

The Audacity of Hope and the Violence of Peace: Obama, War, and Christianity

Inaugural Ethics Lecture at Truett Seminary,
sponsored by the TBMaston Foundation
January 31, 2012

**Paul Powell Chapel,
George W. Truett Theological Seminary at
Baylor University**

**Lecturer: Dr. Jonathan Tran
Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics,
Baylor University**



Introduction

It is humbling to give this, the first TBMaston Foundation Lecture in Christian Ethics, which is a gift to Baylor and the church. I want to thank the Maston family and Foundation, as well as Dean Garland and the Truett community, for hosting this occasion for remembrance and reflection.

I'm going to be speaking about war this morning and, specifically, certain war policies of the Obama administration, reviewing and critically analyzing that policy from a theological perspective. Being that I'm going to be critical, I should qualify what I'm going to say. My assessment of President Obama, especially as it relates to his war policies, is meant neither to endorse his political rivals, such as the Republicans, nor to stump for any political position as defined in terms of the nation-state. I'm not here to critique one partisan position in favor of another.

Rather, what I hope to do is to help those of us who call ourselves Christians to think through the enormously complex questions of warfare, using the considerable tools of theology. I suppose, if I have a side, I would want to claim the side of the church, not only the church's alternative position on such things as war (including the *just war* tradition or, closer to my heart, Christian pacifism), but – most importantly – the church itself as an alternative to war. For ultimately, the church is not a series of religious platforms or values but, most directly, God's alternative to the world's violence, an invitation to the world to be *more than world*, a call to the world to more fully understand itself as participating in God's trinitarian life.

The title of my presentation, "The Audacity of Hope and the Violence of Peace," draws from two books, Barack Obama's well-known ***The Audacity of Hope***, where he speaks of hope and its available lights, and ***The Violence of Peace***, where Yale Law School Professor Stephen Carter tries to show how Obama's hopeful peace

plays out in violence.¹ In putting these two notions together, I am concerned with why our versions of peace tend to look so much like war. You might say war is *peace, American Style*. I am concerned to show why our peace is so violent, and how violent peace (peace secured through violence, which makes us strangely at home with the violence of our peace) characterizes us as a people. I will be focusing on President Obama's *unmanned aerial vehicles* (UAV) targeted killing program as the centerpiece of his war policy and, probably, the emblem of America's approach to war going forward. Ultimately, what I will be trying to say is that peace and violence for Americans are not opposite but complementary. In contrast and in conclusion, I will gesture toward a genuine peace that the church as Christ's body brings, a *real* peace that is participant in, and reflective of, God's life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Juxtaposed against the world's violent peace, Christ's patient peace comes as a sword. I will claim that this peace incarnates itself in the world and dwells among us – fully God, fully human. In light of this realness, the so-called audacity of hope and its violent peace will be *only* audacious and, therefore, a false hope; in Christ and Christ's church, God is not something we hope for, even audaciously, but a *reality* present to us.

On Droning

The following was reported in a 2009 edition of *The New Yorker* magazine:

On August 5th, officials at the Central Intelligence Agency in Langley, Virginia, watched a live video feed relaying close-up footage of one of the most wanted terrorists in Pakistan. Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Taliban in Pakistan [and, by all counts, a really awful dude], could be seen reclining on the rooftop of his father-in-law's house, in Zanghara, a hamlet in South Waziristan. It was a hot summer night, and he was joined outside by his wife and his uncle, a medic; at one point, the remarkably crisp images showed that Mehsud, who suffered from diabetes and a kidney ailment, was receiving an intravenous drip. The video was being captured by the infrared camera of a Predator drone – a remotely controlled, unmanned plane that had been hovering, undetected, two miles or so above the house. . . . The image remained just as stable when the CIA remotely launched two Hellfire missiles from the Predator. Authorities watched the fiery blast in real time. After the dust cloud dissipated, all that remained of Mehsud was a detached torso. Eleven others died: his wife, his father-in-law, his mother-in-law, a lieutenant, and seven bodyguards.²

¹ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Vintage, 2008); and Stephen L. Carter, *The Violence of Peace*.

² Jane Mayer, "The Predator War: What Are the Risks of the CIA's Covert Drone Program?" (October 26, 2009), http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/26/091026fa_fact_mayer.

Later, Mayer shows how the collateral damage was much greater, when considering the prior failed attempts to kill the target: "*the recent campaign to kill Baitullah Mehsud offers a sobering case study of the hazards of robotic warfare. It appears to have taken 16 missile strikes, and 14 months, before the CIA succeeded in killing him. During this hunt, between 207 and 321 additional people were killed, depending on which news accounts you rely upon.*" (Ibid.) See also <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/02/world/la-fg-drones-civilians-20100502>.

Numerous similar stories can be told, since the U.S. currently has approximately 7,000 UAV drones flying the skies, looking for targets to kill. The development of the UAV program has been a *game changer* in the war on terror, a watershed moment in military ingenuity. There are reports that people in places like Afghanistan and Yemen live in constant terror that death will come from the sky without a moment's notice.

We could spend much time thinking about the ethics of the UAV program of targeted killing. Since I'm interested in discussing the broader cultural issues in which droning takes place – that is, how we Americans think about war and peace in a way that droning becomes a watershed, a game changer – let me offer just a sample of what I see as some of the significant moral issues.³

- First, *when did assassination become an acceptable military practice?*⁴ The answer is, when we committed to something called "the war on terror," which knows no spatial, temporal, or political boundaries. The strategic benefit of the war on terror is that anyone, anywhere, anytime can be named an enemy, then targeted and killed in a way that would count as legitimate military action. Within this allowance, we have something called "anticipatory self-defense," which – when situated within the larger *Bush Doctrine* – grants the right to make preemptive strikes an omnipresent possibility. The 2011 droning of Amir Khan and Anwar al-Aulaqi, who were American citizens, would – absent the war on terror – be considered violations of due process, except that the expansive allowances of the war on terror put Aulaqi directly, and Khan indirectly, in the "enemy's" chain of command, rendering them targetable.⁵ While this isn't assassination of the traditional sort, such as slitting the throat of an enemy combatant, it is something similar, leading to certain ethical ironies. As Vicki Divoll, a former CIA lawyer who now teaches at the U.S. Naval Academy, observed, "*People are a lot more comfortable with a Predator strike that kills many people than with a throat-slitting that kills one.*"⁶
- Another ethical question: *Why are the procedures and protocols of this program not only secretive but seemingly purposefully convoluted?* There

³ For a detailed report on targeted killing, see http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/secretcy-defines-obamas-drone-war/2011/10/28/gIQAPKNR5O_story_3.html. For an analysis of "realpolitik," including review of arguments that see it as more moral than traditional warfare, see http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2011/05/targeted_killing.

⁴ Mayer writes, "*In July, 2001, two months before al Qaeda's attacks on New York and Washington profoundly altered America's mind-set, the U.S. denounced Israel's use of targeted killing against Palestinian terrorists. The American ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, said at the time, 'The United States government is very clearly on record as against targeted assassinations. . . . They are extrajudicial killings, and we do not support that.'*"

⁵ http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/strike-on-aulaqi-demonstrates-collaboration-between-cia-and-military/2011/09/30/gIQAD8xHBL_story_1.html; and http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/checkpoint-washington/post/a-proud-traitor-samir-khan-reported-dead-alongside-aulaqi/2011/09/30/gIQAYhcdAL_blog.html. Also see http://www.salon.com/2012/01/30/leon_panettas_explicitly_authoritarian_decree/.

⁶ Jane Mayer, "The Predator War: What Are the Risks of the CIA's Covert Drone Program?" (October 26, 2009), http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/10/26/091026fa_fact_mayer.

are actually (at least) two programs: one run by the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and another run by the CIA; each program possesses its own classified kill list and protocols. Many observers have suggested that this convolution is the government's intentional attempt to obfuscate, resulting in what an NYU international law expert called "*an accountability vacuum*."⁷ Adding to the muddle, the UAV program is run by – alongside military and intelligence officials – civilian contractors, individuals working for for-profit corporations. Now corporations may or may not be people, but they cannot be held accountable to the standard chain of command.⁸

- Third, *is droning acceptable on just war grounds?* The *just war* tradition was established to make sure that war was conducted for the right reasons and in the right ways.⁹ It assumes that, while war is never "good," it is sometimes necessary and, when necessary, should be conducted only for right, or just, causes, and *in* right, or just, ways. One of the key guiding rules is that of proportionality, that the use of force would be proportionate to the stated purpose for going to war, that the use of force is commensurate with the end that the use of force is intended to accomplish. This key stems from a code of honor among warriors; *just warriors are virtuous warriors*, who fight only when necessary and in honorable ways. In the case of droning, a 500-pound bomb that kills everything in sight is neither commensurate with the task of killing one person, nor is it honorable – given that, while one combatant faces grave danger, the other faces *no danger at all*.¹⁰ A former British Air chief marshal referred to such an arrangement as a "virtueless war," given that droning requires of drone pilots, who are far removed from the field of battle, *neither courage nor heroism*, two traditional marks of the

⁷ The phrase comes from U.N. Special Rapporteur [Philip Alston](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/secretcy-defines-obamas-drone-war/2011/10/28/qIQAPKNR50_story_4.html), a New York University law professor. See http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/secretcy-defines-obamas-drone-war/2011/10/28/qIQAPKNR50_story_4.html. Political theorist Michael Walzer asks this about the CIA's drone program: "*Under what code does the CIA operate? I don't know. The military operates under a legal code, and it has judicial mechanisms. . . . There should be a limited, finite group of people who are targets, and that list should be publicly defensible and available. Instead, it's not being publicly defended. People are being killed, and we generally require some public justification when we go about killing people*" (i.e., we don't know what to make morally of the drones). See Mayer.

⁸ See <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/29/world/la-fg-drones-civilians-20111230>.

⁹ Michael Walzer argues that the tradition has long evolved from a checklist of criteria to "ordinary language" about war. See his *Arguing About War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Specifically, Walzer writes, "*Just war is not only an argument about war in general; it is also the ordinary language in which we argue about particular wars. It is the way most of us talk when we join political debates about whether to fight and how to fight. Ideas like self-defense and aggression, war as combat between combatants, the immunity of noncombatants, the doctrine of proportionality, the rules of surrender, the rights of prisoners – these are our common heritage, the product of many centuries of arguing about war. 'Just war' is nothing more than a theoretical version of all this, designed to help us resolve, or at least to think clearly about, the problems of definitions and application*" (Ibid, x). Also, see Daniel M. Bell, *Just War as Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009).

¹⁰ Daniel Bell worries that it is not a proportionate use of force in the other direction, that selective killings of **individuals** may cause the war to drag on indefinitely. See his "On Targeted Killing and Drones" as a response to Stephen Carter's 2012 Society of Christians Plenary, "The Morality of Targeted Killing."

just warrior. A virtueless war sounds a lot like an *unjust* war. *And if we are not conducting a just war in Afghanistan, what **are** we conducting?*

- Finally, and perhaps most worrisome, *who **cares** about the targeted killing program?* Americans seem to care very little that their government is running a war based on targeted killing. *Time* magazine, at the end of 2011, ran a story about the newest UAV drones, which would be faster, smarter, and cheaper.¹¹ Looking at the article, I wasn't sure if I was reading a description of a weapon of war or an ad for the latest iPad. The story offered *no ethical reflection or questions*, demonstrating how Americans have largely granted President Obama a *moral blank check* to end the war in Afghanistan. One of the darker sides of this reality is the suggestion that we have not asked many questions simply because it has been so successful; namely, it has allowed us to kill many people without having American soldiers put in harm's way (other than the post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]-like stress that aviators in Florida experience when remotely controlling drones).¹²

Regardless of these troublesome moral questions, President Obama has expanded the drone program far beyond that of the Bush administration. According to the *Washington Post*, "*Other commanders-in-chief have presided over wars with far higher casualty counts. But no president has ever relied so extensively on the secret killing of individuals to advance the nation's security goals.*"¹³

We are talking about "*a system in which a decentralized apparatus carries out summary executions of people we're assured are bad and who are sometimes U.S. citizens, and the president knows about this but chooses not to exercise oversight or control of the process.*" We have, in the words of one expert, created "*an unaccountable killing machine operating at an industrial scale.*"¹⁴

Such is life under the Obama administration . . . the world under America's *super* power. While the violence and suffering I just described are sad, even devastating, they are not unique. War is what we do, have been doing, and will be doing for the foreseeable future; it

¹¹ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2103298,00.html>.

¹² See Marvin Kalb and Deborah Kalb, *Haunting Legacy: Vietnam and the American Presidency from Ford to Obama* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2011); on Vietnam, see my *The Vietnam War and Theologies of Memory: Time and Eternity in the Far Country* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). On the stressful conditions, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/19/world/asia/air-force-drone-operators-show-high-levels-of-stress.html>. It is interesting to consider the dynamics of the stress created for aviators whose daytime job is to attack human targets and, because the bases are on American soil, return home to their families immediately. In the history of the world, this is a unique phenomenon. For further consideration, see David A. Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, Little, Brown and Company, 1995).

¹³ http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/under-obama-an-emerging-global-apparatus-for-drone-killing/2011/12/13/qIQANPdILP_print.html.

¹⁴ Joshua Foust, *The Atlantic*, "Unaccountable Killing Machines: The True Cost of U.S. Drones," Dec. 30, 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/12/unaccountable-killing-machines-the-true-cost-of-us-drones/250661/#.TwKtT7ialMQ.email>. See also <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/afghanistan-pakistan/kill-capture/what-is-the-secretive-us-killca/>.

is required of us because of the role we play, or think we play, in the world. The UAV system is only the most technologically advanced version of it.

I think it is instructive to think for a moment about Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush. In *The New American Militarism*, the historian and retired U.S. officer, Andrew Bacevich, describes Bush's tenure as commander-in-chief accordingly:

*well before September 11, 2001, and before the younger Bush's ascent to the presidency, a militaristic predisposition was already in place both in official circles and among Americans more generally. In this regard, 9/11 deserves to be seen as an event that gave added impetus to **already** existing tendencies rather than as a turning point. For his part, President Bush himself ought to be seen a player reciting his lines rather than as a playwright drafting an entirely new script.¹⁵*

As off-putting as his bravado could be, Bush was simply acting out the role scripted for him. It was easy to demonize Bush, or Obama for that matter, as if he were an aberration to business as usual, as if before his presidency was a state of perpetual peace. We are a country that has been at war, in one form or another, for most of its history, with Presidents Bush and Obama – and their respective ambitions for peace – just the latest casualties.

We are, after all, a violent people. It is hard to hear that, because we believe we love peace. But our violence is most clearly expressed in the *kind* of peace we love, a peace secured by violence. We go to war not because we love violence, but because we love peace, and violence is how we imagine peace. Let me repeat myself and be clear here: We as a nation are again at war not because we love war, but because we love peace and *war is what we mean by peace*. If you follow our history, including the history that our drones are presently making, you will come to this conclusion: **For Americans, "peace" is not the absence of war, but rather war for certain ends.** This is not because we are a bad people; we are a good people, and this is how we practice our goodness.

Obama's Realism

Those who do not like Obama's war policies, exemplified today in his targeted killing program, cannot accuse him of inconsistency. If we thought he promised us a rose garden and, therefore, now feel disappointed, we weren't listening. What *is* unique about his presidency is that Obama furnished us with perhaps the most philosophically sophisticated articulation for war and its reasons of any president in recent memory. The fact that this articulation came in the form of his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech shows quite clearly what I meant a minute ago when discussing the peculiar American correlation of peace and war. The Peace Prize speech was a statement not only political but, more critically, *theological*, an admonition for war based on a metaphysical (read: theological) description of reality:

¹⁵ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Bacevich goes on to show how this tendency found philosophical expression and intensification through development and influence of the new-conservatives, according to which, "*the beauty of the Bush Doctrine was not that it promised to deny oil weapons to those tempted to discomfit the United States but that it imparted to U.S. policy an 'incandescent moral clarity'*" [Ibid., 95]. Also, see Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

*War, in one form or another, appeared with the first man. At the dawn of history, its morality was not questioned; it was simply a fact, like drought or disease -- the manner in which tribes and then civilizations sought power and settled their differences. . . . The capacity of human beings to think up new ways to kill one another proved inexhaustible, as did our capacity to exempt from mercy those who look different or pray to a different God. . . . We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth: **We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes.** There will be times when nations -- acting individually or in concert -- will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified. . . . **I face the world as it is,** and cannot stand idle in the face of threats to the American people. For make no mistake: Evil does exist in the world. A non-violent movement could not have halted Hitler's armies. Negotiations cannot convince al Qaeda's leaders to lay down their arms. To say that force may sometimes be necessary is not a call to cynicism -- it is a recognition of history; the imperfections of man and the limits of reason.¹⁶*

One of the things that is revealing about this speech is its allusions to the Christian ethics of Reinhold Niebuhr and its espousal of Niebuhr's moral universe and its ensuing ethical posture called "Christian realism," which claims that the way of Jesus, while laudatory, only works as an ideal, not as a reality; that, as Niebuhr believed, **Christ stands only at the edge of history, not in history.** Accordingly, in history, where we must deal with reality, not ideals; with Hitler and Al Qaeda, not Jesus, we must be realistic about how much good can be achieved, about how far peace should be pursued. Hitler and al Qaeda are *realistic*; Jesus and the politics of Jesus that is the *New Testament* church, *not realistic*. **Rejecting** non-violence as an unrealistic possibility, Niebuhr said,

the perfect love of Christ comes into the world, but it does not maintain itself there; the cross, therefore, stands at the edge of history, and not squarely in history; and Christian faith has quite rightly seen in this cross a revelation of the nature of the divine and eternal as well as of the ultimate historical possibility and impossibility.¹⁷

In a 2007 interview with *The New York Times*, Obama was asked, "Have you ever heard of Reinhold Niebuhr?" Obama responded enthusiastically, "I love him. He's one of my favorite philosophers." As to what he learned from Niebuhr, he said,

I take away the compelling idea that there's serious evil in the world, and hardship and pain. And we should be humble and modest in our belief we can eliminate those things. I take away . . . the sense that we have to make these efforts knowing they are hard, and not swinging from naive idealism to realism.¹⁸

In some ways, the only difference between Bush, for all of our antipathy toward him and his wars, and Obama, is that Obama said it better. While Bush gave us the *reasons* for war, Obama gave us a *theology* of war. And while Obama has been, wisely, much less willing to associate war with divine fiat and use God to justify his politics, that is only because he was able to identify war as the *natural order of things*. There is no need to

¹⁶ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-acceptance-nobel-peace-prize>.

¹⁷ *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D.B. Robertson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press), 276.

¹⁸ David Brooks, *The New York Times*, April 27, 2007. I quote from Richard Harris' introduction to Richard Harris and Stephen Platten, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power* (New York: Oxford, 2010). Interestingly, the book is partially dedicated "For Barack Obama as he faces the challenges of wielding power under God."

appeal to the nature of God when you can appeal to the nature of the world, a world shorn of God, where God stands always outside.

Recently, Obama and the Pentagon announced sweeping cuts in national defense, a drop of \$100 billion and reduction of 80,000 troops. In doing so, he said this:

Yes, our military will be leaner, but the world must know the United States is going to maintain our military superiority with armed forces that are agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats. . . . Over the next 10 years, the growth in the defense budget will slow, but the fact of the matter is this: It will still grow, because we have global responsibilities that demand our leadership. In fact, the defense budget will still be larger than it was toward the end of the Bush administration. And I firmly believe, and I think the American people understand, that we can keep our military strong and our nation secure with a defense budget that continues to be larger than roughly the next 10 countries combined.¹⁹

Notice that the argument here is not, "We have been a warring people and now desire peace and so will reduce our armaments." Nor is it, "After 10 years of two wars, we have grown weary of war and the promises of war, and so we need to rest from warring." The argument is not one of peacefulness; it is one of *efficiency*. Obama is, as in 2002, not opposed to war, just "dumb" and "rash" ones.²⁰ After all, in announcing the cuts, he promises:

we've built the best-trained, best-led, best-equipped military in history – and, as commander-in-chief, I'm going to keep it that way.

¹⁹ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/05/remarks-president-defense-strategic-review>. Also, see the specifics of President Obama's proposed reductions: <http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/story/2012-01-26/panetta-military-defense-cuts/52805056/1>. For analysis of the Obama administration's defense budgeting, see Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Budgeting for Hard Power: Defense and Security Spending Under Barack Obama* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 2009). As is evident from the references in this paper, the administration is young enough that most of the literature is not in monograph studies, but Internet sources.

²⁰ Recall Obama's opposition to the Iraqi invasion: *"Good afternoon. Let me begin by saying that, although this has been billed as an anti-war rally, I stand before you as someone who is not opposed to war in all circumstances. . . . I don't oppose all wars. . . . What I am opposed to is a dumb war. What I am opposed to is a rash war. . . . That's what I'm opposed to. A dumb war. A rash war. A war based not on reason but on passion, not on principle but on politics. Now let me be clear – I suffer no illusions about Saddam Hussein. He is a brutal man. A ruthless man. . . . He's a bad guy. The world, and the Iraqi people, would be better off without him. But I also know that Saddam poses no imminent and direct threat to the United States, or to his neighbors, that the Iraqi economy is in shambles, that the Iraqi military a fraction of its former strength, and that – in concert with the international community – he can be contained until, in the way of all petty dictators, he falls away into the dustbin of history. I know that even a successful war against Iraq will require a U.S. occupation of undetermined length, at undetermined cost, with undetermined consequences. I know that an invasion of Iraq without a clear rationale and without strong international support will only fan the flames of the Middle East, and encourage the worst, rather than best, impulses of the Arab world, and strengthen the recruitment arm of al Qaeda. I am not opposed to all wars. I'm opposed to dumb wars."* <http://www.famous-speeches-and-speech-topics.info/famous-speeches/barack-obama-speech-against-going-to-war-with-iraq.htm>. See also Obama's comments about the speech in *The Audacity of Hope*, 294-95.

We will continue to be the warring country we have been, but for cheaper. None of this is about genuine peace but, rather, financial expediency driven by a crushing deficit and a recessed economy.

Bombing with Bread

Some of you may be wondering at this point who I will vote for, if I think there is an alternative to Obama, and, whoever's in office, whether there is a better option than droning. Those of you wondering about my vote, I'm afraid to say, have *missed the point*. Viewing war as our nature and destiny makes targeted killing not only necessary but inevitable. There will be no alternatives for us so long as we continue to confuse our loves, for war and for peace. If we think war makes for peace, droning, even with all its moral baggage, *will* be our best way forward. But this is where American Christians need to *separate their American from their Christian*. The church not only *gives* us alternatives to drones and war; **the church, as Christ's body, is the alternative.**²¹

When the towers came down in 2001, when all those people were murdered at the Pentagon, and those poor folks killed on Flight 93, I mourned with everyone else. I mourned for the incredible loss of life, the disregard for human suffering, the terrible violation of everything we hold dear. I also remember lamenting what would come next. I knew our response to being killed would be to kill. Demonstrating how the propensity to war always short-circuits creativity, we responded the only way we knew how. Someone bombed us, so we were gonna bomb them. The world knew we would do it; *al Qaeda certainly knew we would do it*. Our doing it surprised no one.

But we might have done differently, or at least those people who are both American and Christian could have allowed their faith in Christ to inform how they were going to be citizens of a country at war. We might have suggested an alternative, one that is more than audacious. Instead of bombing them with bombs, we could have, as Stanley Hauerwas once suggested, bombed them with bread.²² Bombing them with bombs only confirmed to the world that America is a violent nation.

Now if we bombed them with bread, that would be a different story. Imagine, in the weeks and months after 9/11, American C-130s and B-52s, and all of our stealth bombers, flying into Afghanistan and – instead of thousand-pound bombs – we dropped bread, parachuting payloads so that people would be fed. Instead of M1-A Abrams tanks rolling into the wastelands of Kabul, big white *Wonder Bread trucks*, with their goofy red-and-yellow circles, delivering nourishment to a people endlessly invaded, religiously oppressed, and criminally bullied. And even, in South Waziristan – yes, that place where we dismembered Meshud [*by all counts, a really awful dude*], Predator drones would sweep down in the dead of night and – instead of attacking with Hellfire missiles – attack him, his wife, his father- and mother-in-law with bread.

Isn't such a proposal, "bombing them with bread," irresponsible? Wouldn't it make us more vulnerable to further attack? Might America become the laughingstock of the world? Yes, to

²¹ On the ethics of America's response to 9/11, see the exchange between George Weigel and Stanley Hauerwas and Paul J. Griffiths. George Weigel, "Moral Clarity in a Time of War," *First Things* (January 2003), 20-27; and Stanley Hauerwas and Paul J. Griffiths, "Policy Pollyanna," *First Things* (December 2010), 6-7.

²² Neither Hauerwas nor I could remember where he published this thought, though he is certain he did at some point. Either way, I am glad he's allowed me to lift it here.

all three, or probably yes, since we didn't try and hence do not know. How could we suggest such a thing? Where could such an idea come from? Why would we respond with bread? Simply, "On the night he was betrayed, he took the bread, and when he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" (1 Corinthians 11:23-24)

The church in America might have suggested this. What *is* the church, after all, other than God's body given to the world, that the world might be nourished on peace and patience rather than war and desperation? We are bread and, insofar as we can live by peace and patience, even in a world of Hitlers and al Qaeda, we let the world know that 9/11 did not change anything; rather, history was changed on a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday when our Lord Christ was crucified, buried, and resurrected.

We might have said, "This is what God did as people were killing him; we as citizens demand we do likewise." We could have complained that the tax dollars of American Christians shouldn't be used for bombs and, even if we lost that argument, might have mobilized the church to bomb them with bread ourselves, as the Baptist Global Response did in 2010 in Afghanistan and Pakistan, responding to monsoon flooding that killed 1,500 and affected millions.²³

You might think that such a call on the part of the church, that such an action by American Christians, is not possible. You may suppose, following Obama following Reinhold Niebuhr, such a response unrealistic and, therefore, irresponsible. You may think that Jesus Christ could do such a thing *only* because he, unlike we, is God. You may think, along with Niebuhr, that the church cannot approximate Christ, cannot be his body, because Christ is not real in the way the church is real, is not real in the way Hitler or al Qaeda are real.

And *yet* the Creed says he was real, in fact "really divine *and* really human." In the face of the violence done to him, in the face of terror, Christ gave his body as bread because he was God, and this is how God acts toward the world, *and* because he was human, and this is what humanness looks like.²⁴ For those who hold to the Creed, to the scriptural witness the Creed summarizes, the problem with "Christian realism" and its pleas to be "realistic" is that, in light of the realness of Christ's body, it is not realistic at all. "*This is my body, given for you.*" To deny the realism of bombing with bread is to deny the realness of Christ's humanity, and to deny *that* is, following St. Athanasius, to deny our salvation. Bombing with bread when people bomb you with bombs is what a reconstituted humanity, a humanity fully realized, a humanity taken up into the trinitarian life of God, looks like; responding to violence and terror with peace and patience is the life of God, translated into the world, embodied in the church.

Would bombing with bread be effective? It can be no *less* effective than all those wars that promised us peace. Can God's love be effective? If not, we are all doomed. Anyhow,

²³ <http://www.christiantelegraph.com/issue10474.html>.

²⁴ John Howard Yoder makes the claim: "*The work of Christ is, at its center, obedience (Philippians 2 et al.). Christ was exactly what God meant man to be: man in free communion with God, obeying God and loving mankind with God's love. This is the truth which the Nicene Creed seeks to safeguard; this man Christ Jesus was really God working, was man in perfect communion with God. Nicaea affirms the reality of God's working in Christ's obedience.*" Yoder, "A Study in the Doctrine of the Work of Christ," Unpublished paper presented at the Domburg Seminary, April 27, 1954. Paul Martens' *The Heterodox Yoder* directed me to this text (Eugene: Cascade, 2012), 29.

effectiveness is not our cause, but faithfulness. We are not here to be effective, especially since those pushing for effectiveness tend to be drawn toward violence to achieve it. The hope of the church is not effectiveness, as if our task is to change the world. **We are not here to change the world,** through violence or peace secured by violence; rather, **we are here to witness to the fact that the world has been saved in Christ.** The world saved in Christ means we need no longer secure peace by violence, that such measures have been deemed forfeit in the terms of the now reigning Kingdom. This is not the *audacity* of hope, but the *reality* of God, his very body, present in the world.²⁵

²⁵ Many thanks to Professor John Wright for his comments and suggestions, which were, as always, spot on.