

Christian Pacifism and Its Cultured Naysayers:

Why not the Gospel Message that Jesus was totally nonviolent, and we're called to be nonviolent too?



The most disadvantageous
peace is better than the most
just war.

~ Desiderius Erasmus

AZ QUOTES

The Problem



There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace.—Proverbs 12:20



I have a good friend who loves the great Christian thinkers, **Erasmus** and his 16th-century Anglican friends and contemporaries known as the Oxford or London Reformers, **Dean John Colet**, **Thomas More** and **Juan Vives**.

My friend writes:

But, Erasmus was no absolute pacifist. He was very much the nimble, subtle and nuanced owl of his age, ever finding a thoughtful and navigating a thoughtful pathway between the pacifist doves and warlike hawks. (name and source withheld).



The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but violence takes lives away.—Proverbs 11:30



My friend's assessment that such thinkers are "*the nimble, subtle and nuanced owls of their age*" has always struck me as passing strange. If "*Teaching the Gospel Message that Jesus was totally nonviolent, and we're*

called to be nonviolent too,”¹ then aren’t exception caveats in the otherwise dovish Erasmus—he the premier 16th-century Peace theologian—more of a departure from *The Way* than ‘nimble’ on *The Way*? And can it be denied that his opposition to church militarism became his legacy—not nimble path-picking between doves and hawks?



If we believe in the final victory of God over evil forces, then we should be willing to wait for it. We do not have to hurry up God’s victory by causing suffering to our present enemies, or by killing them.—[Lois Barrett](#), [*The Way God Fights: War and Peace in the Old Testament*](#)



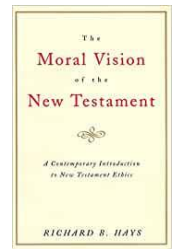
My conditional “If” above is of course the *nub*. But as I read Jesus in the Gospels², the burden of proof is surely on those “nimble” thinkers to explain why they seem to contradict/obviate/set aside what Jesus explicitly taught: *Love your enemies*—don’t you think?


What follows is not so much an argument for Christian Pacifism as making space for a challenge to its alternative, in one’s commitment to taking Jesus seriously. It does not address the minefield of thorny practical issues of living “in, but not of the world,” which two millennia plus of Church history have brought to bold relief on this matter. Then again, neither does Jesus.

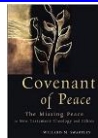
Abstract theology holds for me little appeal. So along the way, beginning with my friend, I interact with embodied expressions of Pacifism’s alternative.

Richard Hays again (See footnote 2):

One reason that the world finds the New Testament’s message of peacemaking and love of enemies incredible is that the church is so massively faithless. On the question of violence, the church is deeply compromised and committed to nationalism, violence, and idolatry. (By comparison, our problems with sexual sin are trivial.) This indictment applies alike to liberation theologies that justify violence against oppressors and to establishment Christianity that continues to play chaplain to the military-industrial complex, citing just war



¹ [The Beatitudes Center for the Nonviolent Jesus](#). There is another superb website,  Center for Christian Nonviolence ([Center For Christian Nonviolence](#)), headed by **Fr. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy**, that is also well worth visiting.



² The outstanding, massive study to be guided by is [Willard Swartley](#)’s magisterial *magnum opus*, [*Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*](#), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. (Please click on title for my book review.) The author understates at the outset:

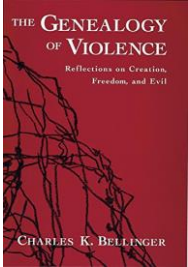
Put simply, why have *peace* and *peacemaking* been topically marginalized in the NT academic guild? (p. 3)

Noted New Testament scholar [Richard Hays](#), in his review, [The Heart of the Gospel](#), states:

Willard Swartley’s powerful, comprehensive study of the theme of peace in the New Testament is his *magnum opus*. Swartley describes the book as a study of a single neglected theme in scripture and offers it as “a companion volume to texts in New Testament theology and ethics.” But this volume is something much more. Not just an overgrown dictionary article on *eiréné* in the New Testament, *it is nothing less than a comprehensive theology of the New Testament presenting peace as the heart of the gospel message and the ground of the New Testament’s unity*. (Emphasis added.)

theory and advocating the defense of a particular nation as though that were somehow a Christian value (p. 343).”

“Violence is the ethos of our times. It is the spirituality of the modern world (Walter Wink, [*Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*](#), 1992, p. 13),” writes one contemporary cultural observer and New Testament theologian, [Walter Wink](#). More than any religious spirituality, including Christian, violence is the cultural air we breathe like no other. How can this be so after 2,000 years of Christian influence on culture? Simply put, it is too often as [Søren Kierkegaard](#) wrote:



My position is that the whole prevailing official proclamation of Christianity is a conspiracy against the Bible – we suppress what does not suit us (quoted in [Charles Bellinger](#), [*The Genealogy of Violence*](#), 2001, p. 98).

Simply stated: in Jesus, if not Pacifism, why not?

Exception-Clause Footnote Theology?

I must express textual agnosticism: Search as I might throughout the New Testament, I find nowhere any [Exception-Clause Footnote Theology](#) at work that permits, let alone encourages, an end-run around this central text and theme. *Do you?*

Surely a nimble mind does not try to find a (convenient?) agnosticism about this theme, while seemingly ignoring that

. . . peace [is] the heart of the gospel message and the ground of the New Testament’s unity. (New Testament scholar Richard Hays. See Footnote 3.)?

Whereas, one must wonder at the apparent abnegation of simply seeing this unifying theme of the New Testament!? Or have *I* missed something—and *not they who fail to embrace Christian Pacifism*?

Mind you (intentional pun), that great thinkers such as C.S. Lewis had such “nimble” minds, one cannot deny. Perhaps though therein lies the problem? . . .

Test Case for Love of God, Etc.

For is not the *enemy* in the New Testament *extreme test case of neighbour*—what assesses the pluck of our enjoined *neighbour love*, according to Jesus, in turn assays the mettle of our exalted *God-talk*? When asked for the Greatest Commandment, Jesus gave two for the price of one, implying, did he not, that the first is predicated upon, and nonexistent without, the second (Matt. 22:40)?

Might one not rightly express it thus?:

The Gospels indicate that the test case for love of God is love of neighbour. The test case for love of neighbour is love of enemy. Therefore, to the extent we love neighbour and enemy, to that extent we love God. And to the extent we fail to love neighbour and enemy, we fail to love God.

“Love” (*agapao*) is a New Testament action verb that constantly reaches out to embrace as friends, draw a circle of inclusion around, neighbour and enemy (*agape* is the noun form, almost invariably referencing God’s unconditional love in the New Testament).

The above is my *Personal Mantra* that may be found on the [Front Page](#) of my website.

And in case we missed the implication of Jesus, the rest of the New Testament telescopes The Two Greatest Commandments into One:

Love your neighbour as yourself (Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8).

Though Christians for two millennia plus have hidden behind the “God-of-violence” escape theory of the Old Testament, Jesus says God’s entire revelation to the ancient Hebrews is ethically summed up in two simple *dicta*:

Love God. Love neighbour.

Surely there is not much room for a God of violence in either!?³

Or do “nimble minds” . . .

- *see* something in the New Testament that simply isn’t there;
- *fail to see* in the New Testament what is there?

For my friend’s “nimble, subtle and nuanced owls,” unlike doves, are vicious birds of prey too—a point Erasmus himself made about the warring princes’ use of eagle imagery. Thinking to attach themselves to the nobility and strength of eagles, Erasmus points out that those nations that used them as their standard became predators. (*One can think of examples: Rome, Nazi Germany, America.*)

For Christians, I suggest then, that the heat is on. Since not only have Christians for two thousand years tried to dodge this “two-for-the-price-of-one” deal from Jesus, and this “one-law-for-all” metonymy of the

³ See too:

We Are All Related

Nathan Beacom

To think of ourselves as related means to recognize that we stand in a network of mutual obligation and care with each person with whom we come into contact. As we know, the US government and American settlers more often treated native peoples with suspicion, violence, and unfaithfulness than with such concern. This fact continues to show its ill effects today. Still, this truth is our only hope for addressing and setting right this ongoing history: you are my relative, and I am yours. Believing and acting this way is the work of peace, for all of us of every heritage, and it is the road we must take if we are to reconcile past hurts and to share this country in friendship.

Jesus would not have said it better! And everything about Jesus surely affirms the above? [As Lakota holy man Black Elk put it, we must learn to “live together as one being.”](#)

New Testament, they seem rather summarily to toss out the window any reference to *love of enemies*. Or again, have I missed something?

With reference to “The Great Tradition,”⁴ it is argued that pacifism has no basis in it. While I am not one capable of offering a counter-argument, possibly this helpful article, by [David A. Hoekema](#)⁵, will go some distance at least: [A Practical Christian Pacifism](#). (Do please see the footnote after his name, for much more, including a recent case study in northern Uganda.) The Summary is apt:

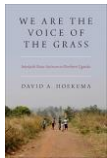
Practical pacifism deserves more serious consideration than it has received in Christian circles, especially since the major alternative to pacifism in Christian ethics, the just-war tradition, has significant deficiencies.

A Case Study

C.S. Lewis’ essay, “Why I Am Not a Pacifist” in [The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses](#), edited by Walter Hooper, (Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1949, pp. 33 – 53), seems a representative example of excising “*love your enemies*” from the “*Dominical sayings*” that Lewis chose to consider.⁶ But surely that is less *nimble* than *straw-man* thinking, where Lewis refused to consider the (potentially?) War-Game-Stopper reality of *peace/peacemaking* being core New Testament teaching, in his bid to support Britain’s involvement in World War II. And he, a grand literary Master. One wonders: What else was going

⁴ See for example: [The Great Tradition—A Great Labor: Studies in Ancient-Future Faith](#), Philip E. Harrold (Editor), [D. H. Williams](#) (Editor).

⁵



Dr. Hoekema is executive director of the American Philosophical Association, Newark, Delaware. This article appeared in the [Christian Century](#), October 22, 1986, pps. 917-919. Copyright by the Christian Century Foundation; used by permission. Current articles and subscription information can be found at www.christiancentury.org. This article prepared for Religion Online by Ted & Winnie Brock. See also his: [There Are No Just Wars: David Rodin and Oliver O'Donovan's Divergent Critiques of a Tradition](#); and [We Are The Voice of the Grass: Interfaith Peace Activism in Northern Uganda](#), of which we read:

In the international press, East Africa is depicted as a region mired in civil war, child abduction, rebel militias, Muslim-Christian violence, and grinding poverty. Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of northern Uganda has become a symbol for the troubles of contemporary Africa. Seen from within, however, an altogether different reality is visible—one in which local communities and their leaders work together to resolve conflict and rebuild their communities. Little known beyond northern Uganda, The Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI) is an inspiring example of one such community organization. The story of ARLPI, examined in this book by philosopher David Hoekema, demonstrates just how much can be accomplished by a small group of dedicated community leaders in a situation where a decade of military force and international pressure have had little discernible effect.

Drawing on published sources and interviews with organization leaders and LRA survivors, Hoekema illuminates how both the depredations of the LRA and the healing work of ARLPI are rooted in modern East African history. He documents the courageous work of the Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim leaders who constitute the ARLPI to overcome centuries of mistrust and help bring an end to one of the most horrific conflicts in recent history. Their work, he argues, puts philosophical and theological ideas into practice and in so doing sheds new light on how religion relates to politics, how brutal conflicts can be resolved, and how a community can reclaim its future through locally-initiated initiatives against overwhelming obstacles.

⁶ Lewis delivered his requested (in)famous talk to a group of pacifists, in support of Britain at war.

on, that he excluded such a key Dominical text? Each time I read his talk, I respond: “Not so fast Dr. Lewis!”

Then there is the classic text in Matthew 22:

[37](#)Jesus declared, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ [38](#)This is the first and greatest commandment. [39](#)And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ [40](#)All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Whatever else one might say about the italicized, at least this: the *enemy* is surely no less a *neighbour*? We hear Lewis saying to that Pacifist Club:

Indeed, as the audience were private people in a disarmed nation, it seems unlikely that they would have ever supposed Our Lord to be referring to war. War was not what they would have been thinking of. The frictions of daily life among villagers were more likely to be in their minds.

And by that kind of sleight-of-hand reasoning, Lewis dismisses out of hand the entire Christian Pacifist panoply of testimonials that dates back—*well*—to Jesus’ clarion call: *Love your enemies*—a cry taken up throughout the history of the Church, not least by many pre-Constantinian voices, as shown below?

Lewis offers not even a nod towards the *sensus plenior* of biblical texts, which according to [Wikipedia](#)

. . . is a Latin phrase that means “fuller sense” or “fuller meaning.” It is used in Biblical exegesis to describe the supposed deeper meaning intended by God but not by the human author. [Walter C. Kaiser](#) notes that the term was coined by F. Andre Fernandez in 1927 but was popularized by [Raymond E. Brown](#).

Brown defines *sensus plenior* as

That additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.

Further, Lewis’ surmised “quiescent villagers” were well aware of, and harboured often, members of a [Zealot](#) splinter group, known as [Sicarii](#), who were cloak-and-dagger assassins of Roman soldiers. And a full-scale rebellion against Rome erupted only a few decades after Jesus’ death, known as the [First Jewish–Roman War](#) (66–73 CE): a rebellion long-since brewing that led to a worldwide diaspora of the Jews, from their last stand at [Masada](#),⁷ until their becoming a nation in 1948.

Burden of proof is surely on the side of Pacifism’s naysayers like Lewis, to insist Jesus’ signature teaching about love of neighbour/enemies was not direct interdiction of the above groups’ commitment to violence, with “*But I say unto you . . .*” its choral crescendo.

⁷ The [siege of Masada](#) by [Roman](#) troops from 73 to 74 [CE](#), at the end of the [First Jewish–Roman War](#), ended in the [mass suicide](#) of the 960 [Sicarii](#) rebels who were hiding there.—[Wikipedia](#)

In the context of the *Good Samaritan Story*—the epitome of the New Testament for [Ivan Illich](#)—also, apart from the Crucifixion, the classic New Testament instance of “*love your enemy*”—we read:

Illich’s sense of the Incarnation, as I’ve said, was that it allowed God “to be loved in the flesh” and not just in the person of the Christ but in the understanding that “whoever loves another loves [Christ] in the person of that other.” Such love is free, unconstrained, and undetermined—when, where, and how it will occur cannot be foreseen. Just as the Incarnation is pure gift and obeys no necessity, so the love that it models and inspires. (David Cayley, [Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey](#) (Ivan Illich: 21st-Century Perspectives), Penn State University Press, p. 266.)

In the understanding that “*whoever loves another loves Christ in the person of that other*,” is it not in the Incarnation therefore we discover as well that, *mutatis mutandi*, “*whoever destroys another destroys Christ in the person of that other*?”

As to Illich’s “no necessity,” if “*God is love*” (I John 4); if God so directed that love towards the “*world, that he gave . . .*” (John 3:16); and if we then are enjoined to

[1](#)*Be imitators of God, therefore, as beloved children, 2*[and walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant sacrificial offering to God](#) (Ephesians 5),

then whatever else, God’s Love is surely its own necessity, or better put, God “*cannot*” do other, and neither should we (though sadly too often do—and tragically in Jesus’ name!).

Though Ivan Illich was insistent that *the essence of this is freedom to love*. David Cayley explains:

The distinction between what is demanded by a norm or rule, on the one hand, and what is recognized through a call, on the other, is a foundation of Illich’s thought. It explains, for example, why he was so confident that the de-institutionalization he promoted would open horizons rather than close them. The usual view is that the modern institutions he analyzed are indispensable and without alternative—if we didn’t have them, we would have no way of obtaining the goods they provide. Illich held that alternatives would appear if they were allowed to *but that they could not be guaranteed in advance without a devastating loss of freedom*. He was willing to depend on how people were inspired, and inspiration is, by its nature, transitory and intermittent. The Samaritan, who loves outside the categories that prescribe his allegiance and obligation, stands for this freedom to invent, to respond, to take unpredictable directions. ([Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey](#) (Ivan Illich: 21st-Century Perspectives), Penn State University Press, p. 352; emphasis added.)

Cayley adds a little later:

The Samaritan addresses this anomaly—he dares to step onto the uncharted, in-between ground on which the man lies stranded. But the condition of his aid is the existence of a homeworld [“The homeworld is the horizon within which meaning is possible. (p. 353)”] to which he can return the wounded one. His act, understood in this way, is the exception that proves the rule. But should this exceptional act ever be taken as a possible norm—Christianity’s unique “temptation”—then the homeworld itself, indeed all homeworlds, will be put into jeopardy because “there can be no ethos of

love of one's neighbour." ([*Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*](#) (Ivan Illich: 21st-Century Perspectives), Penn State University Press, p. 354).

And finally:

The Samaritan becomes a neighbor only by forgetting himself, and all that establishes this self in what Held calls its "referential context" [his homeworld]. His power to go where no ties bind and no law obtains—to go, in Held's terms, into the one world—depends on what is called, in theological language, grace. Grace, in its simplest terms, is gratuity—it names a gift that we can neither compel nor deserve nor return but only gratefully receive. Grace enables action outside the bonds of reciprocity that constitute ethos. The wounded man lies beyond the Samaritan's cultural ambit, outside the give-and-take that sustains people in his community. He can hear his call, his appeal, but he can cross over to him only by the grace of God. Let him think he has done so under his own power, and an "ethos of agape"—that impossibility of which Held speaks—is on the horizon. ([*Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*](#) (Ivan Illich: 21st-Century Perspectives), Penn State University Press, p. 356).

Philosopher [Michael Polanyi](#) similarly emphasizes that personal knowledge is dependent on "communities of dialogue" within given cultural traditions which we all inhabit. It's just that different cultural traditions yield different knowledge/rationalities.⁸

Interestingly, [Steven Shapin](#) (an historian and sociologist of science at Harvard University), contends that

... trust is imperative for constituting every kind of knowledge. Knowledge-making is always a collective enterprise: people have to know whom to trust in order to know something about the natural world. (Quoted in [How To Think About Science](#), CBC [*Ideas transcript*](#), David Cayley, p. 148.)

That presupposes a "homeworld." (See below, with reference again to The Good Samaritan.)

Are we also to assume that the Second Greatest Commandment to Jesus and his followers was only for villagers in Christ's hearing? Lewis' hermeneutical reductionism appears to be a kind of manipulative casuistry that *astounds* to be sure, rather than goes deep, let alone *convinces*? One might have exclaimed the day of his talk, "C'mon, Dr. Lewis, let's get serious!"

For C.S. Lewis (nicknamed by friends, "*Jack*") I wonder that a slightly paraphrased children's rhyme might fit?:

Jack be nimble, Jack be quick/Jack jump over the pacifist shtick,

when he simply excises or leap-frogs over the key *Dominical teaching* to "*Love your enemies*," and fails to see the central textual witness that *peace/peacemaking* is core to the New Testament. Surely his chosen non-

⁸ See his [*Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*](#), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 203; *passim*.

pacifist position is not faithfully nimble, so much as at best disingenuous, at worst . . . what might *you* call it?

Functional *atheists* (whatever their protested *belief* in God) simply do not take God into account in daily life. Likewise, it seems that a great number of Christians are operative *echthrosists*⁹ (whatever their protested *belief* in God, Christ and Scripture) when push comes to shove, as it invariably does, in response to domestic and international enemies.



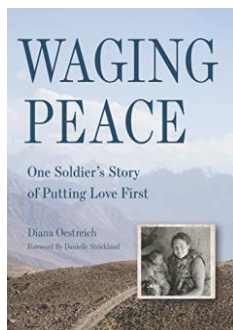
The spiral for responding to violence with violence is like a whirlpool in a river, [Vernard Eller] says. As the water pours in, it whirls faster and faster. The only way to stop the whirlpool is to place a solid rock in the middle. Peacemakers are called to be rocks in the whirlpool of violence.—Susan Classen in [Vultures and Butterflies: Living the Contradictions](#)



A Second, Brief Case Study

The following is a powerful sermon about the book seen immediately below. It was preached Sunday, April 3, 2022, at [Good Shepherd New York](#), a church we have tuned into for much of the pandemic. It combines superb worship music, excellent preaching, and joyful affirmation of the best of “*orthodoxy*” in the context of American Evangelicalism. It is inclusive, challenging, and spiritually nurturing.

We hear the story of [Diana Oestreich](#)’s amazing conversion from waging war to waging peace, in the context of the Iraq War. Her sermon is great, and discusses also the current war in Ukraine.



Her story is also told in: [Waging Peace: One Soldier's Story of Putting Love First](#). We read of it:

Diana Oestreich, a combat medic in the Army National Guard, enlisted like both her parents before her. But when she was commanded to run over an Iraqi child to keep her convoy rolling and keep her battle buddies safe, she was confronted with a choice she never thought she’d have to make.

Torn between God’s call to love her enemy and her country’s command to be willing to kill, Diana chose to wage peace in a place of war. For the remainder of her tour of duty, Diana sought to be a peacemaker—leading to an unlikely and beautiful friendship with an Iraqi family.

A beautiful and gut-wrenching memoir, *Waging Peace* exposes the false divide between loving our country and living out our faith’s call to love our enemies—whether we perceive our enemy as the neighbor with an opposing political viewpoint, the clerk wearing a head-covering, or the refugee

⁹ An *atheist* is one who denies the existence of God, from the Greek meaning literally “without God(s).” In my transliterated Greek neologism, an *echthrosist* is one who denies right of existence to enemies.

from a war-torn country. By showing that us-versus-them is a false choice, this book will inspire each of us to choose love over fear.

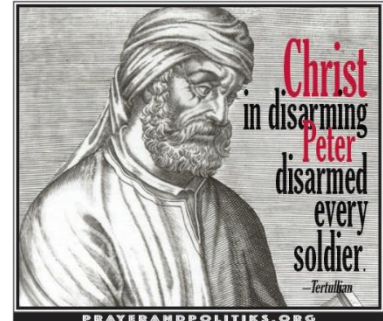
For her sermon, please click on: <https://youtu.be/MAJgWh89Uk0>.

But There Are Legitimate Issues With Pacifism

I suggest that *the real problem* is not textual, rather *a question of how we should then live?*

Things get complex when:

- Christians become a force in a society and its governments. So, no, we should not arm the church and go to war, but should not the state have a military wing/justice system that functions against injustice and resists despots? Like, as often argued, the police? (But see my [War, Police and Prisons: Cross-Examining State-Sanctioned Violence](#); and [War and Hell — and Exception-Clause Footnote Theology](#).) Then ponder also **Tertullian** (160–220 AD) on Matthew 26:52:



Click image for early Christian pacifist testimonials.

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to [Peter], “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.”

One asks: What about Hitler? How in a “Christian land” did he get into power in the first place? What about Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church? What about Bonhoeffer’s participation in the failed plot on Hitler’s life—that cost Bonhoeffer his?

- One sees gross injustice in many parts of the world. What about the failed intervention by the West in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide? What about United Nations peacekeepers in conflict zones?

In short: how can “absolute pacifism” be a Western Christian standard in the “democracies” we inhabit? In giving aid, including military, in conflict zones, etc.? A friend wonders whether this is not unlike opposing safe injection sites, when such interventions are enormously life-saving? . . . Point taken—to a point.

But of course, such pacifism is its own foolishness. Of it, David Cayley explains Ivan Illich’s understanding:

“Faith,” Illich says, “inevitably implies a certain foolishness in worldly terms.” This link between faith and foolishness is crucial to Illich’s understanding of the New Testament, and, in later years, he readily spoke of both himself and his Lord in these terms, calling Jesus, at one point, “a major disturber and fool” and talking of himself as one who employed his “fool’s freedom” to teach as he liked outside all academic categories. He described the idea “that God could be a man” as foolishness—a “logical contradiction” explainable “only by love.” He says that Jesus died as a fool—“this fool who was crucified”—hung in ignominy outside the city walls and “ridiculed by everyone entitled to represent Israel”—his unanimous rejection by his people symbolically completed by Peter’s denial outside the house of the high priest on the night of Jesus’ arrest. It is foolishness

certainly to try to live in an “unimaginable and unpredictable horizon”—Illich’s characterization of faith—when our whole civilization is virtually defined by its effort to increase predictability. ([*Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*](#) (Ivan Illich: 21st-Century Perspectives), Penn State University Press, p. 359.)

Saint Paul’s classic commentary on this is found in 1 Corinthians 1:

[18](#)For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. [19](#)For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

[20](#)Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21](#)For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

[22](#)Jews demand signs and Greeks search for wisdom, [23](#)but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24](#)but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[25](#)For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

So of course: Christian pacifism has never *made sense*, has ever been *foolishness*—in worldly context. But in the utterly counter-intuitive rationality of Kingdom Come, Illich would say that

This foolishness is inherent in the gospel, when seen from a “worldly” point of view, and this becomes significant when “faith is made subject to the power of this world.” Foolishness acts outside self-interest, obeys a promise without guarantee, risks everything on the word of another. ([*Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*](#) (Ivan Illich: 21st-Century Perspectives), Penn State University Press, p. 359.)

So we see through a glass darkly. But let’s at minimum not *hide*, rather wrestle with, New Testament texts and themes that are there, and *not go seek* ethical guidance from the state, arguably supreme manifestation of the very inversion of the *foolhardy* Kingdom of God . . . For Jesus came preaching the *foolishness* of the Kingdom—not the *wisdom* of the state.¹⁰

Limits To Steelmanning



The only message I have to the world is: We are not allowed to kill innocent people. Our plight is very primitive from a Christian point of view . . . Thou shalt not kill . . . Everything today comes down to that.—
[**Daniel Berrigan**](#) in *Peace Heroes*



¹⁰ See on this: [“A FIRE STRONG ENOUGH TO CONSUME THE HOUSE”: THE WARS OF RELIGION AND THE RISE OF THE STATE.](#)

A note of caution in this [steelmanning](#) though: I find that generally, *abstraction dominates* in [just war](#) discussions, where there is little or no personal investment. Few embracing it seem to do so in a personal way *vis à vis* innocent family members, children, friends, personal investments in infrastructure, etc.

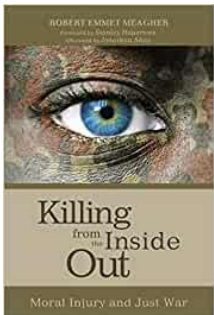
Once, in a workshop discussion about the [Kosova War](#) with a Political Scientist (colleague of my friend Ron Dart) at the University of the Fraser Valley, British Columbia, at one point he indicated that “*only*” 488 Yugoslav civilian deaths due to NATO bombing, ^[73] including substantial numbers of [Kosovar](#) refugees, “*was not all that bad.*”

NATO had also just bombed the headquarters of [RTS](#), Serbian public radio and television, in Belgrade (on 23 April 1999), which killed at least fourteen people. ^[199]

I replied:

OK. Let’s place your young adult daughter visiting a friend in that Radio-Television building as the NATO strike happened. And suddenly, it’s now your daughter among the victims. Is that same death toll still not “*all that bad*”?

That workshop and my question ran twice that day. My fellow discussant would not respond either time. *Except his silence was all the response needed* . . . I only learned from Ron later that he in fact *did* have at that time a young adult daughter . . .



To be pointed about the **abominable immorality of killing in war**, then calling it “*Just War*” ([Augustine](#) first introduced it to Christianity, drawing most immediately on the Roman Republican [Cicero](#)¹¹), the most unusual approach to it I have ever read is: [Killing From The Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War](#).

Of it:

Armies know all about killing. It is what they do, and ours does it more effectively than most. We are painfully coming to realize, however, that we are also especially good at killing our own “from the inside out” silently, invisibly. In every major war since Korea, more of our veterans have taken their lives than have lost them in combat. The latest research, rooted in veteran testimony, reveals that the most severe and intractable PTSD-fraught with shame, despair, and suicide-stems from “moral injury.” But how can there be rampant moral injury in what our military, our government, our churches, and most everyone else call just wars? At the root of our incomprehension lies just war theory-developed, expanded, and updated across the centuries to accommodate the evolution of warfare, its weaponry, its scale, and its victims. Any serious critique of war, as well any true attempt to understand the profound, invisible wounds it inflicts, will be undermined from the outset by the unthinking and all-but-universal acceptance of just war doctrine. *Killing from the Inside Out* radically questions that theory, examines its legacy, and challenges us to look beyond it, beyond just war.

¹¹ See: Brunsletter, D., & D. O’Driscoll, [Just War Thinkers: From Cicero to the 21st Century](#) (Routledge, 2017).

Two commentators about the book write:

In the field of conflict transformation and peace-building there is a recognized gap between grassroots practitioners who have lived through violent conflict and are working with its legacy, and academics who are considered to be ‘experts’ while lacking significant on-the-ground experience. Bob Meagher is one scholar who bridges this gulf with integrity, clarity, compassion, and challenge. *Killing from the Inside Out* is a brilliant example of his ability to chart the development of Just War Theory and consider it in the light of the lived experience of human beings sent into battle across the centuries. He doesn’t swamp the reader with the vast scope of his personal knowledge but helps us trace easily and engagingly the attitudes to violent conflict and its moral status from the time of the wars of ancient Greece, via the emergence and rise of Christianity during the time of Imperial Rome and forward through the writings of key figures to the present day. He draws fascinating, thought-provoking, and some might say, disturbing parallels between war-making and love-making from a male perspective. He takes seriously the understanding of service personnel deployed as combatants to conflict zones across the world, whose experience illustrates why Just War Theory is dead. I found this book gripping, illuminating, and prophetic. In a so-called civilized world where we continue to accept all too easily the killing of innocents in war, and the sometimes devastating long-term impact on those young people we send into battle to kill on our behalf, it is utterly timely.”

—**Ruth Scott** *An Anglican priest, a producer and presenter for the BBC in London, a renowned international peace and conflict resolution worker, and the author of many books, including one on the conflict in Northern Ireland that was made into a feature film starring Liam Neeson.*

Truth often hides, Robert Meagher reminds us, in *Killing from the Inside Out*, especially when the truth challenges our myths, for example, the myth that one can kill another human being and not be damaged by so doing. The truth is no one leaves the battlefield unwounded. Killing wounds the soul. But what if it’s a ‘just war?’ Meagher argues convincingly that to put the adjective ‘just’ in front of the word ‘war’ is self-deception.”

—**Jim Forest** *Co-founded the Catholic Peace Fellowship in 1964 and from 1977 through 1988 was Secretary General of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Currently he serves as International Secretary of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship. His books include [The Road to Emmaus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life](#), [Ladder of the Beatitudes](#), [Praying with Icons](#), [Living With Wisdom: A Biography of Thomas Merton](#), [All Is Grace: A Biography of Dorothy Day](#), [Loving Our Enemies: Reflections on the Hardest Commandment](#), and [Writing Straight with Crooked Lines: A Memoir](#).*

I think of “Just War” theory, if not *the ultimate Christian heresy*, as at least arguably one of the greatest theological con jobs in the history of the church. Certainly the most devastating!

Billy Graham The Nuclear Pacifist: Mulling Billy Over

In 1979, [Sojourners](#) magazine excitedly ran this headline/interview: [A Change of Heart: Billy Graham on the Nuclear Arms Race](#). Editors [Wes Michaelson](#) and [Jim Wallis](#) wrote:

In recent months many fresh voices in the church have been speaking out with a Christian witness against the insanity of the nuclear arms race. One of the most surprising and significant of these is Billy Graham's. He believes that the nation and the world now face their own hour of decision about halting the escalation of nuclear weapons. Graham's growing convictions, which he describes as a change from past years, have taken firm root and are now becoming one of his most deeply felt concerns as a Christian. He graciously agreed to share his thinking publicly by responding to these questions . . .

I have often mulled over in these intervening years the idea of Graham's not being a *pacifist*, yet faithful to Christ; but his being a *nuclear pacifist* is somehow hugely significant—something to celebrate.

Billy Graham at one point in the interview wisely says:

The present arms race is a terrifying thing, and it is almost impossible to overestimate its potential for disaster.

There is a long patch on my [Front Page](#), which I shall incorporate now into discussing Graham that goes into some detail about the American nuclear arms obscenity/horror. *Graham's assertion is of course grossly understated.*

General (George) Lee Butler, a “nuclear warrior” in the early years of the Cold War (that many claim began with the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan, August 1945), spent 27 years in nuclear policy-making. He eventually in an overt *mea culpa* became a passionate proponent for outright nuclear abolition. He self-published [*Uncommon Cause: A Life at Odds With Convention*](#) (volumes I & II). He catalogued a long list of disturbing experiences:

- investigating “a distressing array of accidents and incidents involving strategic weapons and forces”
- seeing “an army of experts confounded;”
- confronting “the mind-numbing compression of decision-making under threat of nuclear attack”;
- “staggering costs;”
- “the relentless pressure of advancing technology;”
- “grotesquely destructive war plans;”
- and “the terror-induced anesthesia which suspended rational thought, made nuclear war thinkable, and grossly excessive arsenals possible during the Cold War.” ([*The Violent American Century: War and Terror Since World War II*](#), **John W. Dower**, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017; p. 37. See also my post on this [here](#).)

Dower continues:

In retrospect, he decried the “wantonness,” “savagery,” “reckless proliferation,” “treacherous axioms,” and voracious “appetite” of deterrence — for which he himself had helped create many systems and technologies, including “war plans with over 12,000 targets.”... Elegant theories of deterrence,” he exclaimed in one speech, “wilt in the crucible of impending nuclear war.” In later recollection of the folly of deterrence, Butler pointed out that at its peak the United States “had 36,000 weapons in our active inventory,” including nuclear landmines and sea mines and “warheads

on artillery shells that could be launched from *jeeps*.” He concluded that mankind escaped the Cold War without a nuclear holocaust by some combination of diplomatic skill, blind luck and divine intervention, probably the latter in greatest proportion. (*ibid*, pp. 36 & 37).

Nuclear strategist [Albert Wohlstetter](#) described this longstanding policy as a “delicate balance of terror (*ibid*, p. 27).” In short, any number of nuclear war planners in Washington contemplated striking 295 Soviet cities, with an estimated death toll total of 115 million, and another 107 million dead in Red China, besides millions more in Soviet satellite countries (*ibid*, pp. 28 & 29).

In some circles, as a kind of sick dark humour, the two bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki due to “only” 200,000 dead, came to be called “firecracker nukes (*ibid*, p. 29).” (This is not to mention [the millions killed](#) since World War II with related devastation in at least 37 countries around the world, or the millions murdered through US proxy wars, CIA covert operations the world over, surrogate terror exported to countries throughout Central and South America for more than a century, and other parts of the world, etc., etc., etc... (See *ibid*, throughout the book.)

Historian [John Coatsworth](#) in [The Cambridge History of the Cold War](#) noted:

Between 1960, by which time the Soviets had dismantled Stalin’s gulags, and the Soviet collapse in 1990, the numbers of political prisoners, torture victims, and executions of nonviolent political dissenters in Latin America vastly exceeded those of the Soviet Union and its East European satellites. In other words, from 1960 to 1990, the Soviet bloc as a whole was less repressive, measured in terms of human victims, than many individual Latin American countries [under direct sway of US Empire] (“The Cold War in Central America,” pp. 216 – 221).

What was true for Latin America was true for around the world: massive human rights abuses, assassinations, regime changes of democratically elected governments, etc., etc., etc. orchestrated by US Empire. Yet Americans invariably have wanted it both ways: to be seen as the exemplary “City on A Hill” that upholds universal human rights and democracy, while operating a brutal Empire directly contrary to all such elevated values, and a concomitant rapacious Empire market economy that takes no prisoners. This began of course even before the founding of the United States of America and continued apace, in its mass slaughter and dispossession of indigenous peoples, in its brutal system of slavery on which its obscene wealth in the 19th-century textile industry in the first place was built. (See my post: [Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism](#), August 30, 2016.)

“The Land of the Free” conceit was a sustained con job on the part of America’s leaders. It was also apotheosis of hypocrisy. *American exceptionalism was/is true in one respect only: it was brutal like no other Empire in its eventual global reach.*

And these “noble” American nuclear strategists holding up of course America as bastion of freedom and democracy throughout the world, blithely contemplated over many decades mass murder on a scale that all previous mass murderers combined in the history of the world could only dream of! And serious contemplation of first-strike deployment was given repeated consideration: Public as well as confidential proposals to launch a “preventive” or “pre-emptive” strike against the Soviet Union were not uncommon

before the Soviets developed a serious retaliatory capability—including for instance [General Douglas MacArthur](#). The American public likewise supported this in general (*ibid*, p. 41).



In other words, from 1960 to 1990, the Soviet bloc as a whole was less repressive, measured in terms of human victims, than many individual Latin American countries [under direct sway of US Empire] (“The Cold War in Central America,” pp. 216 – 221).—[John Coatsworth](#)



This is America—Leader of the Free World?! Vocabulary for such gargantuan evil mindsets utterly fails! Yet every US Administration since [President Harry S. Truman](#) authorized the first atomic bombs dropped (which phenomenon he, a Baptist Sunday School teacher, declared to be “the greatest event in human history”—and *not* the Resurrection?!—one massively death-dealing, the other universally life-giving), along with thousands of strategists, day-in, day-out, went off to work in their business suits with this kind of obscene potential horror, like “visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads.” How delightfully American (Empire)!

In [*The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*](#), by [Daniel Ellsberg](#), we read about a document the writer was privy to, though it was headed “Top Secret—Sensitive.” Under that was “For the President’s Eyes Only”:

The total death toll as calculated by the Joint Chiefs [in 1961], from a U.S. first strike aimed at the Soviet Union, its Warsaw Pact satellites, and China, would be roughly six hundred million dead. A hundred Holocausts. I remember what I thought when I first held the single sheet with the graph on it. I thought, This piece of paper should not exist. It should never have existed. Not in America. Not anywhere, ever. It depicted evil beyond any human project ever. There should be nothing on earth, nothing real, that it referred to. One of the principal expected effects of this plan—partly intended, partly (in allied, neutral, and satellite countries) undesired but foreseeable and accepted “collateral damage”—was summarized on that second piece of paper, which I held a week later in the spring of 1961: the extermination of over half a billion people.

Of the book itself we read:

Shortlisted for the 2018 Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction; Finalist for the California Book Award in Nonfiction; The San Francisco Chronicle’s Best of 2017 List In These Times “Best Books of 2017”; Huffington Post’s Ten Excellent December Books; List LitHub’s “Five Books Making News This Week”

From the legendary whistle-blower who revealed the Pentagon Papers, an eyewitness *exposé* of the dangers of America’s Top Secret, seventy-year-long nuclear policy that continues to this day. Here, for the first time, former high-level defense analyst Daniel Ellsberg reveals his shocking firsthand account of America’s nuclear program in the 1960s. From the remotest air bases in the Pacific Command, where he discovered that the authority to initiate use of nuclear weapons was widely delegated, to the secret plans for general nuclear war under Eisenhower, which, if executed, would cause the near-extinction of humanity, Ellsberg shows that the legacy of this most dangerous arms

buildup in the history of civilization—and its proposed renewal under the Trump administration—threatens our very survival. No other insider with high-level access has written so candidly of the nuclear strategy of the late Eisenhower and early Kennedy years, and nothing has fundamentally changed since that era.”



American exceptionalism was/is true in one respect only: it was brutal like no other Empire in its eventual global reach.



And Hitler, and Stalin are considered “mad” in their mass murders?! By the above dark humour standard, they were only “firecracker despots” compared to a long line of US Presidents. What then are all these upstanding Americans—right up to the present, with possibly a genuinely deranged former President (Trump) who seemingly itched to “nuke” some nation such as North Korea—if not *mad monsters*? And the overwhelming monstrosity of America the Ultimate Evil Empire only increases exponentially when one reads noted historian [Alfred McCoy](#)’s [description of what is being developed by said American Empire](#).

A paper that I wrote years ago, [Christianity and the Subversion of Just About Everything!](#), in relation to this, with an introduction and excerpt, may be accessed [here](#). I explain in introducing it that today were I writing the paper, the overall positing of “Just About Everything!” would mean *Empire. The Judeo-Christian Story is nothing if not one long Counter-Narrative to Empire!* A sermon preached on this theme by Pastor Rob Brown of Eden Mennonite Church may be found [here](#). There is an expanding scholarship that underscores this, links to several instances of which are below, and also mentioned on the page introducing the paper above. *Amen! Thy Kingdom Come! Maranatha! (Come, O Lord).*

Please also see the post on U.S. biological warfare: [Baseless: My Search for Secrets in the Ruins of the Freedom of Information Act](#) by [Nicholson Baker](#). And Trump blames the Chinese!

There is something ironic about the fact that we live in a generation which has made unprecedented advances in such fields as public health and medicine, and yet never before has the threat of wholesale destruction been so real—all because of human technology.

At another point in the *Sojourners* interview with Billy Graham above, we read:

No. I do not think the present differences [between America and other nations] are worth a nuclear war. There is no denying that there are differences between us. But there are many things we have in common, especially on an ordinary human level. I am not a pacifist, but I fervently hope and pray our differences will never become an excuse for nuclear war. I hold the view that some wars had to be fought in history, such as the war against the Nazis. The alternative would have been worse.



Madness in individuals is something rare; but in groups, parties, nations, and epochs, it is the rule.—
Friedrich Nietzsche



Further, a thought-experiment. For Graham the *non-pacifist*, but at-the-time-newly-minted *nuclear pacifist*, I have a simple set of questions about kill and destruction thresholds (where the fine euphemism of “*collateral damage*” covers, like Jesus’ “*whitewashed tombs*,” the horror of dead men’s bones with a sheen of respectability):

- Just how many people, combatants and non-combatants, may (in this case) the United States slaughter in a bombing campaign to declare it nonetheless a *just war*? (Such as [Dr. Richard Land](#) of “The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission” of the [Southern Baptist Convention](#) did, of the First Gulf War in his infamous: “[Land Letter](#).” (Of interest: I once dialogued with Land in Fairbanks, Alaska, on the Death Penalty. Ron Dart had been invited first; he passed on the request to me. See: [Why I Oppose the Death Penalty: “The Talking Place: Discussing the Death Penalty” Forum on the Death Penalty, Fairbanks Alaska, March 22, 1997](#)).
- Just how many people, combatants and non-combatants, must (in this case) the United States slaughter in a bombing campaign to declare it “*too many—and thus an unjust war*?”
- What if to the first question *we added just one more victim*? Would it then become an *unjust war*?
- What if to the second question, *we subtracted just one victim*? Would it then become “*not too many and therefore just*?”
- Just how much infrastructure (in metric tons, life-sustaining things such as waterworks, hydro-electric power, hospitals, food- and medicine-supply chains, etc.), may (in this case) the United States destroy in a bombing campaign to declare it nonetheless a *just war*?
- Just how much infrastructure (in metric tons, life-sustaining things such as waterworks, hydro-electric power, hospitals, food- and medicine-supply chains, etc.), does it take (in this case) the United States to destroy in a bombing campaign to declare it an *unjust war*?
- Just how many civilian loved-ones am I willing to sacrifice to a (in this case) United States bombing campaign my family members are inadvertently caught up in, to declare it nonetheless a *just war*?
- Just how many civilian loved-ones am I willing to sacrifice to a (in this case) United States bombing campaign my family members are inadvertently caught up in, to declare it an *unjust war*?
- Just? . . .

Pretty ridiculous, right, when it all gets downright personal? *Point, I hope taken?* Some people’s daughters, sons, family members, etc.—all made equally in God’s image, and for whom Christ died—are invariably destroyed in war. *Point, I hope taken?* What gives us Christians the right to selectively endorse their destruction? *Point, I hope taken?* Or is it all *just*, if we don’t choose whom in particular (and rarely find out—or care to) should die as in *Monkey see no evil, etc.*? *Point, I hope taken?*

Yet, to the excited *Sojourners* Editors and Billy Graham, at some point nuclear destruction is acknowledged to cause *too many lives lost*; *too much destruction* . . . Surely some kind of such vague—and silly!—numbers *calculus* was at back of Graham’s (and the *Sojourners* Editors’ excitement about) embrace of nuclear pacifism?¹²

¹² A few years ago I wrote a long rambling poem about non-nuclear weaponry kill capacity: [It’s All Fun and War Games at the Air Show!](#)

That capacity only continues to grow in the West. Then of course, there is this exponential growth, as mentioned above in: [The Pentagon’s New Wonder Weapons for World Dominion](#), by Alfred McCoy.

In fact, [Graham sent a secret memo to President Richard Nixon](#) that was later made public as part of [the secretly recorded Nixon tapes](#). It was dated April 15, 1969, and drafted after Graham had met in Bangkok with missionaries from Vietnam. These “men of God” said that if the peace talks in Paris were to fail, Nixon should step up the war and bomb the dikes. Such an act, Graham wrote excitedly, “could overnight destroy the economy of North Vietnam.”

Nixon demurred when advisors indicated that *up to a million civilians* could thereby lose their lives. Graham may not have known that estimated number of potential casualties—but was certainly proposing vast destruction of infrastructure. He was quite willing to countenance mass murder of civilians nonetheless—maybe up to one million? *But perhaps not one million plus one!? Point, I hope taken?*¹³



I have seen that we must seek the good of the whole human race, and not just the good of any one nation or race. [If only!—and his evangelical legacy, not least son [Franklin](#).]—**Billy Graham**



Had Nixon carried out Graham’s urging, *he would have, as seen in the previous footnote, been directly guilty, along with Nuremberg war criminals, of genocide*. As it was, Billy Graham visited troops in Vietnam around Christmastime 1966 and returned in 1968. His son [Franklin Graham](#), CEO and president of the [BGEA](#), shared:

My father felt it was important to go and minister to the U.S. Military. He went to Vietnam not because he supported the war, he was going there to minister ... to men that were dying on the battlefield!

¹³ Please see on this, by [Colin Kalmbacher](#), Feb 22nd, 2018: [Let’s Not Forget Famed Evangelist Billy Graham was an Aspiring War Criminal](#). We read:

To wit: a memo from Graham to **Richard Nixon** was published in April of 1989. The date on that memo was April 15, 1969. Graham drafted said memo after meeting in Bangkok with missionaries from Vietnam. The title of that memo is “*The Confidential Missionary Plan for Ending the Vietnam War*.”

Among the memo’s prescriptions for ending the Vietnam War was [the following kernel and proof of Graham’s unchecked Godliness](#):

There are tens of thousands of North Vietnamese defectors to bomb and invade the north. Especially let them bomb the dikes which could over night destroy the economy of North Vietnam.

The status of the prohibition against targeting civilians was after World War II codified in numerous articles and treaties, most prominently [section 51\(2\) of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions](#)—which was passed in 1977 and reads, in relevant part, “The civilian population as such, as well as individual civilians, shall not be the object of attack.” The prohibition has been reaffirmed [time](#) and [time again](#). It is not controversial.

Prior to this codification, the status of the prohibition against targeting civilians enjoyed at least one instance of legalistic gloss and application. As **Alexander Cockburn** [once noted](#),

The German High Commissioner Seyss-Inquart was sentenced to death at [the [Nuremberg Trials](#) held between 20 November 1945 and 1 October 1946] for breaching dikes and other crimes in Holland in World War II.

But aside from the legal prohibition against bombing Vietnam’s dikes or civilian infrastructure generally, there’s also the moral-ethical dimension. By the estimate of working journalists at the time — [and Nixon’s own White House](#) — the dike-bombing policy would have killed upwards of one million innocent Vietnamese.

It’s shuddering and sobering to think a man of God would countenance this massive loss of life as acceptable in service of American imperialism. He’s dead now, though, so it’s time for his class to play cleanup.



[Warmongering Franklin](#) failed in the above however to mention the obvious: Billy didn't go to Vietnam to encourage—*nay order!*—the American soldiers in the name of Jesus to “love your enemies” as “*the Bible says!*” (Billy’s iconic endlessly repeated shout-out¹⁴), as in: *stop killing the North Vietnamese enemies on the battlefield! . . .*

Nary a mention though of the North Vietnamese . . .

I



Billy in Vietnam to support the troops (pace Franklin), and to ensure their place in heaven.

remember: we Evangelicals across the world prayed on those two occasions of unprecedented evangelistic opportunity, that Graham would preach the Gospel such that American G.I.s *would come to Christ before dying on the battlefield and going to (as was said) a “Christless eternity.”*

At the time, it never occurred to any I knew, including me, that Graham would preach the Gospel such that those same American G.I.s would lay down their arms *and thereby avoid sending (as was taught) the Viet Cong to a Christless eternity . . .*¹⁵

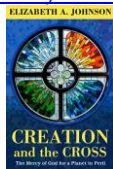
¹⁴ But in the end, his was a seriously selective citing of what “*the Bible says*,” and instead ironically denied, by what he wrote and how he acted, the central claim of God about his Creation, in his most quoted Bible verse: “*God so loved the world. . .*”—John 3:16. See on this, by historian [Matthew Avery Sutton](#), February 21, 2018: [Billy Graham was on the wrong side of history](#). We read the article’s summary thus:

Racial tensions are rising, the earth is warming, and evangelicals are doing little to help. That may be Graham’s most significant, and saddest, legacy.

For more on this, as said above, and in a later footnote, see: [Kristin Kobes du Mez](#), [Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation](#). In chapters 1 & 2, where she writes:

Graham preached a gospel of heroic [idolatrous] Christian nationalism . . . (p. 25)

A brilliant alternative to Graham’s woeful misreading of Scripture is [Elizabeth Johnson](#)’s [Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril](#). Of it:



In this fresh creative approach to theology, Elizabeth Johnson asks how we can understand cosmic redemption in a time of advancing ecological devastation. In effect, how can we extend the core Christian belief in salvation to include all created beings. Immediately this quest runs into a formidable obstacle: the idea that Jesus’ death on the cross was required as an atonement for human sin—a theology laid out by the eleventh-century theologian Anselm. Constructing her argument (like Anselm) in the form of a dialogue, Johnson lays out the foundations in scripture, the teachings of Jesus, and the early Church for an understanding that emphasizes the love and mercy of God, showing how this approach could help us respond to a planet in peril.

¹⁵ In my novel, [Chrysalis Crucible](#), I include much about Graham as representative [White American Evangelical Nationalist](#), who as du Mez says in her [book](#) (click on [book](#) for my lengthy review), [Jesus and John Wayne](#), helped to “*Corrupt a Faith and Fracture a Nation*.”

For in the end, as *Sojourners* magazine often pointed out about Graham's brand of Evangelicalism, Graham tragically practised [*evangelism without the Gospel*](#)—and helped to significantly pave the way to Trump. (See the next paragraph.)

Billy was throughout his career in the end sadly an antichrist idolater who worshipped at the shrine of [*American Christian Nationalism*](#). A superb brief treatment of this is in **Kristin Kobes du Mez**, [*Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*](#),¹⁶ chapters 1 & 2. She writes:

Graham preached a gospel of heroic [idolatrous] Christian nationalism . . . (p. 25)

Billy invariably prayed with every sitting President throughout his evangelistic ministry—access to whom was desperately sought early in his career—for victory on the eve of American military exploits around the world.

Perhaps ironically enough, he had a counterpart decades later in [*Jim Wallis*](#), who agreed to become one of **Barack Obama's** spiritual advisers during his Presidency. Wallis took on that role—like that of Graham with his Presidents—seemingly *despite Obama's murderous militarism*. Wallis could surely not have missed Obama's horrific claim about being “*really good at killing people*.”¹⁷

There are as well huge questions about the notion of “*Christless eternity*” that this website addresses [here](#).

¹⁶ You may see my [Book Review of: *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*](#) and lots of related material on my website.

¹⁷ See [Mollie Reilly's](#) November 3, 2013 article: [Obama Told Aides He's 'Really Good At Killing People,' New Book 'Double Down' Claims](#). In it one reads:

The quote comes in the context of both the drone program and the killing of Osama bin Laden by a special forces strike force. The passage also specifically references the death of another al Qaeda leader, **Anwar al-Awlaki**, who was killed by a CIA drone strike in Yemen on Sept. 30, 2011.

Obama didn't need to run through this preamble. Everyone knew the litany of his achievements. Foremost on that day, with the fresh news about al-Awlaki, it seemed the president was pondering the drone program that he had expanded so dramatically and with such lethal results, as well as the death of Bin Laden, which was still resonating worldwide months later. “Turns out I'm really good at killing people,” Obama said quietly, “Didn't know that was gonna be a strong suit of mine.”

Al-Awlaki's [16-year-old son, Abdulrahman](#), who was an American citizen, was killed in a separate drone strike two weeks after his father.

“My grandson was killed by his own government,” the teenager's grandfather **Nasser al-Awlaki** wrote in a [New York Times](#) op-ed in July. “The Obama administration must answer for its actions and be held accountable.”

Obama, who was [awarded](#) the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009, has overseen the expansion of the CIA's targeted killing program, which the [Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#) estimates has killed between 2,528 and 3,648 individuals in Pakistan since 2004. That organization also [estimates](#) that between 416 and 948 of those killed in drone strikes were civilians — an estimate disputed by the Obama administration.

See during his Presidency, a well-researched/argued article by [Mark Bowden](#), [September 2013: *The Killing Machines: How to think about drones*](#). In it we read:

In our struggle against terrorist networks like al-Qaeda, the distinction between armed conflict and law enforcement matters a great deal. Terrorism embraces lawlessness. It seeks to disrupt. It targets civilians deliberately. So why restrain our response? Why subject ourselves to the rule of law? Because abiding by the law is the point—especially with a weapon like the drone. No act is more final than killing. Drones distill war to its essence. Abiding carefully by the law—man's law, not God's—making judgments carefully, making them transparent and subject to review, is the only way to invest them with moral authority, and the only way to clearly define the terrorist as an enemy of civilization.



Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority.—**Lord Acton**



Western Civilization, Mahatma Ghandi and “Empire Lite”

When a journalist once asked [Mahatma Gandhi](#) about his opinion of Western Civilization, he replied,

I think it would be a very good idea.

See on this my: [Kipling, the ‘White Man’s Burden,’ and U.S. Imperialism](#). For what does *Empire* invariably mean? Kipling puts it bluntly (emphasis added):

Take up the White Man’s burden —
The savage wars of peace —
 Fill full the mouth of Famine
 And bid the sickness cease;
 And when your goal is nearest
 The end for others sought,
 Watch sloth and heathen Folly
 Bring all your hopes to nought.

Such “*savage wars of peace*” have ever meant *the peace of the graveyard*: the very antithesis of “civilization.”¹⁸

I write the following on my [Front Page](#):

American public intellectual [Edward Said](#) wrote in the Preface of [Orientalism](#) (1978):

Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals [such as American **Mark Bowden** above; as Canadian **Michael Ignatieff** in: [Empire Lite: Nation Building In Bosnia Kosovo](#)] to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn’t trust the evidence of one’s eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest ‘*mission civilisatrice* [civilizing].’

Perhaps the fly in the ointment is his aside: “*man’s law, not God’s.*” And as to who is “*an enemy of civilization,*” hands down, the West has been such in its long history of [mass-murder colonization/domination and establishing Empires](#), the latest—arguably the most brutal ever being the American. All this, despite the dominant narrative that the West represents the epitome of “civilization.”

¹⁸ Please see as well my post: [The Mumbai Bombs, July 2006](#), May 9, 2022.

American Empire has always and supremely been about “plundering, butchering, and stealing,” “the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation,” leaving “desolation,” “destruction and misery and death” in its wake (while calling it “peace and freedom”), and long since has been in voracious bid for worldwide domination, in order to extract maximum wealth from all peoples and the Planet. Our call is simply to practise insurrection against Empire in all its avaricious, brutal and horribly destructive ways. (No small order!)

In this historical moment that supreme manifestation of Empire is the United States—to which the entire Western world is tied in various supportive ways; under which domination the rest of the world suffers: in the Greater Middle East as only one example, which endures brutal will to domination and oppression at the hands of American Empire. I reflect on this in an introduction to a posting [here](#). An expanding list of postings on American Empire may be accessed [here](#).¹⁹

In [Empire’s Religion: Arundhati Roy Confronts the Tyranny of the Free Market](#), we read (about [Arundhati Roy](#)):

Perhaps the most revealing words on the topic of globalization in recent years came not from the pen of [Thomas Piketty](#), nor were they written by [Robert Reich](#) or [Joseph Stiglitz](#) or [Paul Krugman](#)—rather, they can be found in the pages of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, written by the notorious *New York Times* columnist [Thomas Friedman](#).

“The hidden hand of the market,” Friedman notes in a particularly telling fragment, “will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald’s cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglass, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon Valley’s technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps.”

...

We are told the world is being made “safe for democracy,” a trope that dates back to the days of the First World War. But “democracy,” in elite-speak, is code for capitalism.

“Across the world,” Roy writes, “as the free market brazenly protects Western markets and forces developing countries to lift their trade barriers, the poor are getting poorer and the rich richer.”

A fist has, of course, always been behind the market’s “invisible” hand. And whether in Iran in 1953 or Guatemala in 1954, whether in Vietnam or Iraq or the Dominican Republic, the fist often takes the lead role, smashing disobedient nations into submission, forcefully prying open previously closed

¹⁹ Please look at several articles as well on American/Western will to world domination by clicking on “[Selected Articles: Western Aggression Backed by Western Media](#)”. The series of articles is introduced thus:

The Western allies never run dry of resources to support their global war of terror and aggression, ostensibly an integral part of their foreign policy. They dynamically legislate laws lest the people awaken. They have the unbending support of the corporate media, which skilfully distorts reality. When will they ever back down from their destructive quest for colonies? Read our selection below.

markets, shaping the world in such a way that is amenable to the needs of the profit-seekers and the already powerful.

The resulting consolidation of wealth is astonishing to behold. Each year, the remarkable achievements of the global elite are celebrated in Davos, Switzerland. And each year, Oxfam publishes a report detailing these achievements.

In 2013, Oxfam [estimated](#) that the income of the world's "richest 100 billionaires would be enough" to eradicate extreme poverty "four times over." A year later, little had changed: "Almost half of the world's wealth is now owned by just one percent of the population," the organization [announced](#). A pattern is emerging. What about 2015? The world's billionaires have it all, Oxfam [told us](#), and they still want more.

Then there was the dutiful 2016 [report](#), which featured many striking but unsurprising facts, like this one: "Runaway inequality has created a world where 62 people own as much wealth as the poorest half of the world's population."

The neoliberal period has been [defined by these trends](#), and whatever critiques of the foundations of global capitalism that remained within mainstream political discourse have been decisively erased or confined to the margins. And, as Roy masterfully documents in her 2014 book [Capitalism: A Ghost Story](#) [*the savage wars of peace, the peace of the graveyard, the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation*], massive corporations have taken to co-opting the heroes of progressive movements for their own purposes.

"Martin Luther King Jr. made the forbidden connections between Capitalism, Imperialism, Racism, and the Vietnam War," Roy notes. "As a result, after he was assassinated even his memory became toxic, a threat to public order. Foundations and corporations worked hard to remodel his legacy to fit a market-friendly format."

The Ford Motor Company—in partnership with Monsanto, General Motors, Procter and Gamble, and other corporate giants—helped set up and bankroll the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, which has coordinated with the U.S. Department of Defense and has [run events](#) with such titles as "The Free Enterprise System: An Agent for Nonviolent Social Change." To call such a headline insulting to Dr. King's legacy would be to vastly understate the case.

I've looked in vain for any direct public challenges by Wallis to Obama for military policy and/or actions while, or since being, President; in particular around [drone warfare](#) that Obama elevated exponentially to ubiquitous killing reach around the globe—despite consistent evidence that the accuracy of the "target" and "successful kill" were at times no better than a [crap shoot](#). I've indeed looked in vain for anything from Wallis like my [Open Letter to Michelle Obama, October 13, 2016](#) or my [Open Letter to Joe Biden](#). (See also [David Sessions'](#) [Liberal Christians Attack Obama Spiritual Adviser Jim Wallis over Gay Ad.](#))



The hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist. McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglass, the designer of the F-15. And the hidden fist that keeps the world safe for Silicon

Valley's technologies to flourish is called the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps.— [Thomas Friedman](#)



Is it possible then that it is hugely problematic to as it were climb into bed with any high statesman like former President Obama?²⁰ For who ends up influencing whom (*tail wagging the dog?*), when Wallis seemingly looked the other way in response to Obama's high crimes of drone murders, etc., etc., etc.? Not least that Obama allocated at the end of his Presidency 1 trillion dollars to upgrade the entire U.S. nuclear arsenal?²¹ And Wallis (apparently?) had nothing to say about it? (*But please enlighten me if he did!*)

If so, then is it not a grand irony that a younger Wallis became so excited about Billy Graham's embrace of *nuclear pacifism*, but had nothing to say four plus decades later about Obama's *nuclear arsenal militarism*?

Lord Acton's Maxim: *Power Tends To Corrupt and Absolute power Corrupts Absolutely.*

Does it not show once again, that 19th-century British historian [Lord Acton](#)'s observation rings invariably true?:

I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favourable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way against holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to make up for the want of legal responsibility. *Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority.*

There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it. That is the point at which the negation of Catholicism and the negation of Liberalism meet and keep high festival, and the end learns to justify the means. You would hang a man of no position, like [François Ravillac](#); but if what one hears is true, then Elizabeth asked the gaoler to murder Mary, and William III ordered his Scots' minister to extirpate a clan. Here are the greater names coupled with the greater crimes. You would spare these criminals, for some mysterious reason. I would hang them, higher than Haman, for reasons of quite obvious justice; still more, still higher, for the sake of historical science. (Emphasis added)—[Lord Acton writes to Anglican Bishop Creighton that the same moral standards should be applied to all men, political and religious leaders included, especially since "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" \(1887\)](#)



To express loyalty [to humanity] by accepting exclusion, to submit to the community but always as a witness to what exceeds it,—this is the quintessential Christian stance, Illich says.—[Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey](#), p. 402



David Cayley writes:

Jesus, he says, is “an anarchist Savior. That’s what the Gospels tell us.” From the moment Jesus refuses the power Satan offers him, in the scene of the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus defines

²⁰ See much more about Obama on my site [here](#).

²¹ Please see: [FACT CHECK: Did Obama Spend \\$1 Trillion ‘To Upgrade The Nuclear Arsenal’?](#)

himself as the “Powerless One.” He is a “dropout from power and money” and “a conscientious objector to force”—his “social doctrine” no more than a series of parries, paradoxes, and one-liners. But, in any case, Illich says, we are not asked to put our trust in his doctrine but in his “person.” [Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey](#), p. 401.

If the above is the case about Jim Wallis, is it not sobering to see an instance in his being so sucked into the vortex of American military power—and Graham before him—through his friendship with Obama, that Wallis betrays his own critique of said power? Is this not a salutary cautionary tale for us all who embrace peace/peacemaking in this violence-riddled world?

Conclusion

A detractor once accosted the great 19th-century preacher [C. H. Spurgeon](#) on why he embraced the doctrine of election. He replied: “I read my Bible.”

While the issue of pacifism is not so readily affirmed, no Christian I know/know of would dispute our need to take Jesus seriously in relation to it. If *nimble thinking* means disregarding Jesus, which neither Erasmus, Lewis nor Graham on purpose did—my friend included—I could as well dismiss their non-pacifism readily enough. But they all claim/claimed to have taken Jesus seriously. *So why did they give, why has Western Christianity given, Jesus such “nimble” wide berth?* (Or have I once again missed something?)

At least this: *it is certainly conceivable, if to Christian pacifists not credible, that their non-pacifism is somehow drawn from Jesus; but surely it is not irrational to ask for somewhat stronger arguments on its behalf?*

Then again, I have never lived under wartime conditions where being bombarded and overrun by a brutal enemy for just over a year . . .

This as of today, February 19, 2023, is Ukraine’s tragic reality.

NOTE: This paper is also online, to be found here: [Christian Pacifism and Its Cultured Naysayers 2023/02/13](#).