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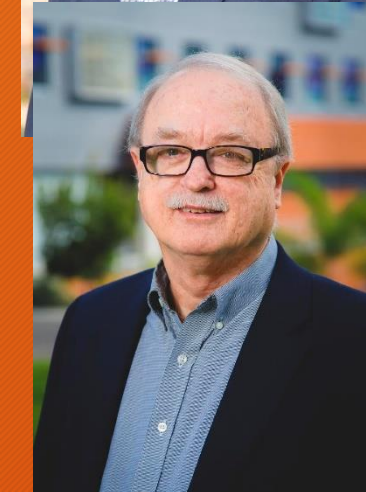
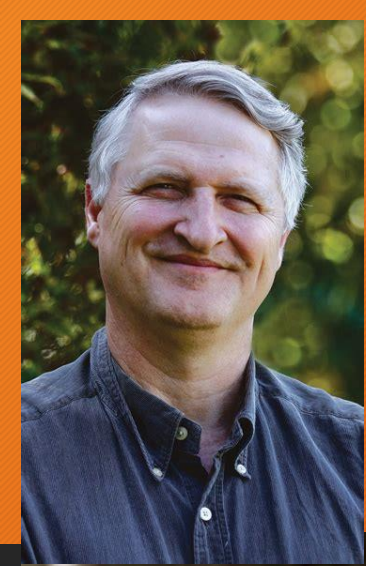
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Peacemaking,
Just War, and Pacifism
Paul Copan
Palm Beach Atlantic University

“War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things; the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing is worth a war, is worse.”

John Stuart Mill



HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING?

- Rogue nations (Iran, North Korea)
- Terrorism (Hamas, ISIS, Al-Qaeda)
- Sex-trafficking/slavery
- Governments engaging in religious persecution and human-rights violations



Russian invasion of Ukraine



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Hamas attacks Israel



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- I. CHRISTIAN PACIFISM?
 - II. JUST WAR: A DEFENSE
 - III. JUST WAR AND TERRORISM
 - III. SCRIPTURE, PEACEMAKING, AND WAR

I. CHRISTIAN PACIFISM? This takes many forms, but this is the basic position:

A. The taking of life in war is incompatible with the Christian life.


B. The refusal to take life in war does not mean abandoning the good of the world (it is not “utopianism” or “quietism”): peacemaking, praying for enemies, doing good in the world.

C. The commitment to pacifism is not solely about fulfilling a command but also about entering into a life of discipleship and virtue.

D. Christian pacifism refuses an ultimate divide between the private and public. Serving in the military is a contradiction to the Christian faith.

RESPONSE TO PACIFISM:

- Pacifism reminds us that we should not be quick to use force, but to seek diplomatic solutions when possible and work together to bring healing after war.
- But the pacifist does not distinguish between shedding blood and shedding innocent blood.
- Pacifism often ignores or leaves unexplained many Old Testament passages where God commands war.
- Peacemaking is not opposed to the use of coercive force; they can work side by side each other.

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- Principles of just war do not exclude loving our neighbor as ourselves—protecting the innocent, keeping order so that societies can flourish.
 - We can show love to our enemies in using just force to stop them from damaging their souls further in their effort to unjustly harm others.
 - Killing should be a last resort; harming or capturing an enemy (or criminal) is preferable to killing him.

- While all violence is force, not all force is violence. The proper use of force is directed at injustice, must be proportionate, etc.
- The issue is not “war vs. peace” (peace can sometimes be unjust) but “justified coercive force vs. unjustified coercive force.”
- We should presume the centrality of justice, not simply peace.

Example: Pennsylvania's short-lived "holy experiment" to establish a "peaceable kingdom" (1680-1750)

- Pacifist Quakers were in charge of this state.
- Lawmakers there refused to use force but hired Indians (among others) instead to keep peace and protect society.
- They chose to let others do the "messy" work of preserving order by force.





Note: Christian pacifists today will benefit from armed guards who protect their life savings or from police who keep criminals off streets.

Many kinds of government work will require the use of force for protecting workers, enforcing the payment of taxes and child support, and so on.

More and more police in the United States are often seen in churches or public schools in order to protect innocent civilians.

II. JUST WAR: A DEFENSE

“The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”

- G.K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News*,
Jan. 14, 1911

A. PRELIMINARIES

- The theory (based on God's general revelation to all humans (Romans 1-2)—for example, a parallel just war theory developed in Confucianism independent of Western (Christian) influence.
- Just war's principles are also reinforced by special revelation.
- Just war thinking assumes that not all evil can be avoided: To let violence and aggression go unchecked does not eliminate evil, nor does it leave me unimplicated if I could do something about it.
- Just war theory is normative for all people: The just war ideal is intended to be universally binding. The Christian does not have a double standard—one for Christians and one for others.

- *Just war theory does not try to justify war:* Just war is directed toward justice and restricts warfare to aggression. If all parties adhered to this rule, then no war would ever occur.
- *Just war theory assumes that private citizens do not have the right to use military force:* The right to use military force is entrusted to legitimate governments in the pursuit of preserving a peaceful and just order.

B. JUST WAR CRITERIA: WHEN TO GO TO WAR: *Jus ad bello* (“the right to war”) – *WEIGHTIER CRITERIA*

#1: Just Cause: All unprovoked aggression is condemned. A war for self-defense and protection (including defense of other vulnerable nations) is morally legitimate.

#2: Just Intent: The only legitimate intention is to secure a just or fair peace for friend and foe alike (not revenge, conquest, economic gain, ideological supremacy). Ultimately, greater good than harm should result from war

#3: Lawful Declaration: Only a lawful government has the right to initiate war. Only the state—not individuals or parties within the state—can legitimately exercise this authority.

Taken from Eric Patterson, “Just War,” in Copan, *War, Peace, and Violence*.

#4: Last Resort: “war should be entered upon only when negotiation, arbitration, and compromise, and all other paths fail; for as a rational being man should, if at all possible, settle his disputes by reason and law, not by force.”

This doesn't mean negotiations should go on indefinitely while gross injustices continue with no end in sight. Last resort is a prudential, secondary consideration, as are the remaining criteria.

WHAT TO DO DURING WAR: *Jus in bello* (“the right in war”)—These are more *PRAGMATIC/PRUDENTIAL* criteria.

#5: Immunity of Non-combatants: Since war is an official act of government, only those who are officially agents of government may fight, and individuals not actively contributing to the conflict (including POWs, medical personnel, and casualties as well as civilian nonparticipants) should be immune from attack—although this is not always possible (e.g., troops embedded in civilian-populated areas).

#6: Limited Objectives: The goal of war is *peace*—not the destruction of the enemy nation’s economy or its political institutions.

#7: Limited/Proportionate Means:

The weaponry and the force used should be limited to what is needed to repel the aggression and deter future attacks, that is to say, to secure a just peace. “only sufficient force should be used to resist violence and restore peace.” “Sufficient” does not necessarily mean decisive victory.

*WHAT TO DO AFTER WAR: *jus post bellum*.*

#8 Order: After war, establishing and ensuring domestic and international security as well as proper governance are critical.

#9. Justice: What just punishments and restitution are called for?

#10. Conciliation: How can both parties imagine and move together toward a shared future?

FINAL THOUGHTS ON JUST WAR

- War or military strength has helped bring an end to chattel slavery in America, Nazism, Fascism, and Soviet Communism.
- Wars typically begin from malicious intent and the absence of deterrence—or because of lack of clear resolution or unresolved disagreements from an earlier war.
- Often nations become accomplices to evil through inaction.

III: JUST WAR AND TERRORISM

TERRORISM IS:

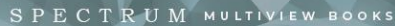
Asymmetric: it does not fight as a nation-state with legitimate authority against another.

Indiscriminate: it makes no distinction between combatants and noncombatants—the whole population is the target; disregards human rights and fundamental equality; does not distinguish between guilt and innocence within a population.



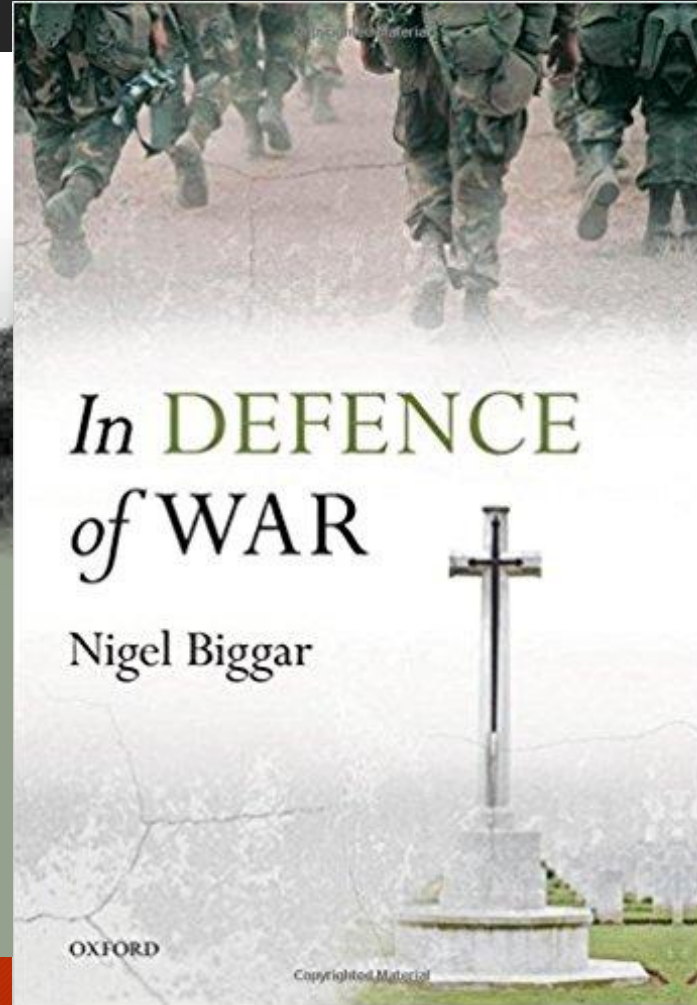
- *Destabilizing*: Terrorism threatens global and national political order, aims at destruction of innocent human life, and engages in sabotage of life-enhancing systems (cultural, economic, political).
- *Unconventional*: Terrorists will embed themselves within civilian populations, schools, houses of worship; they will use nail bombs to maim, fire to burn.

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- The same basic principles of just war would apply to terrorism.



WAR, PEACE,
AND VIOLENCE

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM
Eric Patterson, Myles Werntz,
A. J. Nolte, and Meic Pearse



A. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Turning the other cheek...



Matthew 5:38-42

Traditional teaching (5:38): “You have heard it said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’”

- The Old Testament context is judicial: the punishment should fit the crime.
- Jesus’s contemporaries misused this text to justify personal vengeance or retaliation.
- The danger is that a person will respond by evil means to take personal revenge (by evil means), which becomes a vicious cycle.

- 5:39a: “But I say to you that you should not resist an evildoer [*tō ponērō*].” However, Jesus resisted plenty of evildoers!
 - Jesus opposed the religious leaders (Matthew 23).
 - Jesus turned over tables, drove out money-changers from the temple with a whip, and didn’t allow any merchants enter (Mark 11:15-16; John 2:15). The merchants were turning the temple’s Court of the Gentiles (to be used for prayer) into a place of commerce and a center for Jewish nationalism.

The context makes clear the point of not returning evil for evil.

- Rom. 12:17, 21 refers to this idea: “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
- A better translation of this text would be:
 - ❖ “Do not resist (or violently resist) *by evil means*”;
 - or,
 - ❖ “Do not retaliate by evil means.”

*Charles Talbert's *Reading the Sermon on the Mount* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004) 89. This is also argued by Donal Hagner, Glenn Stassen, and others.

Don't respond by evil means when evil is done to you:

- *“the one who strikes you,”*
- *“wants to sue you,” “*
- *take your coat,”*
- *“forces you to go one mile.”*

The evil person here is abusing power or is personally hostile.

- “*Strikes you on the right cheek*”: This is personal insult—not an act of violence:
 - Job 16:10: “People open their mouths to *jeer* at me; they *strike my cheek* in *scorn*...”
 - Psalms 35:15: “The *smiters*... *slandered me without ceasing*.”
 - Lamentations 3:30: “Let him offer his *cheek* to one who would *strike* him, and let him be *filled with disgrace*” (cf. Isa. 50:6).

Jesus doesn't "turn the other cheek":

John 18:22-23: When [Jesus] had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, "Is that the way You answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

Transforming Initiative:

BE A “SECOND-MILE” DISCIPLE (Matthew 5:39-42): show kindness instead of returning evil for evil.

“But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also: TAKE ANOTHER INSULT;

and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well: BE WILLING TO PART WITH WHAT IS LEGALLY YOURS;

Matthew 5:39-42 (cont.)

...and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile: GO BEYOND DEMANDS FORCED UPON YOU.

Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you: BE GENEROUS IN SPIRIT WITHOUT SHOWING FAVORITISM.”



- **LOVING ONE'S PERSONAL ENEMIES IS NOT EASY FOR US:** But it's a mark of belonging to a peacemaking God: he makes peace with his enemies to turn them into friends (Romans 5:10)—unless people refuse God's offer of reconciliation to them.

B. PEACEMAKING AND WAR IN OTHER SCRIPTURES



1. Jesus didn't "invent" the idea "loving enemies."

Both the Old and New Testaments command us to love them.

Exodus 23:4-5: *"If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him."*

- Proverbs 25:21-22 (which Paul quotes in Romans 12):
“If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.”

- Old Testament Israelites had a responsibility to love enemies at a PERSONAL level even if they carried out judicial punishments at a CIVIC/STATE level. So this is no inherent conflict in the New Testament either.

2. Though God loves all, he will also judge those who rebel.

- Mt. 18:34—Jesus: “...better to have a millstone hung around his neck and drowned...”;
- Jude 5: “Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.”

3. Jesus doesn't absolutize loving one's enemies.

Matthew 18:6: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.”

Revelation 2:20-23: Jesus says, “I will strike her [Jezebel's] followers dead.”

Jude 5: “Jesus, after he delivered the Israelites from Egypt, destroyed those who did not believe.”

Revelation 6:9-10: “When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

4. Rescuing those in danger of death and oppression often requires just coercive force:

“Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, ‘But we knew nothing about this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards your life know it? Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?” (Proverbs 24:11-12 NIV).

Jeremiah 22:3: “Thus says the LORD, ‘Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place.’”

There is a difference between unjust force and just force.

There is also a difference between a just peace and an unjust “peace” (e.g., Britain’s appeasement of Hitler, allowing him to invade the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia and hoping that he would stop there.).



E.g., Yazidi women who became sex slaves of ISIS in Iraq.



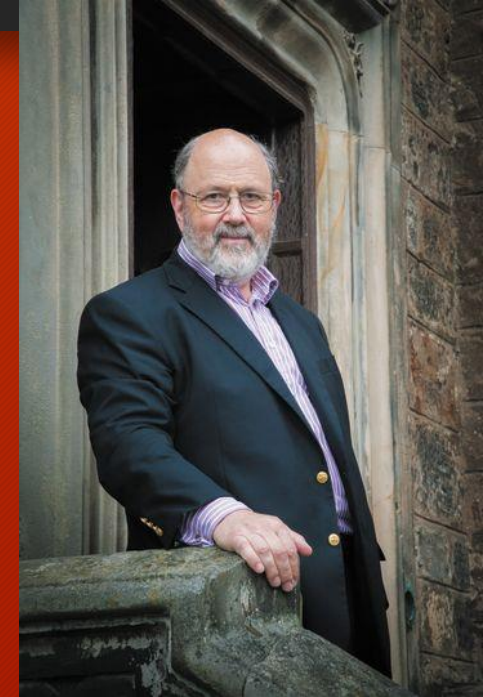
5. Love is not opposed to wrath.

God is both just and loving. Although God's desire is to show mercy, God will also resist evil persons who degrade, harm, and dehumanize others (Rom. 1:28-32).

God acts wrathfully because he loves those who bear his image.

N.T. Wright (New Testament scholar):

“Face it: to deny God’s wrath is, at bottom, to deny God’s love. When God sees humans being enslaved . . . if God doesn’t hate it, he is not a loving God. . . . When God sees innocent people being bombed because of someone’s political agenda, if God doesn’t hate it, he isn’t a loving God.



When God sees people lying and cheating and abusing one another, exploiting and grifting and preying on one another, if God were to say, 'Never mind, I love you all anyway,' he is neither good nor loving. The Bible doesn't speak of a God of generalized benevolence. It speaks of the God who made the world and loves it so passionately that he must and does hate everything that distorts and defaces the world and particularly his human creatures."

- N. T. Wright, "The Word of the Cross," NTWrightPage.com, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/03/30/the-word-of-the-cross/>.

6. Scripture does not condemn all coercive force but at times supports its use when it is just coercive force:

a. General biblical passages lend support to the idea of a just war

Ecclesiastes 3:8: A time for war, a time for peace.

Proverbs 20:18; 24:6: “Make war by wise guidance”; “the abundance of counselors brings victory.”

Luke 14:28-32: Jesus tells the parable of a king counting the cost before going to war.

Luke 22:38: “Here are two swords.” What were Jesus’ disciples doing with swords if Jesus was teaching absolute pacifism?

The New Testament does not speak negatively against Israel’s wars against the Canaanites in Acts 7, Acts 13, and Hebrews 11.

b. Soldiers in the New Testament are often portrayed as honorable people:

- Soldiers are not told to repent of their soldierly ways when given opportunity; they are often virtuous and pious (Matthew 8:10; Luke 3:14; Acts 10:1-2).

c. Positive images of soldiering in the NT (not inherently evil, like prostitution):

- 1 Corinthians 9:7: “Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?” (It’s clear why Paul does not say: “Who at any time serves as a prostitute at her own expense?”)
- 2 Timothy 2:4: “No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.” Why not say, “No harlot in a prostitution ring entangles herself in the affairs of everyday life, so that she may please the pimp who enlisted her”?

7. GOD COMMANDS GOVERNMENTS TO USE THE “SWORD” TO PUNISH THE GUILTY, PROTECT THE INNOCENT, AND PRESERVE THE PEACE (ROMANS 13:1-8; 1 TIM. 2:1-2; SEE GENESIS 9:6).

- Romans 13:4-6: PUNISH THE GUILTY “[the state] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil...., for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.”
- 1 Timothy 2:1-2: PRESERVE THE PEACE: “Pray for government leaders so that we might be able to leave peaceable and quiet lives.”

- Acts 23: PROTECT THE INNOCENT: Acts 23 is an application of Romans 13.
- When Paul's life is under threat from a mob, he seeks and benefits from military force (Acts 23)—470 soldiers!
- WHEN GOVERNMENTS DO THEIR JOB, THEY WILL CONTRIBUTE TO A SOCIETY'S FLOURISHING.



But doesn't Jesus say in that those who live by the sword will perish by the sword (Matthew 26:52)? To be a police officer or soldier does not mean you live by the sword. To live by the sword means to trust in power/military might.

Think of David: "Then David said to the Philistine [Goliath], "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted" (1 Samuel 17:45).

Nigel Biggar, Oxford University



“Jesus’ teaching and practical example of non-retaliation and forgiveness should be understood in the specific context of his rejection of militant Jewish religious nationalism. Whether and how that teaching should be applied more broadly to the business of government, Jesus does not tell us...

If we take our cue from the soldier narratives and suppose that the New Testament does not regard military service as incompatible with Christian discipleship, then we may infer that it has no objection in principle to the publicly authorized use of lethal force.

8. The NT is not obviously pacifistic, and the early church did not consider warfare inherently immoral.

- Some church fathers (Tertullian, Origen) opposed the idolatry of the Roman army, not war itself. (They urged prayer for “brave armies” and “for all our emperors” when fighting in a righteous cause.)
- From AD 170 onward, many Christians were fighting in the Roman army—well before the time of Constantine (4th century).


Andrew Latham, “War & Peace After Jesus,” *Touchstone* (March/April 2017). See Tertullian (*Apology* 30); Origen (*Contra Celsum* 8.73).

- Clement of Alexandria takes a positive view of soldiering based on John the Baptist's and Jesus' attitudes toward soldiers, and he believed that soldiers—like farmers and sailors—could mature in their faith in God (*Exhortation to the Greeks* 10.100.2).
- Saint Sebastian and other Christian soldiers served under Diocletian (early fourth 4th century). Tertullian writes they could be found everywhere—in “fortresses [*castella*]” and in the “military camp [*castra*]” (*Apology* 37).

8. Other biblical texts indicate that war has its place.

This isn't a problem in either testament—just in a post-Enlightenment era.

John Goldingay: “The Scriptures thus do not fret over war and other forms of human violence in the way that people do in the Western world.... Part of the reason for our fretting issues from the Enlightenment; part of it issues from the fact that modern war takes a much heavier toll on humanity because of our technological advances....



So the Scriptures do not help us directly with the problem we feel about war, but they talk much about war and help us precisely by virtue of coming at the subject from a different angle.”

John Goldingay, *Biblical Theology: The God of the Christian Scriptures* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 167-8.

THE APPROVED USE OF WAR IN SCRIPTURE

***STOP OPPRESSION:** The use of coercive force can put down oppressive powers and liberate the oppressed (e.g., Abram rescues Lot in Gen. 14).

***RESIST ATTACK:** Coercive force can be used to resist the attack of another people and punish the attackers (e.g., the attack of the Amalekites in Ex. 17:8-16).

***PUNISH WRONGDOERS:** War may be a means of punishing wrongdoers (e.g., the Midianites in Numbers 31:1-3).

***AIM AT WAR-AVOIDANCE:** We should aim to avoid war where we can (e.g., though Israel tried to peacefully pass through Og's and Sihon's lands in Num. 20:14-21, though they would be attacked).

***CELEBRATE WAR-AVOIDANCE:** We can celebrate deliverance without any war-making (deliverance through Red Sea in Ex. 14-15).

John Goldingay, *Biblical Theology: The God of the Christian Scriptures* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 167-8.

CONCLUSION

- Just war is assumed in the Old and New Testaments.
- Pacifism does not seem to be a position endorsed by Scripture, though it does provide an important voice in the discussion.
- Governments should respect the conscience of those who do not have the conscience or heart to fight.