

The Ghost of Niebuhr, Part 1

Is “Just War” Just War?

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In the interest of full disclosure I have to begin with an affirmation and a disclaimer of sorts. The affirmation will not be news to most, but for those for whom it is, I think it important. I am a pacifist. By that, I mean to say that I concur with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, Steve Biko, Archbishop Oscar Romero and a host of others, in that I believe that the truth is non-violence and that violence is the lie. That is my personal affirmation. It informs my living and colors my perspective.

Being a pacifist in no way implies sainthood. To be sure there have been times when I harbored violent thoughts and even violent wishes. I can remember a few years ago, dealing with a man whose self-stated sole purpose in life was to prove how much of a pain in the posterior of others he could be. After patiently enduring his presence and persistence pursuing his above stated purpose for several weeks, I found myself wanting to deck him on the front steps of the Peace and Justice Center that we operated here in Bloomington in the years following the Gulf War. I informed him of my desire and of the fact that my religion restrained me from doing so. He must have had little faith in the strength of my religious convictions, because he went away and never returned.

Being a pacifist, it goes without saying that no president, regardless of party affiliation is ever likely to act in a way consistent with my political and philosophical perspective. Whether or not it would be wise for one to do so is debatable, and I respect those whose opinions differ from my own although it seems to me that the impotence of violence to provide long term global solutions and security is becoming more and more obvious every day.

The disclaimer is simply to say that I am not a Niebuhr scholar. I spent much more time with the works of Tillich and Bonhoeffer, and the liberation theologians. There are probably persons in this room more acquainted with Niebuhr's thought than I. Of course, they may also be further along the path of forgetfulness than I am, although I haven't seen any evidence of that.

The title of the sermon does not suggest a deep understanding of Niebuhr but merely alludes to his ghost which began to haunt my thinking as I listened to more than one commentator wax eloquent over President Obama's acceptance speech at the Nobel Awards ceremony in Oslo. I had actually first heard the news of his being so honored while still on Isla Mujeres off the coast of Mexico. Robert Bruha, owner of the small restaurant in the neighborhood where I resided for a few months, made it a point to tell me about it before taking my order for dinner. I can report that most of the people I met on my journey were excited by the fact that we no longer had a cowboy for president, and expressed hope that things might take a better turn in the next few years. I hold tight to that same hope.

I did not get to hear the speech live for some reason, but the first news report of it I heard stated that both Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin praised it as a great speech. I must tell you that I was more than a little anxious about that. I went in search of the text to see if President Obama had declared Alaskan wolves enemy combatants.

As I surfed the channels to hear analysts tell me what I had missed, I was struck by the number of them that called forth the spirit of Reinhold Niebuhr. David Gergen, David Brooks and E.J. Dionne all declared that Obama was grounded in Niebuhr's Christian Realist thought, and was thus on solid ground, far to the right of the left wing crazies whose support had helped sweep him into office by the greatest margin in recent history. However, throughout 2009, polls showed the majority of Americans, not merely the left-wing crazies, were opposed to the war in Afghanistan, although a slight majority supported Obama's handling of the war.

As I think about it, it may very well be a good sign that the name of a serious classical theologian is referenced by talking heads in the major media. We have gotten used to seeing the likes of Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, and other mega-church personalities on Larry King, but it has been a while since anyone has paid attention to the likes of Niebuhr. It is comforting for me to know that the President of the United States took his studies seriously, got more than a degree in partying, and has the intellectual ability to discuss theological questions a little deeper than the water in the baptistery. I actually like the idea that the President of the United States is probably smarter than I am.

Interestingly, the President did not mention the name of Reinhold Niebuhr in his speech. David Brooks reported that during the election campaign, in a telephone interview with Candidate Obama, he interjected a question about Niebuhr, and was surprised at the depth of Obama's knowledge and appreciation for his works, especially the two most quoted works, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, and *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.

Needless to say, we are not going to have the time this week and next to thresh out all the grain in Niebuhr's thought. But let me give you a brief synopsis of how I interpreted Niebuhr over the years. My understanding of Niebuhr has been shaped mostly by the use of his thought by others to bolster the Just War Theory of which he was a proponent.

Niebuhr's acceptance of the Just War theory is indicative of his Augustinian roots. If my memory serves me correctly, it is very close to what Jeroslav Pelikan termed the great Augustinian Detour. In the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo laid the foundations of Medieval Christian thought, the remains of which still support the edifice of orthodox Christian theology in the 21st century. His opus magnum was entitled *City of God*. As I recall, Pelikan's observation was that, with this work, Augustine changed the theological road map, giving the Christian empire an out with regard to the kingdom ethics of Jesus. Simply stated, Augustine determined that the *City of Man* was so tainted by the stain of original sin that the ethics of Jesus were impossible to live. The kingdom ethics of Jesus, that is, the ethics by which those in the kingdom of God are to live, can not apply to the *City of Man* on this temporal plane, but only to the *City of God* which is on an eternal plane. Our participation in the *Eternal City of God* assures us of salvation at the end of time when the eternal will be manifest.

Remember that this was not long after the legitimization of Christianity by Constantine. It should be noted that from the death of Jesus of Nazareth somewhere in the neighborhood of the year 30 of the Common Era, until the early fourth century Christianity was a melting pot of the first nomenclature. There was no orthodoxy, or right belief, to which every Christian was required to ascribe. There was however orthopraxis, right action or right living, and that was determined by the interpretation of the kingdom ethics of Jesus, with non-violence, or pacifism, as the central teaching. There were also ethics with regard to common property, care for the needy, and other imperatives directly related to social relations, right here, right now, on this earthly plane.

The turning point in history, which was to make Augustine's theological construct necessary to the legitimacy of the Roman Church, was the conversion of Constantine, rumored to have taken place at the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 of the Common Era. This entry in Wikipedia describes the event:

“Christian sources record that Constantine experienced a dramatic event in 312 at the [Battle of Milvian Bridge](#), after which Constantine would claim the emperorship in the West. According to these sources, Constantine looked up to the sun before the battle and saw a cross of light above it, and with it the Greek words Ev Tourw Nika (“by this, conquer!”, often rendered in the Latin [in hoc signo vinces](#)); Constantine commanded his troops to adorn their shields with a Christian symbol (the [Chi-Rho](#)) and thereafter they were victorious.”

As Emperor, Constantine was far more worried about establishing orthodoxy than in exploring ethical questions about war and, of course, there were other theological questions that had to be pondered, such as whether or not One plus One plus One equals One, the virginity of the Mother of Jesus, the canon of the Bible and the ecclesiastical structure of the church. After a while questions arose regarding the abandonment of the ethics of Jesus, and Augustine stepped into the breach with his theological construct, the City of God, through which the Blessed Community, the Church, could absolve itself of the contradictions inherent to living in a sinful world, participating in the wars of the empire and still maintaining citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

Given my pacifist perspective on the ethics of the kingdom as represented in the teachings of Jesus, I have long considered the Milvian bridge as the historical location where the State climbed in bed with the Church, and Augustine’s apologetics as being the legitimization of the Church’s status as mistress of the empire. My sympathies lean toward the remnant of Christianity which has maintained the radical ethics of Jesus with regard to violence.

Niebuhr’s primary works accept this Augustinian detour as the realist ethic for living with the implications of original sin which Niebuhr stated was the only verifiable doctrine of the Christian religion. The verification was found in the reading of the daily news.

As I began to deal with the Ghost of Niebuhr wandering around my mind long after the images of David Brooks and the others had faded from the screen, I wondered if said ghost might enlighten me. I really wanted to like Niebuhr. He was a champion of the poor and downtrodden, the working class in Detroit, and an opponent of both Henry Ford and the Ku Klux Klan, two of the most powerful forces in Detroit in his day.

I did find reason to believe that Niebuhr and I could agree with regard to modern warfare and, given the historical perspective of the 21st century, that he might very well have moved to the more nuanced just peace position of modern ethicists.

I want to make a plug for the IU library. This wonderful resource is available to all Indiana residents, and there are some weeks of the year when you can actually find a parking place. The problem with books is that they contain far too much information to pack into a twenty minute sermon.

Niebuhr was indeed a cold warrior and his polemic against Stalin’s Russia and the post war Soviet State colored much of his thinking in the 1940’s and 50’s. Yet I was surprised at the prescience of his thinking with regard to the danger of empires. I found a new book published in 2007 entitled *Empire—The Christian Tradition*. *New Readings of Classical Theologians*, edited by Compier, Pui-Lan and Rieger.

The chapter on Reinhold Niebuhr was written by Larry Rasmussen, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Emeritus of Social Ethics, Union Seminary, New York City. After reading his chapter I was so excited I decided to find out if he was still around, and thanks to the wonder of the ethernet, I found a phone number for a Larry Rasmussen in Sante Fe, New Mexico. I also found out that he had just completed a course in master gardening. I dialed the number, asked for Larry Rasmussen and sure enough he came to the phone. After confirming that he was indeed the professor I was seeking, I had the pleasure of a good long conversation about Niebuhr.

By the way, he was absolutely thrilled that someone had actually read his work and wanted to talk about it. He stated that it was a very rare occurrence and thanked me profusely for taking the time to do so. I thanked him profusely for throwing me a rope as I was floundering around looking for a place to latch onto Niebuhr.

Rasmussen points to two late works of Niebuhr that speak directly to empire: *The Irony of American History* (1952), and *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (1959, reprinted in 1962). And he also cites a very early piece by Niebuhr published in 1930 in *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled "Awkward Imperialists."

Niebuhr's perspective on the nature of empire reflected his understanding of human nature and history. Niebuhr believed that the communities of humanity are "subject to endless varieties and progression." (*Empire*, Rasmussen, p.373) Humankind is a "history-making social species" and nothing is static. The status quo is an illusion. Freedom will always triumph over structure and thus one of the infallible rules of empire is that they fall. For Niebuhr there exists no righteous social order blessed by God. (*Ibid*)

Niebuhr stood clearly on the side of the United States in the Cold War and yet warned against the risks inherent in both empirical structures.

"He foresaw a certain danger, no matter who emerged victorious. (Attending to moral differences and eschewing moral equivalence, he ardently hoped it would be the U. S. and worked toward that end.) This again from 1962 (reprint of the *The Irony of American History*): "The victors would... face the 'imperial' problem of using power in global terms but from one particular center of authority, so preponderant and unchallenged that its world rule would almost certainly violate basic standards of justice." (Rasmussen, p.376)

Rasmussen continues in parenthesis "(I interject an aside that follows from this: Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, tortuous end runs around international torture, literally unwarranted invasions of citizens' privacy, ideological tests for sorting friends and foes in government itself—none of these would have taken Niebuhr by surprise, whatever anger and outspoken opposition they would have certainly evoked. They confirm his worry that 'basic standards of justice' will 'almost certainly' be violated by those wielding imperial power.)" (Rasmussen, p.376)

As for the description of an imperial power so preponderant and unchallenged, consider the fact that the United States military budget is more than the next 27 countries combined, and we have more than 735 military bases and more than 500,000 soldiers outside of the United States. An aside, we heard in our social justice moment this morning that it is estimated that it will take ten more years to rebuild the homes lost in New Orleans by the devastation of Katrina. Why is it that we can always justify stealing money from our grandchildren to support the military demands of empire, but we have to rely on churches and other nonprofits to subsidize basic needs of the people?

Rasmussen presents seven theses that enlighten Niebuhr's thinking on human community in all forms. I don't have time for all seven, but let me highlight a few.

"There is no ethical force strong enough to place inner checks upon the use of power if its quantity is inordinate." (Rasmussen p.376) Simply put, if you give any person or institution inordinate power, it will be used, ethical standards be damned. There is no collective moral conscience powerful enough to overcome an inordinate quantity of power.

The second thesis logically follows:

"Evil and injustice flow from imbalances of power." (*Ibid*) There is no greater evidence of this than the application of the doctrine of the unitary executive now applied to the office of the President under which the

Commander-in-Chief is free to defy the law with impunity. I believe that evil and injustice will continue to flow from that imbalance until the congress becomes once again an equal branch of government and exercises constitutional restraint on the war making powers of the President and the expenditures of money from the treasury. There is no check on the expenditure of our dollars for the purpose of torture, assassination, black prisons, and the violation of basic standards of justice in the waging of this endless war on terror in which we have become what we deplore.

“Powerful democratic nations frequently suffer from a certain naiveté and self-delusion. They fail to recognize the sure imperialism which flows from disproportions of power between more powerful nations and less powerful, whether domestic polities are democratic or not.” (Ibid p.378)

Rasmussen explains this one as follows: “Indeed the very moral idealism that bolsters the case for democracies often serves not only to justify their imperialism but intensify it. Power operating behind a screen of acclaimed ideal ends is frequently more self-delusory and sometimes more evil in practice than open and cynical defiance of moral ends. This is Niebuhr’s parallel, for politics, of Luther’s remark that oftentimes the curses of the ungodly are more pleasing to God than the alleluias of the pious! (Another aside: George W. Bush perfectly illustrates this naïveté and self delusion when he says straightforwardly that the U. S. mission of global freedom is not imperial and ought not to be viewed by others in that way.)” (Ibid p. 378)

Now, let me finish this morning with a few comments on the President’s speech which gave rise to the Ghost of Niebuhr which I believe reflects some of the same naïveté which Rasmussen found in the pontifications of the previous president. To be sure President Obama’s use of the English language is a breath of fresh air and easy to listen to, and I appreciate the willingness to wrestle with moral issues, and the humility reflected in portions of the speech.

Yet there are glaring instances of naïveté regarding the imperialist forces that have guided both domestic and foreign policies of the United States from the very beginning. I do not expect a President to give a litany of American sins, but I am concerned with idealist claims of piety. President Obama proclaimed that “America has never fought a war against a democracy, and our closest friends are governments that protect the rights of their citizens.” He surely knows better. We have fought illegal, covert wars against several democracies when the democratic vote did not result in an election to our liking, or threatened economic interests of our corporations, and if military aid constitutes a measure of friendship then some of our “closest friends” are among the worst in terms of human rights.

President Obama again: “I believe that all nations—strong and weak alike—must adhere to standards that govern the use of force. I—like any head of state—reserve the right to act unilaterally if necessary to defend my nation. Nevertheless, I am convinced that adhering to standards strengthens those who do and weakens those who don’t.”

Bill Moyers pointed out that just days before going to Oslo, the United States refused once again to sign the international treaty banning land mines. Since 1997, 156 other nations have signed it, including every country in NATO. Last year 5,000 civilians were killed by land mines. We have between 10 and 15 million land mines in our arsenal. I would suggest that the signature of 156 nations represents an international standard, and President Obama must begin to make our practice consistent with his words.

I think Reinhold Niebuhr would call this nation to justice. The fact that he was a proponent of the Just War Theory does not mean that he found all wars just. In fact, he joined many other religious leaders of his day in condemning the Vietnam War. I pray that our President, will reconsider the justness of our present war. Next week I will address the basic principles of Just War Theory and the Afghanistan War in particular.

Suggested Reading for further study:

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (1959), and *The Irony of American History* (1952 and 1962), also *Christian Realism and Political Problems*(1953)

Current resources and perspectives:

Empire—The Christian Tradition Editors Pui-lan, Compier and Rieger 2007 Fortress Press. Larry Rasmussen's chapter on Niebuhr

Other interesting Resources:

Realist Strategies of Republican Peace, by Vibeke, Schou and Tjalve 2008, Palgrave MacMillan, This is a fascinating study of Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau regarding the politics of patriotic dissent.

And I highly recommend Chalmers Johnson's trilogy on the U. S. empire—*Blowback*, *The Sorrows of Empire*, and *Nemesis*

THE GHOST OF NIEBUHR (PART II)
IS "JUST WAR" JUST WAR?
THE FANTASY AND FALLACY OF
CHRISTIAN REALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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(Note: Printed texts are not always *verbatim* in regard to the sermon given on any given Sunday, but they are pretty close—Reverend Breeden)

Last week I attempted to give some insight into the thinking of Reinhold Niebuhr with regard to the Just War Theory, the roots of which go back to the fifth century theological construct of St. Augustine of Hippo. From those roots there arose a great tree of Christian apologetics for war, the shade of which covered everything from the medieval Crusades to the decimation and subjugation of indigenous populations in Africa, Asia and the Americas by the Colonial Empires of Europe and Britain.

The same apologetics under the guise of Manifest Destiny provided cover for the original sins of our own nation as we “civilized the savages” by means of genocidal policies, and expropriated the northern half of Mexico. Victory became synonymous with the stamp of Divine approval, the validation of the justness of the cause. American historian Henry Steele Commager described the 19th century as one in which “religion prospered and theology went bankrupt.” With regard to the American church’s relation to the empire it is an apt description, but the moral bankruptcy was surely not unique to that century.

The writing of this sermon was interrupted by more than one person asking if I was going to address the role of the American empire in the history of Haiti. I don’t have time to explore it fully, but even a cursory glance at the history of this most impoverished country in the western hemisphere reveals a moral indebtedness of which \$100 million, President Obama’s current pledge to Haiti’s recovery efforts, does not even cover the interest. The \$100 million seem even more anemic juxtaposed to the \$30 billion extra funding requested for the war in Afghanistan.

From its independence in 1803 to the present, Haiti has been kept in economic bondage by policies first of France and then from the latter part of the 19th century by those of the United States.

We invaded Haiti in 1915 and occupied it militarily for nineteen years during which we introduced aerial bombing and created the Haitian Army which, under the heavy hand of the United States, supported years of ruthless dictatorship and implemented chronic instability, repression, and conditions of extreme poverty to this day. The CIA has been implicated in the coup that ousted the elected President Aristide in 1991. The Clinton administration tried to amend the situation by reinstating Aristide in 1994. A mere seven weeks after his return, the Republican majority in Congress lead by Senator Jesse Helms blocked aid and loans that might have given Haiti a chance to succeed. The loans, totaling some \$146 million, were specifically designated for education, health care, water purification and infrastructure. Because of the obstructionism of the United States, Haiti received only \$4 million. In 2004 Aristide was forced from power, kidnapped and taken to the Central African Republic. Haiti’s international debts amount to more than \$1.1 billion while their national budget is only around \$300 million. Forty percent of Haiti’s debt was incurred by the Duvalier dictators and thus, by international law, should be considered “odious debt,” the payment of which should not be required.

For a more complete analysis I refer you to an article by Paul Farmer in the London Review of Books, April 15, 2004. (<http://www.lrb.co.uk:80/v26/n08/paul-farmer/who-removed-aristide>)

Now before I specifically address the Just War Theory with regard to the war in Afghanistan, I want to return to Niebuhr for just a moment.

One of the seven theses provided by Larry Rasmussen crucial to Niebuhrian thought is this:

“Religion normally intensifies power dynamics. Religious humility tends to check the headstrong exercise of power and hold it accountable to standards beyond itself. It recognizes that we are judged by transcendent standards not of our own making and that we belong to a community of responsibility and accountability which doesn’t begin and end with our own ego and will, even our own collective ego and will. On the other hand, religious pride tends to foster extremism, fanaticism, and absolutism...”

“This note on religion is important to imperial politics for two reasons. First, it means that politically conservative religious culture can powerfully bolster nationalist movements to unify society as a collective ‘we’ vis-à-vis a threatening ‘they.’ Leaders sense this keenly, so now and again they attach divine sanction to their missions, sometimes opportunistically, sometimes with genuine conviction. Second, the play of religion and power also means that jihad and crusade

may easily come to mirror one another. When the liberation cause of empire is conceived of as religiously pure and driven in a classic battle of good versus evil, all means are justified and even, given status in a divine mission.” (*Empire—The Christian Tradition. New Readings of Classical Theologians*, Rasmussen p. 378f)

That phrase, “jihad and crusade may easily come to mirror one another” brought to mind the words of Indian author Arundhati Roy.

“Who is Osama bin Laden really? Let me rephrase that. What is Osama bin Laden? He’s America’s family secret. He is the American president’s dark Doppelganger. The savage twin of all that purports to be beautiful and civilized. He has been sculpted from the spare rib of a world laid to waste by America’s foreign policy: its gunboat diplomacy, its nuclear arsenal, its vulgarly stated policy of ‘full spectrum dominance,’ its chilling disregard for non-American lives, its barbarous military interventions, its support for despotic and dictatorial regimes, its merciless economic agenda that has munched through the economies of poor countries like a cloud of locusts...Now that the family secret has been spilled, the twins are blurring into one another and gradually becoming interchangeable.” (Nemesis, Chalmers Johnson, Prologue)

In terms of “twins blurring into one another and gradually becoming interchangeable,” there is no greater example than interchangeability of *Jihad* and *Crusade*, and I believe that there is certainly reason for the world to believe that the United States Empire is waging a crusade. During the Christmas season I was home and took a few moments one day to channel surf. For some reason the surfing landed me on a Fox news channel and I found myself zipping down the seemingly endless wave of insanity that is called the Glen Beck Show.

I started to move on, but was caught by a scene of a group of soldiers in Afghanistan speaking to their loved ones at home, and I decided to listen. I was touched by the love they shared with their families back home and their hopes to return to them. I found myself wishing them good will and hoping for their safe return home. The last one to speak was the commanding officer of the troops. His closing words I found chilling. He said, “I want to remind all Americans that we are here sacrificing ourselves for our country in the same way that Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior sacrificed himself for us.” Such statements, accompanied by incidents of tanks going into battle with “Christ kills Mohammed” painted on them, or military rifle scopes with New Testament scripture references engraved on the them, and many other incidents in this war on terror where fundamentalist Christianity has been touted as the motivating power behind our forces, simply stoke the fires of fear, hatred and war.

There ain’t a nickel’s worth of difference between a jihad and a crusade, and many people, both military and civilian, have raised concerns about the growing influence of fanatical right-wing Christianity among the line officers corps of our military services.

Now, let me give you a concise listing of the principle of the modern Just War Theory. You can find many of these lists with slight variations, but I think these are sufficient.

Principles of the Just War

A just war can only be waged as a last resort. All non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified.

I remember the days after 9/11. I am sure we all do. The world community, including most of the Muslim world was united by the shock of that horrendous day. I also remember the cover of the next *New Yorker* magazine following that attack. It depicted U.S. Air Force B-52's dropping loaves of bread on Afghanistan. I heard an interview with the artist who drew that cover. He said that he could not help but wonder what would happen if the United States responded with a concerted effort to feed the people of Afghanistan.

September 11, 2001, might well have provided our nation an opportunity to win the hearts and minds of the world.

Certainly there were other options than war. The Taliban offered to turn over Osama Bin Laden to be tried by a third country. We refused to even consider the option. The September 11 attack was a criminal act by a rogue bunch of fanatics with no army, no nation and representing a very small element of the Muslim world. We chose war and have multiplied our enemies exponentially. To suggest that we have gone to war as a last resort is an absurdity, and as Voltaire once declared, "He that has the power to make you believe absurdities has the power to make you commit atrocities."

A war is just only if it is waged by a legitimate authority. Even just causes cannot be served by actions taken by individuals or groups who do not constitute an authority sanctioned by whatever the society and outsiders to the society deem legitimate.

Although I would debate whether the War Powers Act fulfills the constitutional duty of Congress alone to declare war, I will not argue the point. However there is something different going on in this war than in any other war in our history. A major portion of this war is being waged by those with no legitimate authority and no accountability—forces not sanctioned by our society nor recognized by the international community.

I am speaking of the mercenary soldiers who are paid enormous salaries as hired killers. Blackwater International soldiers have murdered civilians and are not subject either to the military code of justice or to the laws of the countries in which they commit the crimes. I believe the name of the corporation has been changed to XE Services because the atrocities committed were catching up with the name.

A recent veteran returning from Iraq, the son of a truck driver who works for my brother, was offered \$200,000 a year to quit the United States Army and go to work for XE Services. He refused, saying, "I serve my country, not a corporation."

These mercenary soldiers are being used not only to assassinate so-called enemies, but also to designate targets for our drones. They have no legitimate authority. If this war is just, it should be waged by the legitimate military services of our country and not corporations whose vested interests conflict with the goal of peace.

A war can only be just if it is fought with a reasonable chance of success. Deaths and injury incurred in a hopeless cause are not morally justifiable.

Obviously there is room for disagreement here. President Obama seems to think that success is a reasonable expectation. I could not disagree more. I do not see any precedent for victory in this type of war, especially in Afghanistan. We have the most expensive weaponry in the world, and every time we use it, we increase their recruitment. Inordinate force leads to impotency. We are trying to use 21st Century technology to bomb a 17th Century tribal culture into a 20th Century style democracy. There is nothing realist about this war, nothing pragmatic.

I found a recent report on WFIU radio by Doug Wissing to be very enlightening. Doug was in Afghanistan with the Indiana National Guard. The team was an agriculture team sent to teach the Afghans better agriculture practices. They were escorted to a village by attack helicopters only to learn that the village had been attacked the night before and two young men had been killed. The elders of the village claimed the men were innocent. The tape recording of the interpreter reporting the words of the village elders was chilling to hear. They said to the agriculture experts, "We really don't need anything from you guys—no training, no nothing...In the day time you guys give us something, in the night time the Coalition forces is (sic) coming and killing innocent people. That is why we are sad with Coalition forces. We don't want anything from Coalition forces." (Go to WFIU website and listen to podcasts of Doug's reporting entitled "Cultivating Afghanistan.")

As referenced earlier, President Obama just asked for \$30 billion extra money for this war. It is estimated that we are spending \$1 million a year for each soldier in Afghanistan. The Pentagon recently reported that it cost \$400 to put a gallon of gas in a Humvee in Afghanistan. \$400 a gallon in a vehicle that gets less than 5 miles per gallon!!! They expect it could go over \$1,000 a gallon by the end of the year. In what Alice in Wonderland world can you win a war with those kinds of costs? The only winners are the corporations we are paying to fuel our Humvees.

The cost of each hellfire missile is approximately \$68,000. We have used over 3,000 of them thus far which comes out to \$204 million for a weapon which has been responsible for untold civilian deaths, and is being targeted by paid mercenaries.

The present cost of the war is \$3.5 billion dollars a month. How many schools, how many hospitals, how many water treatment facilities could we build for the children of the world? Moral issues aside, the economics of this war exposes the fantasy of winning.

The ultimate goal of a just war is to re-establish peace. More specifically, the peace established after the war must be preferable to the peace that would have prevailed if the war had not been fought.

What kind of peace will there be? We will have spent our grandchildren's money destroying a country. Where will we find the money to rebuild it? We cannot afford to build up the world and destroy it at the same time.

The violence used in the war must be proportional to the injury suffered. States are prohibited from using force not necessary to attain the limited objective of addressing the injury suffered.

Surely there is no question that the standard of proportionality has been grossly violated. That is why the Pentagon refuses to do body counts, or at least refuses to report them. The civilian death toll of our current wars on terror will be on the scale of genocide.

The weapons used in war must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants. Civilians are never permissible targets of war, and every effort must be taken to avoid killing civilians. The deaths of civilians are justified only if they are unavoidable victims of a deliberate attack on a military target.

During the Shock and Awe campaign in the Iraq War, there was a standard requirement that anytime an airstrike risked the deaths of more than 30 civilians, it had to be approved by the Secretary of Defense. There were fifty such requests, and every one was approved. (Nemesis by Chalmers Johnson, p. 33)

It is my belief that modern warfare renders this standard meaningless. As my logic professor used to say, "Breedon, your argument just died the death of a thousand qualifications." The arguments for Just War die in similar fashion.

The millions of civilians who have died in the wars of the last century cry out for an end.

I believe that Niebuhr, who opposed the war in Vietnam, would find this present war to be unjust. I hope that President Obama will reconsider his decision to wage this endless war. I hope he will listen to the words of another voice who found in Niebuhr an inspiration to stand for justice.

Listen to the words of Martin Luther King Jr.:

"A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of spiritual uplift is approaching spiritual death.....Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust mores and thereby speed the day when 'every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain.'" Martin Luther King Jr. *A Time to Break the Silence*, (a speech given to a meeting of Clergy and Laity Concerned at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, exactly one year before his assassination.)

I have been reading history for a long time, and I have yet to find an example of a president, or even a dictator who has declared an "Unjust War."

Finally, I want to be clear. In my opinion, the principles of the Just War Theory render this war, and for that matter, any conceivable war in this new century, as anything but just. Furthermore, so-called Christian Realism, in so far as it justifies modern warfare, is a contradiction in terms. It is not Christian and it is not realistic. It is fantasy and fallacy.

In our tradition, there is no requirement to agree with the proclamations of the minister, but I am sure that you will give them thoughtful consideration. May you go in peace.

Suggested Reading for further study:

Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Structure of Nations and Empires* (1959), and *The Irony of American History* (1952 and 1962), also *Christian Realism and Political Problems*(1953)

Current resources and perspectives:

Empire—The Christian Tradition Editors Pui-lan, Compier and Rieger 2007 Fortress Press. Larry Rasmussen's chapter on Niebuhr

Other interesting Resources:

Realist Strategies of Republican Peace, by Vibeke, Schou and Tjalve 2008, Palgrave MacMillan, This is a fascinating study of Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau regarding the politics of patriotic dissent.

And I highly recommend Chalmers Johnson's trilogy on the U. S. empire—*Blowback, The Sorrows of Empire, and Nemesis*