



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Articles:

- 📖 Terrorist Enemies and Just War  
(*Peace and War*, pp. 27-35)
- 📖 Moral Equality among Soldiers  
(*Peace and War*, pp. 69-73)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:

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### Christian Reflection

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# Terrorist Enemies and Just War

How do we respond to terrorists who don't even pretend to play by the rules? The just war tradition, if we take it seriously, calls for a response to terrorism that is radically at odds with approaches being pursued in the "war on terrorism."

### Prayer†

Shield us, O God, from the darkness of soul that does not see you, and from the loneliness of heart that does not hear your voice.

Throughout life and in the valley of the shadow of death, do not forsake us; for your Name's sake. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

### Reflection

On the just war view, developed by Christians since the fourth century, violence sometimes is justified by appeal to shared human morality. On this view, war should be waged only (1) for a just cause, (2) after being declared by a legitimate authority, (3) as the last resort, (4) with good intentions, and (5) with promise of a high probability for success. Moreover, warriors should (6) target only combatants, and (7) ensure the damage done is no greater than the offense to which the war is a response.

Of course, "terrorists don't fight fair," observes Cavanaugh. If we approach "matters of organized violence through the just war tradition, terrorist tactics are a source of frustration." No wonder that some Christians suggest the rules of just war should be changed in several ways to fit this difficult and bloody "war on terrorism." Cavanaugh and Sterling, however, challenge us to apply traditional just war thinking more carefully by asking:

- ▶ *Is terrorism a war, or a crime?* Calling their actions "criminal," Cavanaugh suggests, denies terrorists a certain dignity. "To call an attack 'war' is to recognize its potential legitimacy as an act of violence (for after all, there can be acts of just *war*, but there are no just *crimes*)." Unlike war, terrorism has no explicit government support, aims at disruption rather than defeat of an enemy, does not distinguish between combatants and noncombatants, and is carried out by fighters who do not identify themselves by uniforms. Acts of terrorism are more like "hate crimes," the U. N. Security Council says.

What difference does a label make? Our response to crime is policing, not war. "War is us-versus-them, whereas policing is about promoting the common good," says Cavanaugh. We might limit our "response to the apprehension and punishment of those directly responsible...[and] require cooperation with foreign governments and transnational bodies such as the United Nations, listening to their vision of the common good for the international community."

- ▶ *Who has legitimate authority to declare war?* "Nation-states may currently have the military power to wage war, unlike [the United Nations or other transnational bodies], but we should not conflate this power with the moral authority to decide whether a particular use of force is just," Cavanaugh writes.



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On the just war view, furthermore, leaders who decide on war should be concerned for justice and the common good, “formed in the virtues of a disciple, and given authority by the Holy Spirit within the community of disciples.” Cavanaugh fears that in a modern nation state, decisions “about the justice of a particular use of force will inevitably be based on interest and power, and not primarily on the kind of justice proper to the community of Christian disciples. For this reason, the just war tradition, if taken seriously, would mandate at least that the church not abdicate to the nation-state its ability to decide when a particular use of force is just.”

► *May we demonize terrorists?* It’s easy to do, for they have committed grave evils against innocent people. Yet we must not sentimentally think we are as blameless as their victims, nor dismiss the possibility of dialogue with them. The just war criterion of last resort reminds us that “our enemies – even in the grip of evil – remain children of God, and that our own actions and intentions are never above examination.”

The just war view of the “moral equality among soldiers” is applicable here. This requires soldiers to carry out their duties with the intention of restoring enemies to peace, rather than treating them with hatred, revenge, or cruelty. Their dignity should be respected. “Even in waging war,” Augustine counseled Christian soldiers, “cherish the spirit of a peacemaker, that by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace; for our Lord says: ‘Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.’” Augustine warned the greatest evil in warfare “is not the death of some who would soon die in any case,” but rather the “love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like.”

### Study Questions

1. Should terrorists’ actions be called “war” or “crime”? What practical difference would each label make?
2. George Weigel recommends “stretching” the idea of “just cause” beyond responding to aggression, to include preemptive military action against terrorists (p. 28)? Do you agree?
3. Traditionally the criterion of last resort requires one to negotiate with an enemy before declaring war. Do you agree with Weigel that this doesn’t apply to terrorists (p. 28)?
4. Comment on Cavanaugh’s view that “the church [should] be ready and willing to step out of line with national policy when Christian discipleship demands it” (p. 32). Has the church done this effectively?
5. Are military codes of conduct enough to make just warriors?
6. How does your congregation help shape young people’s character in regard to warfare?

### Departing Hymn: “Let Us Sing a Song of Peace”

†Adapted from *A Prayer Book for Soldiers and Sailors* (1941), accessed online at [justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1928/S&S\\_index.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1928/S&S_index.htm).

# Terrorist Enemies and Just War

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	2 Samuel 3:1, 17-39
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (skim all)	Discuss moral equality of soldiers
Questions 4 and 6	Questions (selected)	Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions 4, 5, and 6
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To understand when violence is justified according to the just war tradition.
2. To explore the application of just war criteria to the “war on terrorism.”
3. To consider what prophetic role the church should play in the decision to go to war.
4. To consider what role the church should play in forming the character of a just warrior.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Peace and War (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Comment

Bill Cavanaugh concludes by reminding us: “The just war tradition developed in a penitential context. Christian just-war advocates would do well to approach terrorism in the same spirit. At its best, the just war tradition does not simply justify violence but questions it, both ‘ours’ and ‘theirs.’ In doing so, the hope is to build bridges – not just burn them – between us and our enemies, so that the common good of all of God’s creation is actively pursued. If this does not sound like statecraft, it is because it is not. The church must take a prophetic role in resisting the violence of both state and non-state actors, and witnessing to the peace of Jesus Christ in a violent world” (*Peace and War*, p. 34). How should the church speak prophetically to a nation absorbed in a “war on terrorism”?

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and then ask members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

This lesson offers a framework for Christians to discuss prayerfully the morality of war and the response to terrorism. The just war perspective insists that “violence, when it is truly justified at all, must be the last resort, carried out in a restrained manner, and used with humility and grief” (*Peace and War*, p. 17). The first five criteria cited in the lesson—just cause, declaration by a legitimate authority, last resort, good intention, and high probability for success—offer guidance about a nation’s decision to wage war. They delineate *jus ad bellum* (justice in going toward war). The other criteria—targeting only combatants and limiting damage—along with good intention of individual soldiers, describe *jus in bello* (justice in fighting a war). The moral equality among soldiers, as Sterling shows, is an implication of these criteria for individual warriors.

The just war tradition cannot be reduced to a list of rules about when war is justified. It presumes the character of decision makers and warriors will be formed in justice and other virtues of Christian discipleship.

Sterling talks about the formation of a just warrior's character. Cavanaugh suspects that leaders in a liberal democracy make decisions for political reasons, rather than from a concern for justice and the common good. He is suspicious of attempts to "stretch" the just war criteria to justify the "war on terror."

If the discussion is extended to a second session, reflect on King David's treatment of Abner (2 Samuel 3), for this event shaped Ambrose's view on the formation of a warrior's character.

### **Study Questions**

1. "War," for Weigel, highlights the seriousness of terrorist acts. Cavanaugh prefers "crime" in order to draw proper guidelines for responding to terrorism. He contrasts the methods of war and policing: "Policing seeks to secure the common good within a community, and is therefore limited by the law and customs of that community. War pits one community against another, and is therefore less restrained by the rule of law. War is expeditionary, taking the capacity to kill and destroy into someone else's territory. In other words, war is us-versus-them, whereas policing is about promoting the common good amongst us. Because of this, policing has an inherent mandate to minimize violence; in policing, lethal force is the last resort, whereas in war it is the first. In war, soldiers are less restrained by law, for they serve simultaneously as judges and executioners for those they kill" (p. 30).
2. A preemptive military strike would target a terrorist group (or country harboring terrorists) before it commits any aggression against us. Is this ever in the interest of peace? If so, who should make this decision—a nation-state or some international body like the United Nations or N.A.T.O.? Are there dangers in extending the "just cause" criterion in this way?
3. Weigel says diplomacy is a waste of time. "Terrorists, by definition, do not play by the rules, diplomatic or otherwise," he writes. "I can't see how it makes moral sense to argue that one must first attempt to negotiate with people who regard negotiation as weakness, who think of the 'other' as vermin to be exterminated, and for whom acts of mass murder are deemed religiously praiseworthy." Encourage members to discuss whether Weigel's characterization applies equally to Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and the leaders of nations such as North Korea and Iran. Is this an accurate portrayal, or a demonizing of the enemy?
4. Encourage members to reflect on how their congregations and church bodies have responded to the war on terrorism and the invasion of Iraq. More generally, how should churches exercise their prophetic role in a modern liberal democracy? Should only individual Christians speak out, or should informed groups of Christians, ministers, leaders of church organizations, etc. make statements? How can these statements avoid being politically partisan (i.e., by reflecting on the issue from a theological perspective rather than the point of view of a political party)? Is there any difference between a congregation exercising its prophetic voice and becoming a political action committee?
5. "Codes of conduct—in international laws and conventions, or merely informal—help many service members to act appropriately in times of war," says Sterling. "Most soldiers, like most people in general, want to 'do the right thing,' and this desire helps deter unlawful behavior. Yet when soldiers are consumed with fear or anger in battle, it is unrealistic to expect them to conduct themselves appropriately merely because they have studied abstract codes or manuals" (p. 71). If so, codes of conduct are not enough; we must know and love justice—i.e., know by second nature what is right and desire to do it even when it is difficult). How do we develop this desire and knowledge—through military training, school work, role modeling at home or in church, community service, or church education, etc.?
6. Reflect on how worship, Bible study, and ministry opportunities form young people's character in justice, courage, and wisdom. Are they exposed to the rich Christian debates on pacifism and just war thinking? In what contexts do they confront and examine warfare?

### **Departing Hymn**

"Let Us Sing a Song of Peace" is on pp. 58-59 of *Peace and War*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.