***Is just war an option? Deborah Broome***

Is it ever a Christian response to go to war? That question, and the related one about whether a follower of Jesus can be a soldier, hover underneath the topic of today’s seminar. In many Christian circles the answers to those questions are a resounding No: the default option is pacifism. There is a presumption against war. That old stand-by ‘What would Jesus do?’ is answered by ‘Jesus would never go to war’, accompanied by references to ‘turning the other cheek’. Yet there is another strand within Christianity, with a long and honourable pedigree, that would give a different response to these questions: the Just War tradition, and it is that to which I turn. I have found, incidentally, during the process of preparing this paper, that the Just War tradition is not well known, so I will include in this some of the basics about this line of thinking.

First, let me clear up a couple of frequent misconceptions. The Just War tradition might also, and perhaps more accurately, be described as ‘Justified War’: when is recourse to fighting *justified*? It is not an affirmation of militarism in general, nor is it getting into the realms of what is sometimes called ‘Holy War’, a war characterised by a crusade mentality that assumes that one side, wholly righteous, is fighting a war ‘on God’s side against God’s enemies.’[[1]](#footnote-1) Central to the thinking behind the Just War tradition is the view that although war is a tragic necessity, it may in certain circumstances be justified. War is certainly not a good thing – but in particular situations it may be less bad than other options. As Richard Harries puts it, ‘Moral judgements have to be made. Some things are better than others, but all are flawed.’[[2]](#footnote-2) Moreover war, even when it is justified, is never waged by the simply righteous against the simply unrighteous: it is always one set of sinners versus another.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Another misconception common to those who approach questions of peace and war from a Christian perspective is that there is no biblical justification for recourse to war, or more particularly that this is solely to be found within the Old Testament. Leaving to one side the incipient Marcionism that would see the Old Testament as a bad place to look for a theological perspective on anything, it is clear that war is, at some times, not only permitted but also commanded. There is a time for war as well as a time for peace (Eccl 3:8). We cannot ignore the warfare that was a part of the life of God’s people, and while we may well deplore those ‘kill all the Canaanites’ passages we would be hard-pressed to disregard the way the hand of God is seen explicitly as fighting on behalf of the Hebrews, from the flight from Egypt, to the conquest of the promised land, and afterwards. Some of those wars were defensive ones when Israel was attacked by belligerent foreign nations, others were more pre-emptive strikes (eg against the Philistines 2 Sam 5: 17-25), but still others were clearly aggressive campaigns, the most obvious being those aimed at dislodging the nations that were already living in the promised land (eg Josh 6 and 10). There were times when Israel was commanded by God to wage war: when it came to accomplishing God’s purposes for the chosen nation, military might was one item in the divine toolkit. But – significantly – there were limits. One of the things that was so wrong about David’s scheming against Uriah the Hittite was the way he used a military campaign to bring about his death.

Anyone who is embarrassed by the ‘God with us’ rhetoric of the Old Testament (and yes, there are parts of the Old Testament that do seem embarrassing) and who turns with relief towards the New Testament, expecting to find a consistent pacifism, will be disappointed. Firstly, there are all those ‘soldier passages’, places where soldiers make an appearance but their profession is in no way condemned. Soldiers asked John the Baptist what they should do, and he replied, ‘Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusations, and be satisfied with your wages’. (Luke 3:14-15) There is nothing about repenting from their profession or abandoning it. Jesus heals a centurion’s servant and marvels at his faith, without calling him to leave that occupation (Matt 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-10). Indeed there is quite a procession of good centurions, including the one at the foot of the cross who is first to recognise Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 15:39), and Cornelius, a crucial early Gentile convert (Acts 10). It’s worth noting that when the Ephesian magicians became believers they publicly burned their magic books (Acts 19:18-20) but there is absolutely nothing to indicate that Cornelius likewise renounced his military profession.[[4]](#footnote-4) The New Testament does not seem to regard being a solder as something incompatible with Christian discipleship.

Secondly, there is Romans 13, the passage that begins, ‘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’ and continues ‘for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.’ (Rom 13:1, 4) Paul does not object in principle to the use of lethal force by duly appointed authorities. Then there is the ‘whole armour of God’ passage in Ephesians (6:10-20), which only works if you consider that the writer was not opposed to the exercise of military force. Thirdly, there is the way Jesus is presented in Revelation, as a mighty warrior, striking down the nations with a sharp sword. Love, justice and fighting go hand in hand complete with graphic imagery (Rev 11:11-16). Those within the tradition of Christian Pacifism ground their views in the Gospels, and that is well and good, but they cannot claim that the New Testament speaks univocally on the subject of peace and war.

What both Christian Pacifists and Christian exponents of the Just War tradition agree on is the strength of the command to love, in the New Testament especially. Where they differ, of course, is how that command is applied. We are to love our neighbours as ourselves. As Nigel Biggar notes, ‘just war doctrine’s claim to belong to a *Christian* ethic rests on its conception of the right use of violence as an expression of love for the neighbour.’[[5]](#footnote-5) If one’s neighbour is the innocent victim of unjust aggression, love will motivate the just warrior to take up arms in defence of that neighbour, to prevent further harm or to remedy that which has occurred already. But the unjust aggressor – as neighbour or, indeed, as enemy – is also to be loved: how does that work?

Augustine’s view is that the just warrior is to love the enemy / unjust aggressor by refraining from seeking revenge, since this would be repaying evil for evil (Rom 12:17); and also by ‘correcting with a certain benevolent severity’ which is out of concern for the aggressors’ welfare rather than their wishes. Such a benevolent severity (sometimes translated ‘benevolent harshness’) is exercised within the state by the civil authorities. Wars are carried on by a Christian state with the ‘benevolent design’ that once the opposing nation has been conquered, the two countries may peacefully relate to one another in terms of godliness and justice. Securing peace is thus a key aim of just warfare. Augustine held that a defeated enemy actually benefits from their defeat, since what they lose is the freedom which they have abused by using it to do wrong.[[6]](#footnote-6) The just warrior views going to war as a means of seeking justice and peace for neighbours, including enemy neighbours, and thus as an expression of love for them.

Central to Just War thinking is a concern for justice – which is, we should remember, a divine attribute. Acting to correct or to prevent injustice is the key motivation. As Augustine put it, ‘For it is the injustice of the opposing side that lays on the wise man the duty of waging wars.’[[7]](#footnote-7) Where the Pacifist tradition is based on a presumption against warfare (and against force in general) the Just War tradition is grounded on a presumption against injustice. For Augustine, justice was connected with order: its concern was the right ordering of society for the sake of peace. He makes a distinction between a just peace and an unjust peace, the latter pertaining to the wicked, who hate the just peace of God and seek to impose their own dominion on others, in place of God’s rule.[[8]](#footnote-8) One goes to war to secure peace – one enters into war justly in order to secure a just peace, and this is connected to love of one’s neighbour. Often called the father of the Christian Just War tradition, because of his early setting out of what were to become key criteria, Augustine was realistic about war and did not take it lightly. His view was that, ‘it is a higher glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war. For those who fight, if they are good men, doubtless seek for peace; nevertheless it is through blood.’[[9]](#footnote-9)

Fast forward a few hundred years and we get to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who drew on Augustine and of course on Scripture. Aquinas considered that ‘in order for a war to be just, three things are necessary’: the authority of the sovereign, just cause and right intention.[[10]](#footnote-10) He was clear that it is not the business of a private individual to declare war: war is a public matter, carried on by those in authority over a city or kingdom and not by private citizens. Just cause is connected with the wrongful action of the opponent, while a rightful intention is the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil. For Aquinas, ‘those who wage war justly aim at peace.’ War was permitted to recover what has been stolen, to punish or restrain evil or to protect the innocent from harm.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Martin Luther (1483-1546) also addressed the question of warfare, and the place of Christians serving in the army in his pamphlets ‘Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved’ and ‘Temporal Authority’. He, like Aquinas, Augustine, and Ambrose before him, believed that bearing the sword was not incompatible with Christian discipleship. Luther is realistic about the negativity of war, but considered that it was justified by the good that it gave rise to.

Even so when I consider the work of war, punishing the wicked, slaying wrong doers, and causing so much misery, it seems to be a very un-Christian work and directly contrary to Christian love; but when I consider how it protects the good, women and children, homes, property and honor, and sustains and preserves the peace withal, then it appears how precious and divine the work is, and I see that it too cuts off an arm or a leg to save the whole body. For if the sword did not keep the peace and prevent, riot would needs ruin everything in the world. Therefore such a war is nothing else than a small and brief breach of the peace to prevent a long and limitless breach of the peace, a small misfortune to prevent a great one. All that is said and written about the war being a great curse is true; but at the same time people ought to consider how much greater is the curse that is prevented by war.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Many writers have contributed to the development of the Just War tradition: in the time available I will mention several only briefly. Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) addressed the issue of warfare as a duty of love. War, though inevitable, is not always evil, and not intrinsically forbidden to Christians. Conditions for it to be just include righting a wrong and a declaration by a lawful authority. Immunity should be granted to non-combatants.[[13]](#footnote-13) Hugo Grotius (1583-1646), the Dutch legal theorist, further refined Just War thinking. He believed ‘we should never undertake a war except for the prosecution of Right, nor should we wage it except within the limits of Right and good faith.’[[14]](#footnote-14) This shows a concern not only for whether one should go to war, but also for the issue of how it should be waged. More on this later. One of the contributions made by Grotius was to add to, and further refine, the criteria which must be satisfied in order for a war to be just, including an understanding of the right to self-defence. It is to the criteria that we now turn.

***Jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello***

The Just War tradition sets out particular conditions and criteria to be met before military action takes place, and to govern the conduct of the war. These two branches are denoted by the terms *jus ad bellum* (right in going to war) and *jus in bello* (right in war). As generally understood today, *jus ad bellum* has seven principles which are necessary for entering into a just war: the war must

* have a **just cause**
* be waged by a **legitimate authority**
* with a **right intention**
* be entered into as a **last resort**
* with **overall proportionality**
* be undertaken only if there is a **reasonable chance of success**
* be waged **in pursuit of peace**.

Once the war is begun, for it to be waged justly there must be

* **discrimination** (avoiding intentional harm to non-combatants)
* **proportionality of means**

We will work through these in turn, alongside some examples of where these criteria have (or have not) been met.

***Jus ad bellum*: the decision to go to war**

**Just cause**

Going to war for a just cause is crucial. As Nigel Biggar notes ‘Without just cause nothing that follows can be justified, even if it can be more or less virtuous.’ As an example, he comments that the fact that some fought honourably on the Nazi side during World War II did not make their cause just.[[15]](#footnote-15) In Christian tradition just cause involves an injustice that must be restrained or put right, and that injustice must be severe. Richard Harries, applying the Just War criteria in the context of armed liberation struggles in the 1960s, is blunt: ‘It is not enough that there is tyranny. The tyranny must be long-standing and intolerable.’[[16]](#footnote-16) The idea is that the basic order of justice has been violated and the just warrior is therefore acting to put right the grave injustice that has been perpetrated.

So there must be a severe injustice or injury that a nation or people group can identify as having been inflicted on them. Having its territory invaded and annexed by another country would fit this criterion, so a defensive war fought to throw out a foreign invader would be just. But what if it’s not your country that has been invaded? Love of neighbour provides for going to war to right a grave wrong done to another country. Into this category fall the beginning of World War II (the Allies responding to Germany’s invasion of Poland), the first Gulf War (responding to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait) and the second Gulf War. Many (but not all) commentators consider that atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein’s regime against its own people – including the murder of perhaps close to half a million people in the years 1988-2003 – constitute sufficient just cause for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Legitimate Authority**

Back in Aquinas’s day, private wars, piracy and vandalism were common, and so he emphasised order and proper authority, believing that war could only be waged legitimately by sovereign authorities, acting on behalf of the community. The Christian tradition, taking its cue especially from Romans 13, rules out anarchic violence.[[18]](#footnote-18) There is a presumption here that the authority (whether king, prince or – in our day – president, or government) is not despotic. The issue of who has the ability to declare war and to commit troops in order to punish or remedy a grave injustice takes political responsibility seriously. It is a matter of having both a legal authority to do so and what is frequently termed the moral authority. In some countries there is a legal requirement for the government to obtain specific parliamentary consent to troop deployments abroad; this applies in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Spain and Sweden before deploying troops abroad in some or all circumstances. (There may be exceptions in the case of emergencies or for certain types of deployments.) In other countries without such a legal requirement there is nonetheless a convention that Parliament should have the opportunity to debate the matter before troops are committed. In Canada, if Parliament is not in session it must be summoned when a decision is made to place Canadian forces on active service. In New Zealand there is no legal requirement for the government to obtain Parliament’s consent to deployments of troops abroad, but it has generally been the practice over at least the last 25 years (perhaps longer) for significant initial commitments of troops to overseas operations to be debated in Parliament. Sometimes these debates have been initiated by the government and sometimes by the opposition; they have taken place both before and after the announcements of decisions on deployments.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Until relatively recently, and in the absence of a body to arbitrate between states, legitimate authority was vested in the government of each state. Since the founding of the United Nations that body has come to be looked on by many as the necessary one for the authorising of military action, while others understand this right as remaining with nation states. This dilemma – and it is a major area of disagreement – is recognised in the UN Charter:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security. (Article 51)

The UN Security Council has authorised the use of military force to reverse or repel aggression by one State against another on only two occasions: against Korea (1950-53) and against Iraq (1990-91, the first Gulf War). Other UN-mandated peacekeeping operations (Kosovo, East Timor, the Congo) have been dependent on member states volunteering their military services.[[20]](#footnote-20) One of the debates around the second Gulf War was whether the criterion of legitimate authority was met, given that there was no UN Security Council resolution specifically authorising the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

**Right Intention**

Right intention is about motives. Harries has described this as ‘the most nebulous of traditional just war criteria,’[[21]](#footnote-21) and it is perhaps easier to illustrate this by noting what does *not* count as right intention. Starting a war to assuage wounded pride, or for revenge, or for territorial expansion or imperial ambition are not right motives; neither is to bring about by force a country’s transition to a democratic form of government (since such force would be incompatible with the idea of democracy). Right intention is linked to just cause: the identified just cause should constitute the basic motive for waging that war – otherwise the goals of the war will be independent of its cause and thus the war would be about something other than remedying an injustice.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Several commentators hold that the United States did not have ‘right intention’ for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, considering the motive for conflict to have been the securing of oil supplies, while some expressed the same critique over the first Gulf War, namely the need to safeguard oil supplies from Kuwait in 1990-1991. It is acknowledged that governments are likely to have a number of reasons for embarking on a particular war. Oil may or may not have been a consideration in both of these conflicts, but for the majority of Just War thinkers the action involved in embarking on the first Gulf War did meet the criteria related to punishing and remedying a grave injustice. Others hold the same view in respect of the second Gulf War: it’s an area of considerable debate.[[23]](#footnote-23)

**Last Resort**

One of the conditions, in taking the decision to go to war justly is that military action must be undertaken as a last resort. We should be clear about what this does and does not mean: it does not mean waiting for ever, embarking on a war only when every other possible alternative has been tried and found wanting. Some possible alternatives to conflict have no reasonable chance of succeeding, and going down such a route would simply be a waste of time. Continuing to engage in yet more rounds of negotiation with an opponent who has already shown bad faith is likewise counter-productive, and this I think was one of the factors behind the declaration of war against Hitler in 1939. Neville Chamberlain had negotiated an accord with Hitler that he said signalled ‘peace for our time’ in September 1938; less than a year later Germany invaded Poland: ‘last resort’ did not mean yet more negotiations to produce yet another ‘scrap of paper’. Moreover a delay while further alternatives to declaring war are tried can sometimes result in higher casualties: sometimes an early and decisive use of force can give a better – that is, less costly – outcome than a hesitation which gives the enemy time to grow stronger, or to acquire more territory.[[24]](#footnote-24)

What the Just War tradition means by ‘last resort’ is that alternative means of resolving the conflict – that is, of righting the injustice – short of recourse to military action must, *within reason*, be pursued before the decision is taken to go to war. We are not dealing with an exact science here, and this is an area where judgements need to be weighed up. There is a spectrum between the extremes, on one hand, of a precipitate and illegal military action begun before any real attempt has been made to resolve the issue by peaceful means and, on the other, by a delay so long that the cost in both people’s lives and in money and materiel rises too high.[[25]](#footnote-25) David Biggar has analysed the decision to invade Iraq in March 2003, and found that it met the test of last resort: the policy of containment against the atrocious regime of Saddam Hussein was not working, and there was a widespread belief that Saddam possessed biological and chemical weapons and was seeking to acquire nuclear ones. The belief in the presence of WMD in Iraq was reasonable at the time; that it subsequently was found not to be the case does not alter the judgement that led to the decision taken at that time. Hindsight is a fine thing.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**Overall Proportionality**

Anyone contemplating going to war needs to assess whether the costs incurred, in terms of casualties and general destruction, will be in proportion to remedying the injustice at the heart of the just cause. Do the evils unleashed by resorting to war outweigh the evils that already exist?[[27]](#footnote-27) What is the cost of doing nothing? All of this involves making a judgement about the worth of the cause and whether that cause justifies the loss of human life, the destruction of basic human values, damage to property and to a country’s economy, and a whole range of other factors, in both the short- and the long-term.[[28]](#footnote-28) Overall Proportionality, therefore is sometimes known as ‘proportionality of ends’. It acknowledges that countries should not embark on a war over matters that are trivial. Coming to a judgement on such questions is more art than science. As Tony Blair has written, ‘The leader has to decide whether the objective is worth the cost. What’s more, he or she must do so unsure of what the exact cost might be, or the exact cost of failing to meet the objective.’[[29]](#footnote-29)

A number of commentators cite the 1982 Falklands war as one that was possibly disproportionate. The Falkland Islands had been under British rule for about 150 years when Argentina attacked, asserting a long-standing territorial claim. The Islanders wished to remain British. Most would generally agree that just cause had been established for a forcible response by Britain – but was it proportionate? The total population of the Falklands in 1982 was 1,820 people and 400,000 sheep; there were about 900 combatants killed in action on both sides (more from Argentina), an additional 1845 wounded, and a substantial number of Argentinians taken prisoner. If, as has been conjectured, the everyday lives of the Falkland Islanders would have been little different under Argentine rule, it is arguable that Britain’s decision to achieve its just cause by going to war was not in proportion to the harm suffered by combatants of both sides.

**Reasonable Chance of Success**

This is another area where judgements have to be made: those who go to war (both politicians and generals) must weigh up the likelihood of whether the war will achieve the purpose for which it is being waged. Given the likely losses, in human lives, money and materiel, is it reasonable to expect victory? Or will you be throwing lives and resources away on a hopeless cause? Jesus’ comment is useful here: ‘what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegate and asks for the terms of peace.’ (Luke 14:31-32) This criterion is linked to that dealing with proportionality, for if there is not a reasonable chance that the war might achieve its stated aims, then the ultimate result is likely to be more evil than good.[[30]](#footnote-30) One consideration is defining what ‘success’ might look like: part of the issue with the ‘war on terror’ is that, if success is defined as putting an end to all terrorism, that is extremely unlikely to be achieved.

Two examples of where this criterion might not have been met: before the beginning of the second Gulf War the likelihood of a successful military victory – that is, of the US and British forces defeating those of Iraq – was high. The prospect of regime change, deposing Saddam and successfully installing a liberal democratic government, was also considered high by an over-optimistic US administration, which did not listen to warnings that the task was likely to be more complicated than that.[[31]](#footnote-31) And so it has proved – again, we can look with the benefit of hindsight. Secondly, in 1940 after the fall of France Britain stood alone against Germany, and its chances of success at that point seemed very low indeed.[[32]](#footnote-32) Should Britain have sued for peace? On the face of it, the condition relating to ‘reasonable chance of success’ was not fulfilled – but again, hindsight kicks in.

**In Pursuit of Peace**

As Aquinas said, ‘Those who wage war justly aim at peace’. The Just War tradition holds that the prospects of going to war should be guided by the likelihood of achieving some greater good. The ultimate goal must be to establish a just peace, and political-social stability.[[33]](#footnote-33) It follows therefore that there should be a viable concept of the peace that would result from carrying the war to a successful conclusion. Commentators have questioned the extent to which an eventual peace in Iraq, which might be achieved by disarmament, regime change and rebuilding of the country, had been thought out prior to the commencement of hostilities in March 2003.

So that concludes a brief exploration of the *jus ad bellum* criteria, the conditions which must be satisfied before recourse to war. Once the war is begun, the *jus in bello* principles come into play, concerned with how war should justly be conducted.

***Jus in bello*: how to make war**

The two sets of criteria are in some ways separate from one another and in some ways connected. If the *ad bellum* criteria are not satisfied, then the war is unjust, and it follows from this that all actions that ensue from it are wrong. That’s one way of looking at it. But another way is to admit that sometimes an unjust war can be conducted by commanders who pay attention to the laws of war and seek to carry on that war by just methods. Conversely a country may enter into a just (ie morally justified) war, but then undermine that by the means that it uses and later see its commanders indicted for war crimes.[[34]](#footnote-34)

**Discrimination**

In a war, the only legitimate targets are those actively involved, and so every effort should be made to avoid direct or intentional harm to non-combatants. This is in line with the basic moral prohibition around the taking of innocent life. Non-combatants, which includes civilian populations, wounded soldiers and prisoners of war, are not contributing to the military aspects of the war, are therefore deemed innocent, and should not be directly or intentionally attacked.[[35]](#footnote-35) The killing of over 500 civilians, most of whom were women, children and old men, in the Vietnamese village of My Lai in 1968 clearly violated this criterion.

It often happens, however, that direct attacks on military targets do lead to civilian casualties. The possibility of that occurring can be foreseen, but those aiming the weapons at the military target do not intend to cause the civilian casualties, and so those casualties are not regarded as intrinsically wrong. (This of course is the principle of double effect, under which one act can have two consequences, the first known and intended and the second foreseen but not intended.)

**Proportionality of Means**

The principle of proportionality of means exists to limit the evil consequences of war. It requires that military commanders avoid needless destruction as they go about pursuing the justified aims of the war. All-out war, or gratuitous or excessive violence, is forbidden: commanders should use only so much force as is required to subdue the enemy. There is also a link with the principle of discrimination: this criterion is breached if in the process of destroying a military target a disproportionate number of civilian deaths occur.

There is an obvious example of where both *jus in bello* criteria were not met: carpet bombing of cities by both the Allies and Germany during World War II. The case of Dresden, a mediaeval city filled with artistic treasures bombed by British and American planes in February 1945, is instructive. Other than a rail yard, Dresden was not the site of military facilities. The bombing created a firestorm which burnt for two days and resulted in the deaths of between 35,000 and 135,000 civilians (the wide range is due to the presence within the city of a large number of refugees from the east). The Dresden raid was doubly disproportionate: huge civilian casualties for no military gain, and it was carried out at a time when Germany was well on the way to being beaten. The dropping of the second atomic bomb, on Nagasaki in August 1945, likewise fails the tests of both discrimination and proportionality.

**Conclusions**

So where have we got to? Is just war an option? If by that question we mean is the Just War tradition still a valid way of looking at the issue of if and when a country should go to war, then I consider the answer should be clearly in the affirmative.

Some have argued that since Just War thinking was developed in relation to nation states it is less useful in responding to non-governmental and trans-national organisations like terrorist networks. The criteria, however, can still be applied, as analysis of the sort done by Richard Harries has shown. Harries looked at the application of Just War criteria in the period 1959-1989, in the very different contexts of the armed liberation struggles of the 1960s and the nuclear standoff in the sixties through eighties. He found that while the criteria cannot be applied in ‘a mechanical, wooden way’ they remain a useful tool that must be thought through and applied, taking due account of the different circumstances that now exist.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Harries makes a key point: the Just War criteria are not an easy ‘tick the box’ kind of survey, but a set of principles that can be used to assist politicians and military commanders to come to decisions on whether to go to war, and to guide commanders in the field about how to conduct that war. This is never an exact science. Judgements have to be made, and made often in a limited time and almost always with incomplete information. Some of those judgements will be subjective ones, and all are capable of being critiqued with the benefit of hindsight. Nevertheless the Just War tradition provides a framework for thinking about these issues which examines things from a wider perspective – not only the consequences of taking a particular action, but also the consequences of *not* taking it. This last, incidentally, is an area where the Pacifist tradition (another position with a long and honourable pedigree) fares less well.

And the Just War tradition takes justice seriously. It has, indeed, a presumption against injustice. If a grave injustice is committed, that must be remedied: put right, restored as far as possible, or the perpetrators punished. Sometimes this is justice towards the dead as well as the living. It is this concern for justice – not only an attribute of God but a significant theme in both testaments of Scripture – that makes this tradition such a valuable way of analysing some of the key questions in peace and war.

**Bibliography**

Aquinas, Thomas. ‘*Summa Theologiae*, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3040.htm>

Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans.* trans. by Henry Bettenson. London: Penguin, 2003 ed.

Biggar, Nigel. *In Defence of War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Blair, Tony, *A Journey*. quoted in Biggar, *In Defence of War.*

Charles, J Daryl. *Between Pacifism and Jihad: just war and Christian tradition.* Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 2005.

Grotius, Hugo. *The Right of Peace and War* in *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought 100-1625*. Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, editors. Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999. 787-820.

Harries, Richard. ‘Application of Just War Criteria in the Period 1959-89’ *The Ethics of War: shared problems in different traditions.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. 222-234.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. ‘A British theological perspective’ in *The Price of Peace: just war in the twenty-first century* ed Charles Reed & David Ryall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007.

Luther, Martin. *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved.*

Parliamentary Support. Research Paper. ‘Troop deployments abroad: parliamentary consent’. 24 November 2014 <http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/parl-support/research-papers/00PLLawRP2014051/troop-deployments-abroad>

Reed, Charles. *Just War?* London: SPCK. 2004

1. See Richard Harries, ‘A British theological perspective’ in *The Price of Peace: just war in the twenty-first century* ed Charles Reed & David Ryall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 304-12, at 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. 305. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Nigel Biggar, *In Defence of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Biggar, ibid. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Augustine Letter 138 (to Marcellinus), 9, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.7.. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Augustine, Letter 229.2 (to Darius) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Thomas Aquinas, ‘On War’, *Summa Theologiae*, 2-2 Q40. <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3040.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. J Daryl Charles, *Between Pacifism and Jihad: just war and Christian tradition* (Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Martin Luther, *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved,* section on ‘War as a work of love’. See also Charles, ibid. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Charles, ibid., 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Hugo Grotius, *The Right of Peace and War*, Prolegomena,25. See *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought 100-1625*. Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, editors (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999)787-820, at 796-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Biggar, *In Defence of War*, 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Richard Harries ‘Application of Just War Criteria in the Period 1959-89’ *The Ethics of War: shared problems in different traditions* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 222-234, at 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Biggar, *In Defence of War,* 254-58. Other commentators place more emphasis on the fact that the atrocities lay in the past, and were not actually occurring at the time when the US and its allies invaded Iraw in 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Harries, ‘Application of Just War Criteria’, 223-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See ‘Troop deployments abroad: parliamentary consent’ Parliamentary Support Research Paper, 24 November 2014 <http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/parl-support/research-papers/00PLLawRP2014051/troop-deployments-abroad> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Charles Reed, *Just War?* (London: SPCK, 2004), 37-38. Daryl Charles takes the view that there is no moral obligation for a nation going to war to have consent from the UN 1) since the UN does not technically ‘wield the sword’ as national governments do and 2) the UN has a commitment to avoid war and so risks fostering unjust peace. *Between Pacifism and Jihad,* 135, n31. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Harries, ‘A British Theological Perspective’, 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Biggar, *In Defence of War,* 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Biggar, ibid. 281-294, Harries, , ‘A British Theological Perspective’, 307-308. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Biggar, ibid. 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Harries, ‘A British Theological Perspective’, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Biggar, *In Defence of War,* 294-300. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Harries, ‘Application of Just War Criteria’, 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See Reed, *Just War?,* 40, and Biggar, *In Defence of War,* 300*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Blair, Tony, *A Journey*, 238-9, quoted in Biggar, *In Defence of War,* 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Harries, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Biggar, *In Defence of War*, 307-310. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Harries, ‘A British Theological Perspective’, 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Charles, Charles, *Between Pacifism and Jihad, 135.* [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Harries, ‘A British Theological Perspective’, 311-312.. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Harries, ‘A British Theological Perspective’, 310, notes that once soldiers have laid down their arms they become non-combatants. ‘To kill an unthreatening prisoner of war is murder.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Harries, ‘Application of Just War Criteria’, 222, 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)