

JUST-WAR MORAL REFLECTION, THE CHRISTIAN, AND CIVIL SOCIETY¹

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It is a sign of our time that either radical relativism or segregation and withdrawal characterize how we as a culture face pressing moral dilemmas. Presupposing the *possibility* that civic virtue and moral reasoning might constitute domestic life and public policy, Christians struggle, as did prior generations, to know their proper place in the social-political context to which they have been called by the Almighty. This struggle, rooted in the twin Augustinian convictions of human frailty and justly ordered peace, permits that American Christians may be patriots, but *distinctly chastened* patriots. That is, they are men and women who are in conversation with the past and who have learned from it.²

Civic life that is so “chastened” bears directly on how we think about issues of peace and war. With the collapse just over a decade ago of the Soviet empire, many—from average lay person to the policy-maker—considered the use of military force as a question lacking urgency. But it is precisely those developments *since* the end of the Cold War that invite a reexamination of the merits and moral substructure of armed conflict.

In the few years since 1990 it has been impossible to close our eyes to the gravity of geopolitical developments around the world—among these, Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait and genocidal treatment of its own people, notably the Kurdish population, the starvation of civilians in Somalia, exile and enslavement of Coptic Christians in Sudan, the talibanization of portions of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and northern and western portions of Africa,³ the slaughter of between half a million and a million people in Rwanda,⁴ genocide in Bosnia/Kosovo, the need for massive humanitarian efforts in Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, Sudan, and Afghanistan, the chemical and biological weapons program of Libya and Iraq *inter alia*, drug-trafficking on several

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² The notion of a “chastened patriot” belongs to Jean Elshtain, *Women and War* (rev. ed.; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 252–53, 268–70. Such individuals, Elshtain writes, are both committed *and* detached and thus resist the excesses that shade toward nationalism.

³ See Paul Marshall, *Their Blood Cries Out: The Untold Story of Persecution against Christians in the Modern World* (Dallas: Word, 1996).

⁴ Reliable estimates are in the 800,000–850,000 range.

continents, and the breathtaking rise of maturing international terrorism on several continents. All told, the social, political, and moral challenges before us are daunting, revealing our biases against the need for military intervention to be naive.

These diverse crises, with repercussions for Americans both at home and abroad, force lay persons, educators, politicians, and policy-makers alike to reflect on the morality of war, justified use of force, and military intervention. Should we intervene? Where and when? Why or why not? And by what criteria and in what measure? Do various types of intervention—e.g. against genocide and egregious human rights violations by a non-democratic regime—call for different kinds of moral criteria? What about the place of private conscience regarding war? What is the role of the Church and that of the academy in the national debate over war and military intervention? In moral discourse in general? Does the Church have a “worldly” mission? What is the proper relationship between the Church and the world? Between Christians and moral/social/political evil?

The problem of war and the use of force is a perennial question and thus must be continually confronted. We should be encouraged that Christians from the beginning have struggled with ethics of this issue. The church’s fathers—ancient, medieval, and modern—formulated out of the crucible of contemporary life what they understood to be a Christian response to the problem. Thus, we are not without resources—enduring resources—to help us think about these matters. This is not to say that Christians have always agreed, nor that we all will agree. Nor is to say that this issue is a test for fellowship; it is not. It is, however, to acknowledge that (a) lay people and bishops alike have struggled throughout the centuries with a Christian response; and (b) a consensual understanding of Christian thinking emerges. Thus, Christian reflection on the ethics of war is rooted squarely within the mainstream of the Christian moral tradition and not a recent—or uniquely modern—development.

In this light, it is most unfortunate that many Christians, Protestants in particular, have been divorced from the moral wisdom of this consensual tradition. For this reason, Christian social ethics must intentionally enter into conversation with the tradition and probe its relevance for contemporary ethics and civil society.

I. PRESUMPTION AGAINST WAR OR PRESUMPTION AGAINST INJUSTICE?

In order to enter this conversation, particular obstacles in our thinking, however, must be identified—obstacles that are cultural as well as theological in nature. Consider, for example, how the last fifty years have molded the way in which we think about war, especially in the Church and in the academy. Our national experience as a result of how World War II ended (at least in the Pacific theater) and our experience in Vietnam in particular have molded our national ethos, whether we are Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox. Add to this the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the last forty years and their

potential for mass destruction, many religious people (though not all) believe that war or the use of military force is *intrinsically* immoral. Thus we have today—overwhelmingly so in academic circles and in many religious quarters—a *presumption against force* rather than a *presumption against injustice*. We see this presumption manifest, for example, in Pope Paul VI's famous 1965 address to the U.N., in which the pontiff declared, "Never again war, war never again!"⁵ It surfaced again during the Cold War tensions of the 1980s in official ecclesial statements such as the 1985 National Conference of Catholic Bishops's statement *The Challenge of Peace*⁶ and the 1986 United Methodist bishops's statement *In Defense of Creation*.⁷ And it permeates both the writings of influential Christian ethicists⁸ as well as some of the disheartening, irresponsible statements by religious leaders following 9/11.

Our culture's deep-seated skepticism about force as a moral enterprise is exacerbated by a second cultural development. I refer here to the climate of postmodernity that encourages radical moral skepticism, stubbornly refuses to identify moral markers whatsoever, and is committed to a path of non-intrusive "non-judgmentalism." Such is the social climate in which we presently live. Not only does our culture *not assist us* in making moral judgments, it *discourages* us from doing so, as James Q. Wilson has observed with considerable force in his book *The Moral Sense*.⁹ Why is it, given the omnipresence of evil around us, that people are not more concerned to wrestle with the problem of evil? Why does society flatly and resolutely refuse to acknowledge evil as an entity? To call it by its name? Much less, to inquire how specific forms of manifest evil might be confronted?

⁵ For the full text of this address, see John Paul VI, *Never Again War!* (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1965).

⁶ *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (Washington, DC: U.S.C.C., 1983).

⁷ *In Defense of Creation* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986).

⁸ Anabaptist theologian John Howard Yoder is perhaps the most influential spokesperson over the last 50 years for the pacifist position. See *inter alia* *The Christian Witness to the State* (IMS 3; Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1964); *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* (2d ed.; Scottdale: Herald Press, 1992); *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1971); *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); *What Would You Do?* (Scottdale/Kitchener: Herald Press, 1983); and *When War Is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* (2d ed.; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996). Yoder repudiates any Christian participation in armed force because God and not humanity is responsible for history (*The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* [Scottdale: Herald Press, 1971] 132–47). While just-war proponents share this conviction of providence, they believe, contra Yoder, that such conviction, anchored in love for one's neighbor, takes seriously the need to protect the innocent—in the home, in the neighborhood, at the workplace, and in international relations. Stanley Hauerwas has further popularized Yoder's line of thinking. See, e.g. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame/London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), esp. 121–30; *Should War Be Eliminated? Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984); and *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985). See, further, the recent collection of essays of which Hauerwas is co-editor: *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1999).

⁹ James Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: Free Press, 1993).

Yet another—inherently theological—impediment to just-war thinking flourishes in our midst. It is the view that the “authentic” ethic of Jesus requires non-retaliation, based on a particular reading of Matt 5:38–39 (with its injunctions not to resist the evil person and to turn the other cheek). Does Christian social ethics categorically prohibit retaliation? How have mainstream Christian moral thinkers understood these statements of our Lord?

The distinction between a presumption against force and a presumption against injustice is crucial—a distinction that undergirds the Christian moral tradition. For example, Aquinas begins his discussion of war (*Summ. Theo.* IIa-IIae, q. 40. a.) with the *quaestio*, “Is it always a sin to fight in war?” As he frequently does, Aquinas answers typical objections that cause someone to answer the question incorrectly. One common objection of his day was based on the popular misinterpretation of Matt 5:38–39 that charity could not express itself through coercive means. Aquinas is careful to demonstrate that war and violence *per se* are not a category of injustice. This conclusion accords with his understanding of the role of punishment in broader criminal justice. Utmost in Thomist thinking is the need to protect the common weal, for the social-moral bonds of community are delicate and must be preserved. Rightly constituted authority, for Aquinas, is obligated by the Almighty to punish evil, so that society may flourish without fear of evil being unabated.

II. EARLY CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD WAR AND SOLDIERING

Although just-war thinking is developed by St. Ambrose (AD 340–396) and St. Augustine (AD 354–430), well before their time Christians who wrestled with their duties to organized society had begun serving in the Roman legions. We learn this directly and indirectly from several of the pacifist early Church fathers.

In Tertullian’s treatise *On the Soldier’s Crown*, the reader learns that Christians had been serving in the Roman army in North Africa. In his late second-century work *On Idolatry*, Tertullian writes for the purpose of describing specific vocations that are thought to imperil one’s faith. Included in this list were Roman civil service and military service. Both, he believed, were forms of pagan sacrifice. As to the latter, we know from military history that higher ranks in the Roman legions sacrificed to the emperor. And while lower ranks traditionally did not participate directly in this practice, they were present at such ceremonies, swore allegiance to the emperor and wore badges that bore the emperor’s effigy.¹⁰

But the danger of idolatry, according to Tertullian, is widespread. One cannot be too careful. His list of forbidden occupations is not limited to the

¹⁰ See the related discussion of patristic sources by military historian Paul Christopher in *The Ethics of War and Peace* (rev. ed.; Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1999) 17–18.

state. The danger of idolatry should also prevent Christians from becoming teachers and students, since both require studying the "classics" of Greek and Roman literature. In addition, trades such as gold- and silversmithing as well as woodcarving are also to be avoided by Christians, since these vocations so frequently entail making pagan idols for clients.

It should be noted that both Tertullian and Origen, the two chief pacifist Church fathers, prohibit Christians from bearing the sword, yet neither denied to government the moral duty of self-defense nor denied that Christians actually served in the military. In fact, Tertullian indicates that considerable numbers of Christians were already serving in the Roman legions, and he concedes certain conditions under which he believes a Christian could serve as a magistrate. (And we know from Eusebius that before the fourth century there were Christian governors in the provinces.) What is more, Tertullian can pray for "security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies."¹¹

In the third century, Origen, the other primary witness to Christian pacifism, sought to defend Christianity in the light of attacks made by the pagan philosopher Celsus. Celsus had pressed the argument that Christians who did not serve in the Roman legions would contribute to Rome's collapse at the hands of barbarian hordes. Origen's response is noteworthy. He concedes that some believers are in fact soldiers, though most are not. More importantly, he maintained, Christians supported the Empire in equally valid ways through their prayers for its leaders. In this way, the forces of evil are also combatted.¹² Unfortunately, of all his writings, *Against Celsus* is the lone work in which Origen addresses the issue of war. And even here the concern is not the ethics of war *per se*.

Among early Christians there is a certain ambiguity toward war that emerges from one's reading of patristic sources. The conventional portrait of the early Church that comes to us is that the early Christians were *uniformly* pacifistic, followed by the Church's fourth-century "compromise" with the Roman Empire. Beginning with Constantine's rule, it is typically argued, Christians "prostituted" themselves to secular authority. This portrait, however, does not bear up under close scrutiny. It errs both in its oversimplifying early Christians' relation to the state and in its attributing to fourth-century Christians an overly uncritical attitude toward governing authorities. As Augustine painstakingly argues in his magisterial *City of God*, there are civic duties that are required of the Christian believer, even in a culture that is (quite literally) crumbling. That duty *may* encompass preserving the social order (soldiering), bearing arms, and defending innocent third parties against gross injustice.

¹¹ *On Idolatry* 17. What is remarkable well before Tertullian's time is that the early-second century letter of Pliny to the emperor Trajan (AD 112) concerning the problem of Christians fails to mention anything about their unwillingness to serve in the military. Given the tenor of the letter, non-service would have been conspicuous—and scandalous—to Pliny, since, as Origen writes, the emperor required service.

¹² *Contra Celsum* 8.73.

On balance, the limited evidence we have of early Christian attitudes toward war is inconclusive. Both strands—pacifist and non-pacifist—can be detected. Clearly, many Christians did oppose military service, but this was not universal. Nor was opposition due to explicit prohibitions in the NT, evidenced by the fact that soldiers in the NT are never called to abandon their profession.¹³ Even Christian historian Roland Bainton, who himself has contributed substantially to a pacifist reading of the early Church, concedes from the existing evidence that while “ecclesiastical authors before Constantine condemned participation in warfare,” this is not the case regarding military service “in time of peace” and soldiering in general.¹⁴ James Turner Johnson has also closely examined the writings of the early Church fathers that mirror attitudes toward war and soldiering. His conclusion, following a careful and even more judicious reading of these sources than Bainton’s, is that evidence is mixed.¹⁵ Thus, it is fair to contend that the early Church was not absolutist on either pacifism or military service.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF JUST-WAR THINKING IN HISTORIC CHRISTIAN THOUGHT¹⁶

For St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, from whose writings Christian just-war thinking is thought initially to derive, two common elements in their reflections on war are striking. One is the hortatory tenor with which both admonish fellow Christians not to remain aloof from affairs of the state as they wait for the eschaton. The “earthly city” is never wholly free from the dangers of human depravity, bloodshed, and war. This will mean that in order to preserve the basis upon which peace and order reside, a justly ordered application of force is necessary. Short of the eschaton, that heavenly city, justice must preserve a penultimate form of peace. Christians are by no means absolved from society’s duty to preserve justice.

What is significant about Ambrose is his location and his position. Before he became a bishop, he was a Roman governor in the northern military outpost of Milan. While it is tempting to portray Ambrose as something of a “crusader” because of his background, this is simply not the case. Very

¹³ This is true of the preaching of John the Baptist as well as Christian discipleship as taught by Jesus and the apostles.

¹⁴ Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace* (New York: Abingdon, 1960) 66 and 81.

¹⁵ See, for example, his detailed discussion of Christian attitudes in the first four centuries in chapter one of *The Quest for Peace: Three Moral Traditions in Western Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 3–66 (“Christian Attitudes toward War and Military Service in the First Four Centuries”).

¹⁶ Elsewhere I examine the development of just-war thinking in “Do Not Suppose That I Have Come . . .”: The Ethic of the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ Reconsidered,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* (forthcoming); *idem*, “Justice and Neighbor-Love in the Just-War Tradition,” *Logos* (forthcoming); and *idem*, *Between Pacifism and Jihad* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, forthcoming), chapter 2.

much the opposite is true. In his preaching and teaching he acknowledges that the continuous assaults on the Roman empire by barbarian hordes were part of a larger pattern of divine judgment on Rome's paganism. Nevertheless, he admonishes those under his watch *not* to extract themselves from civic affairs as they await the coming age. His advice to his parishioners comes in the form of outlining duties of the clergy, who have been entrusted with shepherding the flock. The language of these duties, curiously, is the language of *virtue*—justice, temperance, and wisdom. The nature of the virtuous life, as Ambrose understands it, has both vertical and horizontal dimensions; it applies to our service to society as well as to our serving God, to bodily usefulness as well as godliness.¹⁷

Whereas Ambrose readily employs military metaphors in the service of expositing the need for a virtuous life,¹⁸ Augustine argues for justified war on the basis of a "lowest common denominator," the *saeculum*, that is, the need for a social life maintained by peace and a just order; hence, the Augustinian notion of *tranquillitas ordinis*. For Augustine, justice and charity are not at odds. Justice is concerned with a right ordering of society for the sake of social peace, what Augustine calls the *tranquillitas ordinis*. He acknowledges the existence of both a just peace—*iusta pax*—and an unjust peace—*iniqua pax*; the distinction is critical. For this reason, peace *requires* the ordering of justice. Even robbers, he observes, have order and maintain a certain "peace" within their own orbit in order to plunder the innocent.¹⁹ Peace as a good, even in its relative state this side of the eschaton, must be guarded since it furnishes for people the environment in which to contemplate life's mysteries. While ultimate peace that is consummated in the kingdom of God requires no restraints, penultimate peace does.²⁰

While it is tempting to portray either Ambrose or Augustine (as some pacifist theologians would have it) as "crusader" types who represent the Church's being co-opted by the "Constantinian" state, such a view is simplistic and negated by a serious reading of their writings. In his preaching and teaching Ambrose acknowledges that the continuous assaults on the Roman empire by barbarian hordes were part of a larger pattern of divine judgment on Rome's paganism. Nevertheless, he admonishes those under his watch *not* to extract themselves from civic affairs as they await the coming age. He does so in the same spirit with which Augustine challenges his reader in *The City of God* to embody responsible citizenship, even in a society that is in wholesale decline, rather than withdraw to spiritual trenches while awaiting the eschaton.

A second commonality in Ambrosian and Augustinian thinking as it applies to coercive force is the fact that both Fathers renounced the right

¹⁷ *Duties of the Clergy* 2.6, 7.

¹⁸ He does this in *On the Duties of the Clergy*.

¹⁹ *City of God* 19.12.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 15.4; 19.112; 22.24; and *Epistle* 189.6.

to *self-defense*. In a letter to Marcellinus, who needed help defending the Christian faith before influential pagans, Augustine writes that a righteous man privately should be willing to endure evil rather than responding with malice.²¹ Matthew 5:38–39 (on turning the cheek and not resisting evil), he notes, refers to a *disposition of the heart* and not the external act.²² However, the introduction of a *third party* changes the moral equation. Both Ambrose and Augustine believe it to be *the obligation of Christian love* to defend and protect the innocent third party. Not to apply what Augustine calls “benevolent harshness”²³ to the evildoer is as much an evil as to cause it.²⁴ The Christian’s responsibility, moreover, in preventing evil is to act *proportionately to the offense* itself.

Augustine, it should be remembered, lived in a period akin to our own—a period of disintegration and upheaval. Significantly, his treatment of war in *City of God* is most properly viewed as a subset of his discussion of citizenship. A major theme in this part of *City* is that one can simultaneously be a devout Christian and a good citizen.²⁵ Citizenship may entail defending the social order and redressing gross injustice through coercive force. But Augustine’s acceptance of justified war is reluctant. He is painfully aware of war’s miseries, just as he is painfully aware of Rome’s imposed tyrannical peace: “Peace and war had a competition in cruelty,” he notes in biting irony, “and peace won the prize.” Hence, his acceptance of a justified war is reluctant. He is, as it were, a decidedly “chastened patriot.”²⁶ But as to war’s chief aim, it must be to secure a *greater peace*—a peace that is just and not unjust.

According to Augustine, war is justified only under certain conditions—for example, defending against an unjust oppressor, protecting or rescuing innocent victims in hostile territory, defending an ally, and repelling an assault while traveling.²⁷ Augustine, it must be emphasized, is no crusader; he is under no illusions regarding Rome’s own record of aggression. Furthermore, there is no such thing as a Christian polity; Christian wisdom and political power are distinct, although they need not operate independently of one another.

²¹ *Epistle* 138 (“To Marcellinus”). The same argument is presented by Augustine elsewhere to his friend Evodius on the matter of the free choice (*On the Freedom of the Will* 1.5.11–6.15).

²² In another letter, to Publicola, he writes: “In regard to killing men so as not to be killed by them, this view does not satisfy me” (*Epistle* 47). Luther, it should be pointed out, took Augustine to task on the matter of self-defense (*Luther’s Works* [Muhlenberg ed.] 3.249–50), and Aquinas considers self-defense by force not only legitimate but virtuous to the extent that it is proportionate (*Summa Theologiae* II-II Q. 64, a. 7 and Q. 108, a. 1).

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ In the same letter to Publicola, Augustine makes an exception to the prohibition of killing: when it involves the public good, in the case of the soldier or public official. In *On the Duties of the Clergy*, Ambrose poses questions such as: “In the case of a shipwreck, should a wise person take away a plank of wood [on which to float] from an ignorant sailor [who cannot swim]?” (1.24.115 and 3.4.27). Similarly, Augustine uses the examples of highway robbery, assassination, and soldiering to develop his argument (*On the Freedom of the Will* 1.5 and *Contra Faustum* 22.70).

²⁵ “Do not think,” he writes to Boniface, a governor of a north African province, “that it is impossible for anyone serving in the military to please God” (*Epistle* 189).

²⁶ This is the description used by Elshtain, *Women and War* 252, 268–70.

²⁷ *The City of God* 19.15.

In its essence, the just-war tradition from Augustine onward emanates from two fundamental concerns in Christian thought: when the resort to force is justified (*jus ad bellum*) and what kinds of force are appropriate in conflict (*jus in bello*), or, in the words of ethicist Paul Ramsey, permission and limitation.²⁸ The *public versus private* nature of warfare necessitates that the third party be protected, and protection is a fundamental concern of Christian charity.

This public-versus-private—which is to say, communal versus personal—component to Christian just-war thinking is strengthened by Thomas Aquinas's emphasis on legitimate political authority. This occurs against the backdrop of medieval society, in which princes, nobles, and criminals all engaged regularly and aggressively in combat, and this for *private* ends. Hereby the Christian tradition distinguishes between *duellum* and *bellum*. Hence, it is not difficult to understand why for Aquinas the matter of justified war hinges first and foremost on legitimate authority. Insofar as war is a *public* and not *private* matter, it must be adjudicated by political-legal means and not individual citizens. Without question, authority can be abused, but this very possibility constitutes a primary reason why Christian thinking over the centuries developed (and found reaffirmation) in the form of a just-war tradition.²⁹ At the center of this thinking, Thomas explains, lie three fundamental moral guidelines: sovereign authority, just cause, and right intention.³⁰

Relying on Augustine, Thomas emphasizes that a war is justified if it seeks to avenge wrongs, that is, when a nation or state must be punished for wrongs it has inflicted. Moreover, the requirements of *jus ad bellum* must pass several prudential tests: it must work for good and not evil; it should have some prospect of succeeding; its anticipated outcome should promote peace; and it should be a last resort. Correlatively, the conditions for *jus in bello* are equally measured. The use of force must be such that it discriminates between the guilty/enemy and the innocent/noncombatant. Also, it must be proportionate, that is, necessary rather than gratuitous or arbitrary, whereby restraint rather than revenge is intended.

Like Augustine before him, Aquinas responds to the common objection that war is contrary to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount not to resist evil (viz. Matt 5:38–39). And like Augustine,³¹ he answers that, yes, we must be willing to resist the self-centered impulse when it is authentically selfish. "Nevertheless," he observes, "it is necessary sometimes for a man to act otherwise for the common good," and here he quotes Augustine: "Those whom we have to punish with a kindly severity, it is necessary to handle in

²⁸ *War and the Christian Conscience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1961), introduction.

²⁹ The just-war theorist agrees with the pacifist that *some* resort to violence is morally wrong. It rejects, however, the notion that violence is *always* wrong.

³⁰ Aquinas's argument regarding war is developed most fully in Question 40 ("On War") in the *Secunda Secundae* of his *Summa*.

³¹ *The Sermon on the Mount* 1.19.

many ways against their will. For when we are stripping a man of the lawlessness of sin, it is good for him to be vanquished. . . ."³² Foundational to Thomist just-war thinking is the premise that it is the responsibility of the magistrate to protect the common weal. Armed force by the magistrate is the other side of promoting the common good. And while Aquinas may rightly be viewed as an "interventionist," he is not a crusader. Oppression and injustice, not religious proselytization, are grounds for justified war.

The Protestant Reformers Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli were unified in the Pauline conviction that the magistrate is ordained by the Almighty to wield the sword of justice for the purpose of resisting evil and preserving the social order. Moreover, due to the integrity of all vocations, Christians can carry out obedience to God as magistrates or soldiers, even when the spheres of Church and the state remain distinct realms. Luther, like Augustine and Aquinas, also believed that military service can be a service of charity. In his work *On War against the Turk*, he writes: "It is . . . a work of Christian love to protect and defend a whole community with the sword and not let the people be abused."³³ (Luther will also take up the question of a Christian serving as a soldier in a treatise titled *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved*.) "Why does anyone go to war except because he desires peace and obedience?" Luther asks rhetorically.³⁴ His answer is striking: not only should the Christian not shun military service, he should consider it a duty and means by which to order peace and justice.³⁵

In his discussion of war, Calvin anticipates certain religiously-based objections. One comes readily to mind, with three possible answers. If we object that the NT contains no precept or regulations permitting Christian participation in war, three considerations suffice as a response. First, the same causes of war in the ancient world exist in the present time; therefore, governing authorities retain their primary function. Second, that no explicit teaching on the subject of war is found in the teaching of the apostles is to be expected; their chief aim is to proclaim the kingdom of Christ, not to organize and justify civil government. Third, Calvin cites Augustine's observation regarding John the Baptist: if Christian participation in all warring is illegitimate, then the soldiers who sought out the Baptist would have been directed to throw away their arms and leave their profession. To the contrary, they were admonished to act justly and be content with their pay. Military life was not to be understood as prohibited.³⁶

³² *Epistle* 138.

³³ Martin Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should be Obeyed* (1523), reproduced in Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works* (54 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-) 45.121.

³⁴ *LW* 46.

³⁵ Luther writes: "It looks like a great thing when a monk renounces everything and goes into a cloister, carries on a life of asceticism, fasts, prays, etc. . . . On the other hand, it looks like a small thing when a maid cooks and cleans and does other housework. But because God's command is there, even such a small work must be praised as a service to God . . . For here [i.e. concerning secular and mundane vocations] there is no command" (*LW* 4.341 and 5.102).

³⁶ *Institutes of Christian Religion* 4.341 and 5.102.

Historic religious pacifism, in its sixteenth-century Anabaptist expression, rejected the views of Luther and Calvin (as well as the Swiss reformer Zwingli, who stood in basic agreement with them) regarding Christian participation in the affairs of the state. The historic "peace churches"³⁷—so named not because other confessions are not concerned with peace but because these churches refuse participation in war, to the present day—prohibited Christians from bearing the sword or governing.³⁸ Where historic Anabaptists differ from many contemporary Anabaptist pacifists is in their understanding of the powers. Anabaptist writers today tend to have a much more negative (i.e. apocalyptic) view of governing authorities. As evidenced by the sixth of seven articles of the Schleithem Confession, penned in 1527 as a brief summary of Anabaptist beliefs,³⁹ historic Anabaptism affirms that the sword is ordained by God in the hand of the authorities for the twin purposes of punishment and protection:

We are agreed as follows concerning the sword: The sword is ordained by God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and puts to death, and guards and protects the good. In the Law, the sword was ordained for the punishment of the wicked and for their death, and the same [sword] is [now] ordained to be used by the worldly magistrates (Art. 6).

An important adaptation of the just-war idea for the early modern period by theorists such as Francisco de Vitoria (1480–1546), Francisco Suarez (1548–1617), and Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) is the identification of natural law and the law of nations (*ius gentium*) rather than a mere appeal to religion. The moral principles constituting just-war thinking are accessible to all peoples and societies, not merely those that are narrowly Christian. Vitoria, it should be noted, was writing at the time of the Spanish encounter with the new world. Just-war principles as he framed them were not uniquely reserved for European Christians; rooted in reason and natural law, they are common to all of humanity and apply to all cultures. Suarez, significantly, addresses the subject of war not unlike Augustine and Aquinas—as a duty of love—but also argues that the laws of war are binding on all nations.⁴⁰

The Dutch legal theorist Grotius, considered the father of modern international law, is roughly contemporary to Suarez. He wrote in the context of the Thirty Years War that had ravaged much of Europe prior to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. It was the bitterness of this strife, rending Church and

³⁷ The "peace churches" are primarily three confessions: Quaker, Mennonite, and Brethren.

³⁸ Not all groups or individuals associated with the "radical Reformation" were pacifist, though most were. An exception was the Anabaptist preacher Balthasar Hubmaier.

³⁹ At the time that the Schleithem Synod was convened in 1527, the Swiss Brethren—who drafted the Schleithem Confession—were persecuted by Catholics and Protestants alike. For this reason they became separatist, to distance themselves from religious persecution, not to deny the role of the sword or the governing authorities.

⁴⁰ Suarez develops this argument in *The Three Theological Virtues*, written in 1621. The Dutch legal theorist Grotius, contemplating rules for war at about the same time as Suarez (early seventeenth century), argued that limitations placed on warring were binding upon all people, irrespective of their religious beliefs (*The Law of War and Peace* 3.1; 2.1; 2.25–26; and 3.3).

state and leaving no international authority, that caused him to pick up the pen and write. Grotius confronts the dilemma of just limits to war in much the same way as Vitoria and Suarez. In his important work *The Law of War and Peace* (1625), Grotius argues that how nations relate to one another is governed by universally binding moral principles. These are "binding on all kings" and "known through reason."⁴¹ This argument has important implications for both the Church and the state, for it places limitations on both. It also places limitations on whether nations may go to war justly and how warfare is to be conducted. Given the divinely instituted natural law, such rules of military engagement are valid for all people.

A significant contribution of Grotius to just-war thinking was his wrestling with the particular requirements of justice, and hence his acknowledgment of preemptive use of force. What specific occasions justify preemption, and what situations do not qualify? What measures are unwarranted, and how grave must the impending threat be that warrants a preemptive strike of force? For Grotius, not a presumption against *force per se* but a presumption against *injustice* must be the focus of just-war thinking.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinking about war is marked primarily not by moral considerations but by idealistic and utopian dreams—dreams that eventually would find a response by people like Reinhold Niebuhr, writing in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and Paul Ramsey, scarcely a generation later, in the 1960s. Ramsey, it should be noted, was one of few theorists, joining Roman Catholic theologian John Courtney Murray and political scientist William V. O'Brien, who contended for the viability of the just-war tradition in the nuclear age, an age marked by a pervasive presumption against war and against force in general. The shift from a presumption against *injustice* to a presumption against the use of force represents an inversion—indeed one might argue, a perversion—of classic just-war thinking.

In his classic chapter on "Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist,"⁴² Niebuhr wrestles with the tension inherent in "Be not anxious" and "Love Thy Neighbor." Niebuhr sides with Ambrose, Augustine, and Aquinas—and Paul Ramsey after him—that genuine love can be called upon to resist injustice, given the sinful will-to-power that constitutes human depravity. Responding to the religious pacifists of his day, he notes rather sarcastically, "[i]f Britain had only been fortunate enough to have produced 30 percent instead of 2 percent of conscientious objectors to military service, Hitler's heart would have been softened and he would not have dared attack Poland."⁴³ In the end, Niebuhr calls the Christian community to opt for neither anarchy nor tyranny. For him, love is a "principle of discriminate criticism"—a principle that requires us on occasion to confront evil actively with morally measured force.

One generation removed from us, Princeton ethicist Paul Ramsey, in addition to his former student James Turner Johnson, who presently teaches

⁴¹ *The Law of War and Peace* 1.1.10 and 1.3.16.

⁴² Chapter 1 of *Christianity and Power Politics* (New York: Scribner's, 1948).

⁴³ From chapter one of his *Christianity and Power Politics*.

at Rutgers, offers us time-tested wisdom. In their writings both scholars point us to the same question that occupied Ambrose and Augustine: What does Christian charity require us to do? Just-war thinking, as Ramsey and Johnson conceive of it, is the fruit of Christian charity, an expression of moral and political responsibility toward one's neighbor. Without the third party, the situation may reduce to self-interest; therefore, we turn the other cheek. The introduction of a third person, however, changes everything. This line of thinking is described by Ramsey in *Basic Christian Ethics* and in *The Just War* as an "ethics of protection." To illustrate, Ramsey adduces the Parable of the Good Samaritan in which he asks the reader to suppose what might have been Jesus' response had the Samaritan actually come upon the criminals in the very act. Would Jesus have required non-resistance? For Ramsey, the response of charity, rooted in covenantal loyalty to God and one's neighbor, is clear and in no way incompatible with Jesus' commands or Christian ethics: we use morally-guided force to disarm and incapacitate the offender and thus protect the neighbor. Such is our duty, reasoned Ramsey, even in a nuclear age. Just-war principles retain their validity because they are established by universal moral strictures that are known through reason and natural law.⁴⁴

William O'Brien's first major work on just war, *War and/or Survival*⁴⁵ contended for a moral realism that moderated between pacifism and the excesses of militarism. While critical of militarists' moral obtuseness, O'Brien also rejected any ethic that failed to take seriously the political realities of the present. In some respects, he embraced the "Christian realism" of Reinhold Niebuhr a generation earlier. War, as understood by O'Brien, is a political "given" in the present order. Therefore, he argued, its full elimination is utopian at best and wrong-headed at worst. The first order of business, then, morally speaking, is to limit and contain it.⁴⁶ Theology, he believed, must condition our moral analyses of war.

As a Roman Catholic who taught government at Georgetown University, O'Brien was quite critical of the important 1983 U.S. Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*,⁴⁷ which served as a focal point for much debate over war in the 1970s and 80s. The document, in O'Brien's view, was "seriously flawed" for two principal reasons. First, it failed to acknowledge

⁴⁴ See Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968); "A Political Ethics Context for Strategic Thinking," in Morton A. Kaplan, ed., *Strategic Thinking and Its Moral Implications* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) 101-47; *Speak Up for Just War or Pacifism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988); *War and the Christian Conscience*. Representative of Johnson's work are *Can Modern War Be Just?* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1984); *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); *Morality and Contemporary Warfare* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1999); *The Quest for Peace: Three Moral Traditions in Western Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); and *The Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

⁴⁵ Garden City: Doubleday, 1969.

⁴⁶ See esp. chapter eight of *War*, titled "The Laws of War."

⁴⁷ *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1983).

the threat that totalitarianism posed to the free world during the Cold War era. Second, while on the one hand the Bishops pay lip service to the just-war tradition, they alter the tradition and render it incapable of establishing justice; they "disembody" it.⁴⁸

The subject of war and peace cannot be finessed, O'Brien believed. For individual Christians the crucial question is not, "What would Christ do about war, deterrence, revolution, or peace, if he returned to earth?" Rather, the question must be, "What does Christ require me to do about these problems, given my station in life?" In a fallen world, O'Brien argued, we cannot escape the moral obligations that citizenship bestows upon us.⁴⁹

Political theorist Michael Walzer's important 1977 book *Just and Unjust Wars*⁵⁰ is not written from a Christian perspective, and yet it is significant because of the moral questions he raises. Walzer inquires into the justice of particular wars of the twentieth century. How can the morality of particular wars be determined? Who bears responsibility for particular acts of war? And in what dimension? Walzer scrutinizes the ends and means of warfare in this volume.

Despite his misgivings about the war in Vietnam, Walzer believes that a moral dimension to warfare does in fact exist. Because war is hell, it is always assumed that the worst is inevitable.⁵¹ But Walzer calls the reader to reflect further: Is conduct in war *inevitably* consigned to this grim baseline reality? Is there no element of moral reasoning, of moral reckoning, that can trump—or at least *inform*—military strategy? Despite the unwillingness of American culture to make moral judgments, moral arguments, Walzer is convinced, are not only possible but *must* be advocated.

Over the last two decades University of Chicago political theorist Jean Elshtain has been an eloquent defender of the "permanent things" that serve as foundations of civil society. As Elshtain understands it, the moral reasoning of the classic just-war tradition, which assists us in discerning between appropriate uses and abuses of power, is indispensable to this task. Elshtain is perhaps best known as an Augustinian scholar, and her indebtedness to Augustinian thought has caused her to reflect considerably on the just-war tradition as a model both for civil society and for handling foreign-policy issues. Among her many works are *Augustine and the Limits of Politics*, *Democracy on Trial*, *Women and War*, and more recently, *Just War against Terror*. Writing in a most engaging manner, Elshtain is able to weave political theory, the history of ideas, and Christian moral reflection into her very astute—and always timely—social criticism.

⁴⁸ "The Failure of Deterrence and the Conduct of War," in William V. O'Brien and John Langan, eds., *The Nuclear Dilemma and the Just War Tradition* (Lexington/Toronto: Lexington Books, 1986) 155.

⁴⁹ This is the thrust of his concluding chapter in *War*, "War and the Christian Conscience."

⁵⁰ *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

⁵¹ The renowned theorist Karl von Clausewitz remarked: "War is an act of force which theoretically can have no limits" (*War, Politics, and Power* [ed. Edward M. Collins; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962] 65).

Despite the remarkable breadth of her interests, one detects in Elshtain a thread that weaves its way through most of her writings, and her reflections on war and peace in particular. It is the belief—alas, the *burden*—that there exists in Western thought (and American society) a rigid separation between political realities and ethico-religious conviction. This divide, severing political theory from theology and philosophy, in her view is most unfortunate and closely akin to the supposed “wall” between Church and state advanced by one dominant strand of American jurisprudence. It is a divide which ensures that law and politics always trump any and all moral considerations. As a result, “thinkers who ought not to have been set apart were sundered and that fruitful and important engagements did not occur.”⁵² Such a separation, Elshtain is convinced, is by no means innocuous. No descriptions, no evaluations, no theories are ever merely “neutral.” Indeed, all theoretical or descriptive assessments of the *polis*, the *civitas*, or the nation-state are freighted with pre-understandings of what constitutes ultimate reality. And nowhere do we find these philosophical pre-commitments on display more than how we approach difficult issues such as war and peace. What is refreshing is that Elshtain writes as both *a theorist and a citizen*, keenly aware that the one must be in conversation with the other.

“In the beginning . . . politics was war.” Thus begins chapter 4 of *Women and War*, which may be Elshtain’s most original work.⁵³ Herewith she has in mind warrior cultures such as Sparta, Rome, and those fashioned along the lines of the Machiavellian city-state or Rousseau’s republic—models ancient and modern. But there is another discourse that is based on a different tradition, one which interests Elshtain far more than its rivals. This tradition, where it is allowed to exist, understands itself as being in tension with the militarist impulse. But it is more. Important as this countervailing influence is, it entails more than merely opposing bellicism. It also understands itself as a mediating position between militarism and pacifism, even when as a tradition it took root in the same soil that nurtured religious pacifism.⁵⁴

The chief responsibility of government is to guard the social order, what Augustine called the *tranquillitas ordinis*. None of the goods that we as

⁵² *Who Are We? Critical Reflections and Hopeful Possibilities* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2000) x. This severance, furthermore, has marginalized political theory in the academic, “scientific” study of politics.

⁵³ *Women and War* (rev. ed.; Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 121 (emphasis added).

⁵⁴ John Courtney Murray, *Morality and Modern War* (New York: Council on Religion and International Affairs, 1959) 15–19, believed that, practically speaking, the just-war tradition lay in abandon and neglect. The true relevance of the tradition today, he contended optimistically, “lies in its value as the solvent of false dilemmas.” A prime example, for Murray, of constructing such a “false dilemma” were the “two extreme positions” of “a soft, sentimental pacifism” and “a cynical, hard realism.” The latter assumes the need for survival and defeat of one’s ideological foes, unaided by any sort of moral reasoning, while the former fails to deal with the complexities of statecraft. Neither, Murray believed, finds support in traditional Christian moral teaching; neither, for him, was morally or politically acceptable. See also *idem*, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), chapter 11.

human beings cherish are capable of flourishing apart from a measure of civic peace and stability. Elshtain, thoroughly Augustinian, rightly distinguishes between civic peace, the penultimate peace, and a peace that awaits us in the eschaton.

The vision of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, of creating a world in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore," is connected with certain conditions that will always elude us. That vision presupposes that all persons are under one law.⁵⁵

Elshtain would remind us that this vision of peace is not one of civic peace, of the "peaceable kingdom." The primary reason for the state's existence is "to create those minimal conditions that prevent the worst [humanly speaking] from happening."⁵⁶ Such in no way means an absolute, unquestioning obedience to the state. It does mean, however, that political power is a basic reality of life. In times of war and peace, questions that concern the ethics of power, its proper uses and its abuses, are most evident. It is the just-war tradition, with its moral construal of war and its limits, that for Elshtain provides an abiding conceptual framework for examining geopolitical evil in our present world.⁵⁷

Published in 1992 (English edition in 1994), the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is an authoritative declaration of the Church's stance on matters doctrinal and ethical. Under the heading of "Avoiding War," the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war."⁵⁸ The *Catechism* continues, "However, 'as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed.'"⁵⁹ Following in the *Catechism* are prudential tests, enumerated by Thomas Aquinas, that constitute "strict conditions for *legitimate defense by military force*"⁶⁰ and that render "moral legitimacy" to just-war thinking:

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;⁶¹
- there must be serious prospects of success;

⁵⁵ *Just War against Terror: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Basic Books, 2003) 47.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 49.

⁵⁷ This is particularly applicable in the case of terrorism.

⁵⁸ CCC para. 2308.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* This citation is from *Gaudium et Spes* 79, para. 4.

⁶⁰ Emphasis is present in the text.

⁶¹ Clarification of "last resort" is in order. Last resort does not mean that we may only assist or attack *after* an aggressor has initiated attack. This would give the aggressor the upper hand. Rather, last resort requires that all *reasonable* attempts to resolve political conflict via diplomacy be first exhausted. Therefore, preventative strikes to limit catastrophe are morally legitimate.

- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated (the power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition);⁶²
- discrimination and proportionality.⁶³

The *Catechism* qualifies these conditions with an important statement—one that religious activists not infrequently disavow: “The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of *those who have responsibility for the common good*.”⁶⁴ This has particular relevance for the criterion of last resort. Because the Church does not participate in diplomacy, gathering of military intelligence, and similar activity, in the end she is not in a position to establish “last resort.”

In principle, classic just-war thinking proceeds from an assumption not against war or force *per se* but rather against injustice. Significantly, Christian theologians who articulate the just-war position tend to discuss war under the heading of charity, since one may choose war in pursuit of peace for the benefit of the third party.⁶⁵ This assumption undergirds the thought of Ambrose and Augustine, Aquinas and Luther, Suarez and Grotius, and people as diverse as Niebuhr, Ramsey, O'Brien, Johnson, and Elshtain in the present day.

IV. THE MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF JUST-WAR THINKING

Just as important as the developmental history of the just-war tradition are the *implications for civic life* of the just-war idea. The most common way of treating the just-war idea is to approach it as a theoretical doctrine consisting (typically) of seven “laws” based on *ius ad bellum* (justice going to war) and *ius in bello* (justice amidst war) criteria: (1) that war be a *last resort* only after all peaceful recourse has been exhausted; (2) that war clearly be defense against unjust attack or the *just redress* of egregious human rights violations; (3) that war have as its *ultimate intention* the establishment of a greater peace; (4) that there be reasonable chance for victory; (5) that war be declared and carried out by *properly constituted political authority*; (6) that warfare be conducted in such a way as to distinguish and preserve *non-combatant immunity*; and (7) that warfare be conducted in a manner of *proportionality* to the offense or injustice needing redress.

There is the dual tendency among our contemporaries either to view these “laws” as unrealistic and, in practice, unattainable, or to fail to wrestle with the “human factor” in their application by means of political prudence. Nevertheless, despite the difficulty that attends adjudicating these “legal”

⁶² CCC 2309.

⁶³ Ibid. 2313. That is, civilians, wounded soldiers, and prisoners (non-combatants) are to be treated humanely, while disproportionate means of warfare, such as extermination and genocide, are illicit.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 2309 (emphasis added).

⁶⁵ So Augustine, *De civ. Dei* 19.12, and Aquinas, *Summ. Theo.* II-II Q. 40, art. 1 and 3.

criteria and agonizing over issues of justice—in this tradition—moral and political wisdom—that is necessary not just for the sake of foreign policy but for the very ordering of domestic society.

The Christian's interest in just-war thinking should issue more broadly out of a concern about justice, politics, and civic life. If "just war" reasoning on particular occasions is invoked by us as a society, then such is the moral framework that *society should consistently apply to all matters of justice*, both domestic and foreign.⁶⁶ The important point for contemporary civic life is that just-war thinking constrains us as a society in ways that might not otherwise exist. How? Jean Elshtain notes the most basic among these. Just-war thinking

- promotes skepticism and queasiness about the use and abuse of power while not opting out of political reality altogether in favor of utopian fantasies and projections;
- requires action and judgment in a world of limits, estrangements, and partial justice;
- fosters recognition of the provisionality of all political arrangements;
- advances respect for other peoples and nations, both in terms of autonomy as well as accountability;
- acknowledges the necessity of self-defense and intervention against unjust aggression and gross oppression while refusing to legitimize imperialistic crusades and empire-building.⁶⁷

It has been said that just war is not just about war. It is rather "a way of thinking that refuses to separate politics from ethics."⁶⁸ Unlike ideological pacifism, just-war thinking does not shy from difficult issues that require political prudence, agonizing over justice, and morally guided application of force. Unlike *Realpolitik* and militarism, it insists on fusing—rather than divorcing—public and private morality. Therefore, no sharp cleavage between "domestic" and "foreign" policy should exist. For the militarist, force must be used cleverly and totally, since ethical considerations are non-existent or unimportant. For the just-war thinker, by contrast, humanity is to be viewed through the lens of the human condition—dignity and depravity. It follows, therefore, that war is not always justifiable, since it may be tainted by a thoroughly selfish and brutish will-to-power. But it also follows that war may be justified, as a limited means to redress/punish evil and protect the innocent.

The principled reasoning that constitutes just-war thinking calls us to make moral judgments. It calls us to distinguish, whether in domestic or foreign policy, between aggressors and victims, between the just and the unjust, between what human behavior is tolerable and what is intolerable. These are clearly difficult matters for postmoderns, it goes without saying.

⁶⁶ Application of just-war thinking to policy matters and basic issues of justice is the burden of Elshtain's book *Just War against Terror*, though it surfaces also in *Women and War*.

⁶⁷ *Women and War* 265–66.

⁶⁸ *Just War against Terror* 43.

But they are non-negotiable *if as a culture we are to develop and realize any vision of civic virtue and peace*. And that vision must be the possession of "Everyman" and "Everywoman."⁶⁹ It cannot be left to government alone. And it is certainly not *solely* the domain of political theorists or philosophers, even when they play a critical role in reflecting on the proper basis for civil society.

V. CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

In what concrete ways does the Christian moral tradition—and the just-war tradition by implication—inform our national polity and sense of civic responsibility? To begin, Christians will always have the challenging task of reminding society of what it means to be human, that is, reminding politicians and citizens of our anthropological dualism. In the words of Aquinas, we are simultaneously the crown jewel of creation and the scum of the earth; we dare not forget either. Responsible policy depends on it.

We also, as people of truth, have a responsibility in a world of lies, deception, and subterfuge to name things accurately. That is, we must carry the Orwellian burden to use language honestly and resist the totalitarian tendency to manipulate language and meaning for selfish or subversive purposes. We will need to confront society when it insists on linguistic promiscuity or playing fast and loose with facts. We will need to call for a purging of dishonest, manipulative, and false uses of language.

Further, we must learn once more how to engage culture winsomely without losing our convictions. We will need to be prepared to offer a reasoned defense of the "permanent things." We refuse to sever epistemological questions from ontological questions. Because we do not know *all* truth does not mean we cannot bear witness to *some* truth. Correlatively, we must be lovers of people while hating evil that ruins those very same people—and culture at large. Many cultural critics despise America presently. We need not capitulate to either an unreflective nationalism or a culture- and people-despising hatred.

In line with this, we need to be driven by an "incarnational humanism" of which John Courtney Murray,⁷⁰ and more recently, John Paul II, has spoken. That is to say, we need a fresh vision of the cosmic lordship of Christ over *all* things—terrestrial as well as celestial.⁷¹ This is necessary to counter the dualism that plagues so many Protestants. Tertullian was wrong: the earth—and everything in it—is *not* destined for some cosmic ashheap some day; it will be merely transformed.

Finally, and perhaps most challenging, we will need to lead our churches to a place where they can astutely interpret culture and, as a result, responsibly address culture. Not merely being consumed with church growth, not merely being programmatic, not simply chasing after the latest publishing phenomenon, but developing a cultural fluency that allows the Christian

⁶⁹ Such is the argument of Elshtain in chapter 4 of *Women and War*.

⁷⁰ *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960).

⁷¹ See Col 1:18–20.

community responsibly and authoritatively to speak to the culture—such is the need of the hour. Protestants lag behind Roman Catholics in this regard, and there is much, in my opinion, that we can learn from Catholic social thought.

May the Lord graciously assist us in this many-faceted and critical project. We have a responsibility to love and serve our neighbors, whoever they may be. There are times when such love will express itself in an “ethics of protection” in a world of gross injustice and—on occasion—heinous evil. Justly ordered peace is dependent upon it.