war but only stiffen German resolve, waste military resources, and provoke further violence: “It would achieve.

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nothing except the gratification among a certain section of our people of feelings which, however natural, do not spring from the better side of human nature.” He continued: “In any such competition with the enemy we are bound to lose, for there are some limits below which we could not fall without violating the best and oldest instincts of the British character. Even if we were to win, it would be at the cost of bringing lasting shame and dishonor to our cause.” These were strong words; and Lang likely hoped they would appease Bell so that he would not make further trouble. If so, he was disappointed. The next day Bell moved his resolution, and then went on to address the question of night bombing which it had been understood he would avoid, presenting a narrative of events showing that the British, not the Germans, had started the night bombing of cities. Some of the bishops objected that Bell was out of order, and Bell terminated his speech at Lang’s request. According to one report, Cyril Foster Garbett – Bishop of Winchester and soon to become Archbishop of York – shouted Bell down from his seat. Lang muttered to Garbett that Bell had shown a complete lack of judgment. Lang wrote to Bell to express his disappointment that he had brought up the topic of night bombing in violation of what he thought was their previous understanding.37 Bell, Lang continued, had only himself to blame for the furor; his history of the air war was tendentious. Bell responded enclosing a memorandum written by Liddell Hart demonstrating that Britain had indeed started the city bombing with the raids on Berlin at the end of August 1940. Beyond that, the matter

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37 It is perhaps significant that three years later Archbishop Temple similarly felt that Bell had blindsided him in his House of Lords speech of February 1944.
was dropped. No news of Bell’s speech was made public; for the time being, Andrew Chandler notes, he had effectively been censored.\textsuperscript{38}

In December 1942, Bell wrote to Sir Edward Luytens, President of the Royal Academy, expressing concern that valuable works of architecture could be destroyed in upcoming air raids on Italian cities. Noting the RAF’s success in sparing Cologne Cathedral, Bell suggested that the Air Ministry call in an architectural expert to advise air crews on areas to avoid.\textsuperscript{39} Luytens forwarded Bell’s letter to Sir Charles Portal at the Air Ministry,\textsuperscript{40} and Portal replied directly to Bell, with a copy to Archbishop Temple, saying that he did not think that an expert advisor would be of much practical value:

\begin{quote}

We refrain from bombing towns containing art and other treasures as far as the military situation allows. I am afraid that when we do bomb such towns we cannot undertake not to hit specified buildings, but as far as possible confine our attacks to industrial areas and military targets. In this connection I am afraid we cannot claim any credit for the escape of Cologne Cathedral, which, in its position close to so many military objectives, was very fortunate not to have been damaged.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

Bell subsequently wrote back to Luytens expressing disappointment with Portal’s response, and registering surprise about Cologne Cathedral: “Most people think it was


\textsuperscript{40} Luytens to Bell, December 29, 1942, Bell Papers, Vol. 370, f. 5.

deliberately preserved.” Perhaps Portal’s admission inadvertently gave Bell a further indication of how indiscriminate the bombing really was.

In September 1943, Bell wrote an article against the bombing in the *Chichester Diocesan Gazette*. He condemned the growing spirit of vengeance: “when a Minister of the Government speaks in exulting terms of a ruthless and destructive bombing of the German people … the subjection of fifty German cities to the same terror as Hamburg (or Coventry) has suffered … then we have real cause to grieve for a lowering of the moral tone, and also to fear greatly for the future.”

He clearly stated the *jus in bello* principle of discrimination: “To bomb cities as cities, deliberately to attack civilians, quite irrespective of whether or not they are actively contributing to the war effort is a wrong deed, whether done by the Nazis or ourselves.”

In response, A.S. Duncan-Jones, Dean of Chichester Cathedral, asked him to withdraw from preaching at an RAF service commemorating the third anniversary of the Battle of Britain.

Duncan-Jones wrote: “Your expressions of opinion on political & military matters since the beginning of the war have caused deep resentment. No public expression has been given to this feeling so far, but, they say, patience has a limit, & they feel that for you to preach on this occasion is a challenge which will not make for unity and concord.” Acquiescing, Bell did not

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43 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 268.

preach in his own cathedral. Chandler comments: “For the second time the prophetic doctrine had been censored.”

**Speech in the House of Lords**

Early in the next year, Bell addressed the bombing in the House of Lords. As discussed in the previous chapter, in July 1943 Bell had asked Temple to ask a question about bombing policy in the Lords, and Temple had declined, encouraging Bell to do so instead. But Temple only envisioned a request for public reassurance that the bombing was still confined to military and industrial targets. Bell’s speech went beyond anything Temple had in mind, and amounted to a full-blown denunciation of the government’s area bombing policy.

On Wednesday, February 9, Bell’s old friend Lord Woolton saw him sitting on the bishops’ bench in the House of Lords. He approached Bell and said, “George there isn’t a soul in this House who doesn’t wish you wouldn’t make the speech you are going to make.” At that the bishop looked downcast, but Lord Woolton continued, “You must know that. But I also want to tell you there isn’t a soul who doesn’t know that the only reason why you make it, is because you believe it is your duty to make it as a Christian priest.” Even in complete disagreement, Lord Woolton later reflected, the House of Lords still held the bishop in the greatest respect.

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The speech is reprinted in *The Church and Humanity*. Bell opens by reminding his hearers that since 1933 he has been one of the most convinced and consistent anti-Nazis in England. But he desires to challenge the government on the policy of bombing enemy towns, especially with reference to noncombatant civilians, and non-military and non-industrial targets.\(^47\) Few will deny, he continues, that there is a distinction in principle between attacks on military and industrial objectives and other targets. At the outbreak of the war, in response to an appeal from President Roosevelt, the governments of France and the United Kingdom issued a joint declaration of their intention to conduct hostilities in such a way as to spare civilian populations and cultural monuments. Even though both governments reserved the right to respond appropriately to German violations of this restriction, they nevertheless acknowledged the distinction between military and non-military targets.\(^48\)

Bell then appeals to international law as a source of the distinction. The Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armaments of 1922 appointed a panel of jurists to draw up a code of rules about aerial warfare. The code never became an international convention, but nonetheless carries great weight on account of its authors. One article specifically prohibits aerial bombardment for the purpose of terrorizing the civilian population or of destroying civilian property not of a military character. Another article states that aerial bombardment is legitimate only when directed at military

\(^47\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 129.

\(^48\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 129-130.
objectives. Both articles are based on the fundamental assumption that direct attack on noncombatants is unjustifiable.\(^{49}\)

Having thus enunciated the principles of discrimination and noncombatant immunity, Bell turns next to double-effect and proportionality, again without mentioning them by name. He recognizes the legitimacy of “concentrated attack on industrial and military objectives, on air fields and air bases.”\(^{50}\) In such attacks on war industry and transport the unintentional killing of civilians is inevitable. “But there must be a fair balance between the means employed and the purpose achieved. To obliterate a whole town because certain portions contain military and industrial establishments is to reject the balance.”\(^{51}\)

Bell then points to the attacks on Hamburg and Berlin as having caused disproportionate death and destruction. Hamburg contains important military and industrial targets, but on a conservative estimate the raids there have killed 28,000 people. “Practically all the buildings, cultural, military, residential, industrial, religious – including the famous University Library with its 800,000 volumes, of which three quarters have perished – were razed to the ground.”\(^{52}\) Likewise, government offices and industrial and military establishments in Berlin are fair targets. But to date half of Berlin

\(^{49}\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 130-131. Bell is here quoting the Draft Rules on Aerial Warfare considered at the Third Hague Conference of 1922-1923, discussed in Chapter Seven above.

\(^{50}\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 132.

\(^{51}\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 132.

\(^{52}\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 133.
has been destroyed, “the residential and industrial portions alike.”\textsuperscript{53} The policy, he concludes, “is obliteration, openly acknowledged. That is not a justifiable act of war.”\textsuperscript{54} Looking ahead to the postwar period, Bell observes that Berlin is one of the greatest centers of art collections in the world and home to one of the biggest libraries. It is possible to rebuild flats and houses by mass production. But it is not easy to replace lost cultural treasures, which will be needed for the re-education of Germans after the war.\textsuperscript{55}

Bell then turns his attention to the bombing strategy responsible for such wholesale destruction. He notes that area bombing began in 1942 with the raids on Lübeck, Rostock, and Cologne. He then describes the method in detail:

The point I want to bring out, because I doubt whether it is sufficiently realized, is that it is no longer definite military and industrial objectives which are the aim of the bombers, but the whole town, area by area, is plotted carefully out. This area is singled out and plastered on one night; that area is singled out and plastered on another night; a third, a fourth, a fifth area is similarly singled out and plastered night after night, till, to use the language of the Chief of Bomber Command with regard to Berlin, the heart of Nazi Germany ceases to beat. How can there be discrimination in such matters when civilians, monuments, military objectives and industrial objectives all together form the target? How can the bombers aim at anything more than a great space when they see nothing and the bombing is blind?\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53} Bell, \textit{Church and Humanity}, 133.

\textsuperscript{54} Bell, \textit{Church and Humanity}, 133.

\textsuperscript{55} Bell, \textit{Church and Humanity}, 133-134.

\textsuperscript{56} Bell, \textit{Church and Humanity}, 134-135.
In other words, Bell continues, what the British and French denounced as indiscriminate bombing by the Nazis in 1940 has now become official Allied policy.\(^57\)

Bell now expresses his concern for the cities that have not yet been bombed. The government has announced its determination to continue bombing city-by-city. Old German towns that will almost certainly be subjected to raids include Dresden, Augsburg, and Munich among the larger towns; and Regensburg, Hildesheim and Marburg among “the smaller beautiful cities.” In all these towns historic monuments and beautiful buildings are preserved in the centers, while the industries are on the outskirts. A great effort should be made to save the remaining inner towns. The destruction of European culture has already gone too far, but something can still be salvaged if the authorities act on the realization that the industrial centers lie outside the old inner towns.\(^58\)

Bell next turns to arguments that area bombing will save British lives and shorten the war. “We all wish with all our hearts that these two objects could be achieved, but to justify methods inhuman in themselves by arguments of expediency smacks of the Nazi philosophy that Might is Right.”\(^59\) Although Bell here briefly touches on and gives a negative answer to the critical moral question of whether the bombing would be justified if it really did shorten the war and reduce the overall loss of life, he immediately shifts to a pragmatic argument that the bombing is counterproductive and failing to achieve its

\(^{57}\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 135.

\(^{58}\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 136-137.

\(^{59}\) Bell, *Church and Humanity*, 138.
stated objectives. Despite bombing since 1940, the fighting continues, and German military production is going forward. Far from breaking down German morale, the evidence from Swedish newspaper reports is that the bombing is having the opposite effect of stiffening the German resolve to fight. Obliteration bombing is thus likely both to prolong the war and to make the postwar period more miserable.60

At this point Bell states, “I do not believe that His Majesty’s Government desire the annihilation of Germany. They have accepted the distinction between Germany and the Hitlerite State.” The record shows that at this point “several noble Lords” shouted “No!”61 Bell continues by asserting that the present devastation of cities is threatening the very roots of civilization. It is no way to curb military aggression and end war. What is done in war affects the whole character of the subsequent peace. Bell then concludes that the Allies stand for a principle greater than power, namely law. Therefore, it is of supreme importance that the liberators of Europe should always use power under the control of law.62

In response to Bell’s speech, Viscount FitzAlan of Derwent, a Roman Catholic member of the House of Lords, rose to express his disagreement with Bell on the bombing of Germany: “I am an out-and-out bomber, and I approve of the bombing action the Government have taken against Germany, and I hope there may be more to come.”

60 Bell, Church and Humanity, 138-139.

61 Bell, Church and Humanity, 139.

62 Bell, Church and Humanity, 140-141.
Nonetheless, he hoped that all efforts would be made to avoid bombing the city of Rome, both on religious and cultural grounds.⁶³

Cosmo Gordon Lang, the retired Archbishop of Canterbury – now Lord Lang of Lambeth – rose to speak in support of Bell. Apart from the ethics of bombing policy, he said, he was particularly concerned about the preservation of “objects of historical and cultural value.” He had submitted a motion for a future debate on that topic. In the meantime, he had two points to make. First, while it was generally agreed that legitimate attacks on military and industrial targets would entail the unintended deaths of civilians, the pattern of recent bombing seemed to have gone beyond this strategy to entail the deliberate destruction of whole cities. There was thus some force to the plea that the Government should clarify its policy. Second, it was one thing to accept destruction of military objectives and their immediate neighborhoods as a regrettable necessity; it was another to exult and gloat over it. A temper of vengefulness, encouraged by the popular press, was degrading the moral outlook of the nation. He deplored “this rather truculent spirit among our people.”⁶⁴

Lord Cranborne replied for the government. David Hein describes his speech as comprising “the usual official prevarications.”⁶⁵ But according to Chandler, while Cranborne did not address all the arguments that Bell had set forth, his respect for Bell

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was such that he did not simply repeat the glib reassurances that the Air Ministry had been giving to Temple. He admitted the extent of destruction being wrought, which required new justification. He denied that the RAF ever indulged in raids purely for the sake of terror and deplored any tendency to gloat over the damage inflicted. The cities being attacked were the “the administrative centers, the great industrial towns, the ports and the centers of communication,” which were “themselves military targets in a total war.” He maintained that great industries could only be shut down by bringing the cities in which they were located to a standstill. In Berlin, every garage was a factory. The less Germany was bombed, the longer the war would last, and the longer the oppressed and persecuted peoples of Europe would suffer under Nazi tyranny. People must face the fact that “war is a horrible thing.” The bombing would increase; the only way to end the horrors of war was to defeat the enemy rapidly and completely. In effect, then, while Bell’s speech was unsuccessful in the larger aim of moving the government to change its bombing policy, it was successful in the more limited aim of eliciting an admission from the government that its policy was indeed the destruction of entire cities considered as centers of administration, industry, transportation, and communications.

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Aftermath

Bell’s speech caused a press furor, with apoplectic denunciations in the next day’s *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*. Responses in the religious press were more balanced, expressing relief that Bell was raising an issue that had been troubling the conscience of some thoughtful Christians.68 Liddell Hart wrote to Bell on February 12 that while his speech may not have suited the mood of the House of Lords, it was nonetheless “better evidence for Christianity, and human decency, than has been provided by any other spokesman. It represents the longer view and the higher wisdom.” 69 Bell replied thanking Liddell Hart for his letter and noting that he was receiving a large volume of mail, with the proportion of “supporters to abusers” about three to one.70

Bell was not quite alone among the bishops of the Church of England in opposing the area bombing policy; Bishop Headlam of Gloucester wrote in his diocesan magazine in December of 1943, and again to Temple in January of 1944, that the bombing was not as militarily valuable as it was claimed to be and largely represented a war against civilians.71 “But his was an eccentric voice, of little value either to its advocates or its critics.”72 The pacifist Bishop Barnes of Birmingham agonized about the bombing and

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69 Liddell Hart to Bell, February 12, 1944, Bell Papers, Vol. 38, f. 122.

70 Bell to Liddell Hart, February 19, 1944, Bell Papers, Vol. 38, f. 123.

71 Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*, 268.

criticized it publicly. But most Church of England bishops were content to follow Archbishop Temple’s line of accepting government assurances and not asking too many questions; some, like Archbishop Garbett of York, were positively hostile to those who opposed the bombing. Bell stood out among the bishops as the most articulate, well-informed, and credible exponent of the case against area bombing. As such he received both enthusiastic praise and bitter denunciation. Chandler comments that “For some he rekindled faith in the distinctively humane principles of Christianity, and the integrity of the Church.” At a time when many British Christians were disillusioned at what seemed the Church of England’s too easy acquiescence to a morally troubling military strategy, “his was the truly prophetic voice, and the reassurance that the State Church might yet provide an independent and contrary commentary on the ways of the political world.” But others shared the opinion of the priest who wrote to him: “I want you to know that you do not represent the full opinion of the clergy and laity of the Church of England. … It would be well if you left the conduct of the war to those who know most about it.”

Archbishop Temple died in October of 1944. Many thought that Bell was supremely well qualified to succeed Temple as primate. He was mentioned in some sections of the press as a likely successor; Lord Halifax is reported to have recommended

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his name to Churchill. The assertion is thus often made that Bell was passed over on account of his public criticism of the area bombing. Bell himself wrote to Liddell Hart in November, “I have no illusions about Churchill’s attitude to me—he is the last man to put me in any position of greater influence.” Garrett writes that Bell’s fate was paradoxically in some respects a mirror image of that of Sir Arthur Harris; just as the British establishment snubbed Harris after the war because he was too closely associated with the bombing it likewise snubbed Bell because of his opposition to the bombing.

Kenneth Slack makes a plausible case that Bell had been passed over well before his speech in the House of Lords. If he had really been in line for Canterbury he would likely have already been made Archbishop of York or bishop of a larger diocese like London, since it was rare for the bishop of a smaller diocese like Chichester to be translated directly to Canterbury. Bell’s speeches and essays are well-written; he was widely admired for his sincerity, courage, and tenacity; and in personal interactions he was compassionate and kind. But he was also a notoriously dull public speaker, and it is possible that as the Church of England looked ahead to the challenges of the postwar world, more dynamic personalities stood a better chance of preferment. Still, to the extent that Bell was considered for Canterbury, his opposition to the bombing cannot have

79 Garrett, *Ethics and Airpower*, 115
helped him. Many viewed Bell as a dangerous political priest undermining the war effort by meddling in affairs that were none of his concern.\textsuperscript{81} Garrett writes that Bell’s simultaneous strength and weakness was that far from being a wild-eyed radical on the fringes of the establishment, he \textit{was} the establishment, and for the most part tried to work within its unstated code. When pacifists condemned the bombing, they could be dismissed with condescension as well-meaning but naïve. But, Garrett suggests, Bell’s arguments aroused anger because he was offering a sophisticated and measured critique of the policy, on both moral and pragmatic grounds, that could not be dismissed so easily. Slack notes that resentment against Bell continued in high circles for many years for his having committed the unpardonable offense of betraying the establishment from within.\textsuperscript{82}

In a letter to \textit{The Times} on August 14, 1945, Bell deplored the indiscriminate devastation caused to the civilian population by use of the atomic bomb against Japan.\textsuperscript{83} Subsequently, in the post-war years, he played a leading role in the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC). At the inaugural assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948, he clashed with John Foster Dulles over the possibility of a just war in the nuclear age.\textsuperscript{84} In drafting the section of the assembly’s report dealing with war and peace, Bell wrote that in the past a just war was one fought for just causes with just

\textsuperscript{81} Slack, \textit{Bell}, 94; Jasper, \textit{Bell}, 279.

\textsuperscript{82} Slack, \textit{Bell}, 124.

\textsuperscript{83} Jasper, \textit{Bell}, 283.

\textsuperscript{84} Slack, \textit{Bell}, 100.
means, and terminating with a just peace. But a great change had occurred in the twentieth century: “In the second world war total war became unrestricted war and means were employed that no one could call human – obliteration bombing and the indiscriminate use of atomic force. The distinction between just and unjust war had disappeared. … It was time for the Christian Church to urge the world to recognize that harsh fact: that modern war brings barbarism and cannot be an act of justice.” Bell resigned from the See of Chichester in 1957 at the age of seventy-four. An ecumenist to the end, he died at Canterbury on October 3, 1958, having met with Pope John XXIII in Rome in March of the same year.

Assessments of Bell’s Witness

Evaluations of Bell’s stand against obliteration bombing have tended to combine admiration of his idealism and courage with doubts about the logical consistency of his position. Garrett writes that Bell’s critics accused him of the hypocrisy of not being against the killing of large numbers of Germans, but of wanting to do it in a particular way. Referring to Bell’s protest against the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, his official biographer Ronald Jasper writes the following:

This final protest revealed as clearly as any the intellectual weakness of Bell’s position. Fundamentally he believed that war was wrong – ‘War is destructive,

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85 Slack, Bell, 101.

86 Jasper, Bell, 380-387.

87 Garrett, Ethics and Airpower, 114.
and war not only wastes life and wastes material resources, but poisons human relationships.’ Yet he refused to become a pacifist and continued to maintain that Great Britain went to war for a just cause – for freedom and justice against violence and brute force. He failed to see that even a war for a just cause must be – on his own admission – destructive, wasteful of life and resources, and poisonous. As the struggle dragged on, he deplored the retreat from the original high ideals; yet the war itself made such a retreat inevitable. His sensitive conscience therefore made him a constant critic of government policy, but it also forced him into a dilemma which did not make for logic and consistency. Nevertheless, his stand was a noble one and far from useless. 88

Likewise, Kenneth Slack describes what he views as a weakness in Bell’s position born of personal affection for his German friends:

There remained some weakness: it was the kind of weakness which is honorable to a Christian man and leader. Because his emotions were so deeply engaged in the fate of his friends it was not always easy for him to recognize the obdurate necessities of war. His own perception of the true nature of National Socialism … revealed the necessity of war; but he was like David in his instructions to his commanders in combating the rebellion of Absalom, his son. Love warred against resolution. 89

A few pages on, Slack specifies what he sees as the inconsistency in Bell’s position: “In willing the destruction of the evil that Nazism represented, why did he shrink from willing the means by which it might be destroyed? Did he not recognize the consequences of the prophetic stance that he himself had taken up? His kind of witness had none of the logical strength of the pacifist.” 90 Slack later questions even the logical

88 Jasper, Bell, 283.

89 Slack, Bell, 78.

90 Slack, Bell, 84.
strength of pacifism: “In strict logic, no Christian stance in time of war is defensible. The pacifist even in eating benefits from the armed forces that have guarded the convoys which brought him his food. He finds himself protesting against vile evil, such as Nazism, yet refusing to will any clear means for its defeat. The man who like Bell refuses the pacifist position can always be accused of wanting to fight war with gentility.” 91

Both writers assume that the only real choice in war is between a pacifism that rejects force altogether and a military realism that accepts the use of any means necessary to win once war has been undertaken. Both writers fail to recognize that Bell’s position was solidly rooted in a Christian ethical tradition that has insisted for centuries on the moral imperative of fighting just wars with just means. To question the logical consistency of Bell’s position is to question the logical consistency of the *jus in bello* tradition itself. Yet neither writer seems to realize that he is taking on not just the personal idealism of the bishop but the entire ethical tradition that the bishop represents.

**Conclusion**

When Bishop Bell was confronted with the challenge of the British area bombing of German cities, the Just War tradition he inherited had been severely weakened, as recounted above in Chapter Five. Nonetheless, he seems to have understood the contours of the tradition well, and he did his best to apply its principles to the situation at hand. While he regarded the *jus ad bellum* criteria as having been more than satisfied with

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91 Slack, *Bell*, 96.
respect to the decision to wage war against Nazi Germany, he also regarded the subsequent conduct of the war as entailing serious violations of the *jus in bello* criteria. On both points he was surely right. The *jus in bello* criteria rest on the philosophical premise that the adoption of unjust means in warfare betrays the very principles – resistance to aggression and protection of the innocent – that justify going to war in the first place. In the words of Bell’s chaplain Lancelot Mason, “Is a war worth fighting, is it worth winning, if at the end of it you have reduced your own people to the same level of evil against which you took up arms?” Bell was right both to endorse the war against Hitler and to condemn the bombing of civilians in that war. Contrary to his critics, in the context of the Just War tradition there was no logical inconsistency whatever between those two positions.

The weakness in Bell’s presentation of his arguments becomes clear in comparison with the 1944 essay by the American Jesuit John Ford, “The Morality of Obliteration Bombing.” In applying the just war principles to the Second World War, Bell fails to identify the tradition that supplies his moral framework. In his House of Lords speech, he briefly cites recent international law as the authority for the prohibition of attacks on noncombatants. The problem is that many of his hearers will likely dismiss positive international law as a human creation that can be modified, adapted, or set aside

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92 Quoted in Slack, *Bell*, 96.

according to changing needs. Elsewhere Bell simply asserts his moral principles as though they are self-evidently true; but such assertions can easily create the impression that he is merely voicing his own personal moral sentiments. Missing is any explicit appeal to an authoritative moral tradition to which as a bishop he seeks to hold himself accountable and to which he invites his listeners to hold themselves accountable as well.

By contrast, in “The Morality of Obliteration Bombing,” Ford does make an explicit appeal to natural law as interpreted by Church teaching as the authoritative source of the *jus in bello* norms. Ford writes that international law, the law of humanity, and natural law protect the rights of noncombatants to their lives in wartime. As a moral theologian, Ford must deal with the problem primarily in terms of natural law; and Catholic teaching is unanimous that natural law forbids the direct killing of noncombatants.\(^94\) Ford proceeds to argue that (a) large numbers of people in even a modern country at war are clearly noncombatants; (b) the act of obliteration bombing carries within itself the clear intention to cause the deaths of such people; and therefore (c) obliteration bombing must be condemned as an immoral attack on the rights of the innocent.\(^95\) Ford’s argument might well be dismissed out of hand as outdated and irrelevant by those who reject its sources of authority. But its great merit is that it can in no way be mistaken for pious sentimentality on the part of a tender conscience shrinking from the necessary implications of the decision to go to war. By contrast, even Bell’s


biographers formed just such an impression of his position. While it is unlikely that anything Bell could have said in 1944 would have changed British military policy, he would have left himself less open to misinterpretation had he been clearer that he was speaking not simply on behalf of his own conscience but on behalf of an authoritative tradition to which as a bishop he considered himself bound to bear witness.

Bell’s opposition to the area bombing serves as a reminder that sometimes the vocation of Christian witness entails the call – as in the saying attributed to Mother Theresa of Calcutta – to be faithful rather than successful. Even if there was little that he realistically could have done to change the area bombing policy, he still fulfilled what he had described as the Church’s mission “to be still the Church” by going on record with a dissenting voice. Regardless of whether his witness cost him the See of Canterbury, it was personally costly in making him the target of widespread public vilification. Yet, on account of his witness, his reputation has grown in stature in the years since World War II, even to the extent that the anniversary of his death on October 3 was provisionally approved in 2009 as a minor feast in the Episcopal Church.96 In the following chapter, on Vera Brittain, I take up this theme of sacrificial witness in behalf of unpopular moral principles when the odds against success in worldly terms seem overwhelming.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

CONSIDERED AND COMMITTED PACIFISM:
VERA BRITTAINE AGAINST AREA BOMBING

In the days following Bishop Bell’s February 9, 1944 House of Lords speech against area bombing, one of many supportive letters he received was from a correspondent who identified himself as a conscientious objector in World War I and “a pacifist still.” After thanking Bell extensively for his speech, the correspondent concluded: “I hope it will not feel to detract from the sincerity of the above tribute when I say that I wish your protest had been against all bombing and all war.”¹

Several years earlier, in November 1941, when a petition was circulating advocating the end of night bombing, the Archdeacon of Stoke and Chairman of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship (APF), Percy Hartill, wrote to Bell expressing his perplexity: “I cannot help feeling doubtful whether there is any valid reason for opposing night bombing other than the grounds for opposing all modern war. You evidently think there is; and I do not write in any critical spirit. I am anxious that pacifists and non-pacifists should cooperate as far as they possibly can.” After discussing the difficulties of maintaining the distinction between combatants and noncombatants in modern war, Hartill writes that once participation in war is admitted as a regretful necessity and military victory as a morally legitimate aim, “then it seems reasonable to argue that it is right and humane to use night bombing or any other method which will hasten victory.”

Hartill concludes: “If there are any real moral grounds for special objection to night bombing I would be glad to support the petition. . . . If on the other hand there are not, I feel that to concentrate on night bombing might give color to the mistaken idea that war can be humanized and might weaken our case against war in general.” Bell replied that he would have to leave it to Hartill’s own judgment whether a pacifist could support a petition against night bombing. These two exchanges illustrate the complex interactions – mutual admiration, some degree of cooperation, but also some tension – between the *jus in bello* tradition (discussed in Chapters Four and Ten above), and Christian pacifism, the ethical tradition considered in Chapter Six and taken up again in the present chapter with respect to the life and witness of Vera Brittain (1893-1970).

Brittain is best known for *Testament of Youth* (1933), which became a bestseller in the 1930s and, after a period of relative obscurity, regained popularity when it was made into a PBS miniseries in 1979. The book chronicles her life up to her marriage in 1925. Subsequent autobiographical works include *Testament of Friendship* (1940), describing her relationship with writer Winifred Holtby, who died in 1935; *England’s Hour* (1941), describing her work during the opening years of World War II; and *Testament of Experience* (1957), picking up where *Testament of Youth* left off and continuing her life story to 1950. Brittain’s unique style of autobiographical writing, combining vivid descriptions of personal life with running commentary on

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2 Hartill to Bell, November 6, 1941, Bell Papers, Vol. 369, f. 204.

3 Bell to Hartill, December 1, 1941, Bell Papers, Vol. 369, f. 206.
contemporaneous developments on the national and international scenes, has been the subject of much literary analysis written from psychoanalytical, feminist, and other viewpoints. In what follows, I approach her life in terms of a series of “conversions,” breakthrough moments in which her experience led her to new levels of insight and understanding of a quasi-religious – and eventually explicitly religious – character. This approach coheres well with Brittain’s own understanding of her development as she presents it in her writings.

**Testament of Youth**

Vera was born in 1893 into a middle-class family in Staffordshire. In October 1914, she began studies at Somerville College, Oxford, overcoming the initial objections of her father, who thought such pursuits unsuitable for young women. At the end of the previous year, she had fallen in love with Roland Leighton, a friend of her younger brother Edward, and the three had planned to study at Oxford together. Britain’s entry into World War I in August 1914 changed everything. Roland and Edward enlisted in the Army; Vera went up to Oxford alone. After a promising first year of academic study,

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4 See, for example, Austin Riede, “Vera Brittain’s Testaments of Labor, Work, and Action,” *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12/13 (Spring and Fall 2010): 79-95. Reide writes that “Most criticism of *Testament of Youth* has focused on Brittain’s feminism and/or her coming to terms with her losses through the process of writing” (p. 80).

5 A word of justification is perhaps in order for my referring to Vera Brittain in this section by her first name. My intention is not to take liberties with a female historical figure that I would not take with a male; indeed, in this section I refer to some of the male figures in the story – Roland, Edward, George – by their first names as well. Reading her autobiographical writings one feels one gets to know her as one might a character in a novel whose first name one would naturally use. Also, her last name is easily confused with the name of her country.
Vera decided in the spring of 1915 to enlist as a nurse in the Volunteer Aid Detachments (VADs). Fearful that the great discrepancy between life on the front and life at home would come between her and Roland after the war, she saw nursing as a way to make her own contribution to the war effort and share something of its sacrifices. At a service in Christ Church Cathedral she stood and listened, “indescribably uplifted by my new determination to play some active part in the glorious Allied fight against militarism, to a large contingent of Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry singing, in their vigorous young voices, ‘The Son of God goes forth to war!’”6 This, then, was her first conversion: from Oxford undergraduate to volunteer auxiliary nurse. It was a call to service. Her biographers Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge note that against the background of war, “Oxford and the intellectual life appeared increasingly an irrelevance.” Missing Roland and continually worrying about his safety “makes me want nothing so much as to do all I can to alleviate the sufferings of other people.”7

Vera enlisted as a VAD nurse in June 1915, and was assigned to a hospital in Buxton, Staffordshire, near her family home. On leave in August, Roland proposed and they became engaged. In October she was assigned to a military hospital in London. She soon found herself caring for soldiers suffering from grotesque and horrifying injuries. Then, at Christmas, she learned that Roland had died in France on December 23 from

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6 Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925 (1933;repr., London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2009), 120.

7 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 79.
wounds sustained the previous day. He was twenty years old. In the following months, Vera expressed her grief in a series of poems that were eventually published in 1918 in a small volume entitled Verses of a VAD. On July 1, 1916, Edward was wounded at the Somme, and spent most of the following year recovering in England, before being sent back to France. In September, Vera was sent to Malta, where she spent eight months. Following her return to England in February 1917, two of her closest male friends from before the war, Geoffrey Thurlow and Victor Richardson, were killed in France.

Wanting to be near Edward, Vera requested an assignment in France, and was sent in August 1917 to a field hospital near Étaples. Here, to her initial shock and foreboding, she was assigned to the ward for wounded German prisoners of war:

> Before the War I had never been in Germany and had hardly met any Germans. … So it was somewhat disconcerting to be pitch-forked … into the midst of thirty representatives of the nation which, as I had repeatedly been told, had crucified Canadians, cut off the hands of babies, and subjected pure and stainless females to unmentionable ‘atrocities’. I didn’t think I had really believed all those stories, but I wasn’t quite sure. I half expected that one or two of the patients would get out of bed and try to rape me, but I soon discovered that none of them were in a position to rape anybody, or indeed to do anything but cling with stupendous exertion to a life in which the scales were already weighted heavily against them.⁸

At least a third of the men were dying. Vera often found herself left alone in the ward with two German orderlies, Zeppel and Fritz, to dress as best she could what she described as the worst wounds she had ever seen or imagined. Her amicable interactions with her patients brought home the absurdity of the whole situation:

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⁸ Brittain, Testament of Youth, 324.
One tall, bearded captain would invariably stand to attention when I had re-bandaged his arm, click his spurred heels together, and bow with ceremonious gravity. Another badly wounded boy – a Prussian lieutenant who was being transferred to England – held out an emaciated hand to me as he lay on the stretcher waiting to go, and murmured: ‘I tank you, Sister.’ After barely a second’s hesitation I took the pale fingers in mine, thinking how ridiculous it was that I should be holding this man’s hand in friendship when perhaps, only a week or two earlier, Edward up at Ypres had been doing his best to kill him. These shattered, dying boys and I were paying alike for a situation that none of us had desired or done anything to bring about.  

Here is at least the beginning of a second conversion. Having begun nursing as an enthusiastic supporter of the British war effort, Vera had come to see herself and the soldiers on both sides as victims of a catastrophe which made less and less sense.

Vera was to suffer one further great loss before the war’s end. In November 1917, Edward was posted to the Italian Alps, where the British were fighting the Austrians. There, he was killed by a sniper on June 15, 1918. Five months later, back in London, when the Armistice was signed on November 11, Vera detached herself from her companions who had gone out into the streets to join the celebrations. She walked slowly up Whitehall and reflected:

Already this was a different world from the one that I had known. … All those with whom I had really been intimate were gone; not one remained to share with me the heights and depths of my memories. As the years went by and youth departed and remembrance grew dim, a deeper and ever deeper darkness would cover the young men who were once my contemporaries.

For the first time I realized, with all that full realization meant, how completely that everything that had hitherto made up my life had vanished with Edward and

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9 Brittain, Testament of Youth, 326.
Roland, with Victor and Geoffrey. The War was over; a new age was beginning: but the dead were dead and would never return.\textsuperscript{10}

The question implicit in these lines was how to keep faith with the dead even as she moved on. The shape of the rest of her life constituted her answer to that question.

As Vera returned to Oxford in 1919 to finish her interrupted undergraduate degree, she found herself moved – in what might be described as her third conversion – to study History instead of English, in order to understand what had happened in the Great War and why:

It’s my job, now, to find out all about it, and try to prevent it, in so far as one person can, from happening to other people in days to come. Perhaps the careful study of man’s past will explain to me much that seems inexplicable in his disconcerting present. Perhaps the means of salvation are already there, implicit in history, unadvertised, carefully concealed by the war-mongers, only awaiting rediscovery to be acknowledged with enthusiasm by all thinking men and women.\textsuperscript{11}

She did not yet know what she could do, but she could at least begin by trying to understand where humanity had failed and where civilization had gone wrong. Here she senses an answer to the perennial question asked by survivors of why they have been spared. “If only I and a few other people succeed in this, it may be worth while that our lives have been lived; it may even be worth while that the lives of others have been laid down. Perhaps that’s really why, when they died, I was left behind.” She decided that

\textsuperscript{10} Brittain, \textit{Testament of Youth}, 401-402.

\textsuperscript{11} Brittain, \textit{Testament of Youth}, 409.
upon graduation from Oxford she would try to get in touch with some organization which thought and tried to act along these lines. As yet, she knew little of pacifism: “but I had already started on the road which was ultimately to lead me to association with the group that accepted internationalism as a creed.”

The Interwar Years

Vera completed her Oxford degree in 1921 and moved to London where she shared an apartment with her friend Winifred Holtby and set out to establish herself as a journalist and writer. Among other activities, she contacted the League of Nations Union (LNU) and offered her services as a lecturer. Founded in October 1918, the LNU promoted the work of the League in various ways, including sponsoring lectures and study sessions. Vera believed that the League’s concept of collective security was the best hope for peace where alliances, armed neutrality, and balances of power had failed. By 1922 she was lecturing regularly at LNU meetings all over London and in small towns across England. The work was often unpaid, but she developed a reputation as a successful speaker. Beginning in 1922, also, Vera and Winifred visited Geneva each September for the annual League of Nations assembly.

In 1923, at the age of thirty, Vera published her first novel, *The Dark Tide*, but it did not sell well and was largely ignored by the critics. Two years later, in 1925, she

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married political scientist George Catlin, and spent several years dividing her time
between England and the United States where Catlin was a professor at Cornell
University. 14 In 1933, Vera finally achieved critical and popular acclaim with the
publication of Testament of Youth, her memoir of the years from 1900 to 1925, including
her experiences as a nurse in the Great War. She wrote Testament of Youth partly to
complement with a woman’s perspective the already-published war memoirs of men. The
book became an immediate bestseller in both Britain and the United States. Between
1934 and 1940 she undertook three lecture tours of the United States, where she was
much in demand as a speaker. During her 1937 tour, she visited the White House at the
invitation of Eleanor Roosevelt and met both the First Lady and the President.

In the 1930s, Vera’s approach to questions of war and peace changed. Up through
1935, she continued to write and speak on behalf of the LNU, placing her hopes for world
peace in the concept of collective security – which she defined in a 1934 essay as “the
collective ownership of armaments, and the collective enforcement, in the last resort, of
sanctions against an aggressor.” 15 But the international crises of 1936 – the final
subjugation of Abyssinia by Mussolini’s forces, Hitler’s remilitarization of the
Rhineland, and the outbreak of civil war in Spain – had exposed the League’s
weaknesses. Vera later wrote that “the wide moral division between the supporters of

14 George, like Vera, was English and an Oxford graduate, but he spent much of his career
teaching, lecturing, and consulting in the United States.

15 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 351.
collective security and the exponents of revolutionary pacifism had always existed but had not been emphasized. But with the threat of a second world war, the gulf had become clear. Individuals who believed that war was wrong in all circumstances could no longer join with those who were prepared to fight in the last resort.”¹⁶ Martin Ceadel describes a two-way movement of traffic during this period, with some former pacifists deciding that they must support preparations for war against Fascism, and some former internationalists renouncing their faith in collective security and embracing pacifism.¹⁷ Vera was among those who joined the traffic in the latter direction.

In the summer of 1936, what Vera later described as “a turning point of my life” occurred when she was invited to speak at a peace rally near Dorchester.¹⁸ Her fellow speakers were George Lansbury, a veteran Labor politician; the Rev. Donald Soper, “already the best known orator in the Methodist Church”; Canon Dick Sheppard; and Laurence Housman, the novelist and dramatist. After listening to the others, she writes, “I was panic-stricken. This Christian pacifist platform was like no other on which I had stood; here my customary little speech in support of collective security would strike a discordant note. Its basis was political, but the message of my fellow speakers sprang

¹⁶ Brittain, Testament of Experience, 168. One of Canon Dick Sheppard’s sayings at that time was that “Collective security means that if war comes everyone will be in it.”


¹⁸ Brittain, Testament of Experience, 164.
from the love of God.”¹⁹ Instead of her prepared speech, she hastily improvised a quote from Bunyan and a little story about a recent encounter with a group of pacifist pilgrims at Verdun, and sat down, feeling humiliated. On the train back to London, she and the others shared a table in the restaurant car. Sheppard told her about the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and spoke also of his own Peace Pledge Union.

Some days later, Sheppard invited Vera to become a sponsor of the PPU. The invitation precipitated a crisis. She was already attracted to pacifism, as Sheppard clearly recognized, but she realized that embracing it would be costly. Her wartime service as a nurse had often been difficult and painful, but had “lain safely within the confines of social approbation; it had been an accepted form of patriotism, a form of humanitarian cooperation with the war machine.” Likewise, up to now, her work for peace had been with organizations that were politically “respectable” in that they were ultimately prepared to compromise with war.²⁰ But the PPU was different; and she now sensed that she was being called to step outside the confines of respectability:

For three years now I had enjoyed outstanding success in different parts of the world, and had savored that rare experience the more fully owing to the long period of frustration before it. Everything in me recoiled from the prospect of exchanging this welcome stimulus for public disapproval. I was still far from realizing how obstructive such disapproval could be, but I suspected that, once I

¹⁹ Brittain, Testament of Experience, 165.

²⁰ Brittain, Testament of Experience, 168.
stepped outside the borders of officially-endorsed peace-making, there could be no turning back.\textsuperscript{21}

Vera discerned that to follow Sheppard meant “treading the Way of the Cross in modern guise. He pointed to a path which might end, not in crucifixion or a den of lions, but at internment, the concentration camp, and the shooting squad.”\textsuperscript{22} Yet, she reflected, even if the pacifist message would never gain widespread acceptance in her lifetime, nevertheless a beginning could be made, just as Jesus and the apostles had made a beginning in their day:

not by saints, but by ordinary men and women, the twentieth-century equivalents of fishermen and tax-gatherers, publicans and sinners. Just as the followers of Jesus, beneath the shadow of a great imperialist tyranny, had formed and maintained their ‘little flock’ to bear witness to a revolutionary creed, so a handful of modern pioneers could form theirs, and bear witness to the same dynamic faith even in a community which had gone to war.\textsuperscript{23}

As Vera wrestled with Sheppard’s invitation, she decided to test her commitment by addressing several LNU gatherings and upholding the collective security position. She found that brief tour the most disconcerting she had ever undertaken:

Wherever I went, members of local Peace Pledge Union groups turned up to heckle me. The more resolutely I sought to fend off their questions, the more deeply I grew convinced that they were right in their view of the League. It had become a mere French-dominated instrument for continuing the unjust status quo,

\textsuperscript{21} Brittain, \textit{Testament of Experience}, 169.

\textsuperscript{22} Brittain, \textit{Testament of Experience}, 170.

\textsuperscript{23} Brittain, \textit{Testament of Experience}, 170-171.
set up at Versailles, of which Hitler was the appalling consequence. Clearly the road to goodwill on earth no longer lay in this direction, if it ever had.\footnote{Brittain, \textit{Testament of Experience}, 171.}

In response to her husband’s admonition that it was impossible “in measurable time” to convert the numbers of people to pacifism necessary to avert war, Vera reflected that the Apostles could never have envisioned converting the Roman Empire in “measurable time.” Yet few would argue that they should have abandoned the task as too difficult:

I was very far from sainthood and not even sure that I believed in God; but the effect of Jesus upon human history was a fact of experience. As a man He had died on the Cross believing that, whatever the immediate results of a course determined by conviction and ending in apparent total defeat, His Father would reveal in time’s long perspective that an action performed in accordance with the Divine Will would produce the results that He desired for the world.\footnote{Brittain, \textit{Testament of Experience}, 172.}

Vera wrote to Sheppard in January 1937 that she would sign the Pledge. Sheppard “shouted for joy” when he read the letter, and responded thanking her “for what your name means to the cause,” and asking again if she would become a sponsor of the PPU. Vera immediately agreed. “Good for you and grand for us,” Sheppard wrote back. The PPU minutes record that three days later a motion to make Vera a sponsor was unanimously adopted. Vera attended her first Sponsors’ meeting on March 8.\footnote{Berry and Bostridge, \textit{Vera Brittain: A Life}, 358-359.} Her fourth conversion was thus from liberal internationalism to full-blown pacifism.
The Second World War

Upon the outbreak of war in September 1939, Vera decided to write a weekly letter for circulation to pacifists in Britain. The PPU and the FOR endorsed the idea and the first installment of “Vera Brittain’s Personal Letter to Peace-Lovers” – later, simply “Letter to Peace-Lovers” – was published on October 4, 1939. Within two months the letter had over a thousand subscribers and eventually reached a maximum of two thousand – each paying three shillings for a six-month subscription to cover the costs of mimeographing and mailing. The weekly schedule soon proved impractical and after the first year the letter appeared fortnightly. The letter continued after the war until the end of 1946. A selection of the letters has been published in Testament of a Peace Lover (1988).27 Berry and Bostridge remark that the letter “sometimes helped to mitigate the loneliness of a minority, and perhaps to strengthen the resolve of those holding unpopular opinions. From Vera it demanded nothing less than an up-to-the-minute analysis of international events and the pacifist’s relation to them.”28

In addition to the “Letter to Peace Lovers,” Vera’s pacifism led her to undertake a number of humanitarian activities. On June 20, 1940, she wrote that in the period leading up to war, the duty of the peace lover is to do everything possible to prevent its outbreak, and to urge peace by negotiation. But when war comes that duty changes:


28 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 388.
When war is at its height and the prospect of peace remote, he has I think a double obligation: first, to do what he can to save the rational values of civilization from being submerged in the flood of hatred and panic fear; secondly, to relieve, by every opportunity that he is able to seize, the suffering of war’s innocent victims. Of these, the most obvious are children, refugees, and civilian casualties, but I do not exclude wounded soldiers or prisoners of war.\textsuperscript{29}

The “absolute pacifist” might argue that since war is evil, its opponent should stand aside from even its victims. She could not agree with this view: “we are part of a community, and cannot escape the demands that citizenship lays upon us.” Rather than worry about compromising their purity, pacifists should cooperate with government relief efforts, “for at a certain stage of horror, every government is compelled to mitigate the consequences of its own war policy by the organization of mercy.”

In the early years of the war, Vera was active in organizing relief and resettlement efforts for those whose homes had been destroyed by German bombing. She participated in and from 1943 was chairperson of the PPU’s Food Relief Campaign, which sought to persuade the Government to allow small quantities of food through the Allied blockade of occupied Europe to relieve starving civilian populations, especially in Belgium and Greece. And, as shall be discussed below, she took a leading role in the work of the Bombing Restriction Committee (BRC), which worked to publicize and challenge the strategy of area bombing of German cities. Berry and Bostridge note that in both the Food Relief and Bombing Restriction campaigns, Vera had to fight “a defensive rearguard action” against absolutists in the peace movement who argued that attempting

\textsuperscript{29} Brittain, \textit{Testament of a Peace Lover}, 32.
to humanize war meant rendering it more tolerable. Her response was pragmatic: the humanization of war should be looked upon as a preliminary, rather than as an alternative, to its eventual abolition. This evolutionary approach allowed her to make common cause with non-pacifists, such as Bishop Bell, who shared similar aims.  

Vera embarked on her third lecture tour of the United States in January 1940. The Ministry of Information encouraged her to go and helped her obtain the necessary exit visa, on the grounds that such a tour would help maintain friendly Anglo-American relations and that she could report back on the state of public opinion regarding the possibility of American entry into the war. The tour came to the notice of the Foreign Office, however, where an internal memo noted that “Miss Vera Brittain is a determined pacifist. … She is also a crank, and a self-opinionated one at that.” The memo concluded that to stop the tour would do more harm than good by calling unnecessary attention to the PPU. On February 21, a Conservative Member of Parliament asked in the House of Commons whether she was acting in the United States on behalf of the Ministry of Information. Despite its encouragement of her lecture tour, the Minister of Information blandly answered that she had no connection whatever with his department.

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30 Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 425-426.

31 Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 392.

32 Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 390-394.
Subsequently, in June 1940, when a German invasion seemed imminent, Vera and George decided to send their children John and Shirley, aged respectively twelve and nine years, to stay with friends in Minnesota for their safety. After the children had arrived in Saint Paul, Vera applied for an exit visa at the end of July to visit the United States, and was informed off-the-record by an official at the Ministry of Information that as a member of the PPU she was unlikely to get one; the question asked about her in the Commons had embarrassed the Ministry. Her application was rejected on September 25. Despite her frantic lobbying of members of Parliament and the Government, by the end of 1940 two further applications had been rejected. She did not see the children again until they returned to England three years later in the summer of 1943.

In her Peace Letter for November 20, 1941, and again in Testament of Experience, Vera writes that during the Autumn of 1940 she felt she had been deceived into parting with her children before being told that, as a pacifist, she would no longer be allowed to do the work in the United States which the government had previously encouraged her to do. She records that on a visit to Berkshire in October, 1940, she was walking alone down a country lane contemplating how to use her gifts as a writer one day to get back at

33 The future Shirley Williams (Baroness Williams of Crosby), a Labour Member of Parliament from 1964, one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1981, and from 1988 a professor at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.


those officials who had made such wreckage of her personal life. But then her thoughts

took another turn:

Within my mind, an inconvenient second self addressed me firmly. “Don’t you
realize that this is a spiritual experience? For the past few years you have had far
more honor and appreciation than you deserve. Now you know what it is to be
humiliated; and this gives you a new kinship with those to whom you have
hitherto felt superior – prisoners, refugees, the unemployed, and down-and-outs,
and all the despised and rejected of men.” And I remembered writing four years
earlier in a novel, “I suppose, if we took a long enough view, we should feel that
any sorrow bears its own compensation which enlarges the scope of human
mercy. Some of us, perhaps, can never reach our honorable estate – the state of
maturity, of true understanding – until we have wrested strength and dignity out
of humiliation and dishonor.”36

Berry and Bostridge comment that “humiliation” was a common word in Vera’s

vocabulary, which she often used to denote embarrassment or shame. “In this passage,”

they continue, “it signifies, more than anything else, her loss of respectability, an attack

on her sense of dignity and standing in the world.”37 In December 1941, she wrote: “I am
afraid I have come to the conclusion, though I have long resisted it, that to work
effectively on behalf of oppressed humanity you have to give up all hope of remaining
respectable. Like Christ himself you have to put yourself among felons and just endure as
best you can the calumnious and malicious assertions that are made about you.”38 A fifth

36 Brittain, Testament of a Peace Lover, 95-96. “Honorable Estate” was the title of Vera’s first
successful novel, published in 1936.

37 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 421.

38 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 422.
conversion, perhaps: from seeking respectability and recognition to embracing humiliation and dishonor in imitation of Christ.

**Humiliation with Honor**

From 1940, Vera planned to write a short book giving expression to her pacifist views. She began work on this project in January 1942. After several false starts, she hit on the idea of writing it in the form of a series of letters to her son John in the United States, now fourteen. She had heard that he had been critical of her attitude toward the war, which the United States had now entered. The completed book, *Humiliation with Honor*, was published at the end of October, and to Vera’s astonishment, quickly went into three editions, selling ten thousand copies within three months.\(^{39}\) It was republished in 2005 as part of a collection of Vera’s World War II pacifist writings, *One Voice*.\(^{40}\)

Vera opens by reflecting on the pacifist’s “oppressive consciousness” of the wartime government and military establishment as a “vast machine” taking control of those who made it, setting the “wheels of Juggernaut in motion.” The combined forces of censorship and propaganda prevent awareness of what is really happening – such as the starvation of millions by the blockade – on the part of people who might otherwise ask whether any victory is worth having that requires such methods. Press releases and government communications employ a depersonalized new vocabulary – “casualties,”

\(^{39}\) Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 422-424.

“the homeless,” “evacuees” – that desensitizes the hearers to the reality of individual suffering. Such language allows people to recognize and denounce Nazi and Japanese cruelty and yet fail to see how these very denunciations subtly create the same cruelty in themselves. Vera later returns to this theme by emphasizing the pacifist vocation in wartime to preserve religious and human values. Wartime passions wreak moral havoc; the death of human sensibilities is one of the earliest and most disastrous casualties of war. Actions that once seemed unimaginable – such as the bombing of enemy cities – are accepted as normal, or at least unavoidable. Loss of compassion is followed by the infliction of cruelty, always justified by the claim that the enemy is worse.

A pervasive theme of the book concerns the effects of suffering and humiliation. The cliché that suffering ennobles individual character, Vera writes, is seldom true. Suffering tends to crush the weak and embitter the strong. Humiliation characterizes most suffering; and modern war causes humiliation on a global scale. During wartime, pacifists are subjected to systematic humiliation. Yet Christ’s injunction to overcome evil with good lays on his followers the obligation to accept whatever penalties they may suffer with as much charity and as little bitterness as possible: “In the deliberate, unresentful choice of avoidable punishment, we come as close as most of us ever get to

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41 Brittain, Once Voice, 7-15.

42 Brittain, One Voice, 69-70.

43 Brittain, One Voice, 17.
the heart of religious experience.” Willingly accepted, such suffering and humiliation become redemptive and transformative. One becomes more sensitive to the vast accumulation of pain in the world and thus learns compassion for those worse off than oneself. It is not easy to let go of self-pity, but once people achieve the imaginative realization that the sufferings of many are greater than their own, they find themselves possessed by a desire to relieve them, which causes them to set aside and forget their own sense of injury.

Such transformation is not automatic. The alternative is to nurse grudges and seek revenge. Nazism and Fascism are the typical results of humiliation and resentment. For this reason, the way to prevent Germany and Japan from pursuing a path of conquest in the future is not to “smash, humiliate, and punish,” but to direct the course of history into new channels. An armed doctrine cannot be defeated with bombs and tanks; the only way of getting rid of a bad idea is to replace it with a better idea. Victory over Hitler will not overcome but only aggravate the disease of war if the wrongs from which Hitlerism sprang – monopoly capitalism, imperialist nationalism, poverty, hunger, unemployment, and repression – continue unchecked into the postwar era. Pacifists want

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to fight the disease, not the symptoms. Modern war never achieves the ends for which it is ostensibly waged, let alone a stable and peaceful world.⁴⁹

Towards the end of the book, Vera offers her diagnosis of four principal “deep causes” of modern war: (1) the breakup of the unity of Christendom by the Reformation; (2) the rise of nation-states and the doctrine of Reason of State; (3) the failure of the capitalist system to give economic security and a decent life to the average citizen; and (4) the swift development of modern science and technology, which could have been used for good but outpaced human beings’ moral ability to control their direction. To change the course of history requires a reversal of these four trends: (1) restoration of religious unity through revitalization of the Christian churches; (2) an international authority in place of national sovereignty; (3) the replacement of capitalism by socialism; and (4) the development of human moral nature above the level of human scientific inventiveness. The last of these must come first.⁵⁰

Two comments can be made about Vera’s presentation of her ideas in *Humiliation with Honor*. First, what might be called “the lessons of Versailles” dominate her thinking. In common with Bishop Bell of Chichester, Basil Liddell Hart, and other figures of her generation, she has drawn the conclusion that the punitive peace terms imposed on Germany following the First World War were ultimately self-defeating in that they facilitated the rise of Hitler and Nazism. Total victory in the Second World War is likely


to have similar long-term consequences and hence be self-defeating as well. Second, her pacifism retains a strong element of her pre-1936 liberal internationalism. True, she has repudiated the idea of collective security which meant, when all else failed, being willing to support war against an aggressor; and she has joined the dissident minority that will not support the present war or any other war. Her descriptions of the pacifist’s willing embrace of suffering and humiliation are explicitly christological. But, at the same time, she sees the pacifist minority as pointing the way towards a future transformation of world politics in which war will one day become obsolete. As she wrote shortly after Pearl Harbor in her “Letter to Peace Lovers” of December 18, 1941, “The pacifist tries to live in accordance with the standards of a society which has not yet come.”

**Seed of Chaos**

Vera’s protest against the British area bombing of German cities arose from her work on the Bombing Restriction Committee (BRC), chaired by the Quaker Corder Catchpool. The BRC grew out of the Committee for the Abolition of Night Bombing. On April 17, 1941, *The Times* printed a letter from Bishop Bell of Chichester (discussed in Chapter Eleven above), calling for a mutual agreement between Britain and Germany to end night bombing, which by its nature was indiscriminate. Catchpool decided to follow up on the Bishop’s appeal by convening a committee consisting of Vera and several

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others whose first act was to circulate a petition calling for the Government to announce its intention of discontinuing night bombing:

Recognizing that all bombing from the air increasingly involves suffering to the civil population, we believe there is a widespread desire that night-bombing, the most indiscriminate form of such attack, should be abolished. The undersigned therefore urge H.M. Government to seek a convention for the mutual abolition of night-bombing. Alternatively they urge the Government to announce that as from a stated date they will discontinue night-bombing, reserving the right to reconsider their decision if the German Government thereafter continue the practice.  

Pacifists and non-pacifists were among the lead signatories, including Vera herself, three bishops (Chichester, Bath and Wells, and Birmingham), six MPs, and other notable political, academic, literary, and artistic figures. About fifteen thousand signatures were collected in total.  

With the closing of the petition on January 31, 1942, the Committee for the Abolition of Night Bombing ceased to exist, and some of its members held informal conversations about forming a new committee to continue monitoring the situation. Following the appointment of Sir Arthur Harris as head of Bomber Command in February, the BRC was organized in April. One of its first acts was the organization of an exhibition of photographs in November documenting the destruction of German cities.  

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52 Petition Against Night Bombing [no date], Bell Papers, vol. 368, f. 195.  
53 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 430.  
54 Catchpool to Bell, July 28, 1942, Bell Papers, vol. 369, f. 237.  
55 Catchpool to Bell, November 3, 1942, Bell Papers, vol. 369, f. 240.
The Committee’s work consisted of research into the origins of the area bombing policy, the relevant international law, and statistics on the death and devastation caused by the bombing. Its principal goal was to inform the public of the true nature of the offensive in the face of the Government’s prevarications and dissimulations. To this end, posters were printed and displayed, pamphlets published, and questions asked in Parliament through the MPs Reginald Sorenson, Richard Stokes, and Rhys Davies.56

The committee was run from Corder Catchpool’s home on Parliament Hill in Hampstead, and Vera became very close to him. Under his influence, she even considered becoming a Quaker. After discussing the idea with him, however, she reluctantly decided to remain an Anglican. Her literary work required a “self-centered – or rather, work-centered” approach which seemed incompatible with the “group-thinking which seemed to be an essential part of the Quaker philosophy.” Her “frivolous clothes” and use of cosmetics seemed inconsistent with the Quakers’ sober habits. Equally inconsistent with the Quaker way of life was her “combative disposition.”57 As Berry and Bostridge sum up the outcome: “She would remain a ‘denominational hybrid’, a ‘Quaker-inclined Anglican married to a Catholic’.”58 Nonetheless, she and Catchpool remained

56 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 431.

57 Brittain, Testament of Experience, 304-305.

58 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 432.
close, and she relied heavily on his moral support when she came to write her own protest against area bombing.\(^59\)

Vera began work on this protest in November 1943. Disgusted at the exultant tone of the reporting of the bombing in the press, she resolved to stir the “uneasy conscience” of the British people by confronting them with the truth of what was being done in their name. She initially intended to write a pamphlet for publication by the BRC, but the volume of research materials collected by the Committee turned the planned pamphlet into a book of over a hundred pages. She took the title, *Seed of Chaos: What Mass Bombing Really Means* from a couplet in Book IV of Pope’s *Dunciad*: “Then rose the seed of Chaos, and of Night, / To blot out order and extinguish light.” *Seed of Chaos* was published in Britain in April 1944. Together with *Humiliation with Honor*, it was republished in 2005 in the volume *One Voice*.

In her Introduction, Vera writes that historically when the British people have come to understand the pain and misery which their government’s policies have caused or failed to mitigate – as in the cases of slavery and child labor – they have risen and demanded a change of policy. Today the “propagandist Press” skillfully conceals the reality of what bombing entails by the use of carefully chosen phrases, such as “softening up” an area, “neutralizing the target,” “area bombing,” “saturating the defenses,” and “blanketing an industrial district.” Only when the associated facts and figures are

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\(^59\) Vera later told her husband George that she had fallen in love with Catchpool but had no physical relationship with him: “one would as soon think of having sexual relations with one of the Twelve Apostles!” Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 432.
collected does it become clear that RAF raids on German, Italian, and German-occupied cities are subjecting people to “agonizing forms of death and injury comparable to the worst tortures of the Middle Ages.”  

The British citizen, she continues, seeks to escape from this realization by two principal arguments. The first is that mass bombing will shorten the war. To this, Vera replies with four counter-arguments. First, there is no certainty that any such shortening of the war will result. Second, the word “shorten” implies the limiting or reduction of the total suffering and destruction. But such a time test or standard is misleading. In a vast, concentrated raid lasting a few minutes, more persons may be killed or injured than in a modern battle lasting several weeks: “In fact, the mass bombing of great centers of population means a speed-up of the human slaughter, misery and material destruction superimposed on that of the military fighting fronts.” Third, mass bombing so far has failed to induce revolt or break morale. At first, its victims are stunned, exhausted, apathetic, and absorbed in the immediate tasks of survival: “But when they recover, who can doubt that there will be, among the majority at any rate, the desire for revenge …? Thus the psychological foundation is steadily being created in Europe for a Third World War.” Fourth, the systematic destruction of German industrial power is against long-term British interests: “The destruction of German industry means the destruction of the

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biggest British export market, and makes it more difficult, if not impossible, to prevent the lowering of the standard of life in Great Britain for many years after the War.”

The second main argument used to justify the bombing is that the British have suffered from German bombing and are fully entitled to pay back what they have endured. Against this argument Vera quotes a 1943 letter of George Bernard Shaw: “The blitzing of cities has carried war this time to such a climax of infernal atrocity that all recriminations on that score are ridiculous. The Germans will have as big a bill of atrocities against us as we against them if we take them into an impartial international court.” She adds three further responses. First, investigation into the origins of civilian bombing reveals the difficulty of assessing who really started it. It is an outstanding instance of “the tragic fashion in which war-time cruelty grows like a snowball by its own momentum once the power of Juggernaut has taken control.” Some accidental violation of international law is repaid by a reprisal “in kind;” the enemy “hits back,” and the grim competition goes on “until the mass murder of civilians becomes part of our policy – a descent into barbarism.” Second, although Britain suffered cruelly in the Blitz, some of the terrible inventions and tactics now being used were not known or practiced at that stage of the war. Third, retaliation in kind means reducing oneself to the moral level of one’s opponents, “whose perverted values have induced us to fight.” To imitate and

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63 Brittain, One Voice, 97.
intensify the enemy’s methods is to be defeated by the very evils against which one
claims to be fighting.  

So, Vera concludes, she has written this book to make available the facts of what
the bombing policy means to its victims. Only when one knows these facts is one in a
position to say whether or not one approves. “If you do not approve, it is for you to make
known your objection – *remembering always that it is the infliction of suffering, far more
than its endurance, which morally damages the soul of a nation.*”

Following the Introduction, one chapter deals with the history of the bombing
offensive, including the switch from precision to area bombing. Another chapter surveys
fourteen German towns or regions, detailing the death and destruction the bombing has
caused in each place. All is carefully documented with references to government
statements and newspaper reports, many of them from Swiss and Swedish newspapers
whose reporters were eyewitnesses to the effects of the bombing. The section on
Hamburg has a particularly harrowing account of the firestorm of July 24, 1943, by a
Swiss correspondent. An early draft of a section in which Vera argued that Arthur
Harris should one day be arraigned as a war criminal was considered potentially libelous

64 Brittain, *One Voice*, 97-98.


by Catchpool’s solicitor and had to be toned down. Subsequent chapters chronicle debates in Parliament, and attempt to gauge public opinion.

In the final chapter Vera proposes some remedies, including open towns, sanctuary areas, and “an agreed return by both sides to ‘precision’ bombing.” She describes a recent proposal of the BRC to recognize sanctuary areas within enemy territory to which “women and aged people” can be evacuated, including towns which have no important military, industrial, or communications targets, such as “Bonn, Homberg, Baden, Heidelberg, and other university towns and health resorts.” To assure the absence of military preparations from the sanctuary areas, a corps of observers from neutral countries could be formed and placed under the control of the International Red Cross, or of a neutral commission on which the Vatican would be represented. She acknowledges that her advocacy of an agreed return to precision bombing will be opposed not only by supporters of the area bombing policy, but also by absolute pacifists “who maintain that ‘humanizing war’ involves the acceptance of the war method as tolerable, and that no compromise is possible with those who make use of it.” But, she argues, the refusal to do anything short of achieving the millennium is too often an excuse for doing nothing. When Hugo Grotius wrote *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* in 1625, she

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67 Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 437.

68 Brittain, *One Voice*, 175.

69 A town in the Saar region, not to be confused with Hamburg.

continues, he showed himself one of the first to realize that humanizing war is not an alternative to abolishing it. Instead, it is a step toward that state of mind in which the abolition of war will become possible. As a nurse in France, she had to care for ten of the first mustard gas cases in 1917. Remembering those men, she is thankful for the development of public opinion which has caused the belligerents so far to observe the Poison Gas Convention of 1925. So, progress in humanizing war is possible. However, the tortures inflicted upon men, women, and children in the saturation raids far exceed the sufferings caused by poison gas between 1914 and 1918. The callous cruelty and vandalism of the mass bombing, she concludes, “WILL APPEAR TO FUTURE CIVILIZATION AS AN EXTREME FORM OF CRIMINAL LUNACY WITH WHICH OUR POLITICAL AND MILITARY LEADERS DELIBERATELY ALLOWED THEMSELVES TO BECOME AFFLICTED.”

Critical Reaction

In February 1944, six weeks before the publication of Seed of Chaos in Britain, Vera was surprised to learn that an article of hers had appeared in Fellowship, the American journal of the FOR, causing a furor in the United States. The article turned out to be a first draft of Seed of Chaos, which a friend had taken to New York just before Christmas. The typescript had been retained by the censor; and when the FOR finally received it, there was no time to consult Vera before publishing it under the title

“Massacre by Bombing.” What commanded particular attention was the preface signed by twenty-eight leading American clergy:

In our time, as never before, war is showing itself in its logical colors. In the First World War some shreds of the rules of war were observed to the end. Laws of war are intrinsically paradoxical; but so far as they went, they bore witness to the survival of some fragments of a Christian conscience among the combatants. But today these fragments are disappearing. The contesting parties pay little heed to the former decencies and chivalries, save among their own comrades. Christian people should be moved to examine themselves concerning their participation in this carnival of death – even though they be thousands of miles away. Here, surely, there is a call for repentance, that we have not acquainted ourselves with the verities and realities of what is being done in our name in Europe; and surely Christian obligation calls upon us to pray incessantly to God that He in His own way may bid the winds and waves of war be still.

The signatories included such ecclesiastical luminaries as George A. Buttrick, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Georgia Harkness, E. Stanley Jones, and Kenneth Scott Latourette; the one non-clerical signatory was the journalist and editor Oswald Garrison Villard.

Public reaction was immediate and overwhelmingly negative. The New York Times reported that it had received an unusually heavy volume of correspondence, with fifty letters to one opposing the protest. Typical responses accused Vera and the twenty-eight of undermining the Allied War effort and giving aid and comfort to the enemy. The Rev. Dr. Daniel A. Poling asked whether the twenty-eight would have the Axis win:

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“Every word spoken now and every act speeds victory, strengthens America and the Allies to win quickly, or gives comfort to the enemy.” Historical novelist MacKinlay Kantor wrote that it was not the bombing but the soft-heartedness of prelates and humanitarians that was laying the psychological foundations for a third world war: “Is it conceivable that Dr. Goebbels would disapprove the tut-tuttings of the American clergy at this time? No strike of war workers might serve the enemy as well as this coordinated effort to sabotage our bomber command.” Kantor concluded with a saying attributed to Churchill: “‘The Hun is either at your feet or at your throat.’ For the sake of all we value, and for the sake of all future decency, let us not permit the Hun to rise to gash our throats again. Japanese and Nazis understand the language of bombs very well indeed. May we continue to speak it until the necessity for all such cruel oratory has passed.”

Eschewing inflammatory rhetoric, The New York Times editorialized in the classical tradition of military realism: “The argument which Miss Vera Brittain and twenty-eight clergymen have made against ‘massacre by bombing’ is not in reality an argument against bombing. It is an argument against war.” In no theatre of the current war, the editorial continued, “is there any consideration for the lives of civilians when military aims can be attained by taking them.” Vera Brittain and the twenty-eight are not asking whether war should be waged against Nazism but in what manner: “The most


merciful manner is obviously that which will win the war with least human suffering. If the kind of bombing the British and American fliers are doing over Germany will shorten the war and diminish the cost of life, we believe it justifiable. If it will not do that, we believe it unjustifiable.” The editorial concludes with the admonition: “let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that war can be made humane. It cannot. It can only be abolished.” The New Republic opined that those who take up arms to end aggression must do what is necessary to win, and added that in contemporary warfare there were no longer any noncombatants. The Nation doubted that obliteration bombing was really taking place, but concluded that if it was, then it was a “revolting necessity,” but a necessity all the same.

Attacks included those of the American journalist Dorothy Thompson, writing in the British Sunday Chronicle of March 17. Far from “awakening squeamishness,” the protest “has actually released a more furious defense of air warfare than any single political action to date.” The most hostile critic of all was William L. Shirer, author of the bestselling Berlin Diary (1941), who accused Vera of reproducing Nazi propaganda and suggested that Goebbels “would hardly have written it differently.” This was the one attack Vera felt she could not ignore. She wrote to her husband George that Shirer

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78 A.C. Grayling, Among the Dead Cities: The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan (New York: Walker, 2006), 202

79 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 440.

80 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 440.
was saying in so many words that she and the twenty-eight were not Nazi dupes but Nazi agents. She wrote to Shirer to protest: “In the book *Seed of Chaos* … I made exactly ten references to direct German statements, out of literally hundreds to British officials, airmen statesmen, newspapers, etc.”81 She also wrote a rebuttal to Shirer’s attack, “Not made in Germany,” which *Fellowship* published in June 1944.

Support came from two Christian journals, *Commonweal* and the *Christian Century*; the latter editorializing that Vera’s work raises the question ‘as to whether victory won in this fashion is worth having.”82 James Gilles, Editor of the *Catholic World*, wrote that Vera’s argument “deserved either endorsement or patient refutation” – he had read about two hundred newspaper attacks on her book, but not one of them had correctly reported the precise position she had taken.83 Christian activists who defended Vera in the United States included Dorothy Day of the Catholic Worker movement.84

By the final week of April, the controversy had reached the White House. On April 26, *The New York Herald Tribune* reported that President Roosevelt had delivered a “stinging rebuke” to the twenty-eight who had signed the preface. While the President was “disturbed and horrified” by the war’s destruction of life, the easiest way to prevent many more civilian deaths was to compel the Germans and Japanese to change their

81 Quoted in Y. Aleksandra Bennett, introduction to Brittain, *One Voice*, xviii.

82 Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 439.

83 Bennett, “Introduction,” xviii.

84 Shirley Williams, foreword to Brittain, *One Voice*, ix.
philosophy. Without such a change, “we shall have more deaths, more destruction and more wars.” Vera responded: “I must take Christ as my guide before even the President.”

On May 31, The New York Times reported that Eleanor Roosevelt had branded as “sentimental nonsense” Vera’s arguments against the Allies’ policy of unconditional surrender. Vera later speculated that while international etiquette prevented the President from attacking her directly, the Administration may have put Shirer up to discrediting her, partly because public opposition to area bombing could be embarrassing given the plans already under way to use the atomic bomb against Japan.

When Seed of Chaos was finally published in Britain on April 19, it received little press attention or public reaction. On April 20, Corder Catchpool wrote to Bishop Bell to inform him of a public meeting planned by the PPU to discuss the issues raised by Vera’s book and requested that Bell send a message to be read out at such a meeting.

Presumably feeling that in his House of Lords speech of February 9 he had already done everything that could reasonably be done, Bell declined to send such a message. On May 9, Catchpool followed up with a description of the letter signed by the twenty-eight

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85 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 440.

86 Bennett, “Introduction,” xix.


89 Catchpool to Bell, April 20, 1944, Bell Papers, Vol. 370, f. 179.

90 Bell to Catchpool, April 21, 1944, Bell Papers, Vol. 370, f. 180.
American clergy in support of Vera’s book, and asked whether Bell would sponsor such a statement in Britain or, failing that, be one of the signatories. Bell replied that he did not think such a statement would be much use, and declined to be a signatory. Catchpool reported Bell’s lack of support to the BRC, which in turn abandoned plans for the public meeting and statement.

One serious British response to *Seed of Chaos* came from George Orwell, writing in his “As I Please” column in the May 19 issue of the journal *Tribune*. Significantly, Orwell opened by remarking that in *Seed of Chaos* Vera was not taking the pacifist line: “She is willing and anxious to win the war, apparently. She merely wishes us to stick to ‘legitimate’ methods of war and abandon civilian bombing, which she fears will blacken our reputation in the eyes of posterity.” After the aside that “no decent person cares tuppence for the opinion of posterity,” Orwell allows that “pacifism is a tenable position, provided you are willing to take the consequences.” But there is something distasteful in accepting war as an instrument and at the same time evading responsibility for its more barbarous features. Dismissing all talk of limiting or humanizing war as “sheer humbug,” Orwell demands to know: “Why is it worse to kill civilians than soldiers?” He goes on to observe that the suffering of the present war has been shared out more evenly than in the last one: “The immunity of the civilian, one of the things that have made war possible,

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91 Catchpool to Bell, May 9, 1944, Bell Papers, Vol. 370, f. 181.

92 Bell to Catchpool, [no date], Bell Papers, Vol. 370, f. 183.

93 Bennett, “Introduction,” xix.
has been shattered. Unlike Miss Brittain, I don’t regret that. I can’t feel that war is ‘humanized’ by being confined to the slaughter of the young and becomes ‘barbarous’ when the old are killed as well.” When people see themselves as the savages they are, “some improvement is possible, or at least thinkable.”

On July 14, Orwell followed up with a response to negative comments he had received. Again, he attacks the outcry against killing women and children. Any society at war will do its best to protect its children, and the number of children killed in raids probably does not correspond to their percentage of the population. Women cannot be protected to the same extent, “but the outcry against killing women, if you accept killing at all, is sheer sentimentality. Why is it worse to kill a woman than a man?” In World War I, the British Empire lost nearly a million young men; and Britain has still not fully recovered. If that war had been conducted with “flying bombs, rockets, and other long-range weapons which kill old and young, healthy and unhealthy, male and female impartially, it would probably have damaged European civilization somewhat less than it did.” Contrary to what his correspondents think, he has no enthusiasm for air raids. “But I do object to the hypocrisy of accepting force as an instrument while squealing against this or that individual weapon.”

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Vera responded in a letter of June 23 to *Tribune* that Orwell “seems to assume that if pacifists do not succeed in preventing a war, they must throw up the sponge and acquiesce in any excesses that war-makers choose to initiate.”\(^96\) In her “Letter to Peace Lovers” of July 6, she wrote that when Orwell dismisses talk of limiting or humanizing war as “sheer humbug,” he is simply and crudely unhistorical. She went on to cite Grotius, the limited wars of the eighteenth century, and the treaties and conventions of the nineteenth century as instances of progress in limiting warfare.\(^97\) Subsequently, Orwell may have undergone something of a change of heart when he visited Germany in the wake of the advancing Allied armies in 1945, and saw the destruction of German cities for himself. He wrote in the *Observer*, “To walk through the ruined cities of Germany is to feel an actual doubt about the continuity of civilization.”\(^98\)

Support came from one perhaps unexpected quarter. After reading *Seed of Chaos*, Basil Liddell Hart wrote to Vera to express “profound respect for your courage in upholding the claims of human decency in a time when war fever is raging.”\(^99\) Despite the ineffectiveness of the BRC’s efforts to change the government’s policy, Vera took satisfaction from having held the matter up before the public conscience. She wrote to one correspondent concerning the furor in the United States: “When you are putting

\(^{96}\) Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 441.

\(^{97}\) Brittain, Letter of June 1, 1944, in *Testament of a Peace Lover*, 200.

\(^{98}\) Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 441; Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities*, 205.

\(^{99}\) Berry and Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, 442.
forward unpopular views, the thing that really creates despair is to be ignored; when people take notice, abuse you, and defend themselves, you know you have got under their skin and uncovered a bad conscience!” But the controversy did damage her reputation in the United States. She later wrote: “Long after the bombing controversy had vanished from American minds and newspapers, it continued to have a decisive effect on my position there as a writer. No-one remembered exactly what I had done – I was a Communist or something – but such writings as I could still publish never emerged from the shadow which had darkened my name.”

V.E. Day and After

This account of Vera’s witness would be incomplete without mentioning two incidents that took place following the German surrender on May 7, 1945. After the announcement of victory, Vera again found herself walking up Whitehall as she had done almost twenty-seven years before on Armistice Day. The First World War had destroyed her childhood religious faith. In the years since, despite nominal membership in the Church of England, periodic attendance at its services, and indeed a pacifist philosophy modeled on the example and teachings of Christ, she had remained more or less an agnostic. But now something had changed precisely through the wartime humiliations she had experienced as a pacifist:

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100 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 441.

Walking dumbly and blindly up Whitehall at the end of the First War, I had felt no conviction of any divine principle, any Easter morning, any meeting again. Now, walking up Whitehall at the end of the Second, I became deeply aware that, in the past five years, my attitude had changed.

I could not yet believe in the Easter morning and the meeting again; I did not expect to see Edward or Roland or Winifred in any future conceivable by human consciousness. But of the existence of a benign Rule, a spiritual imperative behind the anarchy and chaos of man’s wilful folly, I was now wholly assured; the superficial faith which the First War had destroyed had been replaced by an adult conviction. … I knew that God lived, and that the sorrow and suffering in the world around me had come because men refused to obey His laws. The self-interested, provocative policies which had driven mankind to the edge of the abyss seemed to supply incontrovertible testimony that the opposite policy – the way of God, the road of the Cross – would produce an opposite result.  

Here is a sixth and perhaps final conversion: from agnosticism to belief in a living God who could be known by following in the way of the Cross.

The second incident occurred four months later when the discovery of the Gestapo’s “Black Book” revealed both Vera’s and George’s names on the list of 2,820 British citizens and European exiles to be arrested upon a successful German invasion of England. As a pacifist, she had often been attacked as a Nazi sympathizer. When British newspapers published the list in mid-September, it was for Vera vindication and “a remarkable experience of catharsis,” placing her “once and for all, above the further possibility of suspicion.” The Nazis apparently understood better than the British

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102 Brittain, Testament of Experience, 363.
government that the faith of the Christian pacifist was “a power inimical to, because precisely the opposite of, their own doctrines.”

Conclusion

Vera Brittain recapitulates in her life and writings many of the themes in the historical development of the pacifist tradition considered above in Chapter Six. Her point of entry into the tradition was liberal internationalism, which represented an updated form of Renaissance and Enlightenment plans for peace through education and the establishment of an international authority for resolving conflicts among nations. As she eventually embraced an absolute or pure form of pacifism, her understanding of the pacifist vocation as entailing suffering and humiliation echoed the writings of the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation. Her autobiographical writing – simultaneously chronicling both external history and internal struggles – had deep affinities with the introspective journal-writing characteristic of Puritan and Quaker spirituality. Her evolutionary understanding of limiting and humanizing war in the present as an intermediate step along the way to the eventual abolition of war in the future picks up on ideas developed by such figures as Lyman Abbott in the nineteenth century and Charles Raven in the twentieth. The one stream of the pacifist tradition she really does not engage with is nonviolent resistance. Despite her great admiration for Gandhi, she never seems to have undertaken anything resembling civil disobedience. Although her public opposition

103 Berry and Bostridge, Vera Brittain: A Life, 445-446.
to the Allied war effort was costly in terms of loss of reputation among respectable public opinion, the wartime activities of the PPU and BRC seem to have all been very legal in the context of a liberal democracy: holding public meetings and rallies, making speeches, circulating petitions, and writing books, letters, and pamphlets. The day of anti-nuclear protesters chaining themselves to the perimeter fences of NATO airbases in the United Kingdom remained well in the future.

When it became clear that the League of Nations had failed and that another war was likely, Brittain was forced to choose between pacifism and support for her country’s eventual war against Nazism. Unlike many of her contemporaries, she chose pacifism. As soon as the war came, she was confronted with the question, discussed in the conclusion to Chapter Six above, of how to combine the roles of pacifist and citizen, of how to relate as a pacifist to her country when her country was at war. Her solution was fourfold: (1) make clear her opposition to the war itself; (2) oppose the Allied demand for unconditional surrender and press for a cessation of hostilities and a negotiated peace; (3) organize and participate in humanitarian activities to relieve sufferings caused by the war; and (4) engage in advocacy through the Famine Relief and Bombing Restriction campaigns to influence the government to limit and humanize its prosecution of the war.

The irony is that in her advocacy Brittain ended up taking positions characteristic of the Just War tradition, particularly in its *jus in bello* stream. She realized that absolute pacifists would oppose any attempt to humanize war as running the risk of making it more tolerable. Instead of working to limit and humanize the current war, they would
simply keep on calling for an end to war itself. But Brittain’s evolutionary understanding of pacifism made it possible for her to take the view that limiting war in the present is an intermediate step towards abolishing it in the future. Her only real difference with the classical Just War theorist at this point is that the latter is more likely to regard limiting and humanizing war as a moral imperative in its own right in a world in which war is unlikely ever to be finally abolished, at least this side of the Eschaton. Brittain’s example shows that when their governments are actually fighting wars, some pacifists will end up adopting positions virtually identical with those of the *jus in bello* tradition. Theodore J. Koontz writes that while pacifists have generally been skeptical of the possibility of moral restraint in warfare once it has begun, and would rather draw a line between “war” and “no war” than between “just” and “unjust” war, this does not mean that they are committed to the view that actual wars ought not to be limited by moral constraints: “Pacifists would typically side with just war theorists in hoping that wars can be so restrained, though they would be skeptical of the realism of that happening.”

104 So, unable to prevent the war itself, they will urge observation of the laws of war in the fighting. Unable to prevent bombing of the enemy, they will urge precision-bombing of military targets with the goal of minimizing civilian deaths and injuries. Unable to prevent blockade of the enemy’s ports, they will urge that food be allowed though the blockade in amounts sufficient to prevent the starvation of civilian populations. They would rather that there be no war in the first place, no bombing, no blockades, but since

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that is not the case they find themselves called to respond to the situation they find. At such moments, the *jus in bello* norms furnish such pacifists with the resources for a moral response to war that is perhaps lacking in their own tradition. And here, pacifists and adherents of the Just War tradition have an opportunity to make common cause.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CONCLUSION

The area bombing of German cities during the Second World War constituted a violation of the *jus in bello* norms of discrimination and noncombatant immunity. In the debate that began at the time, the bombing’s apologists challenged the continuing relevance and applicability of these norms. In this study I have examined five ethical traditions that have at least implicitly informed the positions taken by various protagonists in this debate: Holy War / Crusade, Classical Realism, Christian Realism, *Jus in Bello*, and Christian Pacifism. I suggested that rival moral assessments of the area bombing contradict one another not so much because they disagree on the historical facts as because they are informed by largely incompatible ethical presuppositions. To understand why different commentators disagree in their moral assessments of the bombing it helps first to understand the ethical traditions from which they are working. Such a study cannot be taken from a neutral vantage point beyond all ethical traditions, for no such place exists. Hence the investigator must also acknowledge the tradition from within which he or she is working. My evaluation of the ethical traditions has been from the viewpoint of the Christian Just War tradition. I have argued for the continuing validity of the *jus in bello* norms of discrimination and noncombatant immunity. By these standards, the area bombing was wrong and should not have been undertaken despite the great pressures to do so in the early years of World War II.
The five traditions explored here do not begin to exhaust the possibilities for categorizing the positions taken in the debate, which could be analyzed further in terms of other traditions, such as Marxism or Freudianism. Vera Brittain considered herself a feminist as well as a pacifist; and her life has appropriately been the subject of feminist studies.1 Many of the concerns of both Archbishop Temple and Bishop Bell were shaped by the ecumenical movement in which they were both deeply involved. The views of Lord Vansittart and, for that matter, Winston Churchill could be illuminated by study of the ideology of British imperialism.

The five traditions chosen for this study have nonetheless proven enormously useful in elucidating the thinking of the key figures in the British World War II debate. Part of the reason may involve the distinction, touched on previously in the Introduction, between Terry Nardin’s definition of tradition as the authoritative presence of a continuously transmitted past, and Martin Wight’s definition of tradition as a pattern of recurrence and repetition. The ethical traditions examined in this study have exhibited features of both definitions. Tradition as historical transmission can be seen, for example, as Luther draws on Augustine, and as Niebuhr draws on both, or as Grotius draws on Vitoria and Suárez, who both draw in turn on Thomas Aquinas. Traditions as patterns of repetition and recurrence have also been in evidence as, for example, pacifists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reproduced many of the same arguments found in the writings of the later medieval and Radical Reformation pacifist movements which they

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had not read but which drew on the same New Testament texts. Likewise, the norm of noncombatant immunity – resting on the moral intuition that those who do not make war should not have war upon them – seems to have occurred to the international lawyers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries even in the absence of in-depth knowledge of the historical development of the *jus in bello* tradition beginning in the tenth century.

The five ethical traditions considered in this study represent a logical range of options for responding to a particular set of circumstances that does seem to recur in widely different times and places. In the absence of any overarching political authority, the leaders of human collectives – whether tribes, kingdoms, city-states, empires, or modern nation-states – often experience a tension between their highest religious, spiritual, and moral values and the actions and policies they believe they must enact to survive and defend their vital interests in an anarchic and dangerous world. This tension becomes particularly acute when the religious values involved are derived from the Christian Gospel with its emphasis on nonviolence and nonresistance. The New Testament enshrines this tension by juxtaposing texts enjoining nonviolence and nonresistance with texts enjoining obedience to political authorities described as God’s ministers for restraining evil in the world.

One possible means of attempting to resolve this tension is by interpreting the political authority’s actions in the world in terms of a divinely sanctioned struggle of good against evil (Holy War / Crusade). A second possibility, diametrically opposed to the first, is simply to deny the relevance and applicability of moral and spiritual values to
actions taken in the international sphere, other than the one overriding imperative of ensuring the state’s security, honor, and prosperity (Classical Realism). A third possibility, which emerges in the context of a specifically Christian world view, is to embrace the tension by viewing politics in a fallen world as a sphere in which one is obligated to do one’s best, knowing that one’s best always stands condemned by the very standards by which it is inspired (Christian Realism). A fourth possibility is to suggest that even within the tension between ideals and exigencies it is possible to discern determinate moral norms for political action grounded in natural law (Christian Just War and *jus in bello*). A fifth possibility is to decide that when the ideals of the Gospel clash with the seeming requirements of political action in a fallen world, one must simply follow Christ’s teachings regardless of the temporal consequences (Christian Nonviolence / Nonviolent Resistance).² These five options seem to cover the range of possible responses to the initial situation of tension between moral ideals and the exigencies of political action in an anarchic international environment. They are built into the structure of the situation, as it were, in such a way that individuals struggling with these questions are likely to keep on rediscovering them even in the absence of historical awareness of previous thinkers who have discovered and developed them in the past.

In this study, I have tried to give an accurate and empathetic account of each tradition, identifying what I see as the unique contributions it has to make to the debate. The five traditions are incommensurable in the sense that they proceed from different

² Although the Abolitionist and Nonviolent Resistance streams of this tradition maintain the possibility of improving and transforming the world by pacifist witness.
assumptions about human nature, law, morality, and the potential impact of divine grace upon human social and political relations. Yet, the conversation among the five traditions may yield deeper insights into the ethical dilemmas surrounding the area bombing than any one tradition alone.

**Holy War / Crusade**

Ronald Bainton proposed the influential thesis that in distinction to the Pacifist and Just War traditions, the crusading mentality tends inexorably to excesses of cruelty in the prosecution of war. According to Bainton, a holy war in the Christian tradition is typically fought (1) for a holy cause, (2) under God and with his help, (3) against ungodly enemies, and (4) with unsparing prosecution. James Turner Johnson has subjected this aspect of the Bainton thesis to an extensive critique. The three major contexts of holy war ideology in the Western tradition are ancient Israel, medieval Catholicism, and the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Biblical texts describing cultic holy war in the Hebrew Scriptures supplied stories, images, and examples that would inspire later generations of Christian warriors with legitimation of their wars of conquest and annihilation, sometimes to genocidal extremes. Despite Bainton’s characterization of holy war and just war as mutually opposed categories, medieval holy war was really a subcategory of just war, in which the legitimate authority was God or the Church, and the just cause a religious ideal. The crusade, in turn, was a subcategory of holy war, although the language and imagery of crusading has had a long shelf life in other contexts extending well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Johnson shows, however,
that medieval Christian holy war did not necessarily lead to unrestrained violence.
Similarly, the English Puritan combination of holy war with apocalyptic imagery and
demonization of their enemies as the Antichrist could lead to unrestrained violence but
often did not. Johnson persuasively concludes that the link between religious belief and
the practice of warfare is real but can work in either direction: when a holy cause is
assumed to justify unrestrained violence, the tendency is towards total warfare;
conversely, when a holy cause is believed to impose restraints on violence, the tendency
is towards limited warfare. The same dynamic applies to modern ideological wars, which
resemble holy wars transposed into the secular sphere. Some ideological wars have been
marked by unrestrained violence against civilians, as in the French Revolution and the
Napoleonic Wars. Others, such as the American Civil War and World War I, for the most
part have not. The crucial investigative task, then, is to identify the specific types of
beliefs that have tended to lead from the holy or transcendent cause to justifications of
unrestrained violence on behalf of that cause in any given historical context.

After surveying recent scholarship on the nature of total war, I proposed that
pressures for escalation to unrestrained violence in war are greatest when three factors are
present: (1) the perception by either side that the stakes are total, such that a group,
society, or nation comes to believe itself to be engaged in a life-or-death struggle for its
very existence, defined in terms of its physical survival, way of life, or most cherished
beliefs and values; (2) perceptions of the opponent as fundamentally “alien” or “other” in
ways that lend themselves to a process of dehumanizing and demonizing the enemy; and
(3) the perceived lack of any meaningful distinction between the enemy government and the enemy population. These factors can be exacerbated by ideology and propaganda. All three were present in Britain during the early years of World War II; Lord Vansittart promoted (2) and (3) in particular. While Vansittart did not directly advocate killing German civilians by means of area bombing, his anti-German propaganda helped create a public atmosphere in which such killing could be accepted as a regrettable necessity.

Three “non-military justifications” for the area bombing were widely advanced in wartime Britain. First, Winston Churchill and others believed that the bombing was good for morale and demonstrated to the British public and to Britain’s Allies that Britain was doing its part to carry the war to the enemy. Second, many saw the bombing as justified retaliation for the German bombing of British cities during the Blitz, as well as of European cities such as Warsaw, Belgrade, and Rotterdam. Third, many Britons believed that the bombing would teach the Germans a valuable lesson by giving them a taste of what war was really like so that they would be less likely to initiate aggressive wars in the future. These non-military justifications supplied part of the above-mentioned content of belief linking a holy or transcendent cause (the total defeat of Nazi Germany) to unrestrained warfare (in the form of city bombing). The other part of the link was belief in the bombing’s military efficacy as a means of hastening victory. Over and against these non-military justifications I argued, first, that boosting morale is an insufficient justification for immoral actions, and further that any morale boost thus gained is likely to have a debasing effect on the community’s ethical character. Second, if the British
believed that the Nazis had committed war crimes in bombing cities, a far more effective response in terms of upholding international law and morality would have been the prosecution and punishment of the German political leaders and military officers responsible after the war was over. Third, the task of teaching the Germans a lesson would have been achieved just as well by the Allied postwar policies of occupation, denazification, construction of a democratic state, and re-education of the German people, all following Germany’s unconditional surrender.

World War II was a total war in that it aimed at total ends, and in this sense it was for the Allies not only a just war but, in the figurative sense of the word, a crusade. Perhaps the most surprising insight to emerge from this exploration of the holy war / crusading tradition is that sometimes, albeit rarely, war may indeed be justified by what Tyerman calls a transcendent cause. As the revelation of the Final Solution made clear, if only in retrospect, Nazism was a monstrous evil that simply had to be eradicated. Even so, the area bombing of German cities was not inevitable. The Allies could have undertaken to defeat Nazism by military means that avoided as far as possible the killing of German civilians. That they did not was a matter of choice rather than necessity.

**Classical Realism**

The tradition represented by such writers as Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, classical realism presupposes a pessimistic view of human nature. Seeing law and morality as human creations which arise only in the context of settled political societies, this tradition discounts the relevance or applicability of moral categories to
international politics, which resemble a pre-social “state of nature.” In the context of an anarchic international system, states frequently find it necessary to defend their external interests by means that would be considered immoral within the context of the state itself. In matters of military ethics, this tradition directly challenges the *jus in bello* norms, asserting that in war states may from time to time find it necessary to defend their vital interests by intentionally killing noncombatant civilians.

Contrary to what might be expected, however, the internal logic of the tradition supplies its own restraints against gratuitous cruelty in the conduct of warfare. In Thucydides, the Athenians find it in their interests to massacre the Melians but to spare the Mytilenians. Machiavelli makes a critical distinction between “cruelties well-committed” and “cruelties ill-committed.” Hobbes writes that although there is no law against it, gratuitous cruelty in warfare is dishonorable and a manifestation of cowardice. The classical realist criterion for evaluating an act of cruelty in warfare is not “Is it just?” but “Is it necessary?” Almost all writers in the tradition agree that unnecessary cruelty is counterproductive and hence to be avoided.

One influential variant of the realist tradition is “military realism” of the sort articulated by General William Tecumseh Sherman during the American Civil War. Military realism holds that considerations of justice and morality normally obtain among states during peacetime but break down during war. It is impossible to distinguish between moral and immoral means during war because war itself is immoral. The best way to end the immorality of war is to make use of whatever means are necessary to win
quickly and so restore peace. Apologists for the World War II area bombing often advance this argument.

Like utilitarianism, classical realism makes use of consequentialist moral reasoning, according to which the morality of an action is determined by its outcome, rather than any inherent quality of the action itself. Where the *jus in bello* norms tend to presuppose a natural law framework in which the morality of an action is determined by the actor’s *intention* – with certain intentions being inseparable from the end or *telos* of the action itself – consequentialism by contrast sees the morality of an action as determined by the actor’s *motives*, which concern not the action itself but its expected results or consequences. Thus, where a natural law perspective regards the indiscriminate bombing of cities as inherently immoral because the intention to kill civilians is inseparable from the action, consequentialism regards such bombing as licit insofar as its motive is to shorten the war and save lives overall. One difference between utilitarianism and classical realism is that the former weighs the global consequences of actions whereas the former weighs only those consequences affecting the state’s interests.

Apologists for the area bombing have advanced the realist argument that the bombing was justified because it proved militarily effective in weakening Germany, hastening victory, and saving lives overall. Conversely, an example of a realist argument *against* the bombing is found in the wartime writings of the military historian and strategist Captain Basil Liddell Hart. Eager to avoid any repetition of the drawn out war of attrition in the trenches in 1914-1918, Liddell Hart had in the 1920s advocated the use
of air power against enemy cities to win wars quickly. But by World War II he had come to doubt the war-winning efficacy of city bombing, viewing it instead as another way of causing unnecessary death and destruction in a new type of war of attrition. Liddell Hart regarded the Allies’ war aim of unconditional surrender as profoundly unrealistic and destructive compared with more limited war aims capable of accommodation in a negotiated settlement with the Axis, which he believed would better serve Britain’s interests. One implication is that while classical realist thought can advocate violations of the *jus in bello* norms that seem necessary to achieve victory, it also tends to subvert the totalistic ends that are apt to be used to justify such means.

Evaluating the tradition, I argued that classical realism views state interests in overly narrow materialistic terms. Ideals and values also figure into states’ interests. In some cases states may decide to sacrifice their material interests when their highest ideals and values are at stake. The unique contribution that the realist tradition makes, however, is the admonition to count costs carefully. The tragedy of political and military action in the international sphere is that policies motivated by lofty ideals may have high material costs, while policies aimed at defending the state’s interests narrowly conceived may have high moral costs.

**Christian Realism**

The tradition known as Christian Realism expresses the tension between the high moral ideals of the Gospel and the exigencies of political and social life in a fallen world. The establishment of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire in the early
fourth century confronted Christians with the question of whether and to what extent public office and military service compromise the requirements of discipleship. Christian realism emerged as the attempt to honor not only the moral and spiritual demands of the Gospel but also the perceived need to relax those demands for Christians called to political or military service in the world.

Believing that the best that a Christian ruler can achieve in a fallen world is a rough justice reflecting but falling short of true justice, Saint Augustine set out the basic principles of the tradition in three steps: (1) a distinction between what is required of individuals acting in their own behalf in a private capacity and acting in a public capacity on behalf of others; (2) the affirmation that waging just wars and punishing evildoers can be acts of benevolence insofar as they protect the innocent and punish the guilty; and (3) the evaluation of the morality of actions performed in a public capacity according to criteria of interior motivations and dispositions. Against this background, Augustine did not develop the jus in bello norms in any systematic way. He taught that killing in warfare should be limited to that necessary to achieve a just war’s legitimate objectives, and should be carried out dispassionately, without hatred or lust for violence. Yet, while he urged mercy towards prisoners and defeated populations, his writings contain little in the way of explicit prohibitions on attacks on civilians while war is under way.

Martin Luther reproduced most of these features of the Augustinian legacy. Factors inhibiting development of a full-blown doctrine of noncombatant immunity in Luther’s thought include his belief that physical death is not the worst fate that can befall
people in war, compared with eternal damnation. In his doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, he accords the secular ruler a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the Church, and he emphasizes the subject’s duty of obedience. One result is that Church leaders who protest excesses in warfare can be seen as overstepping the boundaries of their spiritual competence and meddling in affairs not their concern. This charge was leveled at Bishop Bell of Chichester during World War II, and continues to be leveled at politically engaged clergy to this day. Most of all, Luther’s teaching that the Christian is simul justus et peccator hints at the possibility that a ruler or soldier may find it necessary to commit objectively wrong acts in the discharge of his or her duties for which the only remedy is continued reliance on God’s forgiveness. While it is not clear that Luther himself admitted this possibility, it was certainly taken up by twentieth-century Christian realists such as Reinhold Niebuhr and William Temple.

In Moral Man and Immoral Society (1932), Niebuhr begins with a pessimistic analysis of humanity’s fallen condition. He proposes that while true justice can never be fully realized in history, it may be approximated by means of the dialectic between idealism and realism. Expanding this point in An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (1935), he posits both the absolute relevance and practical impossibility of the love ethic of Jesus. From the dialectic between the ideal of love and the requirements of life in a fallen world justice emerges as an imperfect approximation of love under conditions of sin. Such justice is not an absolute standard but an adjustment of conflicting claims aiming at but never fully realizing the ideal of love. Later, rejecting pacifism and
endorsing American participation in the coming war with Nazi Germany, Niebuhr wrote that the grace of forgiveness frees the Christian to act in history in defense of his highest values, while at the same time acknowledging the moral ambiguity of even his best actions. During World War II, Niebuhr endorsed the bombing of Germany with the observation that “there is no escape from guilt in history.”

As war approached, Archbishop William Temple similarly wrote that the fallen world is so structured that in many situations even the best available courses of action implicate people in sin; yet they remain their duty because all the alternatives are worse. Going to war is always sinful; but sometimes it is the least of all evils in a sinful situation. Temple’s unwillingness to challenge the British Government on the area bombing becomes comprehensible when viewed in light of his theological ethics. Insofar as he understood the area bombing to be an effective means of winning the war, he was disposed to accept it as a regrettable and sinful but nonetheless necessary policy, for which the nation could only plead for God’s forgiveness.

The weakness of the Christian realist tradition lies in its failure to recognize that justice in the public sphere need not be seen as a second-best choice always up for negotiation and adjustment. Such an approach too easily leads to compromising the ordinary norms of justice in the quest to achieve the overarching goals motivated by the highest ideals. Even within the terms of the Christian realist tradition, the attempt to engage in precision bombing while respecting the norms of discrimination and proportionality could have been upheld as a closer approximation of justice than the
alternative of indiscriminate obliteration bombing. Ethical traditions which accord such norms their own validity and integrity – rather than treating them as provisional compromises between conflicting principles – provide them with a more robust theoretical foundation.

The Jus in Bello Tradition

A society’s conduct of warfare always reflects its cultural values in one way or another. In Europe, the *jus in bello* norms of the Christian Just War tradition evolved as the expression of one such set of cultural values – even when honored more in the breach than in the observance. Although the *jus ad bellum* criteria of the Just War tradition date back to Augustine and, before him, to classical antiquity, the *jus in bello* norms began to be systematized only in the tenth and eleventh centuries. During the medieval period, they developed through the interplay of several streams of tradition: canon law, chivalry, theology, and civil law. Beginning in the tenth century, the Peace of God movement articulated the central insight that those who do not make war should not have war made upon them. Modern commentators such as Paul Ramsey have suggested that the *jus in bello* norms are already implicit in the *jus ad bellum* doctrine: since protecting the innocent from unjust attack is the most important just cause of war, attacking the innocent even on the other side undermines one’s justification in principle for going to war in the first place. Unlike the parallel attempt of the Truce of God movement to restrain fighting to certain days and seasons of the Church year, and attempts to ban certain types of weapons such as crossbows, the Peace of God movement laid the
foundation for the recognition of civilian or noncombatant immunity as a fundamental human right grounded in natural law. In this respect, the canonists’ conception of noncombatant immunity differed from the chivalric conception, which regarded knightly protection of the weak and vulnerable as a gift, bestowed on social inferiors, that could be rescinded at will.

Beginning in the Renaissance, the natural law grounding of noncombatant immunity began to weaken as Just War theorists increasingly came to see the *jus gentium*, or customary law of nations, as diverging from natural law. In the sixteenth century, Francisco de Vitoria treated the *jus gentium* as reflecting, expressing, and extrapolating from the contents of the natural law with no great disjunction. In the following century, however, the divide began to widen. In *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625), Hugo Grotius described the *jus gentium* as permitting much that the law of nature forbids, including significant violations of noncombatant immunity, although in the end he affirmed the prohibitions of natural law over and against what he saw as the permissiveness of the *jus gentium*. With Emer de Vattel in the eighteenth century, conversely, the *jus gentium* in the form of the “voluntary law of nations” displaces natural law as the source of normative standards of conduct in war. For Vattel, natural law remained valid but was effectively privatized to be binding only on the individual conscience of the sovereign. The *jus in bello* norms were thus decoupled from natural law and made a function of the voluntary law of nations. This decoupling anticipated the development of international law, including the laws of war, as positive human law
comprising a collection of agreed treaties and conventions. International law thus became in principle infinitely malleable and subject to constant renegotiation and adjustment according to changing historical needs and circumstances. Subsequently, the nineteenth century saw a great increase in the international legislation of rules of war, mostly focusing on the treatment of combatants, especially prisoners and the wounded, and relatively little on noncombatants.

During World War II, Bishop George A.K. Bell of Chichester protested courageously against the area bombing of German cities. A committed anti-Nazi during the 1930s, he supported Britain’s war against Nazi Germany, which he saw as fully meeting the *jus ad bellum* criteria. Yet he vehemently opposed the area bombing. A number of critics, including even Bell’s biographers, have accused him of inconsistency in willing the defeat of Nazi Germany while refusing to will what they saw as the means necessary to achieve that end. But his position was entirely consistent with the contours of the Christian Just War tradition. The *jus in bello* tradition Bell inherited had been severely weakened by its gradual assimilation to positive international law during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his famous House of Lords speech of February 9, 1944, he cited a few international legal conventions in support of his position, but nowhere identified the Christian Just War tradition as his source of authority. He thus left himself open to the misperception that in denouncing the area bombing he was voicing pious sentimentality rather than speaking in the name of a received ethical tradition.
It is perhaps too much, however, to expect Bell to have done more than he did. The conscious appeal to the past and retrieval of authoritative moral traditions is a largely postmodern development that had not yet begun in the 1940s. Church leaders of Bell’s generation tended to discount the past and looked instead to the present and the future. In the postwar years, scholars such as Paul Ramsey, Michael Walzer, and James Turner Johnson began to retrieve and redeploy the Just War tradition with its *jus in bello* norms, asserting noncombatant immunity as a basic human right: partly in revulsion against the city bombing that had taken place during World War II, and partly out of the desire to challenge the Cold War strategy of nuclear deterrence that relied on targeting cities.

**Christian Pacifism**

While Christian nonviolence comprises many distinct traditions, Theodore J. Koontz provides a useful summary classification of its three main types as pacifism, abolitionism, and nonviolent resistance. Pacifism represents the commitment, often religiously motivated, of an individual or group to refuse to participate in or support war regardless of the consequences. Abolitionism, by contrast, entails working for peace in the world and the eventual abolition of war by political means that need not exclude support for specific wars in the interim. Nonviolent resistance, associated with Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., seeks to resist evil and promote justice in the world by nonviolent means which may include civil disobedience.

Christian pacifism originated in the Church’s first three centuries as an expression of the perceived polarity between God and Caesar, the Church and the world. In
obedience to the teachings of Jesus, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, the earliest
Christians refused to participate in government and the military. This early rigor was
eventually relaxed to the point that some Christians were serving in the Roman armies by
170 CE despite the Church’s continuing disapproval. In the late second and early third
centuries, patristic writers such as Tertullian and Origen advanced the theory of a double-
standard in which members of the Church abstain from war but pray for the emperor and
his armies. Since the Church benefited from the peace secured by the Empire, military
activities forbidden to Christians were considered licit for pagans, and even worthy of
support by the Church’s prayers. After the conversion of Constantine, this double-
standard was eventually transposed into a division of labor within the Church between
clergy and monastics forbidden to bear arms or shed blood, and laity whose work in the
world might include fighting just wars. Recapturing something of the early Church’s
teaching, medieval pacifist movements such as the Waldensians, Lollards, and Hussites
tended to understand their pacifism in legalistic terms as obedience to the Law of Christ,
while the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation emphasized the need for willingness to
undergo persecution as a means of union with Christ in his sufferings.

Renaissance humanists such as Erasmus developed a new approach to Christian
nonviolence. Drawing on the literature of classical antiquity and a fresh reading of the
New Testament, Erasmus believed that rulers would avoid war once they had been
educated to appreciate its folly and expense. Unlike previous Christian pacifists, the
Renaissance humanists sought to effect change within history, and make the world a
safer, happier, and more peaceful place. In the seventeenth century, the Quakers combined traditional Christian pacifism with the optimism of Renaissance humanism and the introspective yet militant spirituality of English Puritanism. They believed that their witness to nonviolence could advance God’s reign and transform the world. In the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thinkers refined and developed the abolitionist tradition with schemes for perpetual peace, usually involving the creation of parliaments of nations and international policing authorities.

Pacifism and abolitionism continued into the nineteenth century, sometimes following parallel but separate courses, sometimes overlapping and intermingling. Liberal Protestant pacifists, such as Lyman Abbott in the United States, embraced an evolutionary view of history which saw international legislation of the laws of war as a major step towards the ultimate goal of abolishing war altogether. Such liberal Protestant pacifism gained a new lease on life in both the United States and Britain following World War I, when many people became determined that the slaughter in the trenches should never happen again. During this period, abolitionists tended to embrace a liberal Internationalism which relied on the League of Nations and the strategy of collective security to guarantee the future peace. Meanwhile, in Britain, pacifist theologians and biblical scholars such as Charles Raven and G.B. Caird articulated the theological bases of Christian nonviolence, while the Anglican clergyman Dick Sheppard mobilized popular support for pacifist position through the Peace Pledge Union (PPU).
As war with Nazi Germany came to appear more and more likely in the 1930s, many members of the PPU recanted their pacifism and prepared to support the Allied war effort, while some liberal Internationalists gave up on collective security and embraced pacifism rather than assent to the coming war. Among the latter was Vera Brittain, already well-known for *Testament of Youth* (1933), her memoir of her experiences as a volunteer nurse in World War I. During the Second World War, Brittain continued her pacifist witness in her fortnightly “Letter to Peace Lovers,” and in her book *Humiliation with Honor* (1942). Her subsequent book opposing the area bombing of Germany, *Seed of Chaos* (1944) caused a storm of controversy in the United States and provoked denunciations from such diverse figures as William L. Shirer and George Orwell.

Brittain believed that in the period leading up to war the pacifist’s duty is to do everything possible to oppose war and prevent its outbreak. But once war is under way, the pacifist is called to relieve the suffering of war’s victims, and to advocate measures to limit excesses in the conduct of war. Brittain realized that more rigorous pacifists would oppose her advocacy of precision bombing in preference to area bombing as tending to render war itself more tolerable. Yet she held an evolutionary view in which present-day restraints on warfare need not be seen as an alternative to but rather a step on the way towards war’s eventual abolition. Under such circumstances, pacifist policy prescriptions become virtually indistinguishable from those of the *jus in bello* tradition. Strained as it sometimes was, the actual cooperation that took place between pacifists such as Brittain,
and Just War advocates such as Bell, demonstrates the potential for convergence between the two traditions while war is under way.

Pacifism’s strength is that it serves as a perpetual reminder that the default Christian position is always for peace and against war. Both Christian realism and the Just War tradition hold that in certain circumstances this default position can and should be overridden. But such a decision always constitutes an exception to the default norm of nonviolence. Such exceptions may from time to time be required by the claims of justice and love. But exceptions they remain. The burden of proof is always on those who would go to war to demonstrate that this particular war is justified, and not on the opponents of war to demonstrate that it is unjustified. For this reason, the Christian realists Reinhold Niebuhr and William Temple paid tribute to the pacifist vocation in the 1930s, while vehemently resisting efforts to prescribe pacifism as the Church’s universal policy. Pacifists have too often been persecuted and oppressed by other Christians. Their witness deserves to be honored and respected as a necessary reminder of the Christian hope for God’s reign of universal peace.

Was the Area Bombing Justified?

The British World War II area bombing of Germany was justified in terms of neither military effectiveness nor ethical principles. It was both ineffective and immoral. From the perspective of the Just War tradition, moreover, it would have remained morally unjustifiable even if it had proven militarily effective.
In Chapter Seven above, I reviewed the various strategic evaluations of the extent to which the area bombing contributed materially to the Allied victory against Nazi Germany. While military historians continue to debate this question, the balance of evidence suggests that strategic bombing of targets in Germany and German-occupied territories did make a significant contribution to the Allied war effort. But the most militarily effective attacks were those conducted in daylight by the USAAF against specific military and industrial objectives according to its doctrine of precision bombing. In 1944 and 1945, American attacks on oil installations caused severe fuel shortages that hampered the effectiveness of mechanized German land forces. Similarly, American attacks on transportation systems – particularly railway marshaling yards – hindered the movement of German reinforcements to the sections of the fronts where they were most needed in attempts to repel Allied ground advances. By contrast, the continuation of British nighttime area attacks on German cities during this period seems to have constituted a wasteful misallocation of resources that caused much unnecessary suffering and death to noncombatant civilians. After the introduction of long-range fighter escorts helped the Allied air forces achieve effective mastery of the skies over Germany in 1944, a combined British-American offensive of precision attacks against oil, communications, and transportation targets would likely have done more to hasten the victory of Allied forces on the ground.

The really difficult ethical question arises, however, in circumstances where such a strategy does appear to prove militarily effective. A case in point is the American fire-
bombing of Japanese cities, beginning with the raid on Tokyo of March 9, 1945, and culminating in the atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of the same year.

The military situation in the Pacific was more favorable to attacks on Japanese cities than had been the case in Europe. Japanese air defenses were considerably weaker than German air defenses, so American bombers suffered fewer losses. Constructed of highly flammable materials, Japanese cities were more vulnerable to destruction by incendiary attacks than German cities. Many Japanese industries were located in small installations spread out over wide areas, so that setting fire to cities promised to be a highly cost-effective means of reducing Japanese war production. Racist attitudes against the Japanese people, combined with the desire for revenge for Pearl Harbor and atrocities against Allied prisoners, meant that American military planners had fewer qualms about the civilian deaths that such incendiary raids would inescapably entail. Moreover, after the German surrender in May 1945, American policymakers became increasingly concerned that public opinion on the home front would not support a protracted war against Japan with high numbers of American casualties. Under these circumstances, the pressure was enormous to find a way to win the war against Japan quickly and with as few additional American combat deaths as possible.

The atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 are rightly regarded – and were recognized at the time – as having crossed a terrifying new threshold in the technology of warfare that called humanity’s future survival into question. As I noted in Chapter Seven above, however, they also represented the logical development of
the strategy of area bombing that the RAF had been carrying out against German cities since 1941 and that the USAAF had been carrying out against Japanese cities since March of 1945. General Curtis LeMay wrote that the atomic bombs represented little new: “We scorched and boiled and baked to death more people in Tokyo in that night of 9-10 March than went up in vapor at Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.” Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson deplored both methods, but reluctantly approved use of the atomic bomb as “the least abhorrent choice” in part because “it stopped the fire raids.”

In the conventional narrative history of World War II, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are credited with having precipitated the subsequent Japanese decision to comply with the Allied demand for unconditional surrender. The danger here is that of the post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy. While all such hypotheses must remain speculative, at least some evidence suggests that by August the faction within the Japanese government advocating surrender had gained sufficient strength that a peace offer would have soon been forthcoming even in the absence of the atomic bombings. Ironically, it appears to have been the conventional firebombing of Japanese cities that led to this conclusion. Before his suicide at the end of 1945, the Japanese politician Prince Konoye wrote: “Fundamentally, the thing that brought about the determination to make peace was the prolonged fire bombing by the B-29s.”

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4 Crane, *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians*, 140.
Whether it was the firebombing, the atomic bombing, or some combination of both that brought about the Japanese surrender, the Allied victory in the Pacific seems a clear instance of an enemy being bombed into submission by air attacks against cities entailing vast numbers of civilian deaths. The Japanese surrender thus appears to have vindicated in principle the claims made by the strategists of RAF Bomber Command that city bombing *alone* could win wars. Moreover, appallingly high as the numbers of deaths and injuries of Japanese civilians were, the numbers of deaths on both sides caused by an American land invasion of Japan would have been much higher. According to the figures quoted above in Chapter Seven, approximately 330,000 Japanese civilians were killed by the American firebombing and atomic bombings combined. At the same time, President Truman’s military advisors were estimating that with a land invasion of Japan the war could last into late 1946 and cause up to a million additional American casualties and far higher Japanese casualties.⁵

Michael Walzer points out that the seeming inescapability of the choice between use of the atomic bomb and a land invasion presupposes the absolute character of the war aim of unconditional surrender followed by an American occupation. While such a war aim was morally imperative in the case of Nazi Germany, he argues, it was not so in the case of Japan. The firebombing, the atomic bombings, *and* the planned land invasion of the Japanese home islands could have been avoided by peace negotiations once American forces had established effective control of the seas around Japan:

The Japanese case is sufficiently different from the German so that unconditional surrender should never have been asked. Japan’s rulers were engaged in a more ordinary sort of military expansion, and all that was morally required was that they be defeated, not that they be conquered and totally overthrown. ... In any case, if killing millions (or many thousands) was militarily necessary for their conquest and overthrow, then it was morally necessary—in order not to kill those people—to settle for something less.”

Persuasive as Walzer’s argument here may be, the thought-experiment of granting the moral imperative of unconditional surrender in the case of Japan brings up the most difficult question of all. Was it morally justified to kill approximately 330,000 Japanese noncombatants by the combination of firebombing and atomic bombing to avoid the likely deaths of millions of combatants on both sides that would have ensued in a land invasion of the home islands?

The different ethical traditions considered in this study will give different answers to this question. A Utilitarian or a Classical Realist will likely approve of both the firebombing and atomic bombings as the most effective and least abhorrent course on the basis of the numbers alone. A Christian Realist might give reluctant approval while regretting the necessity of having to perform such evil actions in a sinful situation. An Absolute Pacifist will refuse the premise of the question, arguing that eschewing all wars from the beginning would obviate the necessity of having to make such horrendous choices. My own position is informed by the natural law ethic undergirding the Just War tradition, which allows for the resort to war in exceptional situations to vindicate justice (jus ad bellum), but which also insists that wars must be fought in such a way as to avoid

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6 Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars, 267-268.
undermining the very principles that justified the resort to force in the first place. This insistence upholds the *jus in bello* norms of discrimination, noncombatant immunity, and proportionality as simple requirements of natural justice – *even when safeguarding civilian populations means accepting higher casualties to one’s own fighting forces.* Just wars must be fought justly. It follows that the firebombing of Japanese cities, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were morally unjustified, however effective they may have proved in actually ending the war on the Allies’ terms. If the unconditional surrender of Japan was a morally imperative war aim, then the Allies should have been prepared to incur the vastly higher costs in combatant casualties that a land invasion would have incurred. If they were not prepared to incur those costs, then, as Walzer rightly suggests, they should have rethought their war aims. But they did not, with the result that the American victory over Japan stands morally tainted by the means by which it was obtained.

The same basic moral argument carries even greater weight in the European theater, where victory ultimately depended upon the combined Allied land forces overrunning Germany from the east and the west. Even if, for the sake of argument, RAF Bomber Command *could* have succeeded in bombing Germany into submission by area attacks on cities, such a strategy would have remained morally unjustifiable. It is to the credit of the strategy’s critics in Britain at the time – including Basil Liddell Hart, Bishop George Bell, and Vera Brittain – that they recognized and bore witness to this truth, even at considerable personal cost to themselves.
Postscript:
The Long-Term Effects of the Bombing

Two points gradually became clear in the course of my research. I have touched on them in passing at various points but have not yet brought them into clear focus. The format of this study led me to focus on three principal British wartime opponents of the area bombing strategy – Basil Liddell Hart, Bishop George Bell, and Vera Brittain – in relation to the ethical traditions that informed their positions but not so much in relation to each other. However, they shared in common at least two principal beliefs concerning the effects of the area bombing.

First, they expressed deep consternation over the policy’s likely impact on the moral character of the British people. That is, their concern was for the bombing’s effects not only on its victims in Germany but also on its perpetrators and supporters in Britain. Bell believed that civilization was in danger of breaking down when nations were capable of such inhumanities. Liddell Hart described the Allied strategy of unconditional surrender, total blockade, and air bombardment as “a reversion to barbarism, and thus a spreading menace to the relatively shallow foundations of civilized life.” In Seed of Chaos, Vera Brittain described the escalation of city bombing as a “descent into barbarism” in which the British would be reduced to the level of their Nazi opponents:

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“Morally, we are already involved in a process of deterioration which displays itself in a loss of sensitivity, and in words and actions showing callous indifference to suffering.”

The opponents of the bombing were incensed at British press reporting that seemed to gloat over the suffering being inflicted on the German population, and they saw the propagation of vindictive and callous attitudes as debasing the moral tone of public discourse. An exchange between Bell and the Oxford classicist Gilbert Murray illustrates this theme. Following the March 1942 raid on Lübeck, Murray wrote to Bell that “the tone of the B.B.C. announcer describing the masses of small houses destroyed in Lübeck really did make on me the impression of a moral degradation – just the sort of thing that most of us thought was likely to happen.” Bell agreed: “It is indeed a degrading thing that what happened at Lübeck should be gloated over as it seemed it was in the tone of the B.B.C. announcer.” Temple shared this concern, writing to Bell that he found the gloating particularly nauseating, although he was inclined to blame it on the press rather than on the “responsible people” directing British policy.

We catch here perhaps echoes of Augustine’s teaching that the sin of war consists not so much in actual killing as in lust for revenge and delight in violence and cruelty.

The critique of the bombing also has close affinities with the tradition of virtue ethics

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9 Murray to Bell, April 19, 1942, Bell Papers, Vol. 369, f. 229.

10 Bell to Murray, May 1, 1942, Bell Papers, Vol. 369, f. 230.

associated with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, and revived in recent years by such ethicists as Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. Briefly, virtue ethics analyzes the morality of actions in terms of their effects – understood as the development of virtuous or vicious habits of conduct – upon the character of the agents repeatedly performing them, whether as individuals or communities. A fruitful topic for further research might be the origins and implications of this belief that the bombing of Germany would morally degrade British civilization, and its interaction with the investigations of virtue ethics.

The second negative effect identified and denounced by the bombing’s opponents involved what they saw as its disastrous long-term consequences for the peace of Europe and the world. They rightly understood the bombing not as an isolated policy but as an integral part of a coordinated Allied strategy consisting also of the total blockade of Europe and the demand for unconditional surrender. They believed that this threefold strategy would convince the Germans to fight to the bitter end rather than surrender unconditionally to those who seemed bent on their annihilation. The “lessons of Versailles” were that a Germany starved and bombed into total defeat would harbor resentments and a thirst for revenge that would sooner or later breed new Hitlers with new expansionist ambitions and policies of aggression.

In 1941, Liddell Hart suggested that while “strategy” aims at winning the current war, “grand strategy” takes the longer view and aims at winning the peace: “it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace you desire.” He concluded by warning of the dangers of embittering the enemy and consolidating his resistance by overly brutal
methods of fighting. Significantly, Liddell Hart later wrote to Bell commending his House of Lords speech as representing “the longer view and the higher wisdom.” Bell himself concluded the House of Lords speech by asking:

How can the War Cabinet fail to see that this progressive devastation of cities is threatening the roots of civilization? How can they be blind to the harvest of even fiercer warring and desolation, even in this country, to which the present destruction will inevitably lead ...? How can they fail to realize that this is not the way to curb military aggression and end war? This is an extraordinarily solemn moment. What we do in war – which, after all, lasts a comparatively short time – affects the whole character of peace, which covers a much longer period.”

Vera Brittain believed that Nazism and Fascism were the products of humiliation and resentment, and that the way to prevent Germany and Japan from pursuing a path of conquest in the future was not to “smash, humiliate, and punish.” Reflecting on conditions in Germany after World War I, Brittain wrote: “[W]e may justly ask what new horror of gangsterdom will ultimately arise from the still greater chaos now being created by the RAF amongst Germany’s population.”

In this respect, however, subsequent history seems to have proven the opponents of the bombing wrong. Almost seventy years after the end of World War II, Germany

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13 Liddell Hart to Bell, February 12, 1944, Bell Papers, Vol. 38, f. 122.
14 G.K.A. Bell, The Church and Humanity 1939-1946 (London: Longmans Green, 1946), 140.
16 Brittain, One Voice, 159.
appears to be a responsible and peaceful member of the European and global communities. Holocaust-denial, circulation of Hitler’s writings, and display of the swastika are crimes that can carry prison time. While neo-Nazism exists in contemporary Germany, it represents a marginal and insignificant force in German politics. The 2012 report of Germany’s Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution estimated the number of right-wing extremists in the country as 23,000, of whom 6,000 were neo-Nazis – respectively less than .03 percent and .007 percent of a total German population of 80.5 million. While mass movements often start from small beginnings, and tiny minorities can exercise influence disproportionate to their numbers, it seems safe to conclude that Neo-Nazism remains a negligible threat in the German context for the time being.

The reasons why wartime predictions of future German revanchisme were not borne out are fairly straightforward. The “lessons of Versailles” were misleading as a guide to what would happen in the postwar world. In the First World War, Germany was defeated but not conquered. After the Armistice of November 11, 1918, the German army withdrew from the front lines and returned home, in many places to a hero’s welcome. The terms of the Versailles Treaty seemed punitive and humiliating, requiring as they did German acknowledgment of war guilt, disarmament, territorial concessions, and reparations. But, apart from the Rhineland, the Allied Powers did not occupy Germany. Although the revolution of 1918-1919 overthrew the Kaiser and established the Weimar Republic, in most respects German society and institutions were left intact. Amidst

17 Verfassungsschutzbericht 2012 (Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, 2012), 56.
rampant inflation and high unemployment, Hitler rose to power by exploiting the resentment of those who found the terms of the peace humiliating, and by scapegoating Jews, Marxists, and others whom they blamed for undermining the German war effort.

By contrast, in World War II, Germany was conquered. No treaty concluded the war because the government of Germany ceased to exist as the Allies took over direct administration of the country. For Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill, the lesson of Versailles was that instead of being left wounded and humiliated, the Nazi regime had to be dismantled and a new German state reconstructed in its place. To that end, Germany was occupied and partitioned among the four occupying powers. Nazi leaders accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity were put on trial and punished. German society was subjected to an extensive program of denazification and re-education. Hitler and the Nazis were discredited in the eyes of most Germans for having led the country into a disastrous war; the full revelation of the horror of the Holocaust went a long way towards sealing that process. Two German states with new constitutions were established in the East and West respectively. In West Germany, the perceived threat of Soviet attack encouraged a spirit of cooperation and friendship with the former enemies France, Britain, and the United States. Rather than nursing grievances against the victors, most West Germans wanted simply to forget the past and get on with the tasks of rebuilding.

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and economic reconstruction. By the time of German reunification in 1990, there was little danger of any revival of the ideology that had led Germany to war in the 1930s.

In retrospect, Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill had the better understanding of what was truly required to prevent a resurgence of Nazism and territorial expansionism in the Germany of the future. But even if Liddell Hart, Bell, and Brittain were wrong about unconditional surrender, they were right in their moral critique of the area bombing. The bombing did have negative long-term consequences that even its opponents did not fully anticipate at the time. The bombing of German and Japanese cities set the precedent for the use of atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Subsequently, during the Cold War, deterrence relied upon the mutual threats of the superpowers to attack each other’s cities with nuclear weapons. The threat was credible partly because during the Second World War the Allies and the Axis actually had bombed the civilian populations of each other’s cities. One can only ponder the morally degrading effects on a civilization relying for its peace on the threat to kill millions of innocent people at the push of a button. If nuclear deterrence succeeded in keeping a peace of sorts during the Cold War, it did so at that high moral cost of threatening the unthinkable and unimaginable.

More recently, in the post 9/11 world, terrorism has become an object of widespread moral repugnance. Terrorism has been aptly defined as random violence aimed at killing innocent civilians for the purpose of intimidating and influencing the political behavior of those not killed.\textsuperscript{19} Bombing cities with the objective of breaking

civilian morale and pressuring the enemy government to sue for peace fits such a
definition precisely. During World War II, such bombing was sometimes referred to as
“terror-bombing,” and after Dresden Churchill himself acknowledged it as such. Later,
during the Cold War, mutual nuclear deterrence was aptly described as “the balance of
terror.” Unfortunately, contemporary terrorists are able to look back at such military
policies and claim a precedent for their own crimes against humanity.

Against this background, in addition to arguing that the area bombing was wrong,
it is all the more important to be able to demonstrate historically that significant voices
were raised in protest against it at the time, drawing on the best ethical traditions
available to them. Part of the purpose of studying these ethical traditions is to enable new
prophetic voices to be raised against similar violations of justice in the future. If I have
succeeded in stimulating reflection about the possible revival of such thoughtful protest
in comparable circumstances, then my efforts in this study have been worthwhile.
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VITA

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An ordained priest in the Episcopal Church, John D. Alexander has been Rector of Saint Stephen’s Church in Providence, Rhode Island since 2000.

John was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1958. When he was five, his family emigrated to the United States, and he grew up in the Philadelphia area. He attended the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, where he entered the five-year B.A.-M.A. program in International Relations, the final two years of which he spent at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (S.A.I.S.) in Washington D.C., receiving his B.A. (Phi Beta Kappa) in 1979 and his M.A. in 1980. During the 1980s, John worked for the International Division of Electronic Data Systems Corporation (EDS) in assignments in Dallas, Texas; London, England; and Herndon, Virginia.

After being granted Postulancy for Ordination to the Priesthood in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, John entered Virginia Theological SemINARY in Alexandria. He graduated with the Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree and was ordained to the Diaconate in 1992. The following year, he was ordained to the Priesthood while serving as Curate at Saint Mary’s Episcopal Church in Wayne, Pennsylvania.

From 1994 to 2000, John served as Rector of the Church of the Ascension in Staten Island, New York. During this time, he experienced a longing to return to academic study and started taking summer courses at Nashotah House Theological
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