How Pacifism Can (Unintentionally) Spawn Violence

By

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Abstract

The first half of this paper argues that the pacifism—or more precisely, the move from pacifism to non-pacifism—can, if not handled well, result in an increase in the inappropriate use of violence. Specifically, the rejection of pacifism can easily transmute into an acceptance of a so-called 'realist' acceptance of almost any form of violence in extreme situations. A number of evangelical churches in Nigeria share a similar background in the historical of their theological approach to violence, in that previously they had a theological tradition of pacifism (or at least been strongly influenced by pacifist traditions), but in more recent years they have moved to non-pacifist positions. This transition can have unintended, and unfortunate, consequences. Without appropriate theological reflection the view that 'Pacifism teaches that all violence is wrong' can become 'Pacifism teaches that all violence is the same—and wrong.' Thus when pacifism is rejected, 'All violence is not wrong' can become 'All violence is the same—and not wrong.' Or, indeed, 'All violence is permitted.' Since pacifism rejects the use of force, it necessarily inhibits theological reflection on appropriate uses of force. Thus when pacifism is rejected, it leaves behind a theological vacuum regarding appropriate uses of force; and if this vacuum is not filled by careful theological reflection. The second half of the article contributes to filling this theological vacuum by briefly canvassing some of the contours of non-pacifist theological reflection on appropriate use of force, including: the role of authority in the 'governmental monopoly' on the use of force, certain key facets of just war theology, such as 'proportion,' and 'discrimination.'

Keywords: Pacifism, Violence, Just War Theory, Christian Ethics, Evangelical Churches in Nigeria

Introduction

The first half of this paper argues that the pacifism—or more precisely, the move from pacifism to non-pacifism—can, if not handled well, result in an increase in the inappropriate use of violence. Specifically, the rejection of pacifism can easily transmute into an acceptance of a so-called 'realist' acceptance of almost any form of violence in extreme situations. A number of evangelical churches in Nigeria share a similar background in the historical of their theological approach to violence, in that previously they had a theological tradition of pacifism, but in more recent years they have moved to a non-pacifist theological tradition. This transition can have unintended, and unfortunate, consequences. The second half of the paper contributes to filling this theological vacuum by briefly canvassing some of the contours of non-pacifist theological reflection on appropriate use of force, including: the role of authority in the 'governmental monopoly' on the use of force, certain key facets of just war theology, such as 'proportion,' and 'discrimination.'

Limitations

Before getting into the main argument of this paper, I would like to clarify some limitations regarding the scope of the argument. The focus of this paper in on the theoretical commitments—or better yet, the theological commitments—underpinning our approach to the use of force. These commitments are vital, because provide part of the framework that shapes our practical engagement with political situations, but they are not comprehensive; many other theoretical commitments will also come into play in any concrete response to a concrete situation. In other words, this paper will contribute to the debate between pacifism and the just war tradition concerning what use of force may or may not be undertaken. But the paper will not contribute more widely to the broader question of what else should be done to make the question to the use of force less like to be raised in any given situation. (For a more detailed exploration of such issues, the recent literature on just peacemaking should be considered.)[1]

[1] See for example: (Cahill, 2003); (Agang, 2016).

Pacifism rejects all violence as wrong, and thereby tends to equate all violence as always wrong

It is reasonably uncontroversial to claim that pacifism—or, at least, certain, prominent versions of pacifism—reject all violence. Consider the following three quotations, from pacifist sources, first from Grimsrud:

> [Pacifism] includes the conviction that peace stands higher than *any* commitment that could justify the use of violence. … The responsibility to practice consistent love should lead anyone in power to make decisions that are respectful and *always* move away from violence and injustice. … Since pacifism concludes that violence is *never* consistent with the fundamental call to love all neighbors - and that this conviction is true of *all* violence - pacifists will not be able to offer direct support for, or participation in, responses to evil-doing that do rely on violence (Grimsrud, 2010, pp. 24, 28, 35 emphases added).

In this concatenation of quotes, Grimsrud is repeatedly clear and emphatic, and does not leave room for any exceptions: 'always', 'never', 'all', 'any'. Second, Reimer is similarly unequivocal as he summarises a representative Mennonite version of pacifism as teaching that 'the true Christian church must be *absolutely* non-resistant and thus, with some exceptions, not participate in the state and in policing *of any kind*' (Reimer, 2008, p. 120 emphasis added). Reimer does not want Christians involved in any kind of policing, and is even wary of general involvement in the state, although there he is willing to make some exceptions. (This anti-state-involvement expression of pacifism is not the same as, but is recognisably related to the talk of politics as 'a dirty game' that Christians should generally avoid, which in previous generations was common in evangelical Nigerian churches.) As a third example, Eberle repeats the same point:

> Principled pacifists are committed to the proposition that no person is *ever* morally permitted to use lethal force against other persons. The principled pacifist's prohibition is *unconditional*: recourse to lethal force is forbidden, not just as a means of personal and

> national aggrandizement, but *even in defense of self or nation*. (Eberle, 2006, p. 203 emphases added)

Many further examples could be multiplied, but the point is clear and uncontroversial. Pacifism rules out all uses of violence[2] as wrong, and therefore equates all uses of violence as wrong.[3]

The danger of rejected pacifism being replaced by unChristian violence

The second step in this paper's argument, is to show what can happen when a previously accepted pacifism is later rejected. To lay the groundwork for considering how this transition can happen, the paper will identify four distinct types of positions which Christians can hold in respect to the use of force and/or violence:

The first is pacifism. Pacifism is a respectable Christian tradition. It holds that violence is always wrong. It is not my view. I do not think it is correct, and I do not think it rightly discerns our responsibilities before God. But it is a position that has its own integrity, and I respect it, and those who hold to it.

The second is the just war tradition. This is also a respectable Christian tradition.[4] It holds that violence is always regrettable, but sometimes right, or even obligatory. This view is, as it happens, my view. I do think it is correct, and that it

[2] There is room for some definitional debate on what counts as violence at the milder end of the spectrum. But at the stronger end of the spectrum, i.e. 'lethal force'—the sort of violence that can lead to the loss of life—the point is clear: all violence is considered wrong.

[3] Of course, this is not to say that pacifists cannot make distinctions between different types of wrong. Consider the example of sexual sin: someone might believe that all forms of adultery are wrong, and still believe that some are more wrong than others (for example, that rape-and-adultery is even worse that 'just' adultery). Similarly, there can be room within pacifist thought for saying that some uses of violence are 'more wrong' or more egregious than others: for example, inflicting torture and death is, in some sense, worse that 'just' inflecting death. But just like most books on sexual ethics do not spend much time exploring how to rank different forms of (wrong) adultery against each other, most books on pacifism to not spend much time exploring how to rank different forms of (wrong) violence against each other.

[4] Oliver O'Donovan helpfully dismisses 'two common misconceptions' by pointing out that just war theory is not 'descriptive of how wars used to be conducted within Christendom' and it does not attempt to 'validate or invalidate particular wars,' since there are no just wars, in the same way that there are no just peoples (O'Donovan, 2003, pp. 12–13).

can help us to rightly discerns our responsibilities before God. I think also it is a position that has its own integrity, and I respect it, and those who hold to it.

There is a third possibility—or, perhaps, group of possibilities. These go by different names: 'realism', 'situation ethics', or even just Machiavellian cynicism. These positions hold that there are no real limits on what violence may be appropriate in any given situation, except for the limits imposed by the situation itself—i.e. what is expedient in the circumstances.[5] Some versions of this position will claim the name 'Christian'—but in my view they a not consistently Christian positions.

There is also a fourth possibility, that of adopting a philosophy of violence that finds its roots in some other tradition (whether a cultural tradition, an alternative religious tradition, a philosophical tradition, or something else). Although this approach is sometimes adopted by Christians, it is done so pragmatically, and not usually with any well-thought-through theological backing. It other words, this position does not even claim to be Christian.

It is certainly possible to move from the first position (pacifism) to the second (just war) or vice versa. But to do so effectively, considerable thinking needs to be done. To move successfully from a just war position to a pacifist position, would require considerable thought to be given to how evil can still be opposed, now that certain methods (the use of force) are no longer available. Without appropriate theological reflection the transition may go astray, so that you end up with a passive pacifism, that acquiesces to evil, instead of an active pacifism that opposes it. The former just war proponent may become merely passive in the face of violence, instead of pacifist.

To move successfully from a pacifist position to a just war position, would also require considerable thought to be given to what sorts of uses of force are not

[5] Joseph Fletcher is an example of someone who holds to 'situation ethics' (Fletcher, 1997); Reinhold Niebuhr is an example of the 'realist' position (Niebuhr, 1953). Although both these writers would claim the adjective 'Christian' and so would claim to write from within the 'Christian tradition', in my view, although I think both are problematic, it seems to me that Niebuhr's position is less far removed from mainstream Christian thinking, while Fletcher's view is sufficiently far removed that it ceases to be substantively Christian at all.

permissible, and which are still impermissible. Again, without appropriate theological reflection the transition may go astray. The former pacifist may become unconstrainedly—or insufficiently constrainedly—violent. Instead of moving from pacifism to *just* uses of violence when confronting evil, the former pacifism may simply move to being violent in the face of evil. This is because the view that 'Pacifism teaches that all violence is wrong' can become 'Pacifism teaches that all violence is the same—and wrong.' Thus when pacifism is rejected, 'All violence is not wrong' can become 'All violence is the same—and not wrong.' Or, indeed, 'All violence is permitted.'

In other words, without appropriate theological reflection the transition my go astray. Instead of moving from pacifism to just war, or former pacifist may either slide all the way across to a cynical so-called 'realist' perspective, or may simply adopt some other (non-Christian) view of violence.

Nature abhors a vacuum. Pacifism creates a vacuum in regard to theological reflection on proper use of force; it inhibits reflection on uses of force that are consistent with the gospel of the Prince of Peace (precisely because it thinks there are none!).[6] If pacifism is later rejected, that vacuum must be filled with something—either sound theological reflection on the use of force, or else it will collapse into something sub-Christian: either cynical opportunism, or else an alien, non-Christian philosophy of violence.

This task is not easy. If we have come from a pacifist tradition, we may have inherited instincts that encourage us to always any thoughts of armed force from any thoughts Christian devotion. Consider this question: Could you advise a Christian soldier pray that God would make him more skilled at killing? If you could not, then perhaps you have still not integrated your theology with the proper use of lethal force. And without that integration you will either reject violence as un-Christian, or you will accept it un-Christianly.[7] Psalm 144:1 gives

[6] McCready observes that the 'realist' tradition also can inhibit proper theological reflection on appropriate uses of violence: 'Both pacifists and so-called realists deny resorting to war is a proper subject for ethical decision-making' (McCready, 2006, p. 466). In other words, 'realism' does not shape its use of force theologically.

[7] Integrating violence with theology does not mean becoming comfortable with violence. Augustine, who is a classic proponent of the just war tradition, laments the necessity of violence: 'But the wise man, they

us an unashamedly integrated perspective. That verse would seem to answer our praying-soldier question with a 'Yes, you could pray to be more skilled at killing', because in this verse the Psalmist (David) is praising the LORD as the one who has trained his hands for war.

If we reject pacifism, and yet fail to fully integrate violence with our theology, then our use of violence will be unconstrained by our theology—and therefore is likely to quickly become inconsistent with our theology. McCready warns of the danger: 'in defending our basic values we must do something, but we may not do everything that comes to mind. The just war tradition guides us in determining where to draw the line without denying who we are and what we stand for' (McCready, 2006, p. 466).[8] It makes no sense to defend our values by compromising them (McCready, 2006, pp. 462–463). That is why the just war tradition commands our attention.

A Brief Introduction to the Just War Tradition

In the New Testament Jesus clearly calls his disciples to non-violence in their personal relationships, using the famous example of turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). Equally clear, the apostle Paul identifies a positive role for government, including the use of violence ('the sword') in the service of government (Romans 13:4). The just war tradition is a long-standing attempt within theology to think through how Christians, as Christians, can rightly contribute to reflection on, and/or involvement in, such appropriate uses of 'the sword'. McCready observes that the just war tradition tries to examine 'whether using force in a particular situation is right or just, and, if it is right, what means

say, will wage just wars. Surely, however, if he remembers that he is a human being, he will be much readier to deplore the fact that he is under the necessity of waging even just wars. For if they were not just, he would not have to wage them, and so there would then be no wars at all for a wise man to engage in. For it is the iniquity of the opposing side that imposes upon the wise man the duty of waging wars' (Augustine, 1998, bk. XIX:7).

[8] McCready quotes a character in a novel who sums this danger up succinctly: 'I suppose only this—be very careful when you fight monsters. Be careful what you become.' (McCready, 2006, p. 462 quoting Joseph Kanon, Los Alamos (New York: Dell Publishing, 1997), 139). McCready also argues that the temptation to use 'extraordinary measures' to defend against extraordinary attacks is a temptation that must be resisted: 'Responding to terrorism with terrorism is not only immoral, it is frequently ineffective or even counterproductive. Pacifists, who abhor any use of force, can offer no help at this point. "Realists," who consider war a necessary evil, tempt us to descend to the moral level of our enemies.' (McCready, 2006, p. 473)

are acceptable' (McCready, 2006, p. 465). The just war tradition 'rejects the claim that all use of force is evil, suggesting instead that in some circumstances the failure to use force is wrong' (McCready, 2006, p. 461).

In other words, the just war tradition is not one option (among others) for responding to violent crises. It is one option (among others) for helping us think Christianly about appropriate and inappropriate uses of force. An appropriate response to a violent crisis will certainly need to be more holistic than this—uses of violence are by no means the only thing that needs thought about or done(!)—but it should not be less than this. (Again, as highlighted earlier, the recent work on just peacemaking makes a more holistic contribution to this, including giving serious thought as to how to prevent situations of violence arising in the first place.) This paper is narrowly focused, not on the whole work of responding to a violent crisis, but on the specific element of thinking carefully about appropriate and inappropriate uses of violence—a necessary, but by no means sufficient, part of the wider task of response.

To simplify our brief discussion we will turn primarily to one contemporary, leading exponent of the just war tradition, namely Oliver O'Donovan.[9]

Oliver O'Donovan's Exposition of the Just War Tradition

O'Donovan's exposition of the just war tradition proceeds under four main headings, which we will also follow: violence as judgment, and then the roles of authority, discrimination, and proportionality.

Violence as Judgment

O'Donovan argues for an 'evangelical counter-praxis' to war, namely that 'armed conflict can and must be re-conceived as an extraordinary extension of ordinary

[9] Of course, many other just war exponents could be chosen, and they would all have their own way of summarising the main aspects of the tradition. McCready, for example, subdivides the main criteria of the tradition somewhat differently from O'Donovan, yet covers broadly the same ground under his slightly different headings: 'Of the historic criteria for entering into war, four (proper authority, just cause, right intention, and the establishment of a just peace) have been clearly defined since the early days of the tradition and have been the primary criteria. The remaining three (last reasonable resort, reasonable chance of success, and proportionality) are prudential criteria, thus more difficult to define and measure. These prudential criteria need political and military input in addition to the wisdom of ethicists—and even then people may in good faith reach differing conclusions' (McCready, 2006, p. 465).

acts of judgment; it can and must be subject to the limits and disciplines of ordinary acts of judgment' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 6). In other words, O'Donovan is taking normal governmental role of just judgment as his starting point. The normal processes of punishing wrong-doers—using police, and courts, and prisons—already commits government to the use of force.[10] The just war tradition begins from this insight, and works out from the normal functions of judgment within society, towards the less normal use of armed conflict.

In particular, O'Donovan observes that classic just war thinkers did not simply reduce armed conflict to the single cause of self-defence, any more than we would think of the criminal justice system as a simple matter of self-defence. (In fact, when people do make this error, we condemn them for 'taking the law into their own hands.') This is because those involved in developing the just war tradition 'thought that the antagonistic structure of self-defence was itself morally problematic for Christians' because of Jesus' counsel not to repay evil for evil (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 22). In other words, self-defence may be sufficient on its own as a secular rationale for the use of force, but it is not sufficient for an evangelical rationale.

Instead, O'Donovan observes that as Christians have wrestled with the question of how armed conflict could be compatible with being a follower of the Prince of Peace, they have taken their queue from the biblical command of love: Augustine 'treats the obligation of military action as an obligation of love to the neighbour' and Aquinas arranges his discussion of war within his discussion of the virtue of love (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 9).[11] This focus on love naturally brings with it a focus

[10] This use of force by the government in criminal prosecution is strictly necessary because, as O'Donovan observes, 'judgment only has the same material means available to it as crime,' namely the use of physical force. So, similarly, when it comes to war those 'available means' are armed conflict: war is a crime of armed conflict, and just judgment must also resort to armed conflict to suppress that crime (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 7).

[11] McCready makes the same point in reverse, arguing against hating one's enemies as being 'an aspect of Augustine's right intention. When one's enemy ignores the laws of war and uses terror against military and civilian indiscriminately, it is difficult not to hate that enemy, but it is spiritually harmful to do so. In dehumanizing our enemy, we also dehumanize ourselves. Hating the enemy also has practical consequences. In dehumanizing them, we often underestimate them; in letting our emotions control us, we are liable to make foolish and dangerous decisions—and be defeated. Also, a captured enemy who has been

on the longer-term effects of the armed conflict: a just conflict ought to bring about a better, and more just, peace than that which currently exists.[12]

The problem with self-defence as the sole criterion for the use of force, is that it makes personal survival an ultimate value—and so goes beyond what the Bible teaches:

> To take survival as the bottom line is to revert to the antagonistic model of mortal combat, and so inevitably to retreat from the Gospel proclamation of the universal rule of Christ and from the praxis of loving judgment. When self-defence, of state, community or individual, has the last word, paganism is restored. Precisely for this reason a Christian witness to God's peace must always be acted out against he horizon of suffering and martyrdom. … [Christian judgement] cannot possibly issue a license to avoid defeat by all possible means (O'Donovan, 2003, pp. 9–10).

There are benefits to O'Donovan's counter-intuitive approach of locating the use of force within the discussion of the Christian duty of love to others. For example, as we consider the problems of herdsmen-farmer conflicts in Nigeria, O'Donovan's approach forces us to reframe our questions in fresh ways, which then also gives the possibility of fresh answers. Instead of just asking the question of how we can protect ourselves (or our family, or other grouping), it encourages us to also ask: what can we do to protect others, even those not in our own tribe/community?

Authority

O'Donovan's second emphasis concerns the role of authority—and this follows naturally from the focus on judgment, since the giving of a judgment implies having someone with the authority to judge.[13] However, as observed already,

dehumanized in this way is more liable to mistreatment and this is inconsistent with the just war tradition' (McCready, 2006, p. 471)

12 Similarly O'Donovan comments that 'war is always unjustified if it is antagonistic; and it is essentially antagonistic if it does not intend the state of peaceful and lawful governance for the community against which war is waged' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 31).

13 The notion of the state as having a 'monopoly of violence' is long-standing, and widely-held. Thomas Hobbes was an early proponent of this view (Hobbes, 1660, Chapters XVII–XXI).

armed conflict is an unusual form of judgment, and so has an unusual role for authority: 'What distinguishes the justified resort to armed conflict is the unavailability of ordinary means of judgment' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 18). Either no relevant government exists, or else the government that does exist is overwhelmed, and cannot cope with the crisis through the normal channels of judgement and prosecution. 'The reason for carrying the practice outside the ordinary institutions of government is simply the emergency: it was "indispensible to mankind"' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 18).[14]

However, even, when armed conflict is necessary, it is important that authority should be respected. O'Donovan puts it this way:

> Governmental authority is God's will for human communities, and should, as such, be strengthened. Not always strengthened precisely on its existing foundations, of course, since it may have contributed to its own decay by failing to represent the people well or by failing to satisfy the demands of justice. But some centre of authority must be located and defended; and that means on the one hand enhancing the representative character of government, and on the other strengthening its imposition of justice (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 70).

Life without governmental authority is anarchy, and that is usually worse than even the worst government. Anarchy means, whoever has the biggest gun today, rules today. That is why authority should be strengthened and respected, and 'where formally constituted authorities exist, it is they, not [imaginary, ideal] ones, that must be obeyed' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 24). But O'Donovan also recognises that circumstances can be complicated, and that in situations where clear authorities do not exist, or are not effective, the question of whether an armed conflict is in fact just must still be asked, and 'we cannot refuse the possibility of informal pronouncements which carry moral authority' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 24).

[14] O'Donovan observes, in passing, that pacifism can imply what he calls 'a certain statism' in the sense that pacifism does not 'allow for the *improvisation* of judgment where it is not provided for within a state structure' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 8 emphasis his).

O'Donovan summaries this authority aspect of the just war tradition by identifying three conditions to be met before armed conflict can be considered:

1. the existence of a clear need for justice to be done;
2. the lack of any formal institution to enforce justice;
3. an existing status of representation, which gives grounds for a representative party to take up arms to judge the causes of its own people (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 27).

As we briefly consider how this might apply to Nigeria's situation, we can acknowledge that the response of the Nigerian Government to the herdsmen-farmers crises has been far from ideal, and we can add our voices to the calls for reform. (Although, in fairness we might wish to add that, to some extent, similar criticisms could be made of any government response to any serious challenge anywhere in the world.) But there is also a question for us as Christian communities, Christian institutions, Christian churches, and Christian individuals regarding our deliberations, discussions, suggestions, and actions: do they tend to strengthen representative governmental authority, and the proper imposition of justice—or do they tend to undermine those things? If we allow the sharp pressures of circumstance to push us to the side of undermining government authority, then, in this regard, we have swung from pacifism to paganism.[15]

An anecdotal example may illustrate the point. A few years ago there were heightened concerns about attacks in the Kagoro area, and an informal debate was organised to discuss the issues. One proposal, which seemed popular with the audience, was the idea of arming the youth of Kagoro with guns. There are a number of things that might be said about this,[16] but consider in particular the its effect on authority. The proposal to indiscriminately arm the youth of Kagoro both ignores the existing authorities, and weakens them for the future. Hypothetically,

[15] McCready also observes 'the necessity of distinguishing the proper roles of the individual, church, and government. What is permitted or required of one may not be permitted or required of the others. This vesting of the authority to make war solely in the hands of the state has been characteristic of the just war tradition from its inception' (McCready, 2006, p. 464).

[16] The feared crisis never arrived, and the concern abated after some months. If a decision to arm the youth of Kagoro had been made, it would have been very difficult to unmake: guns would have been easy to distribute, but much harder to collect again afterwards. It seems unlikely that Kagoro would be a safer place today if the majority of the youth were used to walking around armed.

an alternative approach which took authority seriously, might respond to such a situation by working through the existing authorities in order: first, attempts would be made to get the existing security services (army, police, etc.) to do their job more effectively; second, if this failed, attempts would be made to get traditional rulers to organise some form of community defence; third, if this also failed, some sort of ad hoc, quasi-governmental approach could be considered, perhaps something like an informal vigilante group that answered informally to some community leaders. The central point here is not what those alternative discussions might have looked like (and certainly there would have been plenty of room for heated discussion!). Rather, the point is that jumping directly to the proposal to indiscriminately arm the youth of Kagoro, without any discussion or awareness of the authority-implications involved, illustrates a post-pacifism theological vacuum in regard to thinking about armed conflict and the role of governmental authority. This vacuum is dangerous, and needs to be filled theologically.

Discrimination

The just war tradition has always emphasised the importance of discrimination, in the sense of being discriminating, telling one thing properly from another. This makes good sense when thinking of the just war tradition in terms of judgment. Any judgment worthy of the name should involve separating the innocent from the guilty, and should involve investigating carefully who represents who, who acts for who, and how (O'Donovan, 2003, pp. 32–33). In terms of just war thinking, the principle of discrimination concerns the *intention* of those who resort to armed conflict, specifically the *intention to distinguish guilt from innocence* (O'Donovan, 2003, pp. 42–47). Within the context of violent conflict, O'Donovan defines a 'discriminate act' as one that 'intends to make a distinction between guilt and innocence' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 35); and the guilt in question is the guilt of 'direct material co-operation' in wrongdoing (O'Donovan, 2003, pp. 38–39).

The International Committee of the Red Cross puts it this way:

> 'In order to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, the Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and

> accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives' (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1977).

To speak of the 'innocence' of non-combatants is not to claim they are innocent in every way. Giving moral support to a unjust cause does incur a certain type of guilt; but not one which should result in execution:[17]

> The innocence in question [of non-combatants] is simply that of not being materially co-operative with wrongful hostilities. There are, no doubt, many kinds of guilt by complicity that are plausibly attributed to non-combatant populations of belligerent states. But it is not *that kind* of guilt which the act of judgment deals with, but merely the guilt of direct material co-operation (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 39).

The point here is a simple one: if we are going to do violence justly, then of course we cannot simply attack anyone and everyone. The judgment of violence needs a proper basis in guilt: the guilt of direct material co-operation in wrong-doing. We cannot justly condemn someone to violent consequences on the basis of suspicion, or dislike, or identity, or mere membership of a particular group, or tribe, or religion. There will always be grey areas that are difficult to navigate. Even with the benefit of plenty of time to reflect, some decisions can be hard; how much more so in the heat of the moment. Those difficult, grey areas will always be there. But the mere existence of grey should not distract us from the equally clear existence of black and white: 'To lose the will to discriminate is to lose the will to do justice' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 47).[18]

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17 As O'Donovan notes, 'Involvement in collective guilt does not make us liable to penal execution for an offence of which we are not subjectively guilty. It exposes us only to attack while we positively co-operate in the collective wrongdoing' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 37).

18 The challenge of terrorism makes it both harder, and more vital, to respect the principle of discrimination. O'Donovan, in his definition of terrorism, mentions that it involves the use of armed conflict without 'proportion or (especially) discrimination' and by 'military organisations which are not only *not* governments, or subject to governments, but are not even putative governments, and so have no interest in the provision of judgment for any community which they plunge into the turmoil of armed struggle' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 30).

It is anecdotally well recognised that during recent crises in Nigeria Muslims generally, and Fulani herdsmen in particular, have not respected this principle of discrimination in their attacks. This is a profound wickedness. But those perpetrators are not the primary audience for this paper. Sadly, many in the Christian community, which has now turned away from pacifism, have turned to a non-discriminatory, sub-Christian use of lethal force.

Proportionality

I shall treat the fourth principle, the principle of proportionality, more briefly. This principle looks both backwards and forwards: just judgment must be both 'proportioned *by* a truthful description of the wrong done' and also 'it must be proportioned *to* the state of affairs it attempts to realise' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 48 emphasis mine). In other words, just judgment must be based on a just cause, and must also ensure that the damage done in armed conflict is not disproportionate to the hoped-for peace.

The retrospective aspect ('just cause') rules out pre-emptive strikes (i.e. resorting to armed conflict on the basis of mere suspicion), but may allow for armed response on the basis of serious threats, and/or serious preparations for attack by an aggressor, since to be the victim of threats, or of 'malicious preparation for war is already to be a victim of a wrong' (O'Donovan, 2003, p. 49).

The prospective aspect (towards an goal) of the principle of proportionality means our response to wrongdoing must be measured. The old principle of *lex talonis* ('an eye for an eye'), is not the highest moral principle in the world; but nor is it meant to be. The point is: it is not the lowest. Without the gospel, our desire for vengeance can be infinite (cf. Volf, 1996, p. XXX). The principle of proportionality reminds us that any legitimate reasons for engaging in armed conflict should not be to usurp God's role as Judge, and as the one who will truly execute vengeance. Instead, any legitimate reason for engaging in armed conflict will include the objective of securing a better peace. And that goal limits our actions: any action so destructive that it destroys the possibility of building a peaceful outcome, will necessarily be disproportionate.

Conclusion

This paper takes it as uncontroversial that, within the evangelical community in Nigeria, there has been a broad shift away from pacifism and towards (various forms of) non-pacifism. Given that this shift has happened, the burden of this paper is to appeal for greater theological reflection on right and wrong uses of violence—both in the academy, and the pulpit, and the pew.

The argument of this paper does not directly address the question of whether pacifism is right or wrong. (It is not a view I personally hold to, but that is strictly beside the point of the paper.) Rather, the paper argues that, for Christians and churches who move away from pacifism, there is a heavy responsibility on them quickly develop their 'theology of violence' to ensure that the non-pacifist positions adopted by the Christian community come to be Christian non-pacifist positions.

Otherwise they risk allowing their move away from pacifism to become a move away from a faithful Christian approach to violence (possibly a mistaken one, but still faithfully mistaken!), to a grossly sub-Christian approach, that owes more to paganism, that it does to the Prince of Peace. Let's not let that happen. For those of us who do not advocate pacifism, it is our responsibility to ensure we articulate a gospel-centred understanding of the legitimate and illegitimate uses of violence, and to explain how, in extreme cases, the use of force—even lethal force—can be brought to bear in the service of love.

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