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# SPECIFY AND DISTINGUISH! INTERPRETING THE NEW TESTAMENT ON 'NON-VIOLENCE'

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## ABSTRACT

*Widely showered with superlatives when it was first published in 1996, and now commonly regarded as a masterpiece, Richard Hays's *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (1996) constructs a pacifist reading of the New Testament. To date, Hays's reading has provoked no systematic refutation from proponents of the doctrine of just war. This essay hopes to offer such a refutation. Its argument has three main planks. First, that Hays's reading of the New Testament stories about god-fearing soldiers, who persist in their profession, is not compelling; second, that he fails to specify sufficiently the meaning of Jesus' teaching and conduct in terms of Jesus' own context (particularly the option of armed violence in the service of religiously inspired nationalism); and third, that Hays's normative moral concepts are often too crude, suffering from a failure to employ valid moral distinctions. The essay concludes by arguing that the doctrine of just war is better able than pacifism to make adequate sense of all the relevant New Testament data.*

## KEYWORDS

*biblical ethics, ethics of Jesus, just war, New Testament ethics, non-violence, pacifism, Richard Hays*

The question is not new, but it is important and the answer to it remains controversial: Should we read the New Testament as repudiating every kind of violence or only certain kinds? Over ten years ago, the pacifist<sup>1</sup> response found fresh voice in Richard Hays's *The*

<sup>1</sup> By 'pacifism' I mean the refusal of violent force in all circumstances, since a less absolute definition – the refusal of violent force only in certain circumstances – fails to distinguish pacifism from just war doctrine.

*Moral Vision of the New Testament*.<sup>2</sup> Widely showered with superlatives by biblical scholars on its first publication in 1996,<sup>3</sup> and rated a 'classic' and a 'masterpiece' in 2006<sup>4</sup> and 2007,<sup>5</sup> *The Moral Vision* devotes its fourteenth chapter to presenting a pacifist reading of the New Testament. Yet no attempt has been made by Christian proponents of the doctrine of just war to refute it. This is odd, because if what Hays says is correct, then Christian just warriors must either drop their doctrine or drop their faith. As myself a Christian proponent of the justified use of lethal force, I would seriously prefer to do neither. In the course of this article, therefore, I hope to show that Richard Hays is wrong.

### *Richard Hays's Pacifist Reading of the New Testament*

I begin with a summary of what Hays says. The foundation of his argument, predictably, is the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 5–7). This he sees as Jesus' 'basic training on the life of discipleship', his 'programmatically disclosure of the kingdom of God and of the life to which the community of disciples is called', and 'a definitive charter for the life of the new covenant community'.<sup>6</sup> While not taking the form of 'a comprehensive new legal code', this 'charter' 'suggests by way of a few examples the character of this new community'. And what is this character? *Inter alia*, one in which 'anger is overcome through reconciliation (5:21–26), ... retaliation

<sup>2</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Among the pre-publication plaudits to be found on the back cover and opening page are these: 'Hays's ... book ... has neither peer nor rival' (Leander Keck, Yale Divinity School); 'Hays has pulled off, with a success for which I can think of no contemporary parallel, one of the most difficult tasks in theological and biblical writing today' (James Dunn, University of Durham); '[Hays's] description of the variegated ethical vision of the early church is state-of-the-art, and the application of that vision to contemporary issues is hermeneutically skillful' (George Lindbeck, Yale Divinity School); 'A gem that sparkles on every page' (Graham Stanton, University of London); '... an extraordinary accomplishment' (Allen Verhey, Hope College); 'Hays's method and proposals will ... prove a benchmark for future scholarship' (L. Gregory Jones); '... a rare and fine book' (John Riches, University of Glasgow).

<sup>4</sup> See Willard M. Swartley in *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006): 'Hays's *Moral Vision* is a classic for its penetrating, succinct exegesis of selected NT writings; his hermeneutical model ...; and his perceptive treatment of five major voices in the theological ethics, ... Hays's treatments of Mark, Matthew, Luke–Acts, and John are incisive' (pp. 439, 441); and Robert Morgan in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), who refers to 'Hays's ... subsequent masterpiece *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*' (p. 48).

<sup>5</sup> In the first chapter of his own, alternative reading of New Testament ethics, Richard Burridge writes of *The Moral Vision* that 'it has quickly established itself as the classic treatment and has been widely appreciated' (*Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007], pp. 14–15).

<sup>6</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision*, p. 321.

is renounced (5:38–42), and enemy-love replaces hate (5:43–48).<sup>7</sup> In sum, ‘the transcendence of violence through loving the enemy is the most salient feature of this new model *polis*’.<sup>8</sup>

Lest it be supposed that this vision of a non-violent Christian community is confined to the Sermon on the Mount, Hays proceeds to argue that it finds confirmation in Matthew’s ‘overall portrayal of Jesus’. In the temptation narrative (4:1–11), for example, Jesus renounces the option of ‘wielding power’ over the kingdoms of the world; and (following John Howard Yoder’s interpretation) his deflection of the temptation to refuse the cup of suffering amounts to a renunciation of the resort to armed resistance.<sup>9</sup>

Hays’s next move is to tackle ‘various ingenious interpretations that mitigate the normative claim of this text [Matt. 5:38–48]’.<sup>10</sup> Among these are interpretations holding that the only violence prohibited is that in self-defence (and that violence in defence of third parties is implicitly permitted). Against these, Hays invokes the ‘larger paradigm of Jesus’ own conduct in Matthew’s Gospel’, which ‘indicates a deliberate renunciation of violence as an instrument of God’s will’.<sup>11</sup> He substantiates this by appeal to the temptation narrative, where Jesus ‘does not seek to defend the interests of the poor and oppressed in Palestine by organizing armed resistance against the Romans or against the privileged Jewish collaborators with Roman authority’. He also appeals to the narrative of Jesus’ arrest, where the disciple who draws his sword in defence of his master receives a severe dominical rebuke (Matt. 26:47–52). This he takes to be ‘an explicit refutation’ of the justifiability of the use of violence in defence of a third party.<sup>12</sup>

A second set of interpretations that Hays seeks to discredit are those that would limit the meaning of the prohibitions of violence in terms of their social and political context. One of these readings is offered by Robert Guelich, who argues that the scope of Matthew 5:39a (‘But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil’)<sup>13</sup> should be limited to a courtroom context, specifying its meaning as an injunction against seeking judicial redress against a false accuser.<sup>14</sup> Hays concedes that one of the illustrative injunctions in Matthew 5:38–48 does have a specifically judicial meaning (v. 40: ‘and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>13</sup> All biblical quotations in this article are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

<sup>14</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982).

cloak as well'), but he denies that the others (e.g. v. 39b: 'But if one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also') can be confined to a forensic context. He points out that Guelich himself admits that verses 41 and 42 ('and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you') cannot be so constrained.<sup>15</sup> Hays's case here seems cogent.

Another restrictive interpretation that Hays seeks to discredit is Richard Horsley's. Horsley argues that in the original historical setting, the 'enemies' whom Jesus exhorted his disciples to love (Matt. 5:44) referred only to 'personal enemies' – other members of small Palestinian villages who found themselves competing against one another for scarce economic resources – rather than foreign or military ones; and that Jesus' primary concern was to get the peasants to stop squabbling with each other so as to cooperate for mutual economic benefit.<sup>16</sup> Hays's first counter-argument is that such a reading commands no lexicographical support: the Greek word *echthroï* in Matthew 5:44, translated as 'enemies', is a generic term and is often used in biblical Greek of national or military enemies, not just of personal or local ones.<sup>17</sup> His second point is that nothing in the Gospel of Matthew suggests such a precisely local social situation, and that Horsley himself acknowledges that the Matthaean context actually requires the more general interpretation of enemies as 'outsiders and persecutors'.<sup>18</sup> However, Hays's main complaint is methodological, namely that Horsley makes his reconstruction of the history *behind* the text normative, and uses it to trump the intended meaning of the Matthaean text itself. On the contrary, according to Hays, 'the canonical narrative context governs the normative theological use of the text; the historical reconstruction remains speculative'.<sup>19</sup>

After his defence of a pacifist reading of the Gospel of Matthew, Hays proceeds to show that the non-violent stance of this Gospel is echoed throughout the canonical New Testament as a whole. The Gospels, he finds, are unanimous in portraying Jesus as a Messiah who subverts all prior expectations by assuming the vocation of suffering 'rather than conquering Israel's enemies'.<sup>20</sup> The Acts of the Apostles present the martyr Stephen, praying for the forgiveness of his enemies (Acts 7:60), as the model of a Christian response to violence.<sup>21</sup> In his epistles, Paul presents

<sup>15</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision*, pp. 325–26.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 255–73.

<sup>17</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision*, p. 328.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324 (cf. p. 328).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

God himself as responding to his enemies, not by killing them, but by seeking reconciliation through the 'self giving' of His Son.<sup>22</sup> And while Paul writes that 'the governing authority bears the sword to execute God's wrath (Rom. 13:4), that, according to Hays, is not the role of believers. Those who are members of the one body in Christ (12:5) are never to take vengeance (12:19); they are to bless their persecutors and minister to their enemies, returning good for evil'.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles offer 'a consistent portrayal of the community as called to suffer without anger or retaliation'.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the Apocalypse 'seeks to inculcate in its readers precisely the same character qualities that we have seen extolled through the rest of the New Testament canon: faithful endurance in suffering, trust in God's eschatological vindication of his people, and a response to adversity modeled on the paradigm of "the Lamb who was slaughtered"'.<sup>25</sup>

The concluding move that Hays makes in his argument is to deal with certain particular texts that 'seem to stand in tension with the central witness of the New Testament concerning violence'.<sup>26</sup> Prominent among these are the passages where soldiers make an appearance. In Luke 3:14–15 John the Baptist does not exhort them to abandon their profession, but merely to pursue it honestly without exploiting the civilian population. In Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10 Jesus marvels at the faith of the centurion whose servant he has healed, but raises no questions about his military profession. In Mark 15:39 it is a centurion at the foot of the cross who is the first human character in the Gospel to recognize Jesus as the Son of God. And in Acts 10:1–11:18 the centurion Cornelius, described as 'an upright and God-fearing man', converts to the Christian faith, but there is no indication that this is supposed to involve his renunciation of military service.<sup>27</sup> Hays's response to these awkward texts is to argue that they have a particular literary role, that is, 'to dramatise the power of the Word of God to reach even the unlikeliest people'.<sup>28</sup> In Luke 3:12–13, for example, soldiers appear alongside tax-collectors as examples of how John's preaching reached even the most 'unsavory characters'.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, when measured against 'a synthetic statement of the New Testament's witness', the examples of individual 'good soldiers' in the New Testament 'weigh negligibly': in the light of the vocation of the Christian community to the work of reconciliation

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

and to suffer in the face of great injustice, 'the place of the soldier within the church can only be seen as anomalous'.<sup>30</sup>

There we have Hays's argument. Now let us examine it.

*The Soldier Narratives: The Thin End of the Wedge*

We begin our critique where our exposition ended. Hays holds that 'these narratives about soldiers provide the one possible legitimate basis for arguing that Christian discipleship does not necessarily preclude the exercise of violence in defence of social order or justice'.<sup>31</sup> As he sees it, however, the basis is 'fragile',<sup>32</sup> since these passages are intended to play a particular literary role, namely, to illustrate the rashly generous capaciousness of Jesus' version of the kingdom of God – its capacity to embrace even 'sinners' such as tax-collectors and soldiers. As I see it, three problems attend this interpretation. First, the centurion Cornelius is not presented to the reader as a 'sinner', but rather as 'a devout man who feared God . . . , gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God'; and Cornelius' servants introduce him to Peter as 'an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation' (Acts 10:2, 22). The second problem is that sinners who become Christian disciples are invariably portrayed by the New Testament as renouncing their sinful practices; and Hays himself notes that, whereas the Acts of the Apostles takes care to mention that the Ephesian magicians who became 'believers' publicly burned their magic books (Acts 19:18–20), it makes no suggestion whatsoever that the God-fearing Cornelius was moved to surrender his military profession (Acts 10:1–11:18).<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Hays could also have mentioned that whereas the Gospel of Luke makes a point of showing that a tax-collector's salvation involves the public mending of his extortionate ways (Lk. 19:1–10), on no occasion does it suggest that a soldier's salvation involves the renunciation of military service as such. If the New Testament regarded participation in the military profession as sinful, then *surely* its authors would have taken care to tell us that soldiers who became Christian disciples renounced military service? The third problem with Hays's interpretation lies in his implication that soldiers in the New Testament signify one thing only: the capacity of the grace of God to reach even sinners as 'unsavory' as these. However, were we to grant that this is the primary import of these passages – and I have just explained why I doubt it in the case of Cornelius – why should we suppose that this

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 335–36.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

excludes secondary significances? Why is it not *also* significant that such grave sinners are not shown to repent of their military ways? And why does this not signify that whatever makes them sinners, it is not their status as soldiers? The awkward presence in the text of soldiers who are neither rebuked for their profession, nor repent of it, makes the stance of the New Testament canon toward the use of violent force less ‘unambiguous’<sup>34</sup> – and the ground for arguing that Christian discipleship could include it more robust – than Hays supposes.

Hays’s response to this awkwardness is to claim that it is ‘outweighed’ by ‘a synthetic statement’ of the New Testament’s witness.<sup>35</sup> What he appears to mean by this is that the New Testament is so predominantly in favour of non-violence that these soldier stories can be discounted on account of their paucity and ambiguity. This interpretation, however, takes it for granted that ‘non-violence’ best captures what the New Testament is predominantly in favour of. I shall argue below that this assumption is wrong; and that Hays is incorrect to assume that love for one’s enemies and a commitment to reconciliation necessarily rules out the use of (sometimes lethal) force. Rather than brush the awkward finger aside, therefore, I will let it guide us toward a non-pacifist reading of the New Testament, which does better justice to *all* of the relevant material.

### *Romans 13: On Not Importing the ‘Anabaptist Distinction’*

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. This implication finds explicit corroboration in St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, when he writes that ‘[he who is in governing authority] does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer’ (13:4). It is true that Paul also enjoins members of the body of Christ not to avenge themselves but to leave vengeance to the wrath of God (12:19). Instead, they should minister to their enemies (12:20), repaying no one evil for evil (12:17). Hays reads this along classic Anabaptist lines: the governing authority’s use of force to punish the wicked is ordained by God, but ‘that is not the role of believers’.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 331. The 1527 Schleitheim Confession, the classic statement of Anabaptist faith, puts the point thus in its sixth article: ‘The sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ... [I]t is not appropriate for a Christian to serve as a magistrate’ (in John Leith [ed.], *Creeks of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present* [Atlanta, GA: John Knox, rev. edn, 1973], pp. 287, 289).

This distinction of roles is not coherent. If God has ordained the use of the sword to punish wrongdoers (and thereby defend innocents), then that is something that should be done. It needs to be done and it is right to do it. Why should Christians be exempt from doing what is necessary and right? The Anabaptist answer is that something else is also necessary and right – namely, bearing witness to an alternative society so completely governed by God as to lack need of the sword – and that this is the special calling of Christians. The problem with this position, however, is that such a society is not a practicable alternative *under current conditions of rampant sinfulness*. If it were, then presumably God would have ordained it *instead of* the use of force for public purposes. And besides, why should Christians presume that *other* people will always be available to do the necessary, obligatory coercive work? Alternatively, one might regard the non-coercive, entirely God-governed society, not as a current rival to one where the public use of force is ordained, but rather as its ideal goal. In this case, the pacific ideal would so function as to qualify and discipline the current use of force, which intends it. Rather than produce two distinct classes of people – those who use the sword, and those who point to peace – it would produce one class only – those who struggle to use the sword pacifically. This, however, would bring us not to pacifism, but to the doctrine of just war.

Whether the Anabaptist distinction is coherent, is one issue; whether it makes best sense of St Paul is another. Hays's interpretation gathers its exegetical force from the fact that what the governing authority is instituted by God to do – namely, to execute God's wrath on the wrongdoer (Θεου γαρ διακονος εστιν, εκδικος εις οργην τω το κακον πρᾶσσοντι [13:4]) – is precisely what the Christians at Rome are forbidden to do (μη εαυτους εκδικουντες, αγαπητοι, αλλα δοτε τοπον τη οργη. γεγραπται γαρ, Εμοι εκδικησις, εγω ανταποδωσω, λεγει Κυριος [12:19]). This need not be read, however, as asserting a general distinction between the calling of Christians and the calling of publicly authorized sword-users – and given the incoherence of such a distinction, it *should* not be so read. Rather, it should be understood as an answer to the ad hoc question of whether or not Christians should respond to their persecutors by taking the law into their own hands – by avenging themselves – and thus making themselves into a threat to public order. Paul's answer is that rather than do this, they should bear injustice patiently and charitably – 'be patient in tribulation' (12:12), 'Bless those who persecute you' (12:14) – trusting the public authorities to fulfill their divine commission. We may not take this to imply that Paul held all private use of violent force in defence or promotion of justice to be forbidden to Christians. We may only infer that Paul considered public order to be a sufficiently precious good that Christians should bear some injustice – and try and turn it to good – rather than conjure up an anarchy of private vendettas and provoke the brutality of public repression.

As we read it so far, then, the New Testament does not object in principle to the publicly authorized use of violence. As for its private use, we may say at least that St Paul had very strong reservations. The remedying of injustice is the proper, divinely instituted task of public authorities; and even where the authorities fail to complete their task – as they are bound to do from time to time – private (Christian) persons should bear some injustice and respond to it constructively rather than take the law into their own hands and risk all the grave attendant evils of resultant anarchy.

### *Jesus' Repudiation of Religious Nationalist Revolt*

St Paul's concern about the evils of private violence finds a strong echo in Jesus' teaching and practice. According to Hays, Jesus and the Gospels repudiate the use of violence, not just in self-defence, but also in defence of justice. As witness he calls the temptation narrative in the Gospel of Matthew (4:1–11), where Jesus refuses 'to defend the interests of the poor and oppressed in Palestine by organizing armed resistance against the Romans or against the privileged Jewish collaborators with Roman authority'.<sup>37</sup> He also appeals to the narrative of Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, where a disciple draws his sword in defence of his master, but Jesus, perceiving the same temptation, rebukes him (Matt. 26:47–52).<sup>38</sup> This Hays takes to be 'an explicit refutation' of the justifiability of the use of violence in defence of a third party.<sup>39</sup> Here as elsewhere, however, he generalizes beyond the evidence. The option historically available to Jesus was not merely an abstract 'violence in defence of third parties against injustice', but specifically private violence motivated by a conviction that Israel is *the* divinely chosen nation and by a corresponding hatred of her Gentile imperial masters.

This is controversial. Not every New Testament scholar sees in Jesus' hinterland the option of violent religious nationalism (although Hays himself evidently does).<sup>40</sup> Richard Horsley has argued that, excepting 'the

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>38</sup> Hays reads the disciple's offer of defence as another instance of the temptation that Jesus had earlier refused (ibid., p. 324: '... the temptation that Jesus rejects in the wilderness and again at Gethsemane').

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> He says as much in his interpretation of Matthew's temptation narrative (see the immediately preceding paragraph). Among the good company in which this places him is Seán Freyne, the eminent historian of first-century Palestine. In Freyne's recent *Jesus: A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* [London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004], he writes that 'Jesus refused to endorse the triumphant Zion ideology which viewed the nations as Israel's servants, and which was to provide a rallying call for some of Jesus' near-contemporaries in their struggle against Roman imperialism' (p. 135); 'Jesus was not prepared to share the violent response to such conditions [of oppressive imperial rule], espoused by many Jews throughout the first century, which eventually plunged the nation into a disastrous revolt' (ibid., p. 149).

terrorism of the Sicarii directed against their own high priests', Jewish resistance to Roman rule during Jesus' lifetime was 'fundamentally non-violent'.<sup>41</sup> *Pace* those interpreters who see the 'Zealots' as a continuous movement or 'party' straddling the first seven decades of the first century AD and make of them 'a convenient foil over against which to portray Jesus of Nazareth as a sober prophet of a pacific love of one's enemies', Horsley holds that they did not come into existence until the winter of AD 66–67.<sup>42</sup> Against this it is reasonable to argue that the absence from Jesus' context of the 'Zealots' as a definite 'party' may not be taken to mean the absence of militant nationalism *tout court*. That had erupted in 4 BC and it was to erupt again in AD 66. While it is possible that the failure of the earlier revolt had completely discredited violent nationalism during the intervening period – and so during Jesus' lifetime – it is *prima facie* unlikely. While crushed revolts may confirm some – typically the middle-aged, married, and propertied – in their conviction that armed resistance is futile and counter-productive, they tend to provide others – typically gangs of young bachelors – with heroes, an activist ideal, and a lust for revenge.<sup>43</sup> What is more, even if Horsley is correct in claiming that the violence of the Sicarii was directed only at 'their own high priests', the rule of this religious elite can hardly be considered something entirely separate from Roman hegemony.

What the temptation and Gethsemane narratives permit us to say, then, is only that Jesus declined to participate in violence that was not publicly authorized and that was inspired by religious nationalism. Why he should have done so, the text does not make explicit. We do know, however, that in Jesus' view the boundaries of the kingdom of God were defined less by ethno-national identity than by 'faith' – that is the implied significance of his response to the centurion at Capernaum (Matt. 8:5–13 and Lk. 7:1–10).<sup>44</sup> He therefore had a theological reason to distance himself from religious nationalism.

Moreover, there is some ground for supposing that he also had a moral-prudential one: namely, the grave evils of civil war. Let me explain. Nationalist revolts often lack the unanimous support of the people that

<sup>41</sup> Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, p. 117.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. x–xi.

<sup>43</sup> It is true that I am generalizing here on very particular ground – namely, the pattern of support for the IRA evident in Co. Cork in the aftermath of the failed Easter Rising of 1916. (See Peter Hart, *The I.R.A. and its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916–1923* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998].) Still, I take it to be common sense that human beings who are old enough to have developed commitments to spouses and families and adequate livelihoods are likely to be less keen than herds of young unattached males to run the risks and unleash the unbidable forces of violent revolution.

<sup>44</sup> What is implied here is made quite explicit in Luke's story of the Apostle Peter's encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10:34, 45).

they purport to represent; in which case they are quite as much civil wars as 'wars of independence'. Of all kinds of war, civil wars are arguably the most vicious and inflict the most long-term damage on civil society. As the Latin American 'liberation' theologian, Juan Luis Segundo, has observed, prolonged guerrilla war destroys the social ecology. It 'undermines ... basic rules of human and social existence', because it raises doubts about the non-combatant status of civilians (are they clandestine 'terrorists' or treacherous 'informers?'), proliferates suspicion, and dissolves the cement of trust between citizens.<sup>45</sup> Further, civil war also lends itself to a downward spiral of atrocity and reprisal as each side tries to terrorize the civilian population into compliance and to demoralize the enemy by attacking their families.<sup>46</sup> We might also add that among the most ruthless and uncompromising kinds of civil war is that precipitated by a nationalism that operates in Manichaean religious terms, divinizing the nation and sanctifying an absolute hatred of its enemies.

Now this is a general point about the internecine nature of nationalist revolt. Are there any grounds for supposing that it featured among Jesus' considerations or those of his Evangelists? Yes, there is some. We know from Josephus' account that the Jewish War of AD 66–70 was as much between the Jews as it was against the Romans.<sup>47</sup> The same appears to have been true of the earlier revolt of 4 BC, of which Josephus wrote: 'And so Judaea was filled with brigandage. Anyone might make himself king as the head of a band of rebels whom he fell in with, and then would press on to the destruction of the community, causing trouble to few Romans, and then only to a small degree, *but bringing the greatest slaughter upon their own people*.'<sup>48</sup> This was no mere 'local difficulty': it involved the Roman sacking of Sepphoris in the north (Galilee) and of Emmaus in the south (near Jerusalem). Memory of such a traumatic social event is not likely to have faded within a single generation; and it would be reasonable to suppose

<sup>45</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), p. 287.

<sup>46</sup> Again, I am generalizing here from the experience of Co. Cork during the IRA's campaign against the Royal Irish Constabulary, the British Army, and then the Free State forces during the period 1919–22 (see Hart, *The I.R.A. and its Enemies*).

<sup>47</sup> E.g. Josephus, *The Jewish War*, trans. G. A. Williamson (London: Penguin, 1970), chs 9, 10, 14, 15, 17 (e.g. pp. 156, 158, 160, 166, 177–78, 236–37, 255, 277, but esp. p. 233: 'Every town was seething with turmoil and civil war, and as soon as the Romans gave them breathing-space they turned their hands against each other. Between advocates of war and lovers of peace there was a violent quarrel. First of all in the home family unity was disrupted by partisan bitterness; then the nearest kinsmen severed all ties of blood, and attaching themselves to men who thought as they did lined up on opposite sides. Faction reigned everywhere, the revolutionaries and the jingoes with the boldness of youth silencing the old and sensible'; and p. 255: 'Now that the storm-tossed city was at the mercy of the three greatest calamities, war, tyranny, and party-strife, by comparison the citizens felt that war was almost endurable').

<sup>48</sup> Quoted by Martin Goodman in *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilisations* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 39; my italics.

that it was still current in Jesus' time. It might even find expression in the twelfth verse of the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus warns that 'brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death'. Whereas the immediately preceding passage sets this in the context of religious persecution, the immediately subsequent passage places it in the context of nationalist revolt – if we follow the prevailing view that the 'desolating sacrilege' of verse 14 refers to Titus' soldiers setting up their standards in the Temple in AD 70.

Whatever his reasons – whether simply theological or also moral-prudential – Jesus declined the option of an uprising inspired by religious nationalism. Logically, this represents a specification of St Paul's caution against pursuing justice by taking the law into one's own hands.

### *On Being Discriminate about 'Violence'*

Beyond these reservations about its private, unauthorized use, does the New Testament evidence any more general concerns about violence? Of course it does. As Hays points out, it forbids anger and hatred (and therefore the violence that issues from them), as well as 'retaliation'.<sup>49</sup> However, we should not assume – as Hays does – that all violence is angry, hateful, and retaliatory. It is not.

To begin with, an important distinction may be made with regard to anger. On the one hand, there is the 'resentment' that is both appropriate and proportionate. It is appropriate because it is the human emotion by which we take injustice seriously, recognizing it for what it is; and it is proportionate because it is tempered by a resolve to seek reconciliation. On the other hand, there is the 'anger' that, driven by rage and indignation, intemperately answers injustice with injustice. This distinction between 'resentment' and 'anger' or between two kinds of anger may be made, and the Anglican moral philosopher, Joseph Butler, made it.<sup>50</sup> But, as Butler pointed out, so does the New Testament. St Paul, for example, distinguishes a restrained kind of anger from a sinful one, when he exhorts Christians at Ephesus, 'Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger' (Eph. 4:26). And if we read the Sermon on the Mount in this light, we notice that the anger that Jesus prohibits is abusive: 'But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement; whoever *insults* his brother shall be liable to the council' (Matt. 5:22; my

<sup>49</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision*, pp. 321, 322.

<sup>50</sup> Butler argues that resentment is a 'natural passion' that may take either virtuous or vicious form according to circumstances. For biblical support, he appeals explicitly to St Paul in Ephesians 4:26 (Joseph Butler, 'Upon Resentment', in *Fifteen Sermons*, ed. W. R. Matthews [London: G. Bell & Sons, 1953], p. 123 [section 3]).

emphasis). In these terms, then, violence against injustice is bound to be resentful, but it need not be angry.

Anger can be driven by several possible motives. Impatience is one. Disappointment is another. Hatred is a third. If the use of violence need not be angry, then by the same token it need not be hateful. This is not merely a theoretical truth, but an empirical one. It is widely recognized, for example, that soldiers in battle are often motivated by loyalty to their comrades and by fear of shame, rather than by hatred for the enemy.<sup>51</sup>

One of the defining characteristics of anger is its touchy lack of control by any sense of proportion or of moral duty: it hits back instinctively, no matter how trivial the injury; and even if its retaliation is designed to deter and not merely to inflict suffering, it defends the self without any regard for what it owes the aggressor. In this light, it is noteworthy that none of the injuries with which Jesus illustrates his injunction not to retaliate are very serious ones. If we should understand being struck on the right cheek (Matt. 5:39) by the back of someone's left hand as a calculated insult,<sup>52</sup> then that is merely an offence against dignity, and relatively trivial; and as a purely physical injury being struck on one's cheek hardly rates highly. Losing one's coat to a creditor (Matt. 5:40) and being coerced into carrying military equipment for a mile (Matt. 5:41) are more serious forms of oppression, but still less than grave ones. What the text allows us to say, then, is that the Sermon on the Mount urges Christians not to hit back (and presumably start a fight) in response to tolerable injuries to oneself. As Hays rightly says, Jesus' disciples are to relinquish the 'tit-for-tat ethic of

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999), chapter 5, 'Love and Hate', especially pp. 141–48. A reader of an earlier version of this article judged that my view of military motivation smacked of an armchair perspective. In case readers of the present version should think likewise, let me say that my armchair has afforded me the opportunity to read copious amounts of military history, which furnishes plenty of cases where soldiers have regarded their enemy with respect rather than hatred. For example, take British and ANZAC regard for their Turkish enemy at Gallipoli in 1915. According to one British veteran, the Turk 'became popular with us, and everything suggested that our amiability toward him was reciprocated' (Ernest Raymond, *The Story of My Days: An Autobiography 1882–1922* [London: Cassell, 1968], p. 120, quoted by Richard Harries in 'The De-romanticisation of War and the Struggle for Faith', in *The Straits of War: Gallipoli Remembered*, introduced by Martin Gilbert [Stroud: Sutton, 2000], pp. 190–91). Moreover, on one recent occasion I have risen from my armchair to speak with a colonel in the Royal Marines, who confirmed my bookish view by testifying that military training with which he is familiar positively discourages 'hot' violence in favour of 'cool'. This is because violence that is motivated by hatred lacks control, and therefore makes mistakes, jeopardizes plans, and endangers comrades. Violence that would be efficient and effective cannot afford the distractions of hatred. If you doubt it, ask a boxer.

<sup>52</sup> This is David Daube's interpretation in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956), pp. 260–63, which Robert Guelich follows (*Sermon on the Mount*, p. 222) but Hays does not (*The Moral Vision*, p. 326).

the *lex talionis*'.<sup>53</sup> Clearly, there is here a definite bias away from instinctive retaliation and toward less touchy and more generous, conciliatory and constructive responses. Nevertheless, the text does not allow us to infer – as Hays does – an absolute prohibition of violent retaliation of any kind under any circumstances. Specifically, it does not forbid retaliation that is not motivated by anger or hatred, that observes its moral obligations to the aggressor, that aspires to achieve a just reconciliation, and that *therefore* takes seriously and registers the fact of a grave injustice. As we should distinguish between appropriate 'resentment' and immoderate 'anger', so we should distinguish between on the one hand retaliation governed by a certain care for the aggressor and a desire for genuine peace, and on the other hand retaliation that is driven by a self-regarding indignation. Or, to put the matter more succinctly, we should distinguish between retaliation that is directed by 'love' and that which is not.

Notwithstanding this, it might be protested that 'loving' retaliation cannot be violent, and *a fortiori* it cannot be lethally violent. According to Hays, the practice of loving enemies is, *pace* Augustine and Reinhold Niebuhr, 'incompatible with killing them'.<sup>54</sup> This is not so, however. I may (intend to) kill an aggressor, not because I hate him, nor because I reckon his life worth less than anyone else's, but because, tragically, I know of no other way to prevent him from perpetrating a serious injury on an innocent neighbour. My intentional killing is 'loving', therefore, in two respects: first, its overriding aim is to protect the innocent from serious harm; and second, it acknowledges the aggressor's equal dignity, it wishes him no evil, and it would gladly spare him if it could.

So far, the main thrust of my complaint against Richard Hays's pacifist reading of the New Testament is that it generalizes too much and distinguishes too little. The New Testament does forbid certain kinds of violence, namely, that which is inappropriate and disproportionate because motivated by anger or hatred rather than love. It also refuses the private resort to violence against certain kinds of injustice – and especially that resort which is inspired by religious nationalism that issues in civil war. But its prohibition of violence is specific, not absolute. Therefore it is not accurate to summarize the New Testament's position in terms of a commitment to 'non-violence' *simpliciter*.

### *The Christian's Vocation: Not to Suffer-in-General*

The specification or delimitation of the violence forbidden by the New Testament implies a corresponding delimitation of the patient suffering

<sup>53</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision*, p. 326.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

that it recommends as morally normative for Christian life and ethics. We should demur from saying, as Hays does, that all four evangelists present Jesus' choice of messianic career, epitomized in the symbol of the Cross, as involving 'the vocation of suffering' rather than conquering Israel's enemies;<sup>55</sup> and that the Epistle to the Hebrews and the catholic Epistles prescribe the suffering of violence as the pattern of Christian life.<sup>56</sup> To talk of 'the vocation of suffering' is to make the negative practice of suffering in general the central and defining feature of Jesus' life and teaching. However, Jesus' vocation would be better – because more fully and more positively – characterized as that of wooing sinners and enemies and Gentiles into a generous, compassionate, if not undemanding kingdom of God. Such a vocation did entail the abjuring of hatred, unloving anger and retaliation, easy recourse to private violence in self-defence, and Manichaean religious nationalism. And it therefore entailed a patient endurance of the *correlative* suffering. Nevertheless, it follows that the character or pattern of Christian life should not be defined primarily in terms of *suffering-in-general*.<sup>57</sup>

### *Paul's Theology of the Atonement: Why it Includes Killing*

The final element of Hays's interpretation of the New Testament with which we take issue is his reading of St Paul's theology of the Atonement in the Epistle to the Romans. This, too, falls prey to lack of moral analysis. As Hays presents it, Paul infers from the death of Christ that God deals with his enemies, not by killing them, but by seeking peace through 'self-giving' or 'self-emptying service'; and that those whose lives are reshaped in Christ must treat their enemies likewise.<sup>58</sup> In textual substantiation of this interpretation Hays quotes Romans 5:8–10.<sup>59</sup> This clearly affirms that

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 331–32: '... in Hebrews and the catholic Epistles we encounter a consistent portrayal of the community as called to suffer without anger or retaliation. ... [T]he author of I Peter holds up the suffering of Christ as a paradigm for Christian faithfulness'. To his credit, Hays reports the qualifications that these texts make on the suffering to which Christians are called – the suffering of Christ, and suffering *without anger or retaliation* – as he reports the qualification that the Gospels make on the suffering to which Jesus himself was called – suffering *rather than the conquest of Israel's enemies*. His mistake, however, is that he does not pause to consider whether the strict implication of these qualifications – namely, that they only require the enduring of some kinds of violence under certain circumstances, rather than all kinds of violence everywhere.

<sup>57</sup> I have argued this point more fully in my *Aiming to Kill: The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004), pp. 49–55.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>59</sup> Romans 5:8–10: 'But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.'

God regards sinners with love, that he has taken gracious initiative toward sparing them his 'wrath' by being reconciled with them, and that this initiative has expressed itself in the death of his Son, Jesus Christ. What ethical implications may Christians draw from this theology? Certainly, that they should respond with love to those who do them wrong, that they should therefore desire reconciliation above punishment (or 'wrath'), and that this predominant desire should express itself in the taking of appropriate initiatives. Can we go further and, with Hays, infer an absolute prohibition of the use of lethal force? I think not. While the text clearly implies that God wants to save sinners from his wrath, and that those who are 'in Christ' will be saved, it does not imply that all sinners will be. It follows that, if (with Hays) we take death to be the effect of divine wrath on sinners, then, notwithstanding God's active desire that they should be saved, he nevertheless ends up killing those who do not participate 'in Christ'.

Paul's talk here of being 'justified' or 'acquitted' (δικαιωθέντες) and being saved from God's 'wrath' (της ὀργης) – the execution of which, he later tells us, is the task of governing authorities (Rom. 13:4) – makes metaphorical use of the administration of criminal justice. God is being likened to a civil magistrate, and his wrath to the execution of capital punishment. The notion of God 'killing' sinners as a magistrate authorizes the capital penalty is, of course, one that many contemporary Christians strongly object to. The reasons for their objection bear reflection. The first carries little weight: namely, the fact that in Western societies – or at least among their liberal elites – capital punishment is widely assumed to be a pre-modern, 'medieval' barbarity. There is ground for this view, of course, in the (to us) shocking and brutal readiness with which regimes in previous centuries meted out the death penalty for (to us) trivial crimes. On the other hand, there is ample room for twenty-first-century liberals to become more mindful of the extent to which they enjoy the luxury of historically unprecedented public order and social peace; of the horrors and terrors into which a society can very quickly plunge when that order breaks down; and of the immense difficulty of hauling that society back into a condition of civilization. There is an argument – and to my mind it is a good one – that the infliction of capital punishment may be warranted *in extremis*, when a society cannot afford other effective means of containing violent crime.<sup>60</sup> The death penalty is always severe and terrible; but it need not be gratuitously cruel.

A second objection assumes that anyone authorizing the death penalty must be motivated by a sadistic or vengeful ill will and *wants* to see the

<sup>60</sup> See Oliver O'Donovan, *Measure for Measure: Justice in Punishment and the Sentence of Death*, Grove Booklet on Ethics 19 (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1977), pp. 21–22.

criminal or sinner dead. But this need not be so. The condemning judge might have no such desire. What he might desire is the safety of innocent citizens; and if this could be secured by any means other than the tragic death of criminal, he would gladly choose it. But because there is no alternative, he reluctantly accepts the death of the criminal as an unavoidable and proportionate side-effect of ensuring public security.

A third reason for declining to think of God killing sinners as magistrates kill capital criminals is that human magistrates are warranted in so doing by the exigencies of history, whereas almighty God is presumably not subject to these. The rationale for capital punishment that I have articulated above is that it might be the only effective way for a society to contain grave violence: that is, it might be warranted *in extremis socialibus*.<sup>61</sup> While it might be justified, the death penalty is nevertheless tragic. It involves causing at least two evils – the cutting off of the possibility of a criminal human being's (earthly) repentance and reformation and reconciliation, as well as his physical death. Were there an alternative way of securing innocent neighbours against the threat of violence, the execution of the criminal would not be justified; but sometimes history constrains us into a tragic set of circumstances where we cannot do our primary duty to our innocent neighbours without bringing grave evil (albeit justifiably) upon the heads of those who threaten them. Presumably in his dealings with sinners and their moral and spiritual wrongdoing, almighty God is never so constrained.

On the contrary, he might be. Whatever the radically different conditions of the Next World, the ultimate well-being of creation will require the eradication of sin and the threat it poses; and if some sinners should persist in cordial commitment to their sin, then the ultimate well-being of creation would require their destruction too. It might prove to be the case that God's love is sufficiently powerful to woo every last sinner away from their sin – that his Yes will exhaust all our Noes. But with Karl Barth, we can only hope and pray so; we cannot know so for sure.<sup>62</sup> As the dignity of free will makes possible the voluntary growth of human beings into virtuous maturity, so it necessarily also makes possible the voluntary degeneration of human

<sup>61</sup> This, of course, is a non-Kantian rationale, for it is not the intrinsic nature of the criminal's crime alone that makes him worthy of the death penalty, but also the capacity of his society to contain violence. The consideration here is prudential, but it does not render our rationale utilitarian or consequentialist: the death penalty may only be inflicted on someone who has committed a crime by a public body that has a duty to protect citizens from criminal violence. It may not be inflicted on an innocent by a public body that aspires to achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II, Part 2, 'The Doctrine of God', ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), pp. 417–18; and vol. IV, Part 3.1, 'The Doctrine of Reconciliation', ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962), p. 477.

beings into terminal corruption. We must entertain the possibility, then, that the ultimate salvation of creation will require the permanent removal of some sinners along with the sin to which they are inextricably attached; and unless we can conceive of a form of 'permanent removal' short of final destruction, then we must entertain the possibility that ultimate death will be the destiny of some sinners.

It is true, of course, that St Paul's use of the terms of criminal justice to talk about God's dealing with sinners is metaphorical, and that there might be other ways of talking that have certain advantages over this one. Paul Fiddes, for example, recommends that we think of the ultimate death of sinners in naturalistic, rather than judicial, terms: as the natural, 'automatic' consequence of persistent spiritual alienation from God, rather than the result of an act that God decides to perform.<sup>63</sup> This has the advantage of making clear that the immediate responsibility for the death of a sinner belongs to that sinner. However, insofar as it is designed to dissociate God from all responsibility for the death of sinners, it both fails and misleads. It fails because God, having deliberately created the world as it is, remains indirectly responsible for death being the natural end of intractable sinners. Therefore, the ultimate death of sinners remains the result of a deliberate decision of God, by which God presumably still stands.

This naturalistic conception of the death of sinners also misleads, in that it assumes that if God is (at all) responsible for the death of sinners, then he must be culpable. But God's responsibility here is not that of one who malevolently *wants* the sinner dead (which would be morally culpable). Rather, it is the responsibility of one who, for the sake of the possibility of the voluntary growth of virtuous persons into human fulfilment, is willing to risk the possibility of the voluntary degeneration of vicious persons to the point of ultimate death – and is ready to accept its realization.<sup>64</sup>

Where has this extended discussion brought us? How does it help us to answer the question of whether Richard Hays is correct to claim that St Paul's theology of the Atonement conceives of God responding to

<sup>63</sup> Paul Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1989), pp. 91–93.

<sup>64</sup> At this point some atheist philosophers enter the objection that God (if we suppose that he exists) would have been culpably rash in risking the possibility of ultimate death for the sake of the possibility of virtuous growth. Maybe. But, frankly, what human being has the competence to say so? Who among us can judge that the terrible annihilation of incorrigible sinners 'outweighs' the shining beauty of fulfilled humanity? (And is the ultimate bringing to nought of a Hitler or Stalin or Pol Pot really so 'terrible'?) How do we begin to compare the relative 'weights' of annihilation and fulfillment? Who has the numbers and proportions of saved and damned to hand? It is not unreasonable to trust that a world in which some sinners might perish beyond hope is 'worth' a world where other sinners might grow into glory. Nor is it unreasonable, therefore, to trust that God was not being culpably rash when he made it so.

sinners by saving rather than killing them; and that therefore Christians are forbidden to kill their enemies? First, Paul does not say that all sinners will escape God's 'wrath'. Second, it is not inappropriate for Christians to think of God dealing with incorrigible sinners as magistrates deal *in extremis* with criminals who continue to pose a grave threat – since the authorization of the death penalty need not be malevolent or wanton; since its execution need not be cruel or barbarous; since the dignity of free will requires that sinners be allowed to become inextricably attached to their sin; since the ultimate fulfilment of creation requires the permanent removal of sin; and since in the case of incorrigible sinners this must amount to their death.

I conclude, then, that we should think of God as being prepared to respond to incorrigible sinners (should there be any) by authorizing their deaths, not at all because he wants them dead, but because he wants to secure the fulfilment of creation, and because he cannot have the latter without the former. In this sense we may say that God 'kills' incorrigible sinners. And we may say so without in any way detracting from God's driving desire to save sinners from their sin, and from the costly, gracious initiatives that he has taken to do so. Accordingly, I think Hays mistaken to infer from St Paul's theology of the Atonement that Christians may never kill their 'enemies'.

### *Taking Methodological Stock*

I have tested Richard Hays's pacifist reading of the New Testament against what the text itself says. What I have taken the text to say has been determined by three factors. The first is what it consistently and significantly fails to say – namely, that soldiers should abandon their immoral profession. The second is a relevant feature of the social hinterland of its main subject, Jesus – that is, the option of revolutionary violence inspired by religious nationalism and issuing in civil war. The third factor comprises the logical limits of what we may take the text strictly to imply – namely, that we may not infer an absolute prohibition of the use of lethal violence from the prohibition of anger and hatred, or from the injunction of love for one's enemies, or from St Paul's theology of the Atonement. According to this interpretation of the text, we may say that the New Testament abjures hatred, unloving anger and retaliation, ready recourse to private violence in self-defence, and violence inspired by religious nationalism. We may say that it enjoins whatever suffering is involved by forbearance from these. We may say that, beyond the passive suffering of frustration, insult, and tolerable injustice, it also enjoins the active, generous, and enterprising desire for reconciliation. From this, however, it does not follow that the New Testament absolutely forbids the publicly authorized use of lethal

violence by Christians, nor even their use of private violence *in extremis*. My concluding verdict, therefore, is that the New Testament does not bear Richard Hays's pacifist reading.

I am aware of two objections that this interpretation might attract. One objects to its use of argument from silence. This occurs at two points: first, respecting the soldiers who appear in the New Testament, and second, respecting Jesus' prudential concern about the dreadful internecine strife that revolt against the Romans would likely involve. An argument from what is *not* said is obviously weaker than an argument from what *is* said. Still, an argument from what is not said can have force. Some silences are simply empty and ambiguous, and they can be read in opposite ways with equal justification. Other silences, however, are loaded. Were the pacifist reading of the New Testament correct, there is every reason to expect that soldiers whose faith was approved by Jesus or his disciples would be shown to distance themselves from their fundamentally incompatible profession. But they are not so shown. The New Testament's silence on this matter is, therefore, loud with significance. And when set within hearing of St Paul's affirmation of the public use of force in Romans 13, it becomes even louder.

The argument that among Jesus' concerns was a fear of civil strife is weaker than this; but it is not the central plank of my case. Still, nor is it insubstantial. It marshals a set of grounds from general human experience or common sense, from Jesus' own historical context, and from the text of the New Testament.

A second objection to my interpretation might be that I distinguish too much, meaning either that I use moral distinctions that are spurious or that I import moral distinctions that are 'unbiblical'. One distinction that I use, which many consider spurious, is that between on the one hand a deliberate act that it is foreseen will likely or certainly cause an evil (such as death), where that evil effect is reluctantly accepted; and on the other hand a deliberate act that it is foreseen will likely or certainly cause an evil, where that evil is intended or wanted. Whether this doctrine of double effect is or is not spurious remains controversial. Those who think that it is spurious tend to be utilitarian philosophers; and I have explained elsewhere why I think that they are wrong.<sup>65</sup>

As for the charge that I use moral distinctions that are 'unbiblical', that is either untrue or beside the point. The distinction between what is permitted public officials and what is permitted private subjects or citizens is implied in Romans 12–13, where Paul makes plain that only the governing authorities may mediate the wrath of God on wrongdoers. And the distinction between anger that is sinful and anger that is not, is implied

<sup>65</sup> Biggar, *Aiming to Kill*, ch. 3, 'The Morality of Acts of Killing'.

in Ephesians 4:6. However, whether or not a moral distinction is actually to be found, explicitly or implicitly, in the Bible is not important. One does not have to hold as true *only* what the Bible states or implies, in order to regard it as authoritative. I am not aware that the Bible states or uses the doctrine of double effect; but I still have good reason to think it valid. And even if the Bible does not distinguish between murder and manslaughter, we would, I suggest, still have good reason to do so. Obviously, it would be problematic for a Christian theologian to espouse things that the Bible unequivocally denies. But 'non-biblical' distinctions are not necessarily 'anti-biblical'. They might be, of course, but that remains to be shown.

### *Conclusion*

Until then, my judgement stands: the New Testament does not bear Richard Hays's pacifist reading. What is more, Hays is wrong to claim that '[i]t is not possible to use the just war tradition as a hermeneutical device for illuminating the New Testament'.<sup>66</sup> It is not only possible, but preferable; for the doctrine of just war can make better sense than pacifism of all that the New Testament text does and does not say. On the one hand, of course, this doctrine does not prohibit the publicly authorized use of violent force by police or soldiers. On the other hand, it insists that recourse to lethal violence is only ever justified when its undoubted evils are made risk-worthy by the serious prospect of ending grave and intolerable injustice. By implication injustices that are less than grave should be suffered rather than used as a pretext for premature violence – but they should be suffered in a creative manner that extends compassion to the oppressor in the hope of wooing repentance and making peace. A further implication is that, given the horrors of anarchy, there is a strong presumption against the private use of violence. And *a fortiori* given the severe and long-term social damage that is characteristic of civil war fought by guerrilla tactics, a very large question-mark is posited against the launching of armed insurrection. Finally, the doctrine of just war also insists that lethal violence may only ever be used with the intention of securing a just peace (or 'reconciliation'). This intention is not compatible with motives such as hatred or unloving anger. And it is all the more incompatible with a religious nationalist view of the enemy, which sees them as infidels to be ruthlessly destroyed by the righteous, and not merely as one set of fellow-sinners whose evil actions must, alas, be curtailed by another set.

<sup>66</sup> Hays, *The Moral Vision*, p. 341.

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# NARRATE AND EMBODY: A RESPONSE TO NIGEL BIGGAR, 'SPECIFY AND DISTINGUISH'

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## ABSTRACT

*This response has two parts: a reply to Nigel Biggar's specific criticisms of my exegesis and an appeal for attention to more fundamental theological issues. Biggar generally disregards the narrative and epistolary contexts of the verses he cites and introduces anachronistic conceptual distinctions. Beyond specific exegetical disagreements, his argument fails to address the broader christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological warrants for Christians to embody Jesus' way of peace. The moral vocation of the people of God is grounded in the story of Jesus Christ. It is this story that makes just war theologically problematical.*

## KEYWORDS

*Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, just war, narrative, non-violence, peace, retaliation, violence*

The first word to be said is a word of appreciation to Nigel Biggar for critically engaging my work. The aim of my book was to elicit serious conversation about the way in which the New Testament should shape the life of the church and to invite readers to 'a deeper immersion in the New Testament texts themselves'. Thus, it was offered 'in the hope of opening, not terminating, conversation' about the problems it treated.<sup>1</sup> Professor Biggar has therefore done me an honor by taking my argument seriously and providing a substantial response. I am particularly glad that he has engaged my work at a point near the heart of its concerns: the question

<sup>1</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 315, 463.

of violence and non-violence. I argued in the book that ‘the normative witness of the New Testament against armed violence is powerful, virtually univocal, and integrally related to the central moral vision of the New Testament texts’.<sup>2</sup> Biggar is correct that, until now, there has been relatively little attempt on the part of just war theorists to offer a serious critique of my exegesis or my arguments. One wonders whether perhaps, at least in the United States, the church’s recent preoccupation with issues of sexual ethics has tended to divert attention from other important matters.<sup>3</sup> In any case, I welcome the opportunity for public discussion of the questions that Biggar raises in his essay.

Before I address his questions directly, one preliminary observation is necessary. Biggar’s summary of my argument (pp. 162-66) is a fair and accurate account of my reading of Matthew 5:38–48, as well as an accurate sketch of my description of the wider NT witness concerning violence. Surprisingly, however, his characterization of my argument ends at this point, without addressing my proposals about the *synthetic* role of the three focal images of *community*, *cross*, and *new creation*. Perhaps even more surprisingly for a scholar whose field is Christian ethics, he offers no clear engagement with my reflections about the *hermeneutical* task of relating these texts to our changed historical situation or the *pragmatic* task of embodying our readings in the life of a community. In short, he seems to think that the debate can be conducted chiefly at the *descriptive* exegetical level. His decision to frame the argument in this way has significant consequences, to which I shall return in the final part of my response. But first I will reply to the points he has made.

### *Reply to Biggar’s Critique*

Biggar raises four basic issues: (1) the role of soldiers in the NT; (2) the location of Jesus’ teaching in the context of first-century Jewish religiously inspired nationalism; (3) the need to make precise conceptual distinctions – such as the distinction between ‘retaliation that is directed by “love” and that which is not’ (p. 174); (4) the question whether Paul’s theology of atonement implies that Christians should not kill their enemies.<sup>4</sup> I shall take up each of these matters in turn.

<sup>2</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> On this problem, see Richard B. Hays, ‘A Season of Repentance: An Open Letter to United Methodists’, *The Christian Century* (24 August 2004), pp. 8–9.

<sup>4</sup> Biggar’s abstract of his essay outlines three, not four, points of critique. This is because he categorizes the issues I have enumerated as 3 and 4 under the single heading of my alleged ‘failure to employ valid moral distinctions’. It seems to me that his treatment of questions of atonement and judgement (i.e. #4) is conceptually different from his other critiques and sufficiently lengthy to merit separate comment.

*Soldiers in the New Testament*

Biggar demonstrates correctly that the NT offers several instances of soldiers who are not explicitly instructed to abandon their military profession. As he observes, I duly noted this fact in my book and acknowledged that it constitutes the strongest piece of textual evidence that might be adduced in support of Christian participation in military service or the use of coercive force in support of justice. Thus, for the most part Biggar and I have no major exegetical quarrel here. Our differences pertain primarily to the way in which this evidence is weighed and interpreted in relation to all the other NT evidence.

My willingness to admit that these texts stand in some tension with my overall reading of the NT's normative witness is part of a larger interpretative program in which I insist that the NT contains a diverse collection of materials that cannot simply be homogenized. We must listen to the texts as they come to us and not seek to force them into an artificial uniformity.<sup>5</sup> In my section on the hermeneutical task of NT ethics, I set forth ten basic guidelines. The third of these guidelines is immediately relevant to the present issue: 'Substantive tensions within the canon should be openly acknowledged.'<sup>6</sup> It is precisely because such tensions do exist that we cannot take the NT simply as a timeless rule book; instead, we must move from exegetical description to the more complex tasks of canonical synthesis and hermeneutical reception – precisely the tasks that Biggar fails to address adequately in his essay.

Indeed, I find it astonishing when Professor Biggar remarks that he prefers to adopt 'a non-pacifist reading that does better justice to *all* of the relevant material in the New Testament' (p. 9, emphasis his). *All* of it? Really? It appears to me that he has simply brushed aside or ignored the massive amount of evidence set forth in my chapter that followers of Jesus are called to be peacemakers, to turn the other cheek when attacked, never to avenge themselves, to return good for evil, to fight their battles with the non-fleshly weapons of prayer and the word of God, to accept the plundering of their possessions with joy, and in every way to follow the non-violent example of Jesus. In light of all this, I am puzzled that Biggar can say his non-pacifist position is superior to mine in its capacity to explain '*all* of the relevant material in the New Testament'. In fact, it seems to me quite the reverse. The three or four texts that mention soldiers seem to me to be the oddities, the texts that stand, or at least seem to stand, in tension with

<sup>5</sup> Biggar takes issue (p. 167) with my unguarded statement that the NT witness on this question is 'unambiguous' (*Moral Vision*, p. 341). Here he catches me saying something in tension with my own hermeneutical program. In this case, I should have written, 'nearly unambiguous'.

<sup>6</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 310. See also especially the fuller discussion on p. 190.

the great weight of the NT witness. Since Biggar has not discussed most of the many passages that are in tension with *his* position, or challenged my reading of them, I do not know what he would make of them, or how he would reconcile them with his just war stance. If he wants to maintain his critique of my book, surely he owes us a full exposition of these texts that appear to be deeply problematical for his reading.

But I turn now to a little closer examination of the actual texts in question that deal with soldiers. There are four instances at issue: the soldiers who ask John the Baptist what they should do (Lk. 3:14), the centurion at Capernaum who requests healing of his servant and shows faith in Jesus (Matt. 8:5–13; Lk. 7:1–10), the centurion at the foot of the cross (Mk 15:39; Matt. 27:54; Lk. 23:47), and the centurion Cornelius, whose conversion is the trigger event that leads Peter and the Jerusalem church to accept uncircumcised Gentiles for baptism (Acts 10:1–11:18). Two of these four instances can quickly be set aside.

The soldiers who come to John the Baptist are *not* described as disciples of Jesus; they are asking what they must do to heed John's message and prepare themselves for the coming judgement. Nowhere in the NT is there any suggestion that John preached a message of non-violence. Indeed, he was expecting the coming messiah to be a fiery figure with a winnowing-fork in his hand. According to Matthew and Luke, he was subsequently so puzzled by Jesus' non-violent ways and apparent acceptance of sinners that he sent messengers to ask Jesus, 'Are you the Coming One, or shall we look for another?' (Matt. 11:2–3; Lk. 7:18–20).

Thus, it would be anachronistic for Luke to have John preach non-violence to the soldiers who appear before him even before Jesus has begun his ministry. It should be noted, however, that the Lukan passage makes precisely my point that the soldiers are paired with tax-collectors as notorious sinners who come asking what repentance would require (Lk. 3:12–14).

Similarly, the story of the centurion at the foot of the cross serves to display the shocking reversal that occurs at Jesus' death, when even the enforcer of Roman order, the supervisor of the torture and execution, acknowledges the crucified one as God's Son (Mark and Matthew) or as righteous (Luke). This dramatic reversal is the only narrative function of this centurion. He is not a model for Christian discipleship. We are not told what happened to him subsequently, and there is certainly no suggestion in the NT that he underwent Christian catechesis.

The other two cases, however, are of more weight for Biggar's argument. The centurion at Capernaum is presented in Luke's slightly more elaborated tale as a worthy man who loves the Jewish people and built their synagogue. And in both synoptic stories, he exemplifies a faith more impressive than anything Jesus has found in Israel. In Luke's two-volume work, he seems to foreshadow the much lengthier story of Cornelius.

Biggar is correct to note that Cornelius is not portrayed as a notorious sinner but as a devout man who feared God, gave alms generously, and prayed constantly (Acts 10:1–2; quite an extraordinary description of a Roman centurion). Thus, Luke gives us two centurions who do not fit the ‘notorious sinner’ profile. (Point for Biggar.) And in neither case does Luke say or imply that their faith in Jesus led them subsequently to relinquish their military positions. This is especially noteworthy in the case of Cornelius, since his story is told at considerable length over nearly two full chapters in Acts. (A second point for Biggar. I would say I’m scoring this like a boxing match, but I don’t like the pugilistic image, so let’s think of it as a tennis game.)

But now it’s my turn to serve. As Biggar acknowledges, his argument is an *argumentum e silentio*. We are simply not told one way or the other what role, if any, either of these centurions might have had subsequently in the church, nor are we told whether or not they maintained their military pursuits. In both cases, the NT authors have other interests in focus: in the case of the Capernaum centurion, linking faith to recognition of the authority of Jesus; in the case of Cornelius, proving that ‘God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life’ (Acts 11:18).<sup>7</sup> And, contrary to Biggar’s assertion, it is certainly not correct that ‘sinners who become Christian disciples are *invariably* portrayed . . . as renouncing their sinful practices’ (p. 166, emphasis mine). In fact, one of the chief complaints of the scribes and Pharisees against Jesus was that he associated with sinners and tax-collectors and sat at table with them – presumably without ‘invariably’ requiring them first to change their ways.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes we are told of an amendment of life by those who follow Jesus (e.g. Zaccheus in Lk. 19:1–10, the magicians in Acts 19:18–19), and sometimes we are not (e.g. the sinful woman who washes Jesus’ feet in Lk. 7:36–50).

Further, and here we come to a weightier point, nowhere in the NT do we find any narratives in which soldiers are *commended* for their military actions. Nowhere are there any stories in which ‘good’ soldiers actually act *qua* soldiers in killing or coercing people in order to enforce justice. Indeed, the chief description we have in the NT of soldiers discharging their duty to enforce public order is the story of the crucifixion! This is of considerable

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting that despite Luke’s description of Cornelius’ devout practices, he also portrays him as in need of repentance (a characteristic Lukan theme). We are not informed what acts or practices of Cornelius might be thought to have necessitated repentance.

<sup>8</sup> The point has been sharpened still further by E. P. Sanders (*Jesus and Judaism* [London: SCM Press, 1985], pp. 174–211), who suggests that Jesus ‘may have offered [sinners] inclusion in the kingdom not only *while they were still sinners* but also *without* requiring repentance as normally understood, and therefore he could have been accused of being a friend of people who indefinitely *remained sinners*’ (p. 206, original emphasis). In fairness, it should be noted that this aspect of Sanders’ historical reconstruction has been controversial.

importance if, as I have proposed, the most important way in which the NT informs moral discernment is through the *paradigmatic* function of narrative.<sup>9</sup> But let us turn Biggar's argument from silence around: if it is a good and noble thing for Christian soldiers to wage just war or to execute God's wrath on the wrongdoer, or – in terms more congenial to modern sensitivities – to ensure public security by killing persons who pose intractable threats, why does the NT not give us a single example of such a thing? We have no positive paradigms in the NT – zero instances – of disciples of Jesus having recourse to violence or being commended for taking up the sword to oppose evil. This is a fact that makes the NT strikingly distinctive in world literature.

A final point on soldiers: on the whole, Christians during the first and second centuries seem to have regarded military service as inconsistent with the norms of Christian faith and practice. One finds this position represented with particular force by Tertullian and Origen.<sup>10</sup> This is perhaps a point of some relevance in knowing how to assess the NT's depictions of soldiers. By the third century, we begin to find more evidence of Christians serving as soldiers, and of various justifications offered for the practice. This suggests both that the earliest Christians understood the NT texts in their straightforward sense as prohibiting recourse to violence and that the history of interpretation gradually led to a relaxing of this rigorous position.

### *Jesus in the Context of Jewish Religiously Inspired Nationalism*

Biggar offers the proposal that the only violence Jesus eschewed was 'violence that was not publicly authorized and that was inspired by religious nationalism' (p. 170). As far as I can see, Biggar does not even attempt to justify this claim through exegesis of any particular NT texts.<sup>11</sup> (There is

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g. Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 295, 310.

<sup>10</sup> Especially clear is the position of Origen in *Contra Celsum* 8.73–75, where he argues that Christians have a special priestly role to help the emperor through 'taking up the whole armor of God' (Eph. 6:11) and praying for 'all men, for emperors, and all that are in authority' (2 Tim. 2:2). 'Indeed', he writes, 'the more pious a man is, the more effective he is in helping the emperors – more so than the soldiers who go out into the lines and kill all the enemy troops that they can.' He goes on to argue that Christians should also not serve in public office, but that those with gifts of leadership should employ them in the church. There is of course debate in the literature about whether early Christian aversion to serving in the Roman army was motivated by the rejection of idolatry rather than by opposition to bloodshed. For evenhanded surveys of the literature on this question, see Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983); David G. Hunter, 'A Decade of Research on Early Christians and Military Service', *Religious Studies Review* 18 (1992), pp. 87–94.

<sup>11</sup> Biggar himself recognizes that his suggestions about Jesus' 'fear of civil strife' are weaker than other aspects of his case (p. 180).

no passage in which Jesus distinguishes between illegitimate unauthorized violence and legitimate publicly authorized violence; the distinction is imported by Biggar without any direct warrant in the Gospels.) The assertion rests, rather, on a historical judgement about what sort of violent resistance was 'historically available to Jesus' in his day (p. 169), and a further set of inferences that Jesus might have had 'moral-prudential' reasons for being concerned about 'the grave evils of civil war' (p. 170). Biggar's evidence comes chiefly not from the NT but from the writings of Josephus,<sup>12</sup> as well as from the experience of violent resistance by the IRA in County Cork, Ireland 'in the aftermath of the failed Easter Rising of 1916' (p. 170, n. 43).

Now, while no doubt Biggar's reflections about the havoc wrought by civil rebellions have a strong empirical basis in general human experience (he might well have added the example of Iraq in the years 2003–2008), I must protest, as an exegete of the NT, that it is simply speculative fantasy to project these concerns onto Jesus. There is not the slightest evidence in the text of the NT that Jesus' rejection of violence was premised upon a fear of the dire consequences of resisting Rome or a desire to avoid internecine nationalist conflict. The reasons for non-violence given in our Gospels consistently have to do with simple obedience to a loving, compassionate God and the behavior appropriate to those who are 'children of your Father in heaven' (Matt. 5:43–48). His stated reasons, in other words, have to do with a perfectionist demand for holiness and imitation of God. Jesus' disciples are called to embrace his way of non-retaliation not because of prudential concerns, but because they are to follow and imitate Jesus.

The only passage that Biggar is able to cite, somewhat tentatively, in support of his speculation is Mark 13:12, which warns that 'brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death'. But Biggar tellingly concludes here with an ellipsis and deletes the rest of the sentence: 'and you will be hated by all *because of my name*'. When we read the passage in context, we see that Jesus is not warning his disciples against taking up the sword in support of religiously inspired nationalist violence. Rather, he is describing the apocalyptic tribulations of the final days leading up to the destruction of the Temple and the ultimate coming of the Son of

<sup>12</sup> Josephus' account of civil turmoil in Judea is heavily colored by his own apologetic interests. He was a Jewish quisling who curried favor with the Roman general Vespasian by hailing his conquest of Palestine as the true fulfillment of scriptural prophecy. Josephus thereby secured himself a comfortable place in the patronage of the man who was destined soon to become Emperor. His historical accounts of events in the Jewish War have the aim of blaming the revolt on violent nationalist extremists while attempting to exonerate Judaism as such from Roman disapproval. This does not mean that his historical account of extensive internal civil violence is false; it may be broadly reliable. But the Gospel texts offer no evidence that would allow us to project Josephus' prudentially-based disapproval of nationalist violence onto Jesus.

Man, and he is prophesying the hardships his followers will suffer *as preachers of the gospel* (Mk 13:9–12). The point is reinforced in the closely parallel versions of the same saying in Matthew 10:34–39 and Luke 12:49–53, where the context clearly shows that Jesus is referring to the family-dividing consequences of following his movement, not to the dangers of armed nationalist revolt.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the second plank of Biggar's critique is weak, as he himself at least partially recognizes (p. 180). It hardly constitutes a refutation of my exposition of the Gospel texts in which Jesus first teaches his followers to renounce violence and then exemplifies that teaching by the manner of his own life and death.

### *Two Conceptual Distinctions*

Biggar's third complaint is that 'Hays's normative moral concepts are often too crude, suffering from a failure to employ valid moral distinctions' (p. 161, Abstract). Let us first consider two closely-related instances of this alleged failure: a failure to distinguish between anger and resentment, and a failure 'to distinguish between retaliation that is directed by "love" and that which is not'.

What is Biggar's basis for thinking that the NT might distinguish between a legitimate resentment of injustice and an illegitimate uncontrolled anger characterized by abuse and disproportionate retaliation? It seems he has two texts in mind. The first is Ephesians 4:26, 'Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger'. Once again, I must contest the exegesis that Biggar proposes. He seems to think that the text distinguishes two *types* of anger. It does not. If we consider the context, the author of Ephesians is urging members of the Christian community to speak the truth to their neighbors (4:25, presumably by confronting them openly if wrongs have been committed), and thereby (once again to finish the sentence by supplying the words Biggar deletes) not to 'make room for the devil' by allowing anger to fester and simmer overnight (4:27). Historically considered, this places Ephesians 4:25–27 in a direct line of traditional Jewish teaching that ultimately is rooted in Leviticus 19:17–18: 'You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your own kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your own people, but you shall

<sup>13</sup> Biggar's reference to Mark 13:14 hardly helps his case, since he interprets the reference to the 'abomination of desolation' as a reference to 'Titus' soldiers setting up their standards in the Temple in AD 70', i.e. to an event that happened forty years after Jesus' death. Since Biggar seems to be attempting to make an argument about the historical situation of Jesus' time, not a point about later Markan theology, this argument seems anachronistic and beside the point.

love your neighbor as yourself.’ Of course, Jesus cites precisely this text as one of the two great commandments of Torah (Matt. 22:34–40, Mk 12:28–34; cf. Lk. 10:25–28), and he also emphatically reaffirms the imperative of confronting one’s offending brother or sister as a necessary aspect of community discipline among his followers (Matt. 18:15–18). This is the tradition within which Ephesians 4:26 is to be read.<sup>14</sup> It is not a question of distinguishing between unjust anger and just resentment. Rather, the distinction drawn in the text is the distinction between speaking truthfully and silently harboring anger. (If anything, in the context of Ephesians 4, resentment would be the festering emotion that might result if anger remained unexpressed and harbored overnight.) Thus, Ephesians certainly gives no warrant for the idea that some sort of ‘appropriate’ resentment might putatively justify non-hateful violence or military action. Indeed, as I pointed out in *Moral Vision*, Ephesians 6:10–20 teaches clearly that ‘our struggle is not against blood and flesh’ but against spiritual powers that can be fought only through truth-telling, the word of God, and ‘the gospel of peace’!<sup>15</sup>

What then of Matthew 5:22? Biggar observes that in this text ‘the anger that Jesus prohibits is abusive’ (p. 172). I can only express my astonishment that he concludes from this that Matthew is distinguishing between two kinds of anger and that Jesus is implying that some other kind of non-abusive anger might be OK. As Biggar reads the text, the take-away message is that ‘violence against injustice is bound to be resentful, but it need not be angry’! Once again, I must plead for restoring the *context* in which Jesus’ words appear (5:21–26). Matthew is not distinguishing between two kinds of anger: rather, he is distinguishing between *murder* and *anger*. Whereas the Torah prohibits murder, Jesus radicalizes the commandment to mean that *not only* the outward act of killing is prohibited *but also* the inward attitude of anger. This teaching illuminates the meaning of Jesus’ saying that the righteousness of his disciples must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20): in other words, it must consist not only in outward obedience but also in an inward transformation of the heart. The conclusion that follows from this is not that Jesus’ disciples are justified in killing the wicked as long as they do it with proportionate equanimity; rather, the conclusion is that if some conflict persists, Jesus’ followers are to leave their gift at the altar and seek reconciliation (5:23–24).

In a closely related distinction, Biggar contends that Matthew 5:38–39 – the command to turn the other cheek when attacked – forbids ‘retaliation

<sup>14</sup> It should also be observed that ‘Be angry but do not sin’ is a direct quotation of Psalm 4:5 LXX. The scope of the present brief response precludes a full development of the complex significance of this observation.

<sup>15</sup> See Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 331.

that is driven by self-regarding indignation' but 'does not forbid retaliation that is not motivated by anger or hatred' (p. 174). I am afraid that this is another case of smoke-and-mirrors interpretation; it introduces an artificial distinction that is nowhere to be found in this text, or in any text in the Gospels. Where does such a distinction come from? Certainly not from Matthew 5. The passage in question is not a minimalistic guideline that prescribes the ways in which retaliation may and may not be carried out properly. Rather, it is what Robert Tannehill has aptly described as a 'focal instance', a vivid illustration that works as a synecdoche to suggest the much wider range of transformed thought and action that Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom is meant to evoke.<sup>16</sup> Biggar complains that my reading of the NT 'generalizes too much and distinguishes too little' (p. 174). I would reply that his reading surgically removes the texts from their narrative and epistolary contexts, introduces conceptual distinctions that are nowhere to be found in the texts or their contexts, and adopts, in effect, a legalistic hermeneutical principle that whatever is not explicitly forbidden is therefore permitted. In other words, he distinguishes too much and generalizes too little – like the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, who asks, 'But who is my neighbor?', hoping for an answer that will narrowly distinguish neighbors from non-neighbors.

One more illustration of this sort of strategy appears in Biggar's handling of Romans 12 and 13. He admits that the text explicitly forbids Christians to do precisely what the governing authority is instituted to do: to wield the sword against wrongdoers (12:17–21; 13:3–4). But he opines that, while the passage is meant to discourage Christians from avenging themselves on their persecutors (through 'an anarchy of private vendettas'), we may not take this to imply that Paul held all 'use of violent force in defence or promotion of justice to be forbidden to Christians' (p. 168). Later in the essay, Biggar generalizes his interpretation into a 'distinction between what is permitted public officials and what is permitted private subjects or citizens' (p. 180). One more time, I must protest that an unfortunate exegetical error has been committed here. Paul's distinction is not between public officials and 'private citizens' but between public officials and *Christians*. If Professor Biggar wants to insist that appropriate distinctions be made, I say 'Amen'. But then I want to insist that *if our concern is to seek guidance from the NT*, the distinctions must be the distinctions actually made by its authors, not distinctions projected backwards anachronistically.

Paul is describing a vision for the common life of followers of Jesus – 'one body in Christ – living with transformed minds and not being conformed

<sup>16</sup> Robert Tannehill, *The Sword of His Mouth* (Semeia Supplements, 1; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), pp. 67–77.

to the pagan empire' (Rom. 12:1–5). In that context, he believes that the vocation of the *ekklēsia* is to bear witness to a non-retaliatory, peaceful way of life and leave vengeance to God (12:9–21). Biggar labels this Pauline ecclesial vision as an 'Anabaptist' position that is, in his words, 'not coherent'. Its alleged incoherence is as follows: if God has ordained the use of the sword, then it must be right for Christians to participate in exercising this function. But this does not follow logically at all if in fact the *ekklēsia* is a community set apart for a special vocation in the world.<sup>17</sup> (This is not just an Anabaptist position, by the way: it is precisely the view of Origen – and, I would suggest, of Paul as well.)

Biggar regards such an ecclesiology as 'not a practicable alternative *under current conditions of rampant sinfulness*'. And here lies the real nub of his argument. The problem with the Pauline vision is not that it is logically incoherent (for it is not), but rather that it is allegedly impractical. Much turns on this. For some reason, Biggar is determined to show that Paul could not have thought something that he (Biggar) deems impracticable. So, despite the fact that Paul explicitly tells Christians never to 'repay anyone evil for evil', Biggar produces a question-begging argument to show that he could not really have meant what he actually said.

Now, perhaps the role of Christians in a participatory democracy might necessarily be different from that of Christians in the first-century Roman Empire. Perhaps Paul, living in a world where Christians were a tiny, powerless minority, had a utopian view of the church that cannot or should not determine our own understanding of the vocation of the church. Or perhaps sinfulness is somehow more rampant in our time than it was in the time of Jesus and Paul. But, if so, we need to discuss such suggestions seriously as a counter-proposal to Paul's perspective rather than retrojecting a spurious distinction between 'public' and 'private' into Paul's own teaching. Near the end of his essay, Biggar remarks, 'One does not have to hold as true *only* what the Bible states or implies, in order to regard it as authoritative' (p. 181, original emphasis). Fair enough: but then why such vigorous and strained efforts to read logic-chopping justifications for violence back into texts that seek to witness to exactly the opposite meaning? Why not just say that the politics of Jesus and the early Christians are essentially irrelevant in a post-Constantinian world, and that under changed political circumstances just war doctrine is wiser than what the NT teaches? That would not be my view of the way Christian ethics should do business, but it would at least not force us into the mental contortions required by Biggar's effort to torture these innocent texts into confessing support for just war.

<sup>17</sup> Consider this analogy: God has ordained the institution of marriage. It does not therefore follow that God cannot call some people to a special vocation of celibate singleness.

*The Pauline Doctrine of Atonement and the Question of Killing*

In the last part of his essay, Biggar discusses at some length whether Paul's understanding of the atonement should commit Christians not to kill their enemies. His strategy is to argue against a notion of ultimate universal reconciliation and to hold open the real possibility that God may finally deem it necessary or preferable to judge and destroy 'incurable sinners' (p. 179) – i.e. to execute an eschatological version of the death penalty. While I would want to take with full seriousness Paul's assertion (or hope?) that 'God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all' (Rom. 11:32), I concur with Biggar and Karl Barth that for us this must remain a hoped-for consummation, not a certainty. But I do not think this is particularly relevant for the present debate. Biggar seems to think that if God can finally destroy sinners, we too by analogy can employ violence against them. Indeed, he says explicitly that it is 'mistaken to infer from St Paul's theology of the Atonement that Christians may never kill their "enemies"' (p. 179). As I have already indicated, however, Paul's own position on the role of Christians in this matter is clear: 'Beloved, *never* avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God' (Rom. 12:19, emphasis mine). We cannot put ourselves in the place of God to exercise final judgement. Our role in the present life, as people in Christ, is to be conformed to Christ, 'always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies' (2 Cor. 4:10). That is why I argued in *Moral Vision* that 'those whose lives are reshaped in Christ [in accordance with the pattern traced in the Philippians Hymn] must deal with enemies *in the same way that God in Christ dealt with enemies*'.<sup>18</sup> We are, that is, to be conformed to the pattern of Christ crucified. If I may one more time turn Biggar's demand for distinguishing things back on him, this christologically-shaped way of responding to evil differs significantly from dealing with enemies as we think God may choose to deal with them in the eschaton. Rather, in the present time we are called to live in Christ and mirror his sacrificial self-giving, not presuming to take vengeance into our own hands. Jesus Christ is not only our source of life but also the new Adam, the revelation of the human fidelity for which we were made. The rest is God's business, not ours.

*Wider Theological and Methodological Considerations*

My greatest disappointment with Professor Biggar's well-intentioned critique is that it fails almost entirely to engage the fundamental theological grounds on which my case for Christian pacifism is actually argued. By

<sup>18</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 330, emphasis added.

confining his rebuttals chiefly to the level of descriptive exegesis, he avoids coming to grips with the deepest *christological*, *ecclesiological*, and *eschatological* warrants for Jesus' followers to live the way of peace. Perhaps I can explain what I mean by sketching once more very briefly the implications of reading the NT as a single fundamental story that is best read through the focal lenses of community, cross, and new creation.<sup>19</sup> The NT tells the story of God's action to reconcile the world to himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the subsequent formation of a new community that reenacts the loving obedience of Jesus Christ and thereby serves as a sign of God's eschatological redemptive purposes for the world.

The church as *community*, then, is called to embody 'the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:18–20). We are to be a distinct people, a city set on a hill, incarnating an alternative to the self-destructive violence of a sin-infected world. I am struck by how little attention Biggar's essay gives to this ecclesial dimension of moral discernment, this imperative that the church should live as a countercommunity instantiating the love of God. He seems to think that if he can find an individual soldier or two in the NT, then individual Christians will be given license to become 'public officials' or sword-wielders. But what of the identity of the *ekklēsia*? Surely the people of God, corporately understood, are called to embody a more excellent way.

And the character of that more excellent way is definitively stamped by the story of the *cross*. It is the story of 'a Messiah who refuses the defense of the sword and dies at the hands of a pagan state that bears the power of the sword'.<sup>20</sup> This is very much at the heart of the matter, because the church's vocation is to be shaped by his example. As Paul expresses it, 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death' (Phil. 3:10). So the christological case for pacifism is not merely a matter of explicating one or two of Jesus' sayings about renouncing anger and turning the other cheek. Rather, it is a matter of seeing the overall narrative of his life as the embodiment of human wholeness, and the narrative of his passion and death as a disclosure of the costly faithfulness and enemy-love that leads to reconciliation (Rom. 5:10), rather than perpetuating the cycle of violence.

The church can seek to live in accordance with the way of the cross only because it looks forward to the *new creation*, the resurrection of the dead, and God's healing of all that is broken. In the present time, we are acutely and realistically aware that we do not yet see creation made whole, and

<sup>19</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 193–205. For the application of these images to the question of violence, see pp. 337–39.

<sup>20</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 338.

we groan along with the unredeemed world; yet we wait in hope for 'the glory about to be revealed to us' (Rom. 8:18–25). Living in this state of eschatological expectation frees us for a life of testimony, a life not bound to the apparently prudential moral considerations of the world as we know it. We can walk by faith, not by sight, and seek to live into the promised freedom of the children of God. It is this eschatological horizon that frees us from the need to grasp security through violence and enables us to bear witness to the peaceful hope of the age to come. Even if 'we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered', we know that nothing in all creation can finally separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 8:35–39).

These are the fundamental arguments for Christian pacifism, as I have set them forth in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. It seems to me that Biggar's critique either ignores or fails to grasp these larger theological dimensions of my argument.

Part of the reason for this, I think, is that, as I have suggested, he is operating chiefly at the level of exegetical description of individual texts. I have tried to show why I find his exegesis, even at the descriptive level, misguided and unpersuasive. But the bigger problem (if you will forgive the pun) is that he does not engage my overarching methodological assertion that the NT tells a *story* in which we find ourselves situated, and that its normative claim is therefore most clearly understood in the *paradigmatic* mode. We find our identity and our moral vocation as the people of God within the story of Jesus Christ and nowhere else.

By contrast, the just war doctrine that Biggar espouses does not get its bearings from this story. Instead, it assumes that moral discernment takes place chiefly with reference to the realm of public political order rather than with reference to the *politeuma* of the people of God (Phil. 3:20). Further, this doctrine of just war assumes that the relevance of Jesus for the question of violence can be determined by speculative reconstructions of prudential reasons he might have had for rejecting nationalist insurgency – rather than seeing that it is the cruciform shape of the incarnate word that provides the paradigm for Christian existence. And finally, just war doctrine submerges our moral deliberation almost entirely in the present tense of the mundane politics of this age, rather than looking in patient hope to the resurrection and the life of the world to come. These, I would insist, are the theological grounds on which we must discern whether to have recourse to the sword to oppose injustice.

# The New Testament and Violence: Round Two

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**Nigel Biggar**

Christ Church, University of Oxford

Dear Richard,

Thank you for agreeing to take our debate about the New Testament and violence<sup>1</sup> one stage further. I do think that there's scope for shedding more exact light on our disagreement.

Let me begin with your largest objection to my critique: namely, that I failed to engage with hermeneutical issues—in particular the synthetic role of your three focal images of community, cross, and new creation—and that I therefore avoided coming to grips with 'the deepest christological, ecclesiological, and eschatological warrants' for your position. You're quite correct that I didn't do this; but I don't think that my omission is as important as you suppose. Let me explain.

I entirely recognise the need to construct coherent ethical sense out of the diversity of New Testament texts, by deciding to foreground certain elements and marginalize others. I agree that the foundation of this construction should be the story of God's saving work, as it finds its definitive expression in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. I also agree that Jesus' death and its circumstances epitomise his life. Where I disagree is over your summary of the story of his death as that of 'a Messiah who refuses the defence of the sword and dies at the hands of a pagan state that bears the power of the sword'. To me this seems excessively simplified and wrongly focused. As I read the story, Jesus refused to identify God's salvation with the expectations of religious nationalism, concentrated his fiercest criticism on the oppressive use of religion, and sought to woo wrongdoers to repentance by displaying compassion toward them, with the result that he was eventually hounded to his death by Jewish religious authorities, who managed to manipulate a weak Roman governor into executing him. One of the striking (and anti-nationalist) features of the story is that the main villains are the pious Jews, not the pagan Romans. Yes, the story presents

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1 Nigel Biggar, 'Specify and Distinguish! Interpreting the New Testament on "Non-violence"', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22.2 (May 2009), pp. 164–84; Richard Hays, 'Narrate and Embody: A Response to Nigel Biggar', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22.2 (May 2009), pp. 185–98.

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Pilate in a bad light because of his weakness in yielding to political pressure and ordering the unjust execution of a man whose innocence he recognized. But he is not criticised, as far as I can see, either for being a pagan oppressor of God's people or for bearing the power of the sword as such. For you, it seems, the moral significance of the story of Jesus can be reduced to a single principle: non-violence. For me, the moral meaning of Jesus is more complicated: the religious relativisation of ethnic or national loyalty; the understanding of God and true religion as about human flourishing, not domination; the extension of compassion toward wrongdoers in the hope of wooing them to repentance, and so to complete reconciliation; and the consequent refusal of certain kinds of violence.

I take it for granted that Christian communities are called to embody these views, intentions, dispositions, and refusals. Whether the resultant embodiment proves to be against the grain of the surrounding culture, or with it, however, depends entirely on the historical accident of where that culture happens to be at the time. Since I expect the Spirit of God in Christ to be at work in the world, and not just in those parts of the world that are the Christian churches, I do not presume—as you do—that the churches are called to be '*counter*communities'. It seems to me that the New Testament presents us with different Christian communities assuming different stances toward their social environment in different circumstances. And that is as it should be. I guess that, if one thinks that Jesus means absolute non-violence, then one is bound to expect churches to be at basic odds with every actual, autonomous society. But, as I've explained, that's not a reading of Jesus that I share.

I also take it for granted that Christians are sustained in their moral efforts—not least to forbear and be patient in the face of persistent injustice—by the eschatological hope that at the end of time God will do what justice we cannot or may not. Whereas you see this hope as freeing us from 'the apparently prudential moral considerations of the world as we know it', I actually see it as making prudence possible. Faced with gross and impenitent injustice, righteous resentment is tempted to let loose all constraints, with the result that it ends up multiplying injustice. Hope that God will yet do what cannot or may not now be done helps resentment suffer the discipline of love—that is, of the disposition of compassion and the intention of reconciliation or peace. Where I differ from you is in thinking that a certain kind of resentment is a perfectly appropriate response to injustice; and that the use of lethal violence can suffer love's discipline, being compassionate and intending peace.

The determining point of disagreement between us, it seems to me, is not ecclesiological or eschatological, but christological. It lies in our different readings of the story of Jesus—or, more exactly, in our different summaries or encapsulations of it. How might we adjudicate between our different readings? Presumably in terms of the New Testament texts themselves. Presumably the test must be: Which reading does most justice to what the New Testament actually says? And that is why my original critique of your position operated at the level of what you call '*descriptive exegesis*'.

So, back to the text—and first of all, the soldier narratives. Regarding Lk. 3.12–14, I accept what you say about the soldiers being paired with tax collectors as notorious sinners, and about John the Baptist's message not being one of non-violence. I still think that it tells against your pacifist reading, however, that none of the Gospels think it important to improve upon John's understanding of the nature of the soldiers' sin: not the very fact of being soldiers, but robbery by violence and false accusation, and discontent with their wages.

Regarding Mk 15.39, Matt. 27.54, Lk. 23.47, I accept that the centurion's acknowledgement of the crucified Jesus as Son of God (Mark and Matthew) is dramatic, but I differ with you over the source of the drama. You think that it's because the centurion is a sword-wielder; I think it's because he is a gentile Roman. This is clearer in Luke, where the centurion recognises Jesus' innocence—reinforcing Pilate's earlier judgement (23.14, 22). What's dramatic is that these pagans perceived what the chief priests and scribes refused to see. By ironic implication, unlike the people of God, the gentiles did not blaspheme against the Holy Spirit (12.8–10).

With regard to my treatment of the cases of the centurion at Capernaum (Matt. 8.5–13; Lk. 7.1–10) and Cornelius (Acts 10.1–11.18), I agree that one of the chief complaints made against Jesus was his habit of associating with sinners before they had changed their ways. However, I'm not yet persuaded that the Gospels tell any stories of particular sinners emerging unchanged from an encounter with Jesus. The one example that you give is of the sinful woman who washes Jesus' feet in Lk. 7.36–50. It's true that we're not told here explicitly that she formally renounced her former ways, like Zacchaeus. But on the assumption that the pronouncement of absolution, salvation, and reconciliation ('Your sins are forgiven... Your faith has saved you; go in peace') only makes sense as a response to repentance, albeit implicit (in her tears), the story implies that the woman was not about to return to her sin. Nevertheless, for the sake of argument let me grant that the New Testament does not invariably show particular sinners being changed by their encounter with Jesus. If absolute non-violence were as central to the moral meaning of Jesus as you say, is it not very odd indeed that the New Testament gives us a case of a soldier encountering Jesus and meeting with nothing but approval; and another case of a soldier encountering one of Jesus' apostles, where the story turns, not at all on his being a sword-bearer, but on his being a gentile ('one of another nation...unclean', Acts 10.28)? As for why the New Testament nowhere explicitly commends soldiers *for being soldiers*, the reason is that it feels no need to assert the validity of a social role that it takes entirely for granted. And as for why it fails to give us a single example of a Christian disciple who bears the sword to oppose injustice, well, it doesn't fail: it gives us Cornelius, who as a centurion in the Italian Cohort heard 'the good news of peace by Jesus Christ' (Acts 10.36), received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and was baptised (Acts 10.44–48).

Let's leave behind the soldier narratives and proceed to the central matter of Jesus' own view of violence. In my article I claim that Jesus eschews only violence that was inspired by religious nationalism, that consists in civil war, and that was not publicly authorised. You complain that I offer no exegetical support for any of this. With regard to the second kind of violence—civil war—I did offer some slight exegetical grounding, but I fully concede that it is not adequate. I offered that hostage to fortune in case someone else might notice better support than I could find. You clearly don't think that there is any; and as far as I can see, you're right. So until sufficient textual support is forthcoming, let me remove this distracting piece of speculation from the board.

With regard to the bearing of religious nationalism on the matter, I am puzzled by your response. In *Moral Vision*<sup>2</sup> you interpret the temptation narrative in the Gospel of Matthew (4.1–11) as Jesus refusing 'to defend the interests of the poor and oppressed in

2 Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), p. 324.

Palestine by organizing armed resistance against the Romans or against the privileged Jewish collaborators with Roman authority'. Is it that you deny that such armed resistance was either nationalist or religious? Do you then dissent from Seán Freyne, denying that it was inspired by 'the triumphant Zion ideology which viewed the nations as Israel's servants'?<sup>3</sup> If not, then your position must be that although Jesus rejected this kind of religious nationalist violence, it wasn't because of its kind that he rejected it; it was purely and simply because it was violence. But how do you *know* that?

I think that you think you know it, because you take it for granted that love and compassion always preclude violence. Thus you write that '[t]he reasons for non-violence in our Gospels have to do with simple obedience to a loving, compassionate God'.<sup>4</sup> This brings us to what seems to me to be the real nub of the matter: the making of moral conceptual distinctions, and their importation into the interpretation of the New Testament text. I distinguish between violence that is not authorised for the public good and that which is; between violence that is driven by intemperate anger, hatred, and vengeance, and that which is not; and between violence that retaliates touchily for trivial offences and that which does not. Whence do I get these distinctions? In part, from ethical reflection upon what's wrong with violence. What's wrong with violence is not simply that it causes another person pain or damages her health or life—for so does the parent who rebukes or smacks her child, and the surgeon who cuts through healthy tissue or amputates a leg. Acts that cause the evils of pain or physical harm are not intrinsically wrong. Their wrongness depends on their motivation, their intention, and their proportionality. So violence that is governed by compassion and by the intention of peace—by 'love'—is morally different from that which is not.

You refer to these distinctions as 'logic-chopping' and 'artificial'. By this you mean, I take it, that they hold only at the level of concepts, and not at the level of empirical reality. I think that you're wrong. This brings us to my second source: experience. It seems to me, both from my own experience and from what I have read and observed of others, that anger and violence *can actually* be governed by the motive of compassion and the intention of peace. Sometimes people use violence, not because they hate the enemy or want to wreak vengeance upon him; but because they think it right to stop him doing the injustice he's doing.<sup>5</sup> You also complain that, in interpreting Matt. 5.38–30, I use distinctions that are 'nowhere to be found in this text or in any text in the Gospels'; and you argue that, 'if our concern is to seek guidance from the NT, the distinctions must be the distinctions actually made by its authors, not distinctions projected backwards anachronistically'. I don't quite agree. If I regard the New Testament as a moral authority, then I must think within the terms of what it clearly and recurrently and predominantly *says*. But if I want guidance from it, then within the terms of what it says I must venture an interpretation of what it *means for me here and now*. This must and should involve (what appear to be) the data of reason and experience: 'must', because we cannot but come to the text as beings who already reason and experience; 'should' because the Spirit of God in Christ speaks to us through the world of his creating and our experiencing, and not only through Scripture.

3 Seán Freyne, *Jesus, a Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* (London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), p. 135.

4 Hays, 'Narrate and Embody', p. 191.

5 I gave some examples in note 51 of my article, 'Specify and Distinguish!'

Among the data that I must and should bring to the text in order to interpret the moral import of its words are moral distinctions that appear to make sense logically and empirically. If what the text (clearly, recurrently, predominantly) says simply won't wear these distinctions, then as a Christian ethicist I must reconsider, perhaps abandon them. But if the text will wear them, then I may infer that its meaning includes them. So the fact that a distinction is not to be found explicitly in a text need not matter: it might be implicit. The author didn't say it; but he implied it. And even if it isn't implicit, the text might still accommodate it. The author didn't say it or imply it; but what he did say and imply still leaves room for it. You call the hermeneutical principle that I'm using here—that whatever is not explicitly forbidden is therefore permitted—'legalistic'. I'm puzzled. I'd have thought it permissive. Maybe what you mean is that I exploit the bare words of the text literally, in order 'to read logic-chopping justifications for violence back into texts that seek to witness to exactly the opposite meaning'. Well, yes, I am reading justifications for (some) violence into the text, but I don't agree with you that they contradict the text's meaning. That's precisely what's at issue, isn't it? From my point of view, you're begging the question. It might seem crystal clear to you that the texts *mean* absolute non-violence, even when that's not what they *say*. But for someone like me, who doesn't bring pacifist assumptions to the texts in the first place, it's not clear at all.

As it happens, I still think that some of the texts *do* imply some of the distinctions that I use. You express astonishment that I read Matt. 5.22 as distinguishing two kinds of anger. You plead for restoring the *context*: that Jesus is radicalising the Torah's prohibition of murder and extending it to the attitude of anger. Well, of course; but that's beside the point. It's beside the point, because it doesn't settle the question: What's meant by 'anger'? You might assume that it means all anger everywhere; but I don't. I don't assume it, partly for the empirical reasons I've given above, and partly because 'anger' is surely what infuses Jesus' tirades against the Pharisees: 'But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!... Woe to you, blind guides... You blind fools!... You blind men!... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!... You blind guides...! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!... You blind Pharisee!... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!... You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?' (Matt. 23.13, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 33). Jesus seems pretty angry to me. Does he not to you? If so, then presumably the kind of anger that he expressed toward the scribes and Pharisees is not the same kind that he condemns in Matt. 5.22. So what kind is it? Does what the text *says* give us a clue as to what it *means*? Yes it does: the phrase 'everyone who is angry' in the first part of the sentence is paralleled in the second with 'whoever insults... and whoever says, "You fool!"' Therefore I conclude that the text specifies anger that is insulting and abusive—and implicitly distinguishes this from anger that is not.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, you deny that Eph. 4.26 distinguishes two types of anger, arguing from the context that it intends to urge speaking the truth to an offender rather than allowing anger to fester overnight. I don't deny this. However, I point out that Paul did not write: 'Instead

6 I am aware that these texts call for a further distinction between different kinds of calling others fools, since Jesus urges his disciples not to participate in fool-calling, while himself doing just that in relation to the Pharisees.

of being angry, do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger'. What he wrote was: 'Be angry, but do not sin etc.' The logical implication of this is (to me) entirely straightforward: that there is a form of anger that is not sinful—namely, that which is honest and candid and doesn't fester. I'd add (from reflection and experience) that it's also anger that is an appropriate contradiction of injustice—such as that displayed by Jesus against the oppressive use of religion by the Pharisees. From my point of view, Richard, you appear here to be trying to use the context to escape the text.

Regarding Romans 12 and 13, you object to my importation of the 'anachronistic' distinction between public officials and private citizens, arguing that Paul's distinction is between public officials and Christians. Judging by what you said at our Oxford debate, you think that the public/private distinction is a modern innovation, and that is why you call it anachronistic here. But you'll remember that Markus Bockmuehl pointed out at the time that Plato quotes Socrates making it. Further, do you really doubt that first-century Palestinian and Roman societies gave to certain members responsibility for maintaining public law and order, and authority to use degrees of coercion in their defence, which they withheld from other (private) citizens? You correctly point out that in Romans 12 Paul is urging Christians 'not [to] be conformed to this world but [to] be transformed' (v. 2). But why do you identify 'this world' with 'the pagan empire', rather than with sinful, anti-social impulses and propensities? In the verses immediately following the exhortation against conformity (vv. 3–8) there is no mention whatsoever of the empire or of the sword or of violence. Instead, what Paul urges is that members of the body of Christ do not jeopardise community by rating themselves more highly (and others more lowly) than they ought to. Yes, in the rest of the chapter (vv. 9–21) and in the beginning of chapter 13 (vv. 1–7) Paul does exhort Christians to be patient in tribulation, to bless those who persecute them, to repay no one evil for evil, to live peaceably with all, never to avenge themselves, but instead to leave vengeance to the governing authorities, whom God has instituted to execute his wrath against the wrongdoer 'for your good'. But I can see nothing here that is incompatible with a reading that sees Paul urging Christians, *inter alia*, not to respond to their persecutors by taking the law into their own (unauthorised, private) hands, thus making themselves into a threat to public peace.

Your alternative, Origenite-Anabaptist reading holds that, though the governing authority's use of force to punish the wicked is ordained by God, 'that is not the role of believers'. Instead, the role of believers is to bear witness to an alternative society so completely governed by God as to lack need of the sword. I find this view incoherent because, if such a 'peaceable kingdom' were currently practicable, then God would surely have ordained it *instead of* one that uses the sword? If the 'peaceable kingdom' really were realisable here and now, then the 'coercive kingdom' would not be necessary and should be abandoned forthwith. But according to what Paul says, God evidently thinks that it is necessary—otherwise he surely wouldn't have ordained it. (So, Richard, it is not that I presume to regard 'the Pauline vision' as currently impracticable. It's rather that I see the Pauline vision as implying that *God* thinks it impracticable.) None of this is to deny that the Christian community has a special vocation to perform in the world. It is to say, however, that that vocation is not the pacifist one of renouncing violence always and everywhere, but rather the just war one of submitting it to the discipline of compassionate, peace-intending love (and so of renouncing it sometimes).

The final point to do with the importation of distinctions into the interpretation of the New Testament is this. You are quite right to say that I import the distinction between illegitimate unauthorised violence and legitimate publicly authorised violence into the Gospels ‘without direct warrant’ from the text. But since that text never criticises soldiers *for being sword-bearers* (as distinct from robbing, moaning about their wages, allowing themselves to be manipulated into executing an innocent man, and the cruelty of their executing), it gives me permission to import a distinction that I find both in Romans 12 and 13 and in social common sense. I am aware, somewhat uneasily, of blurring the boundary between exegesis and interpretation here; but right now it seems to me that speculating about what Jesus’ words meant to Jesus and what they mean to me are not discrete operations. I suspect that this might be another point of tension between us. However, I find comfort in *Moral Vision*, where you admit that the exegetical, synthetic, and hermeneutical tasks ‘inevitably interpenetrate and overlap’.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, I suspect that the meaning of the cross as the absolute repudiation of violence is blindingly obvious to you, only because you yourself have imported into the synthetic task empirical assumptions about anger and violence as necessarily vengeful and malevolent.

Let’s turn now to Paul’s theology of the Atonement. In *Moral Vision* you argue from Rom. 5.8–10 that Paul infers from the death of Christ that God deals with his enemies, not by killing them, but by seeking peace through self-sacrificial service; and that those whose lives are reshaped in Christ must treat their enemies likewise. My counter-argument is this. It is true that Paul affirms that God regards sinners with love and has taken gracious initiative toward sparing them his wrath by being reconciled with them through the death of Jesus. However, he does not affirm that in the end God *will be able to* spare sinners, if they refuse to be wooed out of their sin. In the end God as cosmic magistrate may have to kill incorrigible sinners, not because he *wants* to, but because respect for the freedom of the human will and the final peace of the cosmos require it. So what Paul implies here for Christian conduct toward enemies is that this should be marked by the motive of love, a yearning for peace, the taking of peacemaking initiatives, self-sacrifice in forbearance and compassion, and sometimes vulnerability unto death. But what he does not imply is that Christians may never use the sword against wrongdoers. To this you respond by reminding me that Paul says ‘never avenge yourselves’ (Rom. 12.19). But I hadn’t forgotten: just war doctrine, being Christian, rules out the motive of vengeance. Then you say that ‘[w]e cannot put ourselves in the place of God to exercise final judgement’; and that we must deal with enemies as God in Christ dealt with them, and not as God may deal with them at the eschaton. Let me make two comments here. First, Christian proponents of just war do not imagine themselves to be in the business of making final judgements; they merely seek to stop other sinners doing grave wrong by the only effective means available. Second, I resist *your* distinction (just for a change!). I follow Karl Barth in taking the incarnation of God with utmost seriousness, and saying that what we see in Jesus is what we get in God. There is no eschatological God standing behind, and apart from, the christological God. The God who may have to condemn intransigent sinners at the end of time is none other than the God who has loved us to the bitter end in Jesus. How can we make coherent sense of this? Not, I submit, in pacifist terms.

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7 Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 199.

Finally, you argue that ‘on the whole’ Christians during the first and second centuries regarded military service as inconsistent with the norms of Christian faith and practice; whereas by the third century we find more evidence of Christians serving as soldiers and of various justifications for that. This, you think, suggests ‘both that the earliest Christians understood the NT texts in their straightforward sense as prohibiting recourse to violence and that the history of interpretation gradually led to a relaxing of this rigorous position’. In note 10 you admit that ‘[t]here is of course debate in the literature about whether early Christian aversion to serving in the Roman army was motivated by the rejection of idolatry rather than by opposition to bloodshed’, and you refer the reader to two ‘even-handed surveys’ of the relevant literature—one by Louis Swift, the other by David Hunter.<sup>8</sup> Following your lead, I have looked at Hunter (whose 1992 survey covers Swift’s 1983 book). He concludes, not merely that there is debate about the reasons for the objection to military service by (most of) the earliest post-Apostolic Christians, but that this debate has achieved a ‘new consensus’ (as opposed to the old ‘pacifist consensus’): namely, that these reasons were indeed mixed. Further, Hunter’s conclusion makes more explicit what is contained in your qualifying phrase, ‘on the whole’: that at least from the end of the second century there is a diversity of opinion among Christians over military service. It won’t surprise you that I see no need to read the emergence of support for military service among Christians as comprising a Fall from Original Pacifism. I do not doubt that many or most Christians in the second century were pacifist. Given their history of persecution by the governing authorities, the bloodthirstiness and cruelty of Roman culture, the oath of allegiance to the god-emperor—combined with the pronounced pacific themes of the New Testament—Christians of that time and place can easily be forgiven for concluding that sword-bearing is wrong always and everywhere. The fact that at least from the end of the second century some Christians are dissenting from that pacifist position need not be a symptom of their moral feebleness—but rather of second thoughts in more favourable political circumstances, and in the light of increased opportunities to take public responsibility and reshape its exercise.

So I persist in thinking that just war doctrine can do better justice than pacifism to all the relevant material in the New Testament. It strongly affirms that followers of Jesus are forbidden to be vengeful and hateful; that they are called to intend peace, to have compassion, and to forebear; and that in some circumstances—either where they are not authorised to bear the public sword, or where to exercise that authority would be disproportionate and indiscriminate—they are called to leave themselves vulnerable to injury. In addition, it can explain why soldiers in the New Testament are never criticised *for being soldiers*. And it can give a more coherent account both of Romans 12–13 and of Paul’s theology of the Atonement.

Over to you for the last word, if not the conclusive one.

Fraternally,

Nigel

8 David G. Hunter, ‘A Decade of Research on Early Christians and Military Service’, *Religious Studies Review* 18 (1992), pp. 87–94; Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983).

# The Thorny Task of Reconciliation: Another Response to Nigel Biggar

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Dear Nigel,

I am glad to continue the discussion, and I appreciate your cordial and careful reply. Many differences between us remain unresolved, but perhaps it would be well to begin by noting some significant common ground. I am glad to see your agreement with me that the foundation for constructive Christian ethics is ‘the story of God’s saving work, as it finds definitive expression in Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection’—something that was not entirely clear to me in your earlier critique of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. Likewise, I join you in affirming that ‘followers of Jesus are forbidden to be vengeful and hateful; that they are called to intend peace, to have compassion, and to forbear’. The overlap between our positions is a welcome reminder that Christian advocates of just war and Christian pacifists share much in common. As followers of Jesus we serve the same Lord, and we both know ourselves to be called to peacemaking. We both acknowledge that Jesus’ teaching constrains our natural impulses towards retaliation and summons us instead to compassionate responses even to our enemies. It is well to remind ourselves of these shared commitments.

We also have no significant disagreement concerning the historical evidence about the actual practices of the early Christians. I acknowledge that their opinions were mixed, and you acknowledge that, for a variety of reasons, ‘many or most Christians in the second century were pacifist’. Our assessments of this state of affairs may differ slightly, as when you say that the early Christians ‘can easily be forgiven’ for holding such a position. But I assume that this is a wry, ironic turn of phrase on your part.

I turn, then, to address our areas of disagreement. I shall try to do so concisely, expecting that readers will take these remarks as supplementary to our earlier exchange. I won’t respond to every point, but will focus on the most significant differences.

First, Nigel, I’m not satisfied that you have understood my reading of the story of Jesus and its significance for the question of violence. You cite a single sentence from one of my summarising paragraphs (‘a Messiah who refuses the defence of the sword and dies

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at the hands of a pagan state that bears the power of the sword') and then characterise this as 'excessively simplified and wrongly focused'. Further along in the same paragraph you say, 'For you, it seems, the moral significance of the story of Jesus can be reduced to a single principle: non-violence'. I protest this account of my position for two reasons. First, in *Moral Vision* I spend almost 100 pages tracing the story of Jesus in each Gospel and explicating many different facets of its moral significance (*Moral Vision*, pp. 73–168; cf. also pp. 319–39). Of course, I cannot recapitulate all that here, but I urge readers to consult the book. Second, my book explicitly argues against the use of *principles* as adequate distillations of the New Testament narratives; instead, I insist that the narratives themselves retain primacy, and that they are to be read chiefly as *paradigms* or patterns for moral understanding and action (pp. 291–312). Thus, my book adamantly opposes the reduction of the story of Jesus to any single principle. I would suggest that it is your reading of me that is 'overly simplified'. And if my interpretation seems to you 'wrongly focused', that is perhaps because you have disregarded my key proposal that we must constantly re-read the biblical stories in light of the three focusing images of community, cross, and new creation (pp. 193–205).

Your own contrasting summary of the Jesus story highlights Jesus' resistance to religious nationalism and 'the oppressive use of religion'; consequently, you emphasise that Jesus was 'hounded to his death by Jewish religious authorities' and judge that 'the main villains are the pious Jews, not the Romans'. I must register some misgivings about the seemingly anti-Jewish slant of this summary; to be sure, you have based your summary on some features that truly are present in the Gospel narratives, but in its *emphasis* on the Jewishness of Jesus' opponents your account seems to skate dangerously close to a reading of Jesus that distances him from his own Jewish culture and faith. (I trust that further conversation would allay my worries on this point.) I do agree with you, however, that Jesus' message was not chiefly concerned with opposition to the Roman Empire.

Was Jesus then opposed to nationalist religious violence? Yes. Was he opposed to it, as you assert, *only* because it was nationalistic and unauthorised? There the question becomes more complex, but I continue to find in your letter the same dearth of *exegetical* evidence that I found in your earlier critique. Where is the evidence in the Gospels that Jesus ever actually qualified his teaching against violence in the way you propose, or expressed approval for appropriately authorised violence? It seems to me that the burden of proof lies with you, and that you have offered no evidence at all: merely assertion and conjecture.

Turning to a closely related point, you contend that the New Testament 'doesn't fail' to give us an example 'of a Christian disciple who bears the sword to oppose injustice'. Your example is the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10. This reply suggests that I have not made my point clear. My observation is this: the New Testament never *narrates* an act of sword-wielding heroism by a Christian. (For an instructive contrast, see the traditions about the prophet Mohammed.) If Luke had gone on to tell us that Cornelius, after being baptised, strapped on his sword and went out to kill Zealot terrorists who were jeopardising the peace and safety of Roman Palestine, then we would have an example of the kind I'm asking for.

Or what if Jesus, in telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, had narrated it like this: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who started to beat and rob him. A passing priest and Levite, being pacifists, saw the mugging taking place but did nothing. But then, at the last moment, a Samaritan sheriff

swooped down from the hills with a (duly deputised) posse. They fell upon the robbers with their swords and killed them, rescuing their victim and making the Jericho road safe for other travellers. Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?'

My point is that Jesus never told stories in which the good guys kill the bad guys. The Gospels and Acts utterly lack any such stories about the triumph of justice through force. In this respect these texts are truly unusual in the world's literature. If we look to the New Testament narratives for *paradigms of faithfulness*, they are exclusively to be found in characters (Jesus and his followers) who bear witness through proclaiming the word and performing acts of healing and mercy. Often they suffer unjustly at the hands of 'authorised' officials in the social and political order of the day. Yet never do they resist or counsel armed resistance.

Next up is the question of anger. You propose that Jesus' prohibition of anger in Matt. 5:22 can't possibly refer to *all* anger, because in Matthew 23, Jesus himself is depicted as angry at the scribes and Pharisees. But your argument self-destructs when you note correctly in your n. 6 that Jesus also forbids calling others 'fool' and then proceeds to do exactly that in Matt. 23:17. You say that your argument will therefore require 'a further distinction between different kinds of calling others fools'. Nigel, surely you can recognise that you have produced a *reductio ad absurdum* of your own position! This kind of hyperscholastic hair-splitting seems to be generated by the desire to maintain a formally high (almost inerrantist) view of Scripture's authority without an adequate hermeneutical clarity about how Scripture's material *diversity* is to be received in the community of faith. I can imagine several other ways to interpret the tension between Matthew 5 and Matthew 23: Jesus was just inconsistent; or Matthew has redactionally incorporated dissonant traditions without reflectively harmonising them; or Jesus by virtue of his unique divine authority can pass stern prophetic judgments in ways forbidden to others. But from my point of view, our task is not to explain away the tension. Rather, we must acknowledge it frankly; then we must think carefully about *how* a Gospel that contains tensions of this sort is to be read as a source for normative Christian ethics. My suggestion: the *normative* weight of Jesus' teaching in Matt. 5:22–26 (not only prohibiting anger but also urging proactive reconciliation) is confirmed by this text's congruity with the larger narrative pattern of Jesus' own life, pre-eminently as enacted in the cross and resurrection. This is a good example of what I mean by the paradigmatic role of the story.

I will concede that Eph. 4:26 might be interpreted to distinguish between 'two types of anger': that which festers as opposed to 'that which is honest and candid'. But your addition ('from reflection and experience') that the latter also includes 'anger that is an appropriate contradiction of injustice' introduces a new thematic element that is without warrant in the text of Ephesians. And still less does Eph. 4:26 provide any sort of authorisation for taking up arms against evildoers (the issue on which our disagreement focuses). *Au contraire*, the text is precisely an appeal for reconciliation of conflict. Further, as I noted in my earlier response, it is the Letter to the Ephesians that declares our struggle is not against blood and flesh; instead we are to oppose evil by taking up the 'armour' and 'weapons' of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and the word of God (Eph. 6:10–17).

Concerning Romans 12 and 13, we might be able to find a bit more agreement. I admit that my oral remarks at Oxford overstated the alleged anachronism of a distinction

between public and private spheres; I acknowledge Markus Bockmuehl's corrective observation, and you will note that the published form of my response to you does not refer to this issue. The point still stands, however, that in Romans *Paul* does not invoke the public/private distinction. I reiterate that he is distinguishing the role of imperial officials in maintaining order not from the role of general city-dwellers, but from *the distinctive vocation of the Christian community*. He does not say to the Roman Christians, 'Stay in your appropriate role as private citizens'. Rather, he says, 'Do not be conformed to the world (literally, 'to this age', *tō aiōni toutō*), but be transformed by the renewing of your minds' (Rom. 12:2a).

I agree with you that for Paul being conformed to this world/age would include a wide range of sinful propensities, and I concede that my phrase 'not being conformed to the pagan empire' is potentially misleading if it is understood to refer exclusively to violence and sword-wielding. Certainly Paul is also concerned, as you say, with issues of humility and tranquillity within the church. But I think you limit the scope of Paul's concern too narrowly when you say, 'In the verses immediately following the exhortation against conformity (vv. 3–8) there is no mention whatsoever of the empire or of the sword or of violence'. Romans 12:1–2 introduces the whole hortatory section of the epistle (12:1–15:13), and Paul's exposition of the transformed mind includes not just 12:3–8, but the entirety of the next three chapters of the letter. And the whole paragraph 12:14–21 describes the transformed mind of the community in terms reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount and radically countercultural: blessing persecutors, not repaying evil for evil, giving food and drink to enemies, and so overcoming evil with good—*not* with violent force. You are right to say that nothing here is 'incompatible' with a reading that urges Christians 'not to take the law into their own (unauthorised, private) hands'. But Nigel, that reading seems to me to be a rather thin reduction of Paul's more robust vision for the transformed community that is called to the work of reconciliation.

You go on to suggest that 'if such a "peaceable kingdom" were currently practicable, then God would surely have ordained it *instead of* one that uses the sword?' But, in fact, that is precisely what God *has* done in Jesus Christ and in the church! That is exactly what Paul is saying in this passage. It seems to me, Nigel, that you have failed to grasp Paul's dialectical vision for the church as an eschatological community called to proclaim and live the message of reconciliation *already* in a world that is *not yet* brought fully under the lordship of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:22–26). That is why we must walk by faith, not by sight. Yet 'the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us therefore lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light' (Rom. 13:12). So I must disagree when you say that *God* thinks the vision of a peaceable kingdom impracticable. Rather, God calls the followers of Jesus to practise it (as Jesus himself did) in a resistant and violent world. But violence will not have the last word.

The last point I will try to address is your discussion of the Atonement and its relevance for the question of violence in defence of justice. But I must confess that your position remains somewhat unclear to me. You say, 'Christian proponents of just war do not imagine themselves to be in the business of making final judgements; they merely seek to stop other sinners doing grave wrong by the only effective means available'. All right. But then what is the relevance of your point that 'God as cosmic magistrate' may finally have to judge and destroy incorrigible sinners? Doesn't your argument for just war depend on

some authentic analogy between such actions of the cosmic judge and the actions of the secular ruler who is ‘the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer’ (Rom. 13:4)? Indeed, according to Paul, the existing authorities wield the sword not merely by analogy to God but actually as direct instruments of the judgment of God. It seems to me that you deny this, or at least minimise it in a way that weakens your own position.

With talk of final judgment, though, we return in the end to a point where we are once again in strong agreement: the Barthian conviction that ‘what we see in Jesus is what we get in God’. Amen. But let’s see if we can unpack this just a bit. Paul declares that ‘It is Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us’ (Rom. 8:34). Jesus (along with the Spirit, Rom. 8:26–27) is represented as *intercessor* in God’s ultimate judgment. His death for us is the seal and proof of his coming to our defence. That is why, finally, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God. If indeed what we see in Jesus is what we get in God, then perhaps the end of all things will be a cosmic reconciliation of all creation, as envisioned in Rom. 11:32, Phil. 2:9–11 and Col. 1:20. If what we see in Jesus is what we get in God, then we are again brought face to face with the gospel’s announcement that ‘while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son’ (Rom. 5:10). That is why it seems to me your argument seeking to authorise just violence by appeal to God’s final destruction of the wicked suffers from complications and ambiguities. These are difficult matters that would require more deliberation than either of us can pursue in the present forum.

In light of all this, I cannot agree with you, Nigel, that ‘the determining point of difference between us’ is christological. I’m not sure we are really all that far apart in our understanding of Jesus. Rather, it seems to me that the determining point of difference lies in the way you bring reason and experience to bear on the task of exegesis.

By your own account, in your reception and interpretation of the New Testament you introduce moral distinctions derived from your experience of human political order and the created world, apart from the text. If the text will ‘wear’ the distinctions, you then infer that the text’s meaning implicitly ‘includes’ these distinctions. This already strikes me as logically dubious. But then you go on to say that ‘even if [my proposed distinction] isn’t implicit, the text might still accommodate it. The author didn’t say or imply it; but what he did say and imply still leaves room for it.’

These sentences specify precisely the methodological procedure from which I find myself repeatedly dissenting. You import distinctions that are neither stated nor implied in the texts you are addressing, and then you insist that this is what the texts really ‘mean’. And, indeed, you reproach me for failing to think that these distinctions are necessary to interpret the text properly. Jesus never said or implied that legitimately authorised military force was necessary to resist evil, but that is what he must have meant. How do you know? Because experience tells us such force is necessary. Ephesians doesn’t say or imply that there is such a thing as an appropriate anger against injustice that would justify killing an enemy, but that is what Paul must have meant. How do you know? Because surely experience tells us that there is such righteous anger and that it is both necessary and good. And so on.

Nigel, as a biblical exegete, I simply want to throw up my hands. How can one ever argue against such superimposed interpretations? It reminds me of a story told by a colleague who had spoken to a church group about *The Da Vinci Code*. She patiently

explained that neither the New Testament nor any other ancient document offered even a shred of evidence that Jesus had married Mary Magdalene and fathered children. But then someone in the audience stood up and said, 'Well, maybe not. But still, it might be true!'

I do not mean to trivialise the moral seriousness of your advocacy for just war. I just think that you have made bad exegetical arguments: you have dragooned the New Testament texts into the service of a cause antithetical to their own testimony. If I might offer some advice, I would suggest that just-war advocacy would be better served by arguments that forthrightly acknowledge the difficulty of finding support in the New Testament for such a position. (As in Reinhold Niebuhr's famous anti-pacifist essays 'Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist' and 'The Relevance of an Impossible Ethical Ideal'.) Just warriors can certainly appeal to the Old Testament as Christian scripture, to the dictates of experience, and to a long tradition of theological argument since Augustine. But the New Testament documents themselves stubbornly testify to an eschatological countervision: the Gospels portray Jesus as proclaiming and embodying radical nonviolent service (e.g., Mk 10:42–45), and the Epistles portray the church as a community of reconciliation that bears witness proleptically to the peace of the New Creation. The thorny task (a metaphor chosen advisedly) for Christian ethics then becomes to sort out how to weigh and apply such texts in the constructive work of discerning, in this time between the times, 'what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom. 12:2b).

*Grace and peace,*  
Richard