

The Christian Perspective on War; The Activist Position

I. The Biblical View of War.

A. Old Testament.

The three God-ordained purposes of human government

1. To maintain justice in the fear of God (Deut.16:18-20; Prov. 8:15,16)
2. To punish disobedience to the law fairly and impartially (Prov. 17:15; Deut. 17:8-13)
3. To defend the poor and destitute who cannot defend themselves from evildoers (Prov. 31:8,9; Ps. 146:7-9)

B. New Testament

When Christ enjoins us not to resist evil (Matt 5:39), He does not forbid self-defense, but rather vengeance motivated by personal resentment or hurt pride. This passage is clearly meant to apply to individuals rather than to nations.

In Romans 13:1-4, governments are clearly authorized to use coercion, including deadly force if need be, to ensure that justice prevails.

(Side note: Paul often refers to himself as a soldier - would Paul do that if he thought that the role of a soldier was evil?)

II. The Just War Theory.

A. Augustine

Augustine is generally credited with having introduced the just war theory to Christian ethics. Much of what Augustin has to say was said four centuries earlier by Roman jurist and philosopher Cicero

B. Luther

Luther compares the practice of warfare by an army to the practice of surgery by a physician

C. Calvin .

He supports the right of government not only to punish evildoers within its borders, but also the right to wage war against foreign powers which threaten its people.

D. The Just War Criteria

1. Just Cause -- National self-defense is permitted; aggression never is.
2. Just Intention -- The ultimate goal must be peace for all involved .
3. Last Resort -- This does not mean that all possible measures have to be attempted if there is no reasonable expectation that they will be accepted
4. Formal Declaration -- This ensures that the use of armed force is being initiated by a government (which has authority to declare war) as opposed to a private party (which does not) .

5. Reasonable Hope of Success -- An exception is often made in the case of self-defense
6. Proportionality -- The goal in war should be to neutralize the enemy's threat to peace and justice; the goal should not be to obliterate the nation on from existence
7. Noncombatant Immunity -- Individuals not contributing directly to the war effort, such as civilians, POW's, and casualties, should be immune from attack. However, some destruction of innocent lives is unavoidable.

III. Nuclear War .

A. Definition of Nuclear Deterrence. (Defensive posture)

Henry Kissinger has defined deterrence as *"the attempt to keep an opponent from adopting a certain course of action by posing risks which seem to him out of proportion to any gains to be achieved."*

B. The Catholic Church

1. The Catholic Church in America

- a) The Just War Theory is still pertinent in the nuclear age, but so is the attitude of non-violent resistance.
- b) The Just War Theory criterion that requires immunity of noncombatants dictates that nuclear weapons should never be targeted on urban areas - and threatening to do so is also immoral.
- c) First use of nuclear weapons is immoral no matter what the circumstances.

2. Evangelical Reaction to the American Bishops' Letter.

a) The Joint Just War Theory/Non-violent Resistance Approach.

The bishops' advocacy of non-violent resistance as a national strategy is particularly vexing to evangelicals since it revolves around interpretation of Scripture. Evangelicals strongly resist the Catholic tendency to set up a dichotomy between the teachings of the Old and New Testaments. Most conservative evangelicals also strongly object to the bishops' use of the Sermon on the Mount to the virtual exclusion of all other New Testament texts. Evangelicals also charge that continued endorsement of the Just War Theory is inappropriate in the context of the nuclear age.

- b) Non-Combatant immunity. No compassionate person wants to see innocent people killed during an outbreak of war, (Union Army Field Manual - Francis Lever) but given the nature of modern warfare, such deaths are unavoidable.
- c) No First-Use Policy. James Dougherty: *"The essence of a credible deterrent is a threat and a known capacity to carry out the threat."*

3. The Catholic Church in France.

Unlike their American counterparts, the French Catholic Bishops have endorsed the concept of nuclear deterrence *"on the grounds that the state has a moral duty to*

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C. The Conservative Evangelical Viewpoint.

1. War should always be a last resort

2. The free world cannot currently compete with the Soviet Union in the domain of conventional warfare
3. We have a need for deterrence because we cannot trust the Soviet Union and men like Khomeini and Kadhafi (or any other ideological despots)
4. Nuclear deterrence is the only moral and rational choice." We must be willing to use nuclear weapons if necessary.

IV. Conclusion

It is not God's will that as a nation we be defenseless. God has instituted human government to maintain justice and peace on earth, but not peace at the expense of justice. Luther was right in saying that the plague of war prevents the much more pernicious plague of human greed and viciousness from consuming us all. A nation which backs down from its responsibility to defend its citizens shall have to give an account for itself, just as surely as the nation which fails to provide for its poor.

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