

## When is it More than Just Self-Defence?

### I. The Modern Christian War Ethic

Because of these duties that we have even as Christians, we cannot rule out Christian participation in war.

#### A. When should we fight?

The Bible sets some clear limits as to how we can participate in war and support our government. This is how conservative Lutherans apply the appropriate Scriptural principles:

1. The responsibility of taking up arms against other human beings, either as part of a police force or of a military establishment is to be carried out without hatred of one's fellowman, for such animosity and anger constitute the most serious violations of the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." (Matthew 5:21-22)
2. The word used in this commandment for "killing" is one that implies malice and hatred. It is nowhere used in the Old Testament for taking life in battle. This would suggest that the tragic task of taking up arms for combat under orders from legitimate authority is not in itself a violation of the fifth commandment.
3. The destructive potential of modern weaponry and the impersonality of contemporary techniques of warfare lay upon the Christian citizen the special burden of reminding himself and others that human life is a sacred trust from man's Creator and that the temptation to rely on and resort to the kind of massive violence made possible by those inventions has introduced into the human situation a new factor of incalculable moral magnitude. It is therefore imperative for him to work together with all men of good will for the responsible limitation of armaments, the eradication of sources of conflict, and an aggressive interest in the preservation and expansion of the conditions of peace.

#### B. When should you fight?

The whole issue of whether or not it is right to fight a particular war has been left up to the individual Christian in Lutheran practise. Luther wrote, "*Everyone must carefully examine for himself whether a war is justified or not. Here the conscience of the individual must decide; he cannot permit the State or the Church or any man made agency to make that decision for him.*"

If the war is unjust, according to Scriptural principles, then the Christian must refuse to fight. (Acts 5:29) If the war is valid, then the Christian must do his duty.

#### C. The Marks of a "Just War"

What makes a war one that a country has the right to fight? These are the conditions that must be met:

1. Is the war being fought under legitimate authority?
2. Is it being conducted in the framework of international agreements?
3. Is it being waged in the interest of vindicating some obvious right that has suffered outrage? (i.e. self defence or the defence of an otherwise helpless neighbour or ally?)
4. Have all peaceful means of achieving a settlement been exhausted?
5. Is the destruction incurred excessive in terms of the goals to be achieved?
6. Is it being waged with good intentions, or has it been undertaken for purposes of aggression?
7. Will the results achieved by engaging in hostilities provide greater opportunity for justice and freedom to prevail than if such a war had not been entered into?

### II. What Information can you Trust?

This brings us to the most difficult question of all. There is a well-known phrase, "History is written by the Victor". Not only is that the case, public opinion is formed by the people who have access to the media.

The question, then, is how do you get balanced information when examples from the past necessarily come from the perspective of people who have something to gain from interpreting history that way, and when information given in the present also comes out of the perspective of those who allow the information to be shared?

### A. The "One Truth Only" Claim

When it comes to the Word of God, it is perfectly appropriate to work from the starting point that the Bible is true and what it clearly teaches is clearly the truth. That concept is actually the very starting point of Christian faith.

John 8:42-47 What enables us to recognize the truth of God's Word?

However, when it comes to anything outside of God's Word, there is no such thing as one way to see the truth. All perspectives of opinion and science and history start from our sinful nature. As a result, we can only talk about a "best answer", and not an "only answer". From our perspective, the "best answer" least contradicts the Word of God.

1. *Beware of people who use their version of history as a way of justifying the things they are doing in the present.*

See Isaiah 28:15-17.

- a. Why would Isaiah call lies a refuge?
- b. What is God's solution to this problem?

You know that the refuge of lies is the underlying problem when some historical or scientific fact cannot be

challenged without a threat of persecution toward the challenger. For example, people who challenge the current secular doctrines of origins, or global warming can face a loss of social status. People who publically challenge the "established facts" of the holocaust risk prison terms.

2. *Beware anyone who refuses free and open debate among equals.*

- a. Isaiah 5:20 What is one reason why a person would want to avoid open debate?
- b. Matthew 10:27 What is the appropriate way to deal with the truth?
- c. 1 John 4:1 Why is it important to be able to test any claims that are being made?

3. *Beware of people who tells others what they want to hear.*

- a. Ezekiel 13:10-16  
Why were the prophets preaching peace?

What danger did their willingness to tell the people what they wanted to hear bring about?

- b. Jeremiah 9:3-4 How far does habitual lying go?

Jesus said that there would be wars and rumours of wars before the end. He said that the evils of the world would increase and tragedy will follow upon tragedy as we approach the End Times. But He said something else. He said that even the gates of Hell cannot prevail against His Church. (Matthew 16:18) His Church will stand until Jesus comes again in glory to judge both the living and the dead!