1

The Problem: How to Think as Christians about War and Peace

It is fun and inspiring to sing, "Ain't gonna study war no more!" Regrettably it is no kind of guidance for Christian responsibility in the world. Christians are called to work for peace. To do that they must "study war"—not in order to make war, but to find out why it occurs and to learn how to bring its motives and energies under control. But first of all, to study war and peace they must discern the contours of reality disclosed by their Christian faith, and with that theological understanding begin to investigate the demands and challenges of war and the promises of peace. Note the order: First, establish the theological method and context. Second, armed with that knowledge make the inquiry into the political setting and historical occasion of war. That combination will constitute the study of war—and demonstrate the paths to and prospects for peace.

A study of that sort was the idea supporting an international, indeed intercontinental, conference titled "Theology, Politics, and Peace," held at Emory University and the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, Georgia, in April 1988. The focus of the conference was a critical interaction among three Christian approaches to political understanding and peacemaking, each of them highly influential, and each originating on a different continent. Professor Jürgen Moltmann represented German political theology, Professor José Míguez Bonino spoke for Latin American liberation theology, and I was asked to interpret the American tradition of Christian Realism in relation to the other two positions.[1]

---

1. The three addresses, along with numerous other submissions, were published in Runyon, *Theology, Politics, and Peace*. My address is titled "Christian Realism, Power, and Peace," 55–76.

The choice of political theology and liberation theology, and of their two representatives, was self-evident, given the contemporary prominence and influence both of the movements themselves and of their eminent and distinguished spokespersons. The inclusion of the American tradition of Christian Realism in a conversation with German political theology and Latin American liberation theology raised some eyebrows, mainly because many adherents of these other positions see it—whether rightly or wrongly—as an ideological defender of the entrenched powers of which they are strenuous critics. For them, Reinhold Niebuhr is more likely the enemy than a theological ally. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this third position required no justification. Niebuhr's Christian Realism directly and substantively engages the problems of war and peacemaking, and does so from a Christian theological stance. It is an older theopolitical tradition than the other two. Míguez Bonino studied at Union Theological Seminary in New York when Reinhold Niebuhr was a faculty member there, and Moltmann reported that the first book he read of (what he called) "dogmatic theology" was Niebuhr's *Nature and Destiny of Man*.[2] Niebuhrian realism continues as a potent intellectual and political force even today. Presidents Carter and Obama, among many others prominent in American politics and journalism, have been and are readers of Niebuhr. Theologians with profound objections to some aspects of Niebuhr's thought find that they must wrestle with him, and not simply ignore him. Hence the necessity and authenticity of including Christian Realism in the conversation.[3]

2. Moltmann's recollection was offered in personal conversations and public settings, as well as in published statements. When I asked him to say more about his early reading of Niebuhr, he replied, "But I've forgotten that." I doubt it, although Niebuhr certainly was not formative for his thinking.

3. My own role as the position's spokesperson required some qualification. In my opening remarks I noted that I stood in quite a different relation to the position I was representing from the other two speakers. Both of them were prominent originators of their theological traditions, who not only represented their theologies but shaped them as they spoke. By contrast, I had entered the theological culture of Christian Realism after it had been originated by Reinhold Niebuhr and been developed by him and by others, including Paul Ramsey. I saw myself as a "later generation" entry, one who was old enough to have heard Niebuhr preach and lecture, had for several decades taught a course titled "The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr," and was a friend (but not a disciple) of Paul Ramsey, but who engaged Christian Realism mainly by reflecting and improvising on what the creative predecessors had done. In other words, I did not have the same authority of representing a theological tradition as did my two distinguished colleagues. Nor could I consider myself a "Christian Realist" in an exclusive and definitive sense. I was convinced, for the most part, by Niebuhr's understanding of the ambiguity of human

However, this book is not a defense of Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism, nor is it a continuing analysis and critique of the other positions represented. It is an exploration of the theology of reconciliation, showing how even war, with its massive destruction and unrelenting cruelty, is a proper object of reconciling ministry, and how the theology itself is developed and illuminated by this engagement. It expounds and demonstrates a particular Christian theological stance. It includes also a substantive investigation of the political context of war, of power as substantial and relational, of peace as an organization of power, of the historic transition from a European state system to a genuinely *international* system. As I stated earlier, first the theology, then the political analysis, with both essential in combination in any Christian thinking about war and peace. In these respects it remains within the purpose of the conference, which was to consider the interrelationships of theology, politics, and peace.

Preliminary Observations on Reconciliation

In a subsequent chapter I shall explore the meanings of reconciliation more fully. Here I want to offer some preliminary thoughts on what it is and is not. Reconciliation in the fundamental theological sense employed in this book is God's work—the movement of divine grace through history, engaging all the aspects of brokenness and promise, and reaching its climax of fulfillment and disclosure in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the renewal of the fallen creation according to its original divine intention, the recovery of the human purpose of imaging God in caring for God's creation, and of working cooperatively in doing so. With this grand coverage it includes the conflicts of nations, which are aspects of the fallen creation and manifestations of its disruption.

Reconciliation, explained thusly, is in its initiative and history God's work, not primarily and essentially a human work. Nevertheless, it is also—and in consequence—a human work. Just as human beings were created by God to "care for the garden," so too are they called by God to share in the work of recovering and renewing the same garden disrupted and spoiled by

---

nature, the limits of historical expectation, the necessity for love to seek justice for the neighbor and to use power in doing so, and the fragmentary character and tentativity of any concrete achievements of justice. However, my approach was and is more directly christological than Niebuhr's, and my method of thinking about life in general and politics in particular is more inferential from the reconciling history of the work of God.

human sin. The special work of Christians is to disclose the existence and the power of this process, and to share in it. In point of faith, they know that in following their calling they are grounded and guided in this gracious history of God. Just what kind and degree of reconciliation they can achieve are problems to be worked through in this book.

At this point, let us attempt some further clarifications. First, reconciliation is a corporate concept before it is an individualistic or interpersonal concept. Primarily that is because God's work of healing and recovery is for the whole of the fallen creation, not just for individual persons or their fractured relationships. In both its divine and human dimensions it is a community-building enterprise, striving toward the realization of what Martin Luther King Jr. called "the beloved community." But also it recognizes the social nature of human beings—they are persons emergent and embedded in social institutions and groups, and often defined by them. Those who reach out to each other from divergent social locations never are fully empowered to be reconciled until the effects of these societal barriers are overcome. Hence the necessity of defining reconciliation primarily (but not exclusively) in terms of societal transformation and inclusiveness.

Second, theologically guided reconciliation is a matter of contextual discernment, not of method. Methods of encounter and transformation certainly are important, but they are not fundamental to the vocation of reconciliation. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990 and threatened Saudi Arabia, the United States and its gathered allies made plans to expel the Iraqis by military force. At that time, a group of persons of Christian inspiration offered a counterproposal: "Let us try reconciliation," they urged, "not war." I had serious doubts as to the adequacy of their political analysis, but I was troubled even more by their theology. Their proposal was to *try reconciliation*, which implied that reconciliation is a technique or procedure—presumably nonviolent—that holds unusual promise of greater effectiveness in resolving the conflict in a truly constructive and healing manner, but is not yet recognized for its relevance to the problem being addressed by material and damaging forms of power. Viewed thusly, reconciliation is a sometime thing, a religious "specialty," left out of usual deliberations and brought in only when things get really bad—and seem probably hopeless. Moreover, given this understanding, it is the specifically *Christian* way to engage the threatening and destructive realities of war.

I contend, however, for the relationship of reconciliation to war as that of a context of discernment, not that of a special and superior method of

resolution. The context is the comprehensive working of divine grace to overcome the disruptions in human society, and especially the disruptive, destructive, and idolatrous phenomenon of military struggle. What is discerned in the primary sense is the working of grace to set the struggle on the road to healing and wholeness—to the recovery of human reality as the divine image and of human vocation in a corporate sense as the common stewardship of the earth. This discernment of grace discloses the ways in which political analysis and reorganization serve the divine purposes, however meagerly and reluctantly. And yet the very same discernment in the context of grace discloses that human efforts toward peace, though important and helpful, always fall short of the divine plan and expectation. The maximum human beings can achieve in their temporal work of reconciliation is to develop a society in which the members are relatively free to be vulnerable. That is a lot, but it is much less than the kingdom of God, and it is much more fragile.

Third, reconciliation in international conflict, as in other arenas, is a process, not a goal. The setting of particular goals often is important and necessary, but to define reconciliation as an end-goal, an ideal relegated to a far-off future, makes it something that can be set aside as remote and irrelevant. Reconciliation is a present and a constant activity, something to be worked at in every moment and situation. It is a call to enter a process, to transcend immediate realities of alienation, and to do so in response to the grace of God pressing toward wholeness. It is the work at hand. This work will be a demand of grace so long as sin is present in human experience.

Other Possible Approaches

My decision to focus on the reconciling work of God as the governing concept in this process of thinking about war means that I have not chosen some other approaches that are prominent, and at times dominant, in this kind of discussion.

Renouncing Violence, and "Following Jesus"

Specifically, I have not made renunciation of violence the touchstone for Christian thinking about war. When viewed in the context of the history of gracious renewal, violence is something to be subdued and controlled, not something simply to be renounced. Implicit in what I have said is a

decidedly negative attitude toward violence, because it is prime evidence of the disruption of the divine plan; however, one should not therefore abstract it from the total fabric of ruination and resistance with which divine reconciliation must work. The starting point for Christian thinking about war is the work of God in bringing the fallen creation to the realization of wholeness, healing, and development. How to deal with violence falls within the context of that work, but it is not the starting point for faith and action. With regard to nonviolent resistance or direct action, there are times when that commitment is the correct situational expression of Christian vocation, but it is not the definition of Christian response as such.

The decision to renounce violence on principle follows often from the decision to make "following Jesus" the basis for Christian discipleship generally and war-thinking in particular.[4] In no way do I dismiss the authority and relevance of the Jesus of the Gospels. Much of what Jesus did and said are timeless directives for the message and activity of the church. Jesus is Lord and Savior. The fundamental theological relevance of Jesus of Nazareth is that he is both climax and essential instrument of the plan of God to redeem and revitalize the fallen creation—that is the christological construal of "following Jesus." It is not his role as moral teacher or his statements or stance on any given issue, or even his nonviolent acceptance of the cross. What is the plan of God, and what is the role of Jesus in the plan? That is the primary focus for Christian understanding—not his attitudes toward violence.

The immediate difficulty in "following Jesus" with regard to violence and related matters is that the political situation confronting him was not war but rebellion and revolution. The Gospel setting is the prospect of replacing Roman rule with the kingdom of God. The Zealots are prepared and eager to use violence to effect the transformation, and expect fully that they will receive divine assistance. In that setting Jesus rejects the use of violence emphatically, because the purpose of using it then and there was to bring in the kingdom of God. In his view, the kingdom will come in God's own time and by God's efforts. It cannot be established by violent

---

4. A popular approach to guidance for Christian action on tough questions is to ask, "What would Jesus do?" The implication is that Jesus is a non-historical sage who can be lifted out of his own context and expected to speak authoritatively to problems he could not have imagined. If we are going to ask what would Jesus do about basic issues of contemporary international politics, we must lift him out of his own Roman-Jewish situation and plop him down in the office of president or secretary of State. That would be more than a minor exercise in historical wrenching and messianic transformation.

men using violent methods. That is the historical context in which Jesus addresses the issue of violence. He does not deal with the issue in general and abstractly.

His rejection of violent means is applicable to war, but specifically to those wars that are put forth as means to redeem history by military conquest, that is, to establish a secular (or religious) equivalent of the kingdom of God. Violence will not bring in God's kingdom. At best, it will rearrange the material conditions of human society. Perhaps the rearrangement will improve things, but no political reordering—especially any engineered with military force—will bring a messianic end to the internal contradictions of human history.

However, if war is an instrument in the divine work of preservation in a world wracked by sin, it has a different rationale. In that case one must raise the basic questions of justification for war. But even those questions are to be addressed within the history of the divine work of redemption, and not as problems of following Jesus. The fundamental concern in redemptive history is neither the flat rejection of uses of coercive force nor their legitimation, but the recognition that uses of force are present and active in a fallen world and must be brought increasingly under the control of disciplines of consenting and authorizing community. They serve God's purposes of preserving the fallen creation in the course of the history of reconciliation, or they do not serve it at all. One cannot explain that history or enter it without attending fully to the expectations of following Jesus, but the history itself is the theological context for understanding war.

Much more formidable arguments in favor of pacifism, that is, rejection of violence, are those put forth by Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder. What makes them so substantial is that they are grounded in essential theological foundations, in the nature and ways of God, and not in the first instance in a principled rejection of violence. Hauerwas writes that "pacifism is not first of all a prohibition, but an affirmation that God wills to rule his creation not through violence and coercion but by love. . . . Pacifism is the form of life that is inherent in the shape of Christian convictions about God and his relation to us."[5] The first point here pertains to how God rules his creation, namely, by love. That is true in the ultimate sense, in that the love of God wills a new creation through renewal and reconciliation. In the instrumental sense, however, the Bible makes clear that God rules also through divine wrath, reproach, and judgment, and through particular

5. Hauerwas, "Pacifism: Some Philosophical Considerations," 99.

nations as the "rod of the Lord" chastising the people of God. Any of these may be ways of expressing divine love, but they are not inherently nonviolent. The second point has to do with the shape of the Christian life. To that one must reply that it is shaped by the vocation to enter and engage God's work of reconciling the fallen creation. As I shall show in what follows, the process of reconciliation presupposes God's preservation of what has rebelled against God. Preservation involves uses of power, and power includes an element of coercion.

In *The Politics of Jesus*, John Yoder wrote,

> If what we have said about the honor due the Lamb makes any sense, then what is usually called "Christian pacifism" is most adequately understood not on the level of means alone, as if the pacifist were making the claim that he can achieve what war promises to achieve, but do it just as well or even better without violence. This is one kind of pacifism, which in some contexts may be clearly able to prove its point, but not necessarily always. That Christian pacifism which has a theological basis in the character of God and the work of Jesus Christ is one in which the calculating link between our obedience and ultimate efficacy has been broken, since the triumph of God comes through resurrection and not through effective sovereignty or assured survival.[6]

Here Yoder is contrasting a type of pacifism that promises positive results with one that is grounded solely on obedience to the call of God to follow the way of Christ even to the cross. As to the former he says, maybe it will work, maybe not. But the latter is what is meant by Christian pacifism: be obedient to the call, and hope for redemption only through the resurrection. That is a powerful argument. Certainly he is correct in his decision between the two types. The question from my side is whether the call of God essentially is to be obedient to the nonviolent way, or whether it is to enter the divine work of reconciling the fallen creation. If the latter is right, which I believe to be the case, then the requirements of a reconciling ministry define the content of obedience.

War, Sin, and the "Order of Preservation"

Theological thinking about war must involve the whole history of redemptive grace, not one aspect of the story only, and specifically not only or

---

6. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 246.

even primarily sin and its effects. Obviously such thinking must take direct notice of sin, but always in the context of the history of grace, and not as the dimension of human failure that creates its own theological context. That is, the history of redemptive grace including and overcoming sin is the context for theological thinking about war—not the history of sin itself. Nevertheless, the connection between war and sin is so intimate and powerful that it tends to compel theological inquiry to take its departure from the connection, which then also shapes the content of the theology.

The Lutheran tradition divides the forms of divine intervention into three "orders": creation, preservation, redemption. The *order of preservation* is the context for thinking theologically about war, because preservation is the divine intention and mode of intervention to protect what God has created against the worst consequences of the fall into sin. This activity of divine presence is manifest institutionally in the state, which serves the cause of preservation by turning the effects and energies of sin against themselves, for the purpose of maintaining order at home and defending people and territory against attacks from outside. In the latter case it conducts war, and does so, when justified, as an instrument of preservation against the effects of sin.[7]

There are important affirmations in this view, in addition to its commitment to give serious and fundamental attention to the reality of sin. One is that state and war are not present in the original divine plan, and therefore are not elements in the order of creation. The other is that the state is not a redemptive institution, has no presence in the fullness of the kingdom of God, and therefore is not of the order of redemption. The state and its instrument of war serve the order of redemption by maintaining the fallen creation in existence, and by holding it open for the proclamation of the Gospel.

I agree with these theological affirmations, but I do not see that they make the case for concentrating theological inquiry into war in the so-called order of preservation. The state as an institution of the fall is not present in original creation; nevertheless, there is an ordering of power in the original plan of God that is not simply replaced by the state. The organic elements of power both come to expression in the state and seek to give it normative direction. The state, as I have said, is not itself a redemptive institution; it must not be allowed to usurp the role and functions of the church.

7. For a recent and very prominent Lutheran interpretation of the state and war, see Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 2, *Politics*.

But the redemptive activity of God embraces even the state and war, and strives by grace to discipline the violence of the former to the consent and authority of developing community, and to move the latter toward more complete achievements of the prospects for peace. This redemptive activity is manifest most completely in the history of grace, which therefore is the necessary starting point for theological thinking about war.

The Just War (or Justified War) Ethic

The just war ethic is another frequent starting point for Christian thinking about war.[8] The case for it usually is that states will in fact fight wars, and in light of that inexorable tendency the morally responsible—and indeed the theologically responsible—effort should be to limit the occasions for resort to war and also the damage done in wars when they do occur. This ethic essentially is about justification for the use of force. It has developed historically into the two critical categories of *ius ad bellum* (justification for resort to war) and *ius in bello* (moral criteria limiting the actual practice of war).[9] This alternative to pacifism is of great importance, at least for those who do not reject all war on principle yet do not agree that in war everything is permissible.

The problem with this ethic for specifically Christian thinking is that it does not have an explicit theological foundation, even though it has theological elements and—as some see it—may be anchored in love of God and neighbor.[10] In fact, its provisions and criteria can be separated from theology and made into a secular ethic with no theological framework, guidance, or limitation.[11] The absence of an explicit Christian theological framework, with the possibility of its being separated out into a purely secular ethic, exclude a possible role as the principal guide for Christian

---

8. For an authoritative study of historic Christian views on war, see Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace*.

9. Paul Ramsey was the principal Protestant contributor to just war theoretical development and analysis in the second half of the twentieth century. See especially his *War and the Christian Conscience*; *The Just War*; and *Speak Up for Just War or Pacifism*. For a more recent analysis, see O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited*. My own early contribution is *Modern War and the Pursuit of Peace*.

10. See Bell, *Just War as Christian Discipleship*.

11. A forthright and commendable example of this—nontheological—case for the justified war ethic is Atack, *The Ethics of Peace and War*.

war-thinking—even if it does in fact have some usefulness for clarifying issues of justification for the uses of military force.

When the justified war ethic is incorporated into God's work of reconciliation, the theology transforms some of its basic aspects. I shall explore this claim in a later chapter. Here I suggest two points: 1) the context of the history of grace rearranges the importance of the criteria of resort to war and assigns priority to the criterion of just intention, not to just cause, inasmuch as the primary content of just intention ought always to be the restoration or creation of peace between the belligerents, whatever the cause of conflict may be; 2) the same context of the history of grace stretches out the time and space in which issues of justice and justification are to be determined. This "stretching out" allows and encourages reflection on how all parties have contributed to the creation of the problem, and in doing so invites—and indeed requires—confession, repentance, and forgiveness. It recognizes moral responsibility and moral analysis as permanent elements of the exercises of power, and does not limit the role of moral inquiry to a point in time when the "moral issue" arises.

I must emphasize that this book is not another study of the just war tradition and the ethic arising from it. I have written on that topic in the past, and I encourage further inquiry into the just war ethic's reasoning, applications, and theological sources. The issue here is to discern and explore the wider theological context of that ethic and in doing so to provide a framework for its review and reconsideration.

Invitation to a Conversation in Faith

Both modes of inquiry—the theological and the political—are fundamental to the project; nevertheless, I privilege the theological aspect, because I am writing as a churchman—a pastor, preacher, theologian, and theological educator—and not as a would-be policymaker or pundit. I write for the purpose of inviting members of the community of faith into an ongoing and vital conversation. When I engage in extended explorations into political meanings, I do so in order to show what is involved in the political incarnation of the doctrine of reconciliation, not to score points with or provoke specialists in the fields of foreign policy and political theory. I want to encourage people of the church to explore the relationship more fully and faithfully, to think more profoundly and critically about the meaning of reconciliation, and in doing so to equip themselves better to engage in

faith the threats, the crises, and the challenges of war. Persons who are interested in the policies and practices of war, but who are not inclined to pursue theological inquiry, may find something useful here. If so, that is a welcome result, but an incidental one. I intend the book to be an offering to those who are or aspire to be "stewards of the mysteries of Christ," but who understand also that as stewards they must deal with the uglier aspects of human existence. Nevertheless, if it is true, as I maintain, that war is inherently a theological problem, it will be impossible to arrive at a full understanding of its reality by nontheological methods alone. That is another reason for privileging a theological inquiry.

For those who want to compare theological and nontheological methods for understanding the relation of reconciliation and war, I recommend William J. Long and Peter Brecke's *War and Reconciliation: Reason and Emotion in Conflict Resolution*.[12] It is a very good book with a title similar to this one. It is not at all theological but is well worth reading for its historical and social scientific studies of reconciliation processes in domestic and international conflicts. By comparing the two, one can see the differences in method between a book that is both theological and political, and one that is strictly political.

Those who are looking for analyses of and policy proposals for particular hot spots in international relations will not find them here. As I have indicated, this book is a methodological exercise in *how to think* as Christians. The method can be adapted to other types of problems. It is not focused on case studies, nor are its implications for war only.

Doubtless some critics of this work will maintain that the approach is a very American one, that the discussions of power betray the national location of the author. I do not dispute the point. Everyone who makes an inquiry into war and peace shaped by the central doctrines of the Christian faith must construe the issues from his or her own location in time and space. So it is with me and my own efforts. I cannot purport to rise above the strenuous and at times appalling challenges of my own country's vast power and its disposition and contend for a one-size-fits-all Christian formula. The point, however, is to offer the invitation to thinking about the problems from the standpoint of faith, which also means concretely from whatever place in human society the Almighty has chosen to settle us.

---

12. Long and Brecke, *War and Reconciliation.*

How I Got Here

In 1958 Emory University hired me as a newly minted PhD to teach what they called "Religion and the Political Order" in the Candler School of Theology and the newly organized Graduate Division of Religion.[13] Through the succeeding decades I developed and taught courses dealing with ethics and international politics, Christian political thought, peace and war, the churches and international conflict, and Reinhold Niebuhr, in addition to the broader courses in Christian ethics and a denominationally specific course on John Wesley's ethics. From the beginning I insisted on grounding my teaching and writing theologically, and early on I became convinced that the doctrine of reconciliation was that true and necessary grounding. I saw it as the defining representation of the work of God in Christ, and therefore the framework for all Christian thinking and vocation. I directed this focus pedagogically into a course titled "The Theology and Ethics of Reconciliation," in which I encouraged students to develop a coherent and biblically grounded theology to guide and permeate all of their pastoral work, and especially to shape and inform their preaching. The two sets of concerns—theological and political—issued also in a number of published essays on reconciliation and various aspects of life, especially international politics.[14] My presidential address (1989) to the Society of Christian Ethics in the United States and Canada applied the theology of reconciliation to the theme of "Truth and Political Leadership."[15]

The present essay carries these issues forward by exploring the relationships among war, peace, and reconciliation. Given the nature of my background and interests, one would expect it to be both theological and political. Given the nature of the topic, it cannot be one without the other.

A Note on War

For purposes of this inquiry I am limiting the meaning of war primarily to armed conflict between or among states. The focus of reconciliation and peace in this case is on war as a social institution inhabiting the web of relationships among more or less discrete entities that like to represent themselves as sovereign states. In doing so, I am excluding the metaphorical

---

13. Now renamed, appropriately, the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies.

14. *Modern War and the Pursuit of Peace*. See further entries in the bibliography.

15. *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1989), 3–19.

applications of the term *war*, such as "war on drugs," "war on terrorism," "war on crime," and the like. The massive concentrations of efforts in such cases often reach across state lines, but they do not inherently involve conflict among the states. If they do so, then they become occasions of interstate war. Also, I mean to set aside reference to revolutionary movements with no direct and immediate relevance to the state system, although the development of the argument may have implications for these movements as well.[16] That is especially so when states must use their military capabilities to oppose sub- or nonstatal mobilizations of force that aim to destroy existing states or to enter into the interstate system by seizing control of particular states.

In theoretical terms, war is a negation of the web of relationships that constitutes the international system, substituting for the relationships various degrees and kinds of violence as means of resolution, communication, and peacemaking. It is also the unraveling of the civilizing process, inasmuch as it weakens or eliminates rules governing and restraining international behavior. This theoretical definition allows us to acknowledge changes in warfare across the years and to move ahead with the issues of politics and reconciliation. War changes, of course, and continues to do so. It involves whole nations and not armies only, and increasingly the prospect of cyberwarfare. It is reshaped by communications and technology. The emergence of nuclear weaponry and delivery systems not only extends the destructive and deterrent power of states but also generates its own characteristic technological-political system. Asymmetrical warfare allows stateless forces to attack powerful states at their points of weakness. The historically European theater of war becomes global. War indeed may become intercivilizational—a "clash of civilizations"—and not only interstatal.[17] None of these changes in warfare moves the phenomenon outside the connectedness of the international system, nor converts it from a conflict involving states to something entirely different.

16. Long and Brecke, *War and Reconciliation*, study both international and domestic conflicts and conclude that the prospects for reconciliation are much stronger for the latter than the former, with some exceptions. They write, ". . . the role of reconciliation events as a means for conflict resolution is substantially different between nations than it is within nations. Factors associated with forgiveness that act to restore order in civil conflict cases are largely absent in international cases. Yet, unlike the civil conflict cases, negotiated bargains *can* work to restore order between nations when reconciliation events constitute effective signals of a desire for improved relations by their costly, novel, voluntary, and irrevocable nature."

17. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*.

Of course, one may argue that the state itself is phasing out of existence, challenged by forces that are economic in one dimension and civilizational in another. Yet however prominent and influential these forces become, they do not eliminate the power and centrality of the states. I shall deal with this question later. Here I point out that the states are the primary controllers of the weaponry and other means of warfare. When war breaks out, including asymmetrical war, the primary aim of opponents is to diminish or capture the war-making capabilities of states. The continuing reality of war is as a social institution in the international system, of which the fundamental component is the state system.

If the nation-state is not yet destined for extinction, neither—sadly—is interstate war. As I write, Israel is contemplating whether it should destroy Iran's incipient nuclear weapons capability before Iran can use a developed capability to destroy Israel. Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador are augmenting their military establishments to deal with reciprocal threats, real or imagined. India and Pakistan—both nuclear powers—muscle each other over Kashmir instead of focusing on the more real and immediate threats from domestic terrorist groups. China bullies other states in its region to enforce territorial claims and expands its "blue water" navy. Syria seems to be imploding as a state, and its internal conflict has invited interstate antagonisms into its civil strife. Russia is using its armed forces to bully the Ukraine, while risking wider military conflict. North Korea, well . . .

Most of Europe has learned how to overcome its long history of militant hostility and military disasters, but much of the world has not yet found the way to create this "paradise"—to use Robert Kagan's term.[18] And some observers worry that Europe's "paradise" may not survive major and extended economic crises. Regrettably, there are still reasons to address the problems of war and peace in the interstate system. To do so in the context of reconciliation remains as a necessity of Christian faith.

To Continue . . .

With this sketch of the project set forth, we move on to examine the theological and political contexts of war and their interaction. The interaction is fraught with numerous conflicts and contradictions between reconciliation and war, none so profound and momentous as the radical contrast between the inherent natures of the two terms. To that problem we must turn first.

18. Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*.