

Christian Ethics. How Should We Live?

10. *Applied Ethics: War and the Quest for Peace*

Sunday, July 31, 2005
9 to 9:50 am, in the Parlor.
Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

O God, the Father of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth: deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Book of Common Prayer, p. 816

An Introduction to
**CHRISTIAN
ETHICS**

Fourth Edition

ROGER H. CROOK

- **An Introduction to Christian Ethics (4th Edition)**, Roger H. Crook. Prentice Hall, 2001. ISBN: 0-130-34149-5 Chapter 13: “War and the Quest for Peace”
- Dr. Crook is Emeritus professor and former chair of the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Meredith College

Christian Ethics

An Introduction

Edited by
Bernard Hoose

- “Peace, violence and war” by Richard G Jones, in: **Christian Ethics: An Introduction**. Edited by Bernard Hoose, A Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1998. ISBN: 0-8146-5929-2.
- Richard G Jones taught Christian ethics at Manchester, England, is former President of the Methodist Conference, and is currently editor of the *Epworth Review*.

The Bible and War

The Bible and War

Introduction

- Christians have struggled over the morality of war since the beginning of the church.
- Looking at Scripture for guidance, we can find support for several different ethical approaches to war.

The Bible and War

The Old Testament

- In the struggle of God's chosen people, the Hebrews, for the promised land, the rightness of war as a means to fulfill the promise seems to be presumed.
 - They had to conquer a land already occupied by others and establish in that land a new nation.
- They often felt that their faithfulness to God was reflected in their success or failure.
 - When the people were faithful, God rewarded them with victory over their enemies
 - When the people were unfaithful, God allowed their enemies to win in order to punish the people.

The Bible and War

The Old Testament

- War was seen as a tool of God (“mighty in battle”) working in human history.
 - Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah spoke of God’s punishing the Hebrews for their unfaithfulness by letting foreign powers oppress them.
 - Obadiah gloated over the destruction of Edom, calling it God’s vengeance against a nation who had warred against God’s chosen people.
 - Nahum gloated over the destruction of Ninevah (capital of the Assyrian empire) after their long oppression of the Hebrews.

The Bible and War

The Old Testament

- Yet one also finds in the Prophets profound and poetic passages emphasizing:
 - God's love for all people.
 - The hope and expectation of a time of universal peace.

The Bible and War

The Old Testament

- “... they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (identical passage in Isaiah 2:4 *and* Micah 4:3, NRSV)

The Bible and War

The Old Testament

- Isaiah 11:6-9 NRSV, “The Peaceable Kingdom:”

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.

They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD.

The Bible and War

The Gospels

- The New Testament says very little directly about war.
- Many of Jesus' teachings about love of others have been cited as being incompatible with war.
- Mark 12:29-31 NRSV (Jesus telling the scribes the Greatest Commandment) **“The first is ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”**

The Bible and War

The Gospels

- **Matthew 5:43-45 NRSV: “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, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”**

The Bible and War

The Gospels

- Beatitude on peacemakers, Matthew 5:9
NRSV: **“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.”**

The Bible and War

The Gospels

- Jesus on non-retaliation, Matthew 5:38-42, NRSV:
“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 an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”

The Bible and War

The Gospels

- Jesus teaching the Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12, NRSV **“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the law and the prophets.”**
- In addition to these passages,
 - Jesus’ non-violent self sacrifice on the cross, and
 - his love for the tax collectors and sinners and others despised by society,are felt by some to build a strong case that no follower and imitator of Jesus could morally participate in war.

The Bible and War

The Gospels

- Other Christians find passages that suggest that Jesus was not completely non-violent.
- Jesus used force to cleanse the temple of the money changers and merchants (Matthew 21:12-13; John 2:13-16)
- Jesus in Matthew 10:34, NRSV reminds us:
“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

The Bible and War

The Gospels

- Jesus' statement at his arrest in Luke 22:36-37
NRSV: **“But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted among the lawless’; ...”**

The Bible and War

The Gospels

- Jesus also seem to accept the reality of war without being judgmental
 - He praised the faith of the Roman centurion without lecturing him on his profession (Matthew 8:5-10).
 - He frequently used military figures of speech.

The Bible and War

The Letters of Paul

- Paul tried to summarize Jesus' teachings about how to live with others in a passage in Romans 12:14-21, NRSV:

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

The Bible and War

The Letters of Paul

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Just War Theory

Just War Theory

Origins

- For the first three centuries of the church, there was a strong pacifist movement in Christianity.
 - Many early Christians felt Jesus' teachings prohibited participation in war, and refused to serve in the Roman army.
- After Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion, and the empire faced invasions from barbarian tribes in the north, Christian theologians struggled over what might constitute a “just” war.

Just War Theory

Origins

- A “Just War Theory” was developed, beginning with **St. Ambrose of Milan** (340 to 397) then **St. Augustine** (354-430), and finally refined by **St. Thomas Aquinas** (1224-1274).
- The theory had two parts:
 - The Decision to Commence War (*jus ad bellum*)
 - The Appropriate Conduct of War (*jus in bello*)

Just War Theory

Requirements for Commencement of War

- 1. There must be some just cause for the war.
- 2. There must be just intent.
 - The war must be intended for the advancement of good or the avoidance of evil.
- 3. The war must a last resort.
 - Every possibility for a peaceful settlement must first be exhausted.
- 4. There must be good prospects for success in achieving the good intent.
- 5. It must be conducted by a legitimate governing authority, not a faction within a nation.

Just War Theory

Requirements for the Conduct of War

- 1. The innocent must not be directly attacked, but only the army of the enemy.
 - Wanton destruction and atrocities against civilians are prohibited.
- 2. The means must be proportional to the ends.
 - The harm caused by the war must not exceed the good it hopes to achieve.
 - Huge destructive forces should not be deployed against a small enemy. Unnecessary destruction, looting, massacres are prohibited.

Just War Theory

Criticisms

- War usually arises from a tangle of reasons; specifying the “just cause” is often a moral fiction.
- The “just intent” is also often a moral fiction, since wars are usually motivated by a variety of national policy concerns.
- A war’s outcome and probability of success cannot be calculated: wars have a terrible dynamic of own, and unpredictable elements quickly dominate once a war has begun.

Just War Theory

Criticisms

- A war's conduct is not easily controlled:
 - In a crucible of life and death, combatants will use whatever strategy they can to stay alive and kill the enemy.
 - Wars can quickly become “all out” affairs.

Christian Attitudes to Participation in War

Attitudes Toward Participation

Three Attitudes

- Three attitudes to Christian participation in war:
 - 1. It is a responsibility of citizenship
 - 2. Participation in any war is immoral: pacifism
 - 3. Some wars are necessary as the lesser of two evils, and require “agonized participation”

Attitudes Toward Participation

A Responsibility of Citizenship

- 1. Participation in war is a responsibility of citizenship.
 - Resistance to the state is justified only if the state claims ultimate authority and assumes the place of God.
 - Paul in Romans 13:1-2 NRSV said **“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”**

Attitudes Toward Participation

Pacifism

- 2. Pacifism. Commitment to Jesus prohibits participation in war.
 - God intends people to live in peace, and we must therefore live in peace with others in grateful obedience to the God of love.
 - Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor, and war can never be an expression of love.

Attitudes Toward Participation

Agonized Participation

- 3. “Agonized Participation”
 - War is horrible, but is sometimes the lesser of two evils.
 - Christians must not give unconditional support to any government, but must individually evaluate the situation, and support their government in those wars that are necessary.

Attitudes Toward Participation

Agonized Participation

- 3. “Agonized Participation.” Edward LeRoy Long described this view in *War and Conscience in America* as:
 - This position believes that while war can never be an act of justice it may sometimes be necessary for the prevention of a greater evil that would result from permitting morally perverse power to gain political dominance. (p. 41)
 - The agonized participant insists that war must be conducted with contrition and kept free of vindictive hatred for the enemy. (p. 44)

Attitudes Toward Participation

Agonized Participation

- 3. “Agonized Participation.” Edward LeRoy Long described this view in *War and Conscience in America* as:
 - **Military victory, while necessary, is but a negative attainment that clears the way for subsequent political and social programs designed to establish justice and order. (p. 45)**
 - **Lastly, the agonized participant acknowledges the right and privilege of conscientious objection to war even though he disagrees with those Christians who consider themselves called to this witness. (p. 46)**

Issues Raised by Modern Warfare

Modern Warfare

The Consummation of Human History

- The traditional Christian view of the end time is that the consummation of human history will be God's climactic act, to be anticipated in hope.
- But in the last century, with the development of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, it has become feasible for the consummation of human history to be our own act, which will not inaugurate the new heaven and new earth, but simply exterminate human life in the creation.
- How should this reality change our views on the morality of war, of what is a "just" war?

Modern Warfare

Political Approaches to Nuclear Weapons

- There have been two political approaches to the use of nuclear weapons in the West.
 - 1. “Mutual Assured Destruction”
 - We had to keep our nuclear arsenal equal to the Soviet Union’s, so that any nuclear attack would evoke such a massive retaliatory strike that no nuclear attack could be rationally contemplated.
 - 2. Limited Tactical Use of Nuclear Weapons
 - Since a surprise conventional Soviet attack against West Germany could overwhelm the conventional forces of that nation, NATO maintained intermediate range nuclear weapons throughout Europe that were to be used to counter such a Soviet conventional attack.

Modern Warfare

Political Approaches to Nuclear Weapons

- With the reunification of Germany and the “end” of the Cold War, the dynamics driving these policies have eased but not disappeared.

Modern Warfare

Morality of Using Nuclear Weapons

- Christians have been divided over the questions:
 - Is it moral to keep nuclear weapons as a deterrent to opponents?
 - Is it ever right to use them in a first strike?
 - Is it ever right to use them in a counterattack?

Modern Warfare

Morality of Using Nuclear Weapons

- The Anglican Synod of 1982 was presented a report *The Church and the Bomb* which said:
 - Nuclear warfare is immoral
 - Negotiation from the strength of a big nuclear arsenal is an “unsatisfactory philosophy” because it leads to an arms race of leapfrogging capacity for destruction.
 - Urged Britain to give up nuclear weapons in phased manner and work for multi-lateral disarmament.
- Report led to huge debates and was never accepted.
 - A resolution that nuclear warfare was immoral did pass, although a minority strongly opposed even that resolution.

Modern Warfare

Morality of Using Nuclear Weapons

- US Catholic Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter in 1983 *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and our Response* which said:
 - A “deterrence” based on balance, no more than sufficient to deter, and intended as a step on the way to disarmament was morally acceptable
 - Not all “deterrence” was moral: targeting civilian centers with missiles for example was immoral.
 - Any first-strike use of nuclear weapons was immoral.
 - Urged immense energies be devoted to arms reduction and the strengthening of peace-keeping organizations like the UN.
- Report annoyed the Reagan administration.

Modern Warfare

Morality of Using Nuclear Weapons

- United Methodist Council of Bishops in 1984 issued a Pastoral Letter *In Defense of Creation*:
 - Declared the deterrence policy was an “idolatry” that put our pride and faith in nuclear weapons rather than God, that perpetuated “the most distorted and more inhuman images of our ‘enemy.’”

Modern Warfare

Peacekeeping Efforts

- The immense destructive power of modern nuclear, chemical and biological weapons make Christian efforts for peacekeeping an even deeper responsibility:
 - Peacekeeping must be more than deciding whether or not to go to war when a conflict has boiled over.
 - Peacekeeping must include nurturing all those things that make for peace in world and prevent conflicts from growing.