

piece) that succeeds in “attuning us to ‘the very life we’re living’ with an expanded sense of meaning, attentiveness, even gratitude.” Are there any other authors that you read in this section that might disagree with what makes a piece of art “the highest order,” and if so, who and why?

7. Anderson begins his article by admitting that art, both as a complex discipline and by its very nature, is often difficult to understand. Then, at the end of this article, he declares that art has deep theological truths and questions at its root that Christians should engage with and not ignore. In light of his introductory admissions, however, could it be dangerous for the Christian to engage art if they do not have adequate training and tools to understand the depths of its complexity?

8. While Taylor and Fujimura tend to stress the Christian engaging in art as a “maker” or creator, Worley and Anderson emphasize the Christian’s role in art as “engagers” or experiencers. Are these two opinions contradictory or complementary?

9. Taylor uses attributes of God to justify the Christian’s engagement in the arts. Worley, however, uses Christian values. How do you think that these two views would interact? Do you think that they are essentially saying the same thing, or would they distinctly disagree?

10. In Fujimura’s essay, he says that rather than engaging, Christians should be making art. However, with so much art already being produced, where does this leave the Christian in regards to understanding the art that surrounds them constantly?

chapter twelve

WAR, WEAPONS, AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

There is no singular Christian position on the role Christians should take in war and how Christians should think about weapons and capital punishment. Throughout history, thoughtful Christians have understood the Bible’s teaching on these topics quite differently based on their interpretations of Scripture—with Genesis 9 and Romans 13 functioning as pivotal texts in the debate—and their understanding of church history as well as the pressures of their own historical context. At least part of the challenge Christians face when determining how and what we ought to think about going to war—and, more broadly, violence—stems from the seeming discontinuity between the Old Testament’s record of and teaching on war and Christ’s attitude and teachings on the subject. Positions on war, weapons, and capital punishment depend, at least in part, on the hermeneutical relationship one holds between the Old and the New Testaments. The God of the Old Testament at times leads his people—the Israelites—into war to free them from their oppressors, to deliver them from their enemies, and secure for them the Promised Land. Christ, on the other hand, teaches his followers to love their enemies, to pray for them, and, following his example, even to die for them. It is widely recognized that the early church fathers maintained pacifist positions, drawing hard lines between the government and military of the age and membership within the kingdom of God. This duality meant that they generally acknowledged the empire’s right to administer capital punishment while also admonishing Christians against being involved in the administration of executions.¹

One of the earliest pacifists recorded in church history is Justin Martyr (c. 150 CE).² Second-century Christians identified themselves as “warriors but

1. See James J. McGivern: *The Death Penalty: An Historical and Theological Survey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 9–50.

2. Kirk MacGregor, “Nonviolence in the Ancient Church and Christian Obedience,” *Themelios* 33, no. 1 (May 2008): 17.

of a special kind, namely, peaceful warriors" because they "refused to practice violence and, on the warrior side, they excelled . . . in showing fidelity to their cause and courage in the face of imminent death."³ The record shows that for some early Christians, nonviolence was viewed "as an essential attribute of discipleship" required even of new converts who had held military or other positions requiring violence.⁴ In fact, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE), "the church perceived military service and following Jesus as mutually exclusive, a choice which Roman soldiers attracted to the gospel were forced to make."⁵ Tertullian maintained that the very nature of the gospel required those who believed it to "accept death when under attack" rather than act violently against their aggressors.⁶ He even went so far as to prohibit Christians from holding governmental offices wherein their decisions would naturally affect matters of life or death for others.⁷ The church's stance on nonviolence relaxed, however, as Rome experienced an extended period of peace under the *pax Romana*, and Tertullian did eventually allow converts to continue to hold posts in those professions so long as peace prevailed.⁸ And so it did, for a time.

The first major shift in the view of the Christian's relationship to violence occurred because the church found itself in the position to offer ethical guidance on governmental and geopolitical issues. Augustine is famously credited with developing the foundations for Just War theory, the guiding principles by which Christians traditionally have condoned and participated in war with other nations. Augustine writes,

What is the moral evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may be subdued to a peaceful state in which life may flourish? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to impose just punishment on them that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars against violent resistance, when they find themselves set in positions of responsibility which require them to command or execute actions of this kind.⁹

3. Ibid., 18.

4. Ibid., 18.

5. Ibid., 19.

6. Ibid., 19.

7. Ibid., 20.

8. Ibid., 21.

9. Augustine, "Against Faustus, Book 22" in *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook on Christian Political Thought*, ed. Oliver and Joan O'Donovan (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 117.

In other words, Augustine, affirming what the Old Testament reveals about the nature of the Lord through his interactions with Israel while simultaneously upholding what Christ teaches about the kingdom of God in the New Testament, suggests that violence is not wrong in and of itself. Rather, Augustine argued, it is the unrestrained *love of violence* that is evil and ought to be resisted and restrained through holy violence if necessary. In *The City of God* he argues against the objection that the first commandment forbids all killing:

The divine authority itself, however, did make certain exceptions to the rule that it is against the law to kill a human being. But these exceptions include only those whom God orders to be killed, either by a law he provided or by an express command applying to a particular person at a particular time. In addition the one who owes this service to his commander does not himself kill; rather he is, like a sword, an instrument in the user's hand. Consequently, those who, by God's authority, have waged wars have in no way acted against the commandment which says, *you shall not kill*; nor have those who, bearing the public power in their own person, have punished the wicked with death according to his laws, that is, according to the authority of the supremely just reason.¹⁰

These statements, among others, not only laid the groundwork for Just War theory¹¹ and promoted the ongoing Christian defense of capital punishment, but also, when misapplied, opened the door for the justification of the Crusades, a period of church history in which violence against the church's enemies was aggressively pursued. By the modern period, the church had turned much of its warring and violence inward, in the form of the various forms of violence the church of Rome and its Protestant Reformers wreaked upon one another across Europe.

The founding of America, prompted by the religious wars that impinged on the religious liberties of emerging Christian sects, itself depended on violence and weaponry at the personal and community level as European settlers came and, in the name of religious freedom, wrested land from Native Americans. At the root of the nation's formation in the early colonies and later in its westward expansion, and eventually in its own Civil War, was a rationale for the use of weapons and violence to seize and settle the land. This long history continues to influence national debates on gun control and gun violence.

10. Augustine, *The City of God*, books I–X, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. William Babcock (Hyde Park, NY: New City 2012), 24 (1.21).

11. John Langan, "The Elements of Augustine's Just War Theory," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1984), 19–38.

By the early twentieth century, when the world itself was at war, Christians who conscientiously objected were the exception rather than the rule. The church, along with the rest of the world, faced unprecedented violence from weapons far more powerful than anything seen before. "Everywhere by overwhelming majorities Christian people pronounced in word and act the same decision, viz. that to fight, to shed blood, to kill—provided it be done in the defense of one's country or of the weak, for the sanctity of treaties or for the maintenance of international righteousness—is at once the Christian's duty and his privilege."¹² In other words, Christians by and large returned to a more philosophically and theologically sound understanding of the Just War theory instituted by Augustine and largely supported the great World Wars as necessary to curb the evil that was oppressing and killing innocent people.

Of course, the wars of the twentieth century were not limited to those two great wars of the first half of the century. In fact, the century saw wars and heard rumors of wars in every corner of the world. And the Christian response to these wars has continued to vary, with the two most prominent scholarly views being a responsible application of the Just War theory and passivism. Famous contemporary pacifist Stanley Hauerwas explains the distinctions even within pacifism, saying, "My pacifism, which is based upon Christological presuppositions, does not look on our disavowal of war as a strategy to make the world less violent. Indeed, my own view is that Christians are called to nonviolence not because our nonviolence promises to make the world free of war, but because in a world of war we, as faithful followers of Jesus, cannot imagine being other than nonviolent."¹³

The specter of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction in the twenty-first century has shifted the debate in ways that could not have been foreseen even in the world wars. Today Just War theory and pacifism must take into account the possibility of entire nations of innocent people being maimed or destroyed by the press of a button or the release of noxious substance. Moreover, with the aid of modern news reporting and technology, our acute awareness of the horrific evil and mass violence that continues to be perpetrated around the world raises the question for some whether capital punishment is, at least in extreme cases of reprehensible brutality, the proper punishment. Yet even for some who in theory see merit in the case for the death penalty, the apparent systemic racial and socioeconomic injustices have caused them to oppose capital punishment in practice. Much of the American church, seemingly, has faced these issues more fervently at the ballot box than at the altar.

This section includes three sets of articles that clearly take opposing positions. First, Matthew Arbo presents a theological and philosophical argument against capital punishment, while Joe Carter presents an argument in favor of capital punishment founded in a study of the Noahic covenant.

In the second set of positions, Bruce Ashford lends his support for biblical Just War theory, arguing that it is the most logically and theologically coherent approach to understanding the function of war and violence in light of Scripture. In contrast, Ben Witherington III presents an argument in favor of Christian personal pacifism, rejecting violence at the personal level based on Christian moral and ethical standards while recognizing that God has given authority to secular governments to enact violence when necessary.

Third, Rob Schenck argues that Christians should, in following Christ's example, avoid gun ownership and lethal violence, while Karen Swallow Prior, drawing from her personal experiences and pro-life principles, presents her argument for gun ownership, urging Christians—and particularly Christian women—to use wisdom and conscientious stewardship to develop their views on gun ownership and violence.

12. C. John Cadoux, *The Early Christian Attitude to War*, rev. ed. (New York: Gordon, 1975), 127–28.

13. Stanley Hauerwas, "Pacifism, Just War & the Gulf: An Exchange," *First Things*, May 2, 1991, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1991/05/pacifism-just-war-the-gulf-an-exchange>.

THE CASE AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY

Matthew Arbo

Christians are not obligated to support capital punishment and indeed should not support it. That is the claim I intend to argue for here. My reasons for opposing the death penalty are both philosophical and theological. Let me begin with philosophical objections, which I divide into practical and theological objections to capital punishment. The justice in capital punishment does not consist in feelings of satisfaction achieved through retaliation or vengeance, but in setting to right what really can be set to right.

Practical Objections

Evidence also suggests that capital punishment does not serve as an effective deterrent to capital offenses. First, if a crime is unpremeditated, or committed in the heat of passion, then clearly the threat of execution never entered the wrongdoer's mind before committing the crime. In addition, many who have committed capital offenses admit to ignoring the possibility of being executed for their crime. Moreover, in fourteen states without the death penalty, homicide rates are at or below the national average. Positive evidence of the death penalty's effectiveness at dissuading violent crime is not compelling.

Consider the following US statistics:

- More than half of death row inmates are people of color.
- Since 1977, the overwhelming majority of death row inmates (77 percent) have been executed for killing white victims, even though African-Americans were victims in half of all homicides.
- Since 1973, 140 individuals on death row have been exonerated.
- Almost all death row inmates could not afford their own trial attorney.

- Since 1976, 82 percent of all executions have taken place in the South.
- Of the 344 exonerates represented by the Innocence Project, 20 served time on death row. Of those 344 exonerations, 71 percent involved eyewitness misidentification, 46 percent involved misapplication of forensic evidence, and 28 percent involved false or coerced confessions.
- Of those 344, a full two-thirds were people of color.¹

These represent but a small sample of the practical problems endemic to the criminal justice system.² I wish to highlight the problems of attorney representation and racial bias, in particular. Given the current strain placed on public defenders, both because of case load and prolonged underfunding, it is difficult to see how every violent offender who cannot afford their own counsel is comparably represented by state-appointed counsel, no matter how well-meaning or talented that counsel might be. Mounting evidence also suggests people of color receive a disproportionate percentage of the capital sentences. Together these findings constitute reason enough to place a temporary national stay on capital punishment.

Theological Objections

I transition now to theological objections to the death penalty. First, if one wishes to base one's justification for capital punishment on *lex talionis* of the Old Testament, then one must demonstrate how death as a punitive measure is morally right, not merely permissible. Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:38–41 makes clear that retaliatory interpretations of the law are incorrect. If one is subject to wrongdoing or injustice, Jesus implores forbearance and charity, dismissing any reading that justifies vengeance. It is especially difficult in practice to disentangle vengeance from retribution in capital punishment. Governing authorities are sometimes required to use force in upholding the law and securing peace, of course, but nothing requires them to kill offenders to do so (cf. Rom. 13). In pleading for measured clemency, the Christian is not being insubordinate or disrespectful.

A second theological point is one offered long ago by Augustine: once the condemned is put to death, that person is no longer eligible for evangelization and conversion. Clemency extends the possibility of rebirth in Christ. It doesn't

1. These statistics come from the innocence project and the exoneration database from the University of Michigan. See <https://www.innocenceproject.org/dna-exonerations-in-the-united-states/> and <https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/about.aspx>.

2. For more on the state of the criminal justice system, including some policy reform proposals, see William Stuntz's superb book *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2011).

guarantee conversion, obviously, but execution certainly ends the opportunity. Historically the church has taken this particular opportunity very much to heart.

Third, the Christian faith is fully and entirely pro-life, beginning to end. This commitment has broad enough scope to include even the condemned. Every human being has dignity and no one, not even the monstrous, can lose their dignity altogether. If Christians take human dignity seriously, we should criticize any penalty that fosters attitudes of contempt toward the condemned. The Deuteronomic code, for example, limits the number of times the guilty can be flogged, for otherwise "your fellow Israelite will be degraded in your eyes" (Deut. 25:1-3). Degradation is here distinguishable from shame, which may rightly attend punishment; but execution is degradation by definition. As Oliver O'Donovan puts it, "When the suffering of punishment becomes an object of vulgar curiosity and fascination, even experiment, the condemned person ceases to count among us as a human being deserving of neighbor-love, and ordinary human respect seems to vanish."³

Let me address two possible objections. First, some may wish to take issue with the appeal to Matthew 5:38-41 as a criticism of *lex talionis*. They will say Jesus' instruction is directed to disciples, to the church, and does not apply to civil authorities. This objection is valid in part, for Jesus is indeed addressing followers. But the text does not specify that it is only followers he speaks to, nor does it preclude the possibility of a civil authority also being Christian. Thus, if I am right, then the Christian apologist for capital punishment must give distinctly Christian reasons that respect the force of Jesus' teaching: does it avoid vengeance, and what distinctly Christian good does it establish that no other punishment can?

The second objection has to do with my dismissal of Genesis 9:6 as constituting a sufficient Christian principle for capital punishment. The text itself seems straightforward: whoever sheds the blood of man, so shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his image. Destroying the image of God carries grave consequences. This is a powerful theological claim, and because Genesis 9:6 figures so centrally in defenses of capital punishment, I wish here to offer a more detailed response to the objection.

A tremendous amount could be said about what is happening in Genesis 9, from its unique postflood context to the repeated use of "blood" language. In its application to capital punishment, however, it is the principle in verse 6 that has been enshrined in legal history. Taken literally, the verse does not speak to

capital punishment. In spirit, however, it serves as an important legal rationale for retribution, a retribution based on the intrinsic value of the image of God.

The covenant in Genesis 9 has two distinct but integrated parts—verses 1-7 and 8-17. In the first part, God tells Noah and his sons what they are to do and explains to them the relation they now share with other creatures. God gives them "everything," but with a couple of stipulations: They may not eat meat with blood in it, nor may another man's blood be shed. That's the immediate context for verse 9, which then pronounces the penalty for shedding another's blood. Humanity is distinctive among creatures because of the image of God. Then the command to be fruitful is repeated, and only after this, in the second part, is the covenant broadened to include every living creature. It just doesn't make any sense to read verses 1-7 as including all creatures when all the provisions of the covenant are about distinctly human activities.

I see something distinctive in verse 6 and believe it should be interpreted in light of Christ's saving work and the New Covenant he has established with this church. I do so because other provisions of the covenant in Genesis 9:1-7 have only loose application to the church today, and in some instances are also fulfilled in Christ himself. Is "everything that moves" really meant to be food for us? It is possible, if not probable, that in context this is precisely what is being commanded. Are we obliged to follow it? All humanity? Or only the church? If so, what are we supposed to make of Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 about eating and abstaining? God also tells Noah and his sons that he gives them "everything." If that is true, how are we to interpret John 3:34-36 in which Jesus explains that the Father loves the Son and "has given all things into his hand"? The Noachic covenant is still meaningful and relevant for the church, of course, but for these reasons I do not interpret verses 1-7 as a self-standing moral prescription.

Interpreting verse 6 as is, apart from Christ's work and covenant, carries rather odd implications. As mentioned, verse 6 presumes the logic of *lex talionis*, but at almost no place in history has the principle been upheld in literal terms—i.e., that punishment should identically match the wrong. Not even in odd Islamic codes does this happen. When someone steals from another's produce stand, for example, the penalty is to remove the offender's hand, not to steal produce from the offender, when the latter would more accurately reflect *lex talionis*. When politically institutionalized, as after many generations it inevitably would be, penal codes do not specify total replication of the wrong upon the wrongdoer, but of proportionate justice upon the wrongdoer, particularly in form and severity.

The pivotal question is how the Noachic covenant is reinterpreted in light of Christ's finished work. The church cannot draw a straight line from Genesis 9:6

to formal justification of capital punishment. It has to be interpreted and applied in light of the New Covenant and the mission it confers upon the church. The church is a people reconstituted in the grace and love of Christ. It is his command to love God and love neighbor. Could the condemned be a neighbor, I wonder? Are we loving family and friends of the slain, for example, when we affirm their longing to see the killer executed? If all human beings are bearers of the image of God, who are we supposed to love: the killed or the killer? If we cannot love the killed, then would it be possible to love some idealized Killed, a victim representing all who are lost? Genesis 9:6 doesn't settle these sorts of questions and wasn't meant to. This also begins to get at my claim that killing a person as punishment for killing is a paradoxical thing to "support." How do we love bearers of the image and support the killing of them at the same time?

Those are my objections and explanations. I put them frankly, knowing many readers will vehemently reject my arguments. I ask only that readers consider whether capital punishment in fact gives the condemned what they deserve or whether it simply assuages the anger, however justifiable, of those with a relation to the slain, who equate "justice is served" with "the one who killed my loved one has been killed."

A legitimate Christian defense of capital punishment must demonstrate the good it serves without recourse to satisfying vengeance. Christians are aware of at least one example of an innocent man being unjustly executed. How many more are we willing to accept for the sole purpose of maintaining a penalty we could just as well do without? Many so-called Christian defenses of capital punishment are, I fear, more emotive and utilitarian than theological.

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THE DEATH PENALTY IS BIBLICAL AND JUST

 Joe Carter

When considering the morality of an issue like capital punishment, the first question Christians must ask is, "Has God spoken about the topic?"

In attempting to answer this question, many Christians look to the Mosaic law. Denying the legitimacy of the death penalty is made more difficult when we recognize that the law God gave the Israelites included twenty-one different offenses that would warrant the death penalty.

The problem with this approach, of course, is that the law of Moses applied only to Israel. Since this particular covenant was made between God and the Hebrew people, it was never universally applicable. But while the Mosaic law doesn't provide a sound basis for a defense of modern capital punishment, there is a covenant that does: the Noachic covenant.

After God destroyed mankind with a flood, he established a covenant with Noah, his family, and with his descendants. Along with the promise that he would never destroy the earth by water again, God included this moral command: "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind" (Gen. 9:6).

This verse not only provides a moral norm for capital punishment but also delegates the responsibility to mankind—to a legitimate, though undefined, human authority—and limits it to a particular crime: murder. Since this covenant is "everlasting" (9:16) and "for all generations to come" (9:12), it's applicable today as it was in the age of Noah.

But who is the legitimate authority to carry out this duty? In Israelite society, the family of the victim carried out God's mandate. When more advanced forms of governing authorities were created, this duty was transferred to magistrates.

Some Christians argue that since modern liberal governments do not recognize the authority of God, the modern state is free from having to carry out

his mandates. The result is that the question of capital punishment must be considered a matter of social, and sometimes individual, justice. Since capital punishment does not serve a legitimate societal interest, they contend, its only purpose is to slake a victim's quest for vengeance.

This argument turns on the assumption that outlawing private revenge frees governments from the responsibility to implement God-mandated capital punishment. But what basis do we have for believing that claim?

In the ancient Near East, a person claiming wrongdoing was expected to seek personal justice by retaliating in kind. This seeking of justice would often escalate into a private vendetta, and eventually into a blood feud between families or tribes. The resulting suffering would often far outweigh the original injustice.

The Mosaic law, however, placed a limit on personal vengeance, allowing only what was directly proportional to the injury done. This is known as the *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation (Ex. 21:23–24; Deut. 19:21; Lev. 24:20–21). The phrase “eye for an eye” doesn't literally mean you could poke someone's eyes out (as Ex. 21:26–27 makes clear) but only that the compensation had to be in exact proportion to the damages. (We should also note that the judges—Israel's version of the civil magistrate—used the verses to adjudicate on the matter. A third party mediated the vengeance.)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus places an even greater restriction on the *lex talionis*: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matt. 5:38–39).

This is a radical limitation on what was once considered an individual right to justice. But we should carefully note what Jesus didn't say in this passage. What he left out of the verse he quoted is as important as what he included. Exodus 21:23–24 states: “If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Notice Jesus starts quoting at “eye for eye” instead of “life for life.” Murder was not, nor had it ever been, a matter of individual vengeance. When a person commits murder, they are committing an offense against God himself and not against a mere individual, his family, or even society. Jesus' command only applies to individual vengeance; it does not abrogate God's command in the Noachic covenant.

Different orderings of the social contract may shift the burden of carrying out capital punishment from one societal sphere (the family) to another (the civil magistrate). But the duty must be carried out. If Christians believe their governing authorities are legitimate, then we must expect them to take on the role instituted by God himself.

The apostle Paul makes clear that governing authorities are tasked with implementing the wrath of God on the evildoer. In Romans 13:1–6 Paul makes a logical argument with multiple, interrelated premises.

1. All authorities have been established by God.
2. All Christians are subject to these governing authorities.
3. All such authorities have been instituted by God for the good of the people.
4. Governing authorities are God's servants.
5. Resisting these authorities is resisting what God has appointed and will result in divine judgment upon the individual.
6. Governing authorities that “bear the sword” are carrying out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

The passage by Paul is unambiguous: Governing authorities are instituted by God to carry out God's wrath on the evildoer. Whether citizens of the state recognize his lordship over civil government is inconsequential; the Bible makes it clear that nations and rulers are servants of God (see Isa. 45:1; Jer. 25:9; Dan. 4:32).


We may choose to reject the legitimacy of this arrangement, but in doing so we are choosing to reject God's wisdom. If Christians believe governing authorities are legitimate, then we must expect them to carry out this mandate against murderers. For officials of the church to slander the officials of the state by claiming they are “not in keeping with the gospel of Jesus Christ” while they are carrying out God's command is scandalous.

This is not the only scandal, however. There are serious concerns with how the death penalty is applied and carried out in the United States. While the Bible establishes a justification and requirement for capital punishment, it does not address the problems with its application. We have a moral responsibility to redress these wrongs through the political process. What we must not do, though, is allow our apprehension about the means, method, and scope of capital punishment to override our obedience in carrying out the Creator's command.

Long ago, God made a promise to never again destroy the human race with a flood. When we see the rainbow in the sky, we are to “remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth” (Gen. 9:16). As Christians, we should remember more than just the covenant. When we see a rainbow, we should remember that we are made in the image of God. And when we see the electric chair, we should remember too the price to be paid when we destroy the image-bearer.

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WHEN WAR IS JUST

 Bruce Riley Ashford

At the age of fifty-three, after having served as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, George Washington stated, “My first wish is to see this plague of mankind, war, banished from the earth.”¹ No doubt many of us also wish that war would be banished from the earth. But, like Washington, we must recognize that war is sometimes inevitable in a world populated by sinners.

A Biblical “Just War” View of War and Peace

The Bible reveals to us an overarching story about the world. This story stretches all the way back to God’s creation of heaven and earth and leans forward to Jesus Christ’s return to defeat his enemies and renew the heavens and earth. This divine narrative is the true story of the whole world, and it is the context within which we can begin to make sense of war and peace.

At the time of creation, God’s world was characterized by a comprehensive peace and harmony (Gen. 1–2). In fact, the Hebrew word that is translated as “peace” is *shalom*. This term means more than mere absence of war. It signifies something more comprehensive: universal flourishing, delight, peace, order, and justice.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they broke this *shalom* and left the world in the condition we now know and inhabit (Gen. 3). Because of sin, our world is no longer characterized by universal flourishing, delight, or peace. Instead, it is riddled with the effects of sin, including the horrifying realities of war. But God, in his love, sent his Son to save us from sin and sin’s consequences (John 3:16–18); in fact, he promises that he will send his Son again in the future to defeat his enemies and institute a peaceful kingdom (Rev. 21–22).

1. Letter from George Washington to David Humphreys on July 25, 1785.

In the meantime, before the Son returns to consummate his peaceful kingdom, the Bible gives some specific principles that are applicable to war and peace. First, it makes clear that we cannot force the world to be a war-free utopia. Until Jesus returns, there will continue to be "wars and rumors of wars" because "the end is not yet" (Matt. 24:6 NKJV). Second, God has ordained governments to use force as an appropriate tool to defend their citizens (Ps. 144:1; Rom. 13:1-7). Third, Christians should always hope and pray for peace, but should accept the fact that war will sometimes be necessary. And because war is necessary, they should view the military as an honorable vocation (Luke 3:14).

Two Flawed Approaches to War

The view that has just been outlined is known as the "Just War" view. It draws upon biblical teaching to argue that deadly force is sometimes necessary because we live in a fallen world. However, not all Christians hold the "Just War" view.

Pacifism (Be Peaceful by Laying Down Your Sword)

Some Christians are pacifists. Pacifists refuse to use deadly force because they believe it is evil to do so. Some pacifists will approve of the military using deadly force as long as the pacifist himself doesn't participate, but consistent pacifists refuse to support any type of violence at all. They draw upon passages such as the Sermon on the Mount, in which we are told that we should love our enemies and be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9, 38-46).

Although well-intentioned, pacifism is idealistic and does not make sense of a fuller biblical teaching. It overlooks the Bible's teaching that God instructs the government to bear the sword (Rom. 13:3-5). Jesus used violence to cleanse the temple (John 2:15-16), and told his disciples to carry swords in case they needed them (Luke 22:36). Pacifists are right to want peace but are wrong to think that government should not wield the sword in a fallen world.

Crusade (Seek Universal Peace by Means of the Sword)

Other Christians reject "Just War" criteria and support wars of crusade. A war of crusade is religious and/or ideological. It is led by a religious (e.g., imam) or ideological (e.g., Lenin) authority who wishes to defeat evil and impose their vision of the "good."² Crusaders see themselves as waging war on behalf of ultimate good by imposing an ideal social order. Instead of showing restraint in war by, for example, distinguishing between combatants and noncombatants,

they tend to want to annihilate the old social order by converting, punishing, or destroying the enemy.

Crusaderism's own idealistic picture does not make sense of biblical teaching. Although there are instances in which the Bible views a crusade mentality approvingly, those instances are ones in which God himself instructed Israel to go to war (e.g., Num. 31:1-54) or in which God will lead a final crusade to defeat his enemies and institute a one-world government (Rev. 19:11-21).

Criteria for Waging a Just War

Over the millennia, Greek philosophers, Roman lawyers, Christian theologians, and others have developed specific criteria that must be met if a nation-state is to be justified in becoming engaged in a just war. Those criteria are:³

Just Cause: A nation must go to war only if it is defending against an unjust aggression. In other words, a nation should not go to war merely to topple another nation's leader, install a preferred political or economic system, or expand its own power.⁴

Competent Authority: The decision to go to war must be made by the ruler or ruling body that is responsible for maintaining that nation's order and security.

Comparative Justice: A nation should go to war only if this war leads to greater justice than refraining from war and tolerating the other nation's injustice.

Right Intention: A nation may go to war only if the intention is to restore the peace. It may not go to war for the purpose of glorifying itself, enlarging its territory, or humiliating its opponent.

Last Resort: A nation must exhaust all realistic nonviolent options (e.g., diplomacy, economic sanctions) before going to war.

Probability of Success: A nation must determine that it has a realistic hope of achieving victory.

3. For a fuller exploration of these criteria as they apply to a recent war, the Persian Gulf War, see Daniel R. Heimbach, "The Bush Just War Doctrine: Genesis and Application of the President's Moral Leadership in the Persian Gulf War," ch. 17 in *From Cold War to New World Order: The Foreign Policy of George H. W. Bush*, ed. Meena Bose and Rosanna Perotti (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), 441-64.

4. The question of what counts as "just cause" has been hotly contested in recent years. In particular, just war theorists have debated whether "preemptive" or "preventive" rationales can count as just. The author of this chapter considers the former a just cause and the latter unjust. For a comparison and contrast of these two views, see Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. (New York: Basic, 2006), 74-85.

Proportionality of Projected Results: A nation must determine that the anticipated results of the war are worth more than the anticipated costs.
Right Spirit: A nation must never go to war with anything other than regret. It should never wage war with a lust for power or delight in humiliating the enemy.

Just as there are criteria for becoming engaged in war, so there are also criteria for a nation's conduct during the war. The nation must not use more force or do more killing than is necessary to achieve its legitimate military goals. It must distinguish between combatants and noncombatants, avoid using evil means such as rape or the desecration of holy places, treat POWs with humane decency, and cease fighting once it becomes clear there is no chance of winning.

Conclusion

Augustine, the fifth-century church father, once wrote,

But perhaps it is displeasing to good men to . . . provoke with voluntary war neighbors who are peaceable and do no wrong, in order to enlarge a kingdom? If they feel thus, I entirely approve and praise them.⁵

Pacifists, Crusaders, and Just War proponents agree that the world clashes with conflict, and also that God's full shalom will not be restored until Jesus returns. Inevitably in our broken world, nations and kingdoms will "provoke . . . neighboring kingdoms . . . as a way to enlarge [their] own kingdom." Thus, not only should Christians themselves seek peace with neighbors, domestic and foreign, but they must encourage nations' leaders to seek peace and to exercise force only after having met specific criteria that ensure the ensuing conflict is justified.

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5. Augustine, *City of God* 4.14, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, series 1, vol. 2, St. Augustine's *City of God and Christian Doctrine* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 72.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Ben Witherington III

Perhaps some of you saw the highly acclaimed film *Hacksaw Ridge*, which came out in the fall of 2016. It tells the true story of a Christian, Desmond Doss, who served in World War II on Okinawa and rescued seventy-five soldiers during that battle, all while carrying no weapon at all, indeed refusing to do so. He is the only pacifist to have received the Congressional Medal of Honor. What his story makes perfectly clear is that Christian pacifism has nothing to do with cowardice or being passive. Indeed, Doss's witness suggests that it takes far more courage to crawl across a battlefield and rescue the wounded without a weapon than with one.

At its core, and for me personally, the commitment to pacifism comes from the desire to fully obey the teachings of Jesus and Paul on this subject, teachings found in Matthew 5–7 and the second half of Romans 12 and 13. The gist of the matter is, as Wendell Berry makes clear, when Jesus called us to love our enemies, he did not mean love them to death at the point of a gun.¹ He really meant "thou shalt not kill" or, if you prefer, "you shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). This is not an optional added extra commandment of Jesus; it is something that reflects the necessary corollary to the call of the great commandment—"Love your neighbor as yourself." It means that one treats every human life as of sacred worth, whether unborn human life, or born human life. For me, this means being totally pro-life. I cannot be party to abortions, capital punishment, or war in any combat capacity. I am amazed at the lack of consistency in some Christians' so-called pro-life ethic. Being pro-life means more than being pro-birth.

Let me be clear: this does not mean that I expect my government or any government to run on the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. I'm quite familiar with Romans 13 and what it says. I do not agree with the Amish reading of that text, which suggests that God merely ordered but did not authorize

1. Wendell Berry, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Christ's Teachings about Love, Compassion, and Forgiveness* (Berkeley: Shoemaker Hoard, 2005).

human authorities and governments. No, it was Jesus himself who told us that all legitimate human authority comes from God, and that even Pilate had such authority given him by God.

The issue here is not what is legitimate for a non-Christian government to do, or not do. One cannot impose a specifically Christian ethic on a secular government, or at least one ought not to do so. People have to be convinced in their own hearts of the Christian faith and its ethics—convinced, not coerced by government. The ethics of the kingdom are ethics for disciples of Jesus, and not until you are a disciple do they have authority over you.

What Jesus specifically calls for is not merely to resist retaliation to someone's attack; he calls for forgiveness of those who offend against us in any way. You will remember the story in Matthew 18 where Peter asks Jesus how many times must he forgive someone who sins against him. Jesus replies that infinite forgiveness is called for. Indeed, Jesus is depicted in the Lukan crucifixion narrative as even forgiving those who nailed him to the cross! This is not natural; it is the gospel of grace—it is supernatural. Forgiveness is the one thing that can break the cycle of violence. From Cain and Abel until now, violence has generated only more violence.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 12:17–21, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . Do not take revenge, . . . but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (this is also the message of the bloodiest book in the NT—Revelation). “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (such as providing one's enemies with the necessities of life). Here's a truth we should have suspected all along. Doing violence to others does violence to yourself, not least to your God-given conscience. When you meet persons who have come back from Iraq or Afghanistan and discover they have PTSD, as a Christian, you should hardly be surprised. Killing someone is the opposite of affirming that they are of sacred worth—the opposite of loving them as you love yourself. God hears the blood of the innocents crying from the ground, and believe me, there are always innocents and noncombatants caught in the crossfire.

I find it more than a little ironic that so many people who insist on taking the Bible not merely seriously, but literally, skirt lightly over the teachings of Jesus and Paul on this subject. They ignore the plea, “Why not rather be wronged? . . . you yourselves cheat and do wrong” (1 Cor. 6:7–8). They dismiss whole denominations like the Mennonites and the Amish who affirm Christian pacifism. They ignore the witness of the earliest Christians in the first four centuries of Christian history who were prepared to give their lives for others, but were not willing to take other people's lives away from them. I am old enough to remember

and to have supported the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and even today, we should not ignore the witness of people like Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., through whom great social change came about with nonviolent witness and protest against racism. He held to “active pacifism” and was inspired by E. Stanley Jones's discussions of the life of Gandhi, who in turn was inspired by Jesus. Jones was a graduate of Asbury College and the person for whom our mission school at Asbury Seminary was named.

What Christian personal pacifism means for me is that I could not serve in the military in a combat capacity, but I could serve as a chaplain or medic—someone trying to rescue and put people back together, even in a war zone. I could serve in a police department as an EMT dispatcher or the like. What I cannot and will not do is have or carry around the instruments of death—guns. There is a powerful scene in the older movie *The Witness*, starring Harrison Ford as a policeman, where the Amish grandfather tells his grandson when he sees Ford's weapon on the kitchen table one morning, “Touch not the unclean thing, for murder is a grave sin.”

I happen to believe that in a society that involves both Christians and others, there is a place for a loyal minority witness to a better way than violence, namely the way of the cross and of Christ. I love my country as much as anyone, but my job is not to do any and every task possible in our society; my job is to bear witness to the better kingdom way of loving even one's enemies, praying for those who persecute you, and forgiving those who harm you.

Am I being naïve about the wicked ways of a fallen world? No, not at all. I will serve my country in ways that do not lead to the harming of others and as such provide a preview of coming attractions, because as Isaiah told us, the day is coming when we will train for war no more and bear our weapons into implements of farming (Isa. 2:4). While empires may rise and fall, the kingdom of God is forever. Because I know this, I choose to make my first priority always the serving of that peaceable kingdom that will one day come fully on earth as it is in heaven.

When there is a conflict between my kingdom values and our American values, then the American values have to be set aside. Christ and his gospel must always be first, and the example of Christ's life, who helped, healed, delivered, loved one and all, and even forgave his enemies, must be followed. Again, this is not optional. It is obligatory for a Christian.

Inevitably, the question of “lesser of two evils” situations arise. What if the life of the mother is almost certainly going to be lost if the pregnancy goes to full term? What then? Some pacifists would say, pray hard and trust God. Others have said, though murder is always a serious sin, it would be an even more serious

sin to deprive the other children of this, and so an abortion is seen as a sin, but not an unforgivable one. Nevertheless, one must repent of the sin of terminating the unborn's life.


The same logic would apply if someone attacks a pacifist's family. Personally, what I hope I would do in such a situation is the following: (1) try to get in the way of the assailant and convince him to not harm others but direct his attention to me; (2) if necessary use nonlethal force to subdue him and his efforts (again remember pacifists are opposed to the use of violence, particularly lethal violence, not the use of all force); (3) if even this doesn't work, then I might try to do nonlethal harm to the assailant.

For the Christian pacifist, the most important thing is salvation, whether of one's own family or of the assailant. When you kill someone, you deprive them of the opportunity to (1) know Christ, or (2) repent if they have lapsed from their faith. It is precisely because the pacifist believes only God has enough knowledge to pass final judgment on people and will take care of the matter at the final judgment, that it is not necessary for his children to try to be judge, jury, and executioner of other human beings.

For those looking for detailed exegesis of some of the key passages, I would refer them to my Marthew and Romans commentaries (Smyth and Helwys Commentary, Erdmans). For those wanting thoughtful discussion about the ethics and theology of Christian pacifism, I commend Ron Sider's *Christ and Violence*, John Howard Yoder's classic study *The Politics of Jesus*, and S. Haerwas and W. Willimon, *Resident Aliens*.

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THE NEED TO RESTRICT GUNS

 Rob Schenck

If I'm going to train you in how to use a firearm, you must assure me you can use the weapon to kill in an instant, without hesitating. Understand? If you can't do that, you're more dangerous with the gun than without it, because, in a violent confrontation, it will be taken from you and used to kill you and go on to kill others."

The admonition from my volunteer firearms instructor, a US Marine reservist, was a tough challenge; firearms were not a part of my world. As a minister, I never imagined using lethal force in any situation. My job was to preach, teach, and work toward harmony between man and God and between one person and another. Killing did not fit in my toolkit, but, as part of a research project on evangelicals and American gun culture, I wanted to know my subject matter firsthand.

The unusual exercise began when Abigail Disney, an award-winning documentary filmmaker, sought me out as a nationally known evangelical pro-life advocate. She was a nonreligious progressive, and she wondered about the ardent stance my community took on unfettered gun rights, as compared to our adamant opposition to abortion rights. "How can you be pro-life and pro-gun?" she asked.

What mystified Abby was how people who believed in the Sermon on the Mount, with its beatification of peacemakers, would so jealously guard the right to use lethal weapons. After all, didn't Jesus command his followers to "love your enemy"?

For most Christians, the topic of lethal weapons and Jesus doesn't usually come up in the same sentence, but they must. American evangelicals in particular constitute a demographic sector most likely to embrace unfettered gun rights and access to firearms. Other Christians enthusiastically defend the Second Amendment to the US Constitution, which indicates that owning and using a gun for self-defense is a right protected by the highest law in the land. Still other

Christians, among them Mennonites and Brethren groups, take a diametrically opposite position, objecting to the use of lethal weapons of any kind based on moral grounds.

Concerned about a growing threat of terrorism, more and more congregants and pastors have armed up. Churches have recruited armed volunteer security details, while some pastors and Christian leaders even conceal-carry their weapon in the pulpit.

The embrace of deadly force by Christians raises several moral, ethical, and even theological questions that must be addressed. Quite simply, under what circumstances may a follower of Christ kill another human being? When is one's own life more important than that of another, even an enemy? How is readiness to kill a perceived "enemy" consistent with Jesus' command to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44)?

Different answers to these questions divide Christians. A quick search of phrases like, "God and guns," "biblical self-defense," and "Christians and killing," will result in a plethora of websites, Bible studies, and books often presenting very different conclusions based on the same biblical material. How might we approach such an unsettled matter? We could begin by agreeing on authority. Who—or what—has the last word on such an inquiry?

Most evangelicals subscribe to a tenet that defines the Bible as "the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God." Other Christians balance the Bible with creeds, councils, traditions, or teaching bodies, such as the Catholic Magisterium, or, in Orthodoxy, "the conscience of the Church." It would seem, then, that the question of when and how a Christian may use lethal force in self-defense must rely on what the Bible says and what church authorities say. But evangelicals—and all Christians—are, in the end, focused most on the person and work of Jesus Christ. We are "Christo-centric." This includes how we read Scripture and interpret it. In other words, the model and teaching of Jesus is the ultimate key to unlocking the will of God—in the pages of Scripture and in his dealings with humankind.

In John 14:8–10, Philip asked Jesus to "show us the Father." In response, Jesus said to him, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." And, "The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." Based on this instruction, we must ask, "What does Christ say about God's will in the defensive use of a deadly weapon?"

Luke 22:36–38 is often cited when the subject of guns and lethal force are raised. In that passage, Jesus directed his disciples, "If you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one," to which they responded, "Sec, Lord, here are two

swords." This brief exchange is used to justify a Christian's purchase and use of deadly weapons for self-defense. Besides the problem of relying on one unique and isolated passage as an authority for faith and practice, there is also historical context to consider. First, the only protective law enforcement available to the disciples in that time was the Roman guard and by the time of Luke's writing the Empire had become hostile toward Christians. It would be centuries before there was a civilian police force anywhere in the world. In New Testament times, protecting oneself meant you were entirely on your own. With these elements in mind, it is easy to see that Jesus was simply preparing his disciples for what may await them in the days ahead, including physical threats. However, he still had more to teach them, and it would come by way of his arrest, torture, and ultimate execution. In each phase of these physical assaults against Jesus, not only did he not retaliate, but he forbid his disciples from using any type of force to protect him.

Some say it was only because Jesus was on a messianic mission to surrender his physical life to accomplish God's plan of salvation that the disciples were prohibited from using force to protect him. Yet, this does not explain why, when Stephen was later martyred, the same disciples who proudly displayed their arms to Jesus did not use them to protect one of their own. Nor did Stephen offer resistance to his persecutors. If Christ permitted reasonable self-protection, why then did the disciples not employ it?

The answer is found in what is required to orient oneself to kill and the consequences of killing. Killing is central in this discussion. Using a gun to "scare off" a threat is never a good idea. First, guns can escalate a confrontation. Second, using a gun is itself a very uncertain response to a threat. It is difficult to hit a moving target, and bullets are indiscriminate in where they land, putting bystanders at great risk. In addition to all of this, a shooter cannot know who may be on the other side of a door or wall. This positions the shooter to err toward defending his own life at the expense of others, a position of power that, I would argue, is also a position of pride. It is, in fact, in direct conflict with the admonition to "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" (Phil. 2:3). In my own experience with firearms, I have felt the rush of self-confidence and even domination that often goes with having lethal firepower at your immediate disposal. There is an element of pride to the process that puts the shooter at odds with what Paul is calling Christians to choose.

For evangelicals, there is one particular theological problem when it comes to easy access to deadly force. We believe all human beings are lost in sin, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (Rom. 3:23) and, "The heart is

deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9 KJV). Jesus said of this sinful human condition, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt. 15:19). So, by definition, whoever may be handling a deadly weapon is, by biblical definition, "desperately wicked."

As my firearms instructor told me, anyone that bears arms must be ready to use them to take human life in an instant. If this impulse to kill is affected by our sinful nature, as the Bible makes clear it is, then any shooter is vulnerable to killing unjustifiably. Of course, even in the most justifiable of circumstances, the taking of a human life is regrettable, and the shooter must be prepared in the aftermath to experience a full spectrum of emotions from unhealthy triumphalism or gloating to doubt, guilt, shame, and remorse. Military chaplains speak of debilitating "moral injury" suffered by soldiers who have killed under the most justifiable circumstances. This indicates killing is not natural to humans; it is always an anomaly. For Christians, the act of killing, whether offensive or defensive, is a product of sin and spiritual rebellion.

For all these reasons and more, civilized peoples have largely delegated the onerous task of killing for protection to a select few who are highly trained, highly regulated, and held highly accountable. These include members of the armed forces, police officers, government agents of various kinds, and specially certified private security personnel. In this way, society limits the danger of wrongful shootings.

American evangelicals have made concerted efforts to preserve the constitutional right to "bear arms," but we must ask why we haven't matched our enthusiasm for killing to finding nonlethal forms of protection. Bible believers celebrate human life as a gift from God. We dedicate ourselves to the Lord Jesus, who said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). As Christians, we decry murder and abortion because they violate the sanctity of God-given life. Surely, as prayerfully motivated Christ-followers, we can find solutions to danger that do not include a constant disposition toward killing.

In a fallen world there will be killing, both as an act of murder and as an act of self-preservation. However, this reality does not resolve the serious ethical, moral, and spiritual questions about a Christian's use of deadly force. Owning and using a gun may be legal, but that doesn't make it moral. Killing another human being may be a reality, but that doesn't mean we should condone it. I suggest we follow the model of Jesus and eschew defensive guns and the violence that goes with them whenever and wherever we can.

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CAN GUNS BE PRO-LIFE?

 Karen Swallow Prior

It's not every Christmas morning you wake up with a Bersa .380 in your Christmas stocking.

The story started on an isolated stretch of road, escalated into flagging down a police car, and resolved with more calls to the police and their surprise visit at the home of a very dirty old man. The handgun was the epilogue.

But this isn't about guns as much as it is about how Christian women should think and act in matters of self-defense, given the realities of today. For the record, I'm for gun control, but that term includes greatly divergent types of control that are not the purpose of this essay.

I run 35 to 40 miles a week. Living as I do in a rural area, those miles are on roads of varying degrees of inhabitation. I live in a low-crime area—all the more reason to resist the lull of a false sense of security, especially when being a woman alone is enough to make one vulnerable. So I spend a fair amount of time during those miles being wary, vigilant, and proactive with self-defense strategies.

The first trouble I had, years ago when I lived in another state with more crime, was a flasher who parked on my road in the early mornings, awaiting my daily runs. He would keep far away, face me to, um, service himself, then get in his car and speed off before I was close enough to read his license plate. Teamwork with a neighbor, however, resulted in identification, a house call by the police, and an end to his shenanigans.

The incident that birthed the Bersa started with a truck pulling up beside me and the driver asking me if I “wanted a ride.” It's surprising how many such offers one encounters when one is out running. (Note: if you see me running along the road in running shoes and running shorts, rest assured, I do not want a ride. Besides, I'm dying to know: has anyone ever really gotten lucky with such an offer?) When the truck turned around and passed me again, I successfully used what was then the first strategy of my self-defense plan (which I can't disclose publicly without rendering it useless). This was before I was in the habit of taking

a cell phone with me (the purpose of such runs being, after all, the sense of lightness and disconnectedness), but miraculously, when I got out on the main road, a police car drove by and I flagged it down. Even so, it took one more encounter with the man before the police were able to put an end to it.

That's when my husband bought me the handgun.

So I wasn't surprised to read in my local newspaper that a new shooting range in my area is attracting a significant portion of female clients. Locations around the country reflect similar patterns. A poll conducted by Gallup in 2014 reported that 38 percent of women surveyed and 58 percent of women polled said they believed having a gun in the house makes it safer.¹

I know that Christians in favor of tighter gun control laws argue that as Christians, particularly ones like me who strongly identify as pro-life, we, of all people, should “love our enemies” and “turn the other cheek.” But while as a Christian I try to cultivate my willingness to lay down my life for the sake of the gospel or for the life of another, I don't believe I'm supposed to risk my life for a would-be rapist. To me, being pro-life means protecting my own life too.

No one seriously contests the right to defend oneself. Self-defense is a natural right, and a self-evident one at that. The disagreement is merely over how much lethal force one must be prepared to use in fighting back against an attack on the innocent. Rescuing the innocent is commanded by Scripture, as in Psalm 82:4, which says, “Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (ESV). And Proverbs 25:26 states, “Like a muddled spring or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked” (ESV).

Some might say I should simply give up my love of the outdoors and running (which I've enjoyed since I began running cross-country in junior high), join a gym, maybe, or drive twenty miles one way into the city to run in a more populous area. But surrendering my freedom and giving in to evil so willingly doesn't seem like the call of the Christian either. Matters of stewardship play into the equation too: stewardship of my time, talents, and my physical and mental health. More than anything else, running meets these needs in my life.

Besides, the handgun is a self-defense strategy of last resort. I now run with a phone. I pay attention to my surroundings at all times. I text the plate numbers of any suspicious vehicles (or those whose drivers offer me a ride) to my husband's phone and call immediately if I am alone on a long stretch and encounter an unfamiliar, parked, or slow-moving vehicle. And I gave up running on the beautifully forested road where the man in the truck accosted me the first and second time (the final time was on my own road).

1. Justin McCarthy, *Gallup*, “More Than Six in 10 Americans Say Guns Make Homes Safer,” November 7, 2014, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/179213/six-americans-say-guns-homes-safer.aspx>.

Ultimately, in my running, as in all things, I must put my trust in the Lord, yet without resting him.

I was reminded of God's sovereign protection in yet another incident. I was running uphill on a two-mile stretch of a private, uninhabited dirt road when I saw an older model car with an out-of-state plate parked up ahead. A man was leaning against the car smoking a cigarette. Quickly, I pulled my phone from the pack that holds all my necessities and called my mother, whom I knew to be home. I stayed on the phone with her as I ran a wide berth around the man and his car. As I crested the hill, I saw a police car sitting at the top. Unbeknownst to me, the officer, from his elevated position at the crossroads, had been able to see us the entire time and waited for me to arrive safely.

Yes, God is watching over me. Yet, I am still called to wisdom and good stewardship of all the gifts he's given me, including my life and health.

This piece has been adapted from an article that first appeared on ChristianityToday.com on July 26, 2012. Used by permission of Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 60188. The original title was "Packing Heat and Trusting in Providence: Why I Own a Handgun."

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Schenck discusses in his article against Christians carrying guns that using weapons involves an element of pride. Explain his logic and then explain why you agree or disagree.
2. Carter, in his pro-capital punishment article, uses verse 6 of the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9 as the foundation for his argument that capital punishment is a biblical mandate. Explain how someone might see Genesis 9:6 as a commandment that is not to be universally applied.
3. Witherington uses the specific argument that to be pro-life requires a Christian to be a pacifist. Can a person be pro-life and pro-Just War? Explain why or why not.
4. Both Schenck and Witherington use the life of Jesus, his character, and his teachings to espouse a selfless, weaponless, pacifistic Christian life. How would someone from Ashford's tradition respond to this use of Jesus' life and teachings?
5. How might someone from Schenck's tradition respond to Prior's claim that "No one seriously contests the right to defend oneself"?
6. Arbo presents statistics in his anti-capital punishment article that indicate possible but extremely serious corruption in the capital punishment arena. Can someone who supports capital punishment address these concerns, or must they require a change of position? Explain your answer.
7. Schenck poses the question: "How is readiness to kill a perceived 'enemy' consistent with Jesus' command to 'Love your enemies'?" How might someone from Prior's or Ashford's tradition respond to this question?
8. Ashford gives a list of criteria that must be met before a war can be supported in good conscience by Christians. How do you think that someone from Witherington's position would respond to their criteria?
9. A few different terms have been used by all of these authors, but each seems to have a different set of presupposed definitions. How is each author defining "murder," "enemy," "pro-life," "protect," and "selfish/selfless"?

10. Carter claims in strong language that verse 6 of the Noahic covenant, in regards to capital punishment, "delegates the responsibility to mankind." How might Schenck respond to this claim, especially in his discussion of pride and selfishness?

part three

MOVING FORWARD