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**The Influence of Christianity on the American Way of War: Implications  
for the Operational Commander**

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War college or the Department of the Navy.

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## ABSTRACT

### The Influence of Christianity on the American Way of War: Implications for the Operational Commander

In today's emphasis on Joint Warfare, America's distinctive operating style embraces the use of "overwhelming and discriminate force, rapid operating tempo and the exploitation of advanced technology. This American way of war focuses on joint campaigns — seamless operations from air, land, sea and space, operating with overwhelming force from every conceivable dimension and direction to shock, disrupt and rapidly defeat opponents." Where, if at all, is the influence of Christianity in this operating style? The historical record documents the significant contributions of Christianity to the American understanding of "when" military force is appropriate, and also, "how" this military force should best be applied as an instrument of national policy.

This paper will summarize the unique role Christianity played in the development of a national style of warfare and demonstrate the implications of this unique influence for the operational commander who must plan for future wars. Joint Publication 1-05, *Religious Ministry Support for Joint Operations*, acknowledges that religion "may play a determinative or regulating role on policy, strategy, or tactics. Therefore, it is important for the Joint Force Commander to have an understanding of the religious groups and movements within the theater and the potential impact that they may have on the accomplishment of the assigned mission." Operational commanders correctly expend a tremendous amount of resources to know the enemy's capability, including their religious culture, but frequently ignored or marginalized is the role of the American religious community and its impact on military force. Proper appreciation for the influence of Christianity on the American way of war can make a significant contribution to the commander's ability to accomplish the assigned mission.

*We also must have the courage to wield military power in an unimpeachable moral fashion. We respect human rights. We observe the Geneva Conventions not only as a matter of legality but from conscience. This behavior is integral to our status as American fighting men and women. Acting with conscience reinforces the links among the Services and between the Armed Forces of the United States and the American people, and these linkages are basic sources of our strength.<sup>1</sup>*

Throughout American history, Christianity consistently exerted a profound influence on what the military historian Russell Weigley calls the “American Way of War.” This “American Way of War” is much more than a “strategy of annihilation.”<sup>2</sup> It also includes “the collective history, attitudes, geography, and political culture of the American experience.”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, many readers may express surprise at a statement which implies the Christian Church could have any measurable influence on the way America fights wars. Americans have always prided themselves, with a few exceptions, on the ethical standards imposed on the use of force. Extensive religious diversity and the ethical confusion prevalent in contemporary American life might imply a lessening of the influence welded by the Christian church. On the contrary, there are strong indications the church will remain a vital force in the American culture and as a consequence upon the American way of war.

In today’s emphasis on Joint Warfare, America’s distinctive operating style embraces the use of “overwhelming and discriminate force, rapid operating tempo and the exploitation of advanced technology. This American way of war focuses on joint campaigns — seamless operations from air, land, sea and space, operating with overwhelming force from every conceivable dimension and direction to shock, disrupt and rapidly defeat opponents.”<sup>4</sup> Where is the influence of Christianity in this operating style? The historical record documents the significant contributions of Christianity to the American understanding of “when” military force is appropriate, and also, “how” this military force should best be applied as an instrument of national policy.

This paper will summarize the unique role Christianity played in the development of a national style of warfare and demonstrate the implications of this unique influence for the operational commander who must plan for future wars. Joint Publication 1-05, *Religious Ministry Support for Joint Operations*, acknowledged that religion “may play a determinative or regulating role on policy, strategy, or tactics. Therefore, it is important for the

Joint Force Commander to have an understanding of the religious groups and movements within the theater and the potential impact that they may have on the accomplishment of the assigned mission.”<sup>5</sup> The military strategist Sun Tzu advises the commander to: “Know the enemy and know yourself, in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”<sup>6</sup> Operational commanders correctly expend a tremendous amount of resources to know the enemy’s capability, including their religious culture, but frequently ignore or marginalize the role of the American religious community and its impact on the use of military force. Proper appreciation for the influence of Christianity on the American way of war can make a significant contribution to the commander’s ability to accomplish the assigned mission.

### **SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD WAR**

Every operational commander receives extensive training in the International Laws of Armed Conflict. The United States military directs its commanders to comply with the Law of Armed Conflict in the conduct of military operations. Adherence to these laws is not only legally compelling, but it is also in the commander’s best interest to be guided by consistent and mutually acceptable rules of behavior. The purpose of these laws of war is:

“to prevent the unnecessary suffering and destruction by controlling and mitigating the harmful effects of hostilities through minimum standards of protection to be accorded to ‘combatants’ and to ‘noncombatants’ and their property . . . [It] is not intended to impede the waging of hostilities. Its purpose is to ensure that the violence of hostilities is directed toward the enemy’s forces and is not used to cause purposeless, unnecessary human misery and physical destruction.”<sup>7</sup>

The operational commander may not appreciate that these regulating principles actually have their origin in the Christian tradition. The church took the lead in formulating a set of standards which were not just to guide (or justify) a Christian’s participation in warfare, but which were also intended to influence national and military leaders. The commander should have no trouble recognizing the many ways these governing principles address critical aspects of operational design, namely: determining appropriate objectives, selecting methods of defeating the enemy, employing of operational fires, and providing force protection. These standards also provide guidance on civilian casualties, collateral damage, prisoners of war, and post-war activities. But the church’s contributions

need to be viewed positively by the commanders rather than as a restraint because the intent is to preserve a moral character in the way America fights wars. Also, the wise commander will understand and respect that American military personnel are more frequently motivated by their religious convictions than they are by an intellectual understanding of international law. Therefore, the operational commander will not only ensure personnel are thoroughly acquainted with the Laws of Armed Conflict, but give due weight to the church's concerns in planning and conducting warfare and will also aggressively foster an atmosphere where the religious convictions of personnel can reinforce these essential values.

To understand the church's influence on the American way of war, it is necessary to review the Christian origins of the just war theory. The "just war theory" is the dominant concept to describe the American church's attitude toward armed conflict since the Revolution War. In contrast to the "just war" theory, are various forms of Christian pacifism (mainly from the Quaker, Brethren, and Mennonite traditions) which can be divided into two basic groups. One group opposes all forms of violence and killing—personal, national, and international. The second group would argue that Christians are never allowed to use violence or to kill, but the state may justly do so under limited conditions.<sup>8</sup> Since Vietnam, church leadership from many mainline Protestant and Catholic churches began to voice pacifist beliefs. These leaders, however, are not representative of their congregations as evidenced during the Gulf War. The American religious community overwhelmingly supported this war despite the vocal protests of a few denominational leaders. This diversity of opinion illustrated how the Christian church, from its beginning, debated their relationship to society.

War troubled the Christian church from the very beginning. Many early Christians struggled with the question of whether military service was consistent with being a genuine follower of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Although Jesus seemed to teach non-resistance in his Sermon on the Mount,<sup>a</sup> He did recognize war as a part of human existence and did not condemn various followers who were members of the Roman military.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Matthew 5:39,40: "But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also...And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two."

Interestingly, some of Jesus' first disciples were Zealots (we might call them insurgents) who were committed to overthrowing Roman rule. Nevertheless, Jesus made it very clear His cause would not be advanced by the sword or physical force.<sup>b</sup> The Apostle Paul explained that the purpose of all governments, which were established by God, were for the good of its citizens.<sup>c</sup> Furthermore, he said the church was to recognize that legitimate government was expressly given the sword for the purposes of promoting the good of society and providing for its defense.<sup>10</sup>

No pressure was exerted on early Christians to participate in the military because Rome did not require universal conscription. Controversy arose as Roman soldiers began to be converted to Christianity. By the second century, there was significant evidence of Christians serving in the army despite the growing protests of church leaders. The church's initial objections were due largely to the required pagan oaths of allegiance and the idolatrous rites of the Roman legions. A few church leaders did object on theological grounds. For example, in an early church guide to discipline, St Hippolytus is quoted as saying that a Christian soldier is not to be taught to kill, and should he be told to do so, he must refuse. Early church fathers, Tertullian and Lactantius in particular, explicitly condemned any military service.<sup>11</sup> Evidence also shows that pacifism was a significant voice within the church during this period, but it never became dominant. Many of the converts simply continued to serve in the military.<sup>12</sup>

In the fourth century events occurred which made the Christian's participation in the military more acceptable. Christians were severely criticized for accepting the benefits of citizenship without a willingness to bear some of the responsibility. The obstacles to participation in the military were removed when Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity in 312 A.D. Constantine immediately removed the pagan oaths of allegiance and the idolatrous rites of the legions. Not long after this the empire came under attack by groups of barbarians, and the

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<sup>b</sup> In John 18:36, Jesus answered Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Following his arrest, Jesus tells Peter in Matthew 26:52: "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword."

<sup>c</sup> In Romans 13:4 we read: "For it [the government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."

Christians were called upon to do their part in defending the empire. General Boniface approached Augustine, the well known church leader, to inquire if he should lead his troops in battle or enter a monastery. Augustine's response, what we call today "The Just War" theory, was a bringing "together the views of a number of classical thinkers such as Plato and Cicero and giving them a Christian emphasis." Augustine maintained that wars: should only be fought to reestablish peace and secure justice; they must be declared by the legitimate leader and prompted by Christian love; they must be conducted in an understanding way without unnecessary violence; and destruction must be kept to a minimum.<sup>13</sup>

Roland Bainton in his book, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, said the accession of Constantine terminated the pacifist period of early church history. Pacifism continued to remain an important voice but the change was so abrupt there was doubt whether the earlier pacifism had really been as widespread as was often portrayed.<sup>14</sup> In the years following, the church resisted any glorification of killing but sadly this new attitude to war eventually led to the period known as the Crusades. In 1095, Pope Urban II called upon the church to free the Middle East from pagan control. Many scholars speculate one of the reasons for the Crusades was to reduce the violence in Western Europe. The Knights were constantly fighting one another and the Crusades provided a new direction for their aggression.<sup>15</sup>

Augustine's "Just War" theory was put into legal form in the twelfth century by Gratian and restated in scholastic form by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Aquinas addressed the two basic issues regarding the morality of the use of force: when is it justified to use military force (*jus ad bellum*), and what is just behavior when using force (*jus in bello*). The requirements of *jus ad bellum* are clear in Aquinas' writings: The resort to force must have a just cause; it must be declared by a competent authority; and it must be motivated by right intention. Aquinas defined "just cause" as:

[J]ust cause is required, namely that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault. Wherefore Augustine says: A just war is wont to be described as one that avenges wrongs, when a nation or state has to be punished for refusing to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects, or to restore what has been seized unjustly... True religion looks upon as peaceful those wars

that war waged not for motive of aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and uplifting the good.<sup>16</sup>

The requirements for *jus in bello* is equally clear in Aquinas' writings. The use of force had to be discriminate, meaning, it had to distinguish the guilty from the innocent. Also, the use of force had to be proportional, meaning, it had to distinguish necessary force from gratuitous force. According to Aquinas, it is morally condemnable to use force with the wrong intention, namely: "[t]he passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an unpacific and relentless spirit, the fever of revolt, the lust of power, and such like things."<sup>17</sup>

The Renaissance and Reformation periods further defined the relationship of Christianity and war. Technological advances rapidly began to change the way war was conducted. The threat to civilians increased. Knights were no longer protected by their armor. Europe was being divided along dynastic lines. Christians were now being called upon to fight other Christians. Inspired by these changes, Erasmus attempted to renew interest in the pacifist ideal. In his satire, *In Praise of Folly*, Erasmus ridiculed the church leaders who accepted the just war theory. Erasmus believed the church had accepted the idea of a just war and missed the true teaching of Scripture. Such a justification of war, Erasmus felt, made war glorious and reduced the church to the role of nothing more than serving the aspirations of the princes.<sup>18</sup> Similar claims are made by many of today's church leaders! The Protestant Reformers, however, did not break from the traditional Catholic teaching on the just war. Martin Luther reaffirmed that the sword was divinely entrusted to the government to repel injustice and keep the peace. Luther also stated he believed only defensive wars were just and condemned religious wars, wars of aggression, and attempts to avenge an insult.<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, agreed with Luther and said princes were divinely entrusted with the authority to restrain the misdeeds of private citizens and to defend by war the land under their safekeeping.<sup>20</sup>

Other key supporters of the just war tradition were Francisco de Vitoria, Francisco Suarez, and the Dutch Protestant jurist, Hugo Grotius. Grotius took the just war tradition and began to work it into a secular form. In his *The Law of War and Peace*, Grotius was responsible for the beginning of a body of international law intended to

control international conflict.<sup>21</sup> He was quoted as saying the just war restraints were valid "even if we should concede . . . there is no God."<sup>22</sup> The idea of an international law which was binding on all nations came into existence with the Hague Convention of 1899, and was further defined by: the Hague Court in 1907, the covenant establishing the League of Nations in 1920, the United Nations Charter in 1945, and numerous Geneva Conventions.

The significance of all this for the operational commander, regardless of any personal religious belief, is there exists an internationally accepted and legally binding set of guidelines. In America, however, the military means of conducting a war (and military operations other than war) are not just directed by these international standards but also are informed and evaluated by the beliefs of the Christian church. The church seeks to positively inform military decisions such as; operational design, operational leadership, force morale, battlefield behavior, and post-hostility activities. Again, the intent should be perceived as seeking to preserve a moral character in combat.

In summary, the American Christian church predominantly continues to embrace a just war theory which requires conflicts be: declared by a legitimate authority; directed by a just cause; motivated by the intention to reestablish peace and secure justice; undertaken as a last resort; assured of a reasonable hope for success; limited by the standard of proportionality; and discriminates between combatants and noncombatants.<sup>23</sup> These standards are intended to emphasize the extremely high premium the church places on human life. For example, the degree to which the church recognizes the justice of the conflict (including military operations other than war) determines the level of tolerance for American casualties. The Gulf War was viewed by most of the church as being morally justified and so the predictions of large numbers of casualties did not translate into lower levels of support. Vietnam reflected a different story. Initially there was strong support in the Christian church for American participation in Vietnam because it was viewed as a war against communism. When the true nature of the war and the "costs" in both lives and national treasure became apparent, this support rapidly diminished. Large segments of the church began to call for an end to a war which many no longer considered "just".<sup>24</sup> The commander should

carefully calculate what costs and risks are acceptable in order to achieve the mission. Such a calculus not only demonstrates a sensitivity to the value of human life, but also a respect for the necessity to sustain popular support at home.

The church's high value of human life also demands that the battlefield actions of the American military be evaluated to determine their consistency with the just war standards. The chemical warfare of World War I, German and Japanese attacks of civilian vessels, and the "obliteration bombing" in World War II (which the U.S. participated) raised many moral concerns for the church. The intentional targeting of civilians and life-support infrastructure not only violated international law, but clashed with the basic moral fibers of the American culture. Additionally, Ronald Clouse noted how the church became increasingly to be "disturbed by the techniques used in the military operation in Vietnam." Some argued that neither the American nor South Vietnamese forces exerted much effort to make distinctions between innocent civilians and guerrillas. Civilians were killed, villages were bombed and strafed, and napalm and defoliants were widely used. Furthermore, most Americans were outraged by the murder of over three hundred men, women, and children at My Lai by troops under the command of Lieutenant William Calley.<sup>25</sup> The Vietnam War contributed to the present climate within the church of a heightened sensitivity to civilian casualties, collateral damage, impact on life-supporting infrastructure, long term damage to the environment, and the treatment of prisoners of war. What makes all this most relevant for the commander is the inherent impact of operational decisions and the battlefield behavior of military personnel will have on the political leaders' ability to sustain popular support and achieve national objectives. In the operational design, the commander will ensure the plan balances these issues with the necessary conditions to achieve mission success. Operational leadership will establish a command climate which models and expects morally appropriate battlefield behavior.

Commanders should also be aware that with the prospect of future wars potentially increasing rather than decreasing the role of religion, the Roman Catholic Church and many mainline Protestant church leaders are calling

these just war standards into question. The 1983 pastoral letter of the American Catholic bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*, proposed limiting a just war to purely self-defense against aggression. The bishops rejected offensive war as morally unjustifiable whatever the circumstances.<sup>26</sup> This helps to explain the strong opposition of the Catholic leadership to the Gulf War. Many Catholic leaders believe the just war theory is no longer adequate in an age of modern warfare.<sup>27</sup> Other respected leaders disagree and suggest America has discovered a military-technical solution to the problems of proportionality and discrimination. A. J. Bacevich is just one qualified analyst who believes the surgical accuracy and carefully calibrated effects of American weapons exceeds all previous standards of adhering to the requirements of proportionality and discrimination. In Bacevich's opinion, "Desert Storm proceeded to its happy conclusion with few of the moral controversies that had marred virtually every other large scale use of American force since 1945: collateral damage was kept to a minimum; civilian casualties were few; operations were promptly terminated as soon as military objectives appeared to be within reach."<sup>28</sup> The commander, by understanding and demonstrating appropriate respect for the moral and religious issues, will not only enable the political leaders to maintain national support but also will enhance the moral atmosphere on the battlefield.

### **THE GULF WAR, THE CHURCH, AND THE OPERATIONAL COMMANDER**

Numerous military leaders and historians have made the statement in recent years that the Gulf War was the first time when religion played a key role in the overall planning of a major campaign. There were many obvious reasons for the increase in religious emphasis. For the first time since the Crusades, the lead country of a multi-national coalition whose predominate religion was Christianity opposed on the battlefield a nation whose religion was Islam. Add to this the fact that the American forces, together with other Muslims and non-Muslims coalition members, were deployed to the world's leading Islamic country--Saudi Arabia. Simply put, religion unleashed unique passions in time of war. The Gulf War illustrated a number of ways this unique passion was revealed in wartime, ways which were common to American history and would impact a commander's operational

decisions. Further, this war also reflects the profound influence exerted by the Christian church and hints at the potential impact for future conflicts.

American military personnel, especially Christians, have always been passionate about maintaining the freedom to worship in times of war. This should be important to the commander because of the link between an individual's faith and battlefield behavior—morals, morale, courage, leadership, obedience, and unselfishness. These are intangible qualities of military might and should be fostered to enhance the force's effectiveness. Carl von Clausewitz challenges the commander to consider these factors having said: "Essentially war is fighting . . . Fighting, in turn, is a trial of moral and physical forces through the medium of the latter. Naturally moral strength must not be excluded, for psychological forces exert a decisive influence on the elements involved in war."<sup>29</sup> Although the "spiritual" dimension was not specifically mentioned by Clausewitz, it would unquestionably be a major source of this "moral strength."

During the Gulf war, as Christmas and the Jewish festival of Hanukkah approached in December 1990, the Pentagon was deeply sensitive to offending the Saudi public and their rulers. One Pentagon official remarked that outside of war plans, no subject was treated by the Defense Department with more sensitivity and secrecy than that of religion. While making it clear the 300,000 American personnel were permitted to worship as they chose, they were to do so quietly and with discretion. The idea was to avoid any offense to the Saudi religious leaders, a nation which legally only recognizes Islam.<sup>d</sup> The Pentagon policy stated: "As guardians of Islam's holy places, the Saudis restrict the overt practice of proselytizing of any religion other than Islam. Our personnel, whether Jewish, Christian or any other faith, are free to practice their religion as long as they do so in a discreet manner."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>d</sup> United States Central Command enacted the following policy to guide personnel and their religious expression: (a) Faith specific religious symbols (including flags and pennants) will not be displayed out of doors, but may be discretely displayed indoors in areas not frequented by Muslims; (b) Chaplains may wear chaplain insignia (cross or tablets) when in U.S. controlled areas, but Chaplain insignia should not be worn when outside the U.S. controlled areas; (c) religious articles and ecclesiastical supplies and equipment shipped through other than military airlift command channels will be marked for the morale officer; (d) formal worship services will be conducted only within covered shelters or private settings, and not in open areas or in the view of host nations; and (e) inter-faith ministry with local Muslim Imams is not permitted. Proselytizing in AOR nations is strictly forbidden under Islamic law. It subjects the proselytizer to severe criminal penalties. (John R. Blair and Brian H. Highfill. Servants in the Storm. Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: May 1992.)

Naturally these restrictions created confusion and disturbance in the theater and at home. Many resented any prohibition on their religious freedom, especially when they were being asked to defend that country. Military and government officials agreed to the restrictions, however, at the request of the Saudi government. One Saudi government official expressed the fear that public religious displays would upset the nation's fundamentalist religious leaders, a group of great power. Even journalists were restricted from observing religious services and interviewing Chaplains, mainly to prevent Iraq from using the news coverage as a tool of propaganda. Iraq no doubt believed "popular support" was for the United States a strategic center of gravity and the approval of the church a critical vulnerability. There were many examples of Iraq seeking to disrupt popular support by appealing to American religious interests. The Pentagon also explained that reports of religious restrictions were greatly exaggerated and these restrictions were only enforced in populated areas and all but disappeared in the remote desert camps.<sup>31</sup> The impact of these restrictions in the United States, though potentially very great, was minimal due to the excellent public relations effort of the Pentagon. American religious leaders were briefed on the guidelines, and the American public was assured U.S. forces were permitted sufficient freedom of worship.<sup>32</sup>

Another element of unique religious passion generated in time of armed conflict concerns the temptation for the church to make the war a religious crusade. Visions of holy war were prevalent in the United States and Iraq. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein declared: "It is a day of holy struggle against the infidels. It is one of Muhammad's days." President Bush countered with the affirmation that the conflict had "everything to do with what religion embodies, good versus evil, right versus wrong, human dignity and freedom versus tyranny and oppression." The President added, "We will prevail because of the support of the American people, armed with a trust in God."<sup>33</sup> Such a statement reflected the sentiment expressed by the Christian church in each of the nation's conflicts up through World War I. Beginning with the American Revolution, and each war thereafter, the Christian church contributed a unique passion to the fighting of the nation's wars. This "passion" was frequently called a "crusade spirit" by historians. When the church was convinced (correctly or questionably) of the moral

justification of the cause, the Christian communities generated a “righteous” enthusiasm which galvanized the American public and especially the military forces.

Applying the same moral principles utilized by the Puritans in their 1640 insurgency against the King of England, the Colonists mobilized large segments of the church not just to support the Revolution, but to generate the mood of a religious crusade. Roland Bainton explained that several clergy not only served as chaplains in the war but recruited and led companies of militia. The story is told of one pastor, John Peter Gabriel, who declared at the end of his Sunday morning sermon: “In the language of Holy Writ, there is a time for all things. There is a time to preach and a time to fight; now is the time to fight.” After the benediction, Pastor Gabriel removed his robe and stood in the uniform of a Virginia colonel.<sup>34</sup> George Marsden, a prominent historian, stated that the vast majority of Christians did more than merely acquiesce to the justification advanced by the Revolutionary leaders; frequently their enthusiasm for war often surpassed that found among their compatriots.<sup>35</sup>

The church, in both the North and the South, viewed the Civil War as a moral crusade. Sydney Ahlstrom, the foremost American church historian, stated: “It [the Civil War] was a moral war because it sprang from a moral impasse on issues which Americans in the mid-nineteenth century could no longer avoid or escape. Had there been no slavery, there would have been no war. Had there been no moral condemnation of slavery, there would have been no war.”<sup>36</sup> For the churches in the North, the war became a God-directed crusade against the injustice of slavery. Southerners were equally certain of the rightness of their position, and four years of war did not dim their conviction that they were fighting God’s war.<sup>37</sup>

The mood in America just prior to World War I was “a blend of hysterical nationalism and crusading idealism.” Following the German declaration of unrestricted U-boat operations in the Atlantic, the America public in general and the church specifically, rejected the isolation of nationalism and rallied with the cry of a “holy war.” Roland Bainton explains:

The Germans were Huns. To kill them was to purge the earth of monsters. Nor was such action incompatible with love, because their deaths would restrain them from crime and transplant them to a

better land. The Lord God of battles was rolling up the host of Armageddon to destroy the great beast of the abyss that the new Jerusalem might descend from the sky."<sup>38</sup>

World War I was the last war, until the Gulf War, where the Christian church's enthusiasm for war approached the level of a "crusade." Although the majority of Christians strongly supported the American war efforts in World War II and Korea, and did so initially with the Vietnam War, that world-changing optimism was gone.<sup>39</sup>

With the Gulf War, the church was presented again with a cause which inflamed the "crusade" emotions. Not only did this war appear to fit all the requirements to satisfy the just war theory, but it was taking place in a land where the world's major faith groups have their origins. Outspoken anti-war opponents, including some prominent religious leaders, did not find President Bush or the majority of Christians easily dissuaded. The President answered their criticisms of U.S. policy in the Gulf with a passionate appeal to religious groups who acknowledged the justice of the war. Speaking to both the National Religious Broadcasters and the Southern Baptist Convention, the President declared, "Our cause is just. Our cause is moral. That is why we must act reasonably, humanely and make every effort possible to keep casualties to a minimum. And we've done so." The President said the battle with Iraq was primarily a righteous response to the "rape, pillage and plunder of Kuwait. Our cause could not be more noble."<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, there were elements within the church which viewed the Gulf War as more than "just" but also as a religious crusade. Just war theorist Michael Walzer says, "a crusade is a war fought for religious or ideological purposes. Its aims not at defense or law enforcement, but at the creation of new political orders and at mass conversions."<sup>41</sup> Any conflict supposedly resurrecting images of the Crusades are certainly problematic. All the talk about the Gulf War being the "mother of all battles" led some in the church to speculate about the fulfillment of biblical prophecies regarding the imminence of Armageddon, the final conflict before the end of history and the Second Coming of Christ. Christian bookstores were selling numerous publications which described possible indications that the world was in the final days. One major publishing company printed ONE MILLION copies of an updated version of John F. Walvoord's 1974 best seller, *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle*

*East Crisis*. *Time* magazine also noted the tremendous rise in ratings for conservative televangelists who regularly preached about the impending apocalypse.<sup>42</sup>

Why does the operational commander need to give serious consideration to the emotional dimension frequently found in the church's response to a perceived moral war? There are a number of reasons. First, this extreme passion may bring a behavior to the battlefield which is potentially harmful to morale and may stimulate behavior in combat in the name of "religion" which contradicts the values of faith and national moral standards. Without a correctly focused moral compass, there exists the potential for all measures of unnecessary cruelty and inhumanity in war. Michael Walzer was quoted as having said: "Military professionals have a very strong sense of what distinguishes the work they do from butchering . . . It is a moral sense, even though it's entangled with professional pride and a sense of what works and what doesn't."<sup>43</sup> The commander is responsible for bringing the passions of war under the discipline of morally acceptable behavior. This is one responsibility a commander cannot delegate.<sup>44</sup> For example, moral leadership is demonstrated by the priority the commander placed on battlefield behavior, by the restraints and constraints placed on operational fires, the prescribed treatment of prisoners of war, and attitude towards post-hostilities responsibilities. Winning the war cannot be the only criteria for success, the war must be won with the moral dignity of the nation intact. History says this will always be the concern of the church.

Second, the operational commander must exercise wise and sensitive leadership in managing the religious needs of assigned personnel. During times of combat, interest in spiritual matters and anxiety over the future greatly increase. The Army's Chief of Chaplains is quoted as saying: "During Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, there was probably more praying in the Army than we've had since maybe World War II."<sup>45</sup> Military personnel throughout the ages have relied upon their faith in times of hardship and danger. Brigadier General Donald Shea, Deputy Chief of Chaplains for the Army during the Gulf War said it well when he wrote: "Religion always touches the human community. In times of crisis, when people are at the limits of their humanity,

they search for meaning beyond themselves or in the deepest reaches of their souls. The old saying, 'There are no atheists in foxholes,' is one way we acknowledge the importance of religion when we stand at the limits of living--when we stand in the presence of death."<sup>46</sup> One chaplain described the spiritual needs of military personnel during combat this way:

The concept of maneuver--the central element of modern, joint U.S. combat doctrine--seeks to create disruption not so much by what is happening at the moment as by causing mental apprehension, doubt, and fear as to what might come next. When this happens--and it can happen to either side--a unit's "morale envelope" is said to be threatened. The size of that "envelope" fluctuates and depends upon many variables . . . but religious belief can have a tremendous impact upon it. Spiritual resources can provide strength, inner peace, security, and a sense of tranquillity to the soldier, thereby increasing the moral force of the unit.<sup>47</sup>

Another concern for the commander is with the increased reliance upon the Reserve component (the frequently called "citizen soldier") there potentially will be a much closer connection to the local churches back home. Reserve personnel will bring to the battlefield, especially with wars where there is a strong religious dimension, many of the religious community's attitudes and fears. Concerns over the justification of military actions may or may not be resolved and moral sensitivities may be higher because of the local church's influence. The church's questions concerning the use of military action may be felt even more significantly during operations other than war, especially where the justification is less clear and the lines between combat and peacekeeping are blurred. Some of these more extreme attitudes may be disruptive or problematic for unit morale and require sensitive command intervention. Rules of Engagements and the Laws of Armed Conflict must be clearly understood by all personnel, but especially by those who may bring to the battlefield a higher level of religious passion. Also, many Reservists never face the moral questions concerning war until mobilization and personally confronted with combat. Instead of immediately sending these personnel home, and potentially creating a major morale issue, a well thought out plan should be considered in advance of the conflict just how to deal with these issues without diminishing troop effectiveness.

As mentioned earlier, many segments of today's church are very sensitive to the protection of religious and holy sites, civilian casualties, war's impact upon the environment, and collateral damage to the infrastructure which supports the enemy's civilian population. During the Gulf War, military officials were pressed to talk about civilians casualties from the bombing actions in Iraq. The general public seemed satisfied with the report from military officials and a few independent experts confirmed "that U.S. munitions have not caused surprising or untoward civilian damage, and appear to be hitting far fewer noncombatants than orchestrated bombing in previous wars."<sup>48</sup> Those who questioned the "justice" of the war were not as convinced. A number of religious leaders believed the "Air War" put more civilian lives at risk than was required by military necessity or the objective of forcing Iraq out of Kuwait and preventing future aggression. Another major concern was the destruction of Iraq's electrical system, vital for the water filtration and purification. Such destruction, it was charged, profoundly affected Iraq's ability to sustain human life, particularly innocent women and children.<sup>49</sup> This concern illustrates the tension faced by the commander. Operational objectives, in this instance Iraqi command and control nodes, were frequently in conflict with minimizing damage to life-supporting infrastructure. The cost and benefits of attacking the electrical system had to be weighed against moral considerations. Eliminating Iraq's ability for command and control was vital for achieving the mission and reducing potential coalition casualties. Targeting decisions will always be second guessed, but commanders must consider these unintended consequences when attacking the enemy's command and control capability.

Finally, in the Gulf War, the Joint Force Commander was very concerned with respecting host nation sensitivities, preserving the multi-national coalition, and preventing Iraq from utilizing religion as a source for divisive propaganda. The perception could be drawn, if the commander does not exercise great care, that the host nation sensitivities were more important than the fundamental religious needs of troops being sent into combat. These are tough issues to balance, but the commander can do a number of things to reduce potential confusion. First, the CINC's Command Chaplain can be a highly useful advisor and should be included in the forward

elements deployed to the region. This was not the case with the Gulf War. There was a great deal of confusion, misunderstanding, and rumor until senior chaplain leadership arrived on scene. "No chaplain had been assigned to the CentCom staff during the opening stages of Desert Shield, and until Colonel Peterson arrived the lack of a chaplain contributed greatly to confusion in religious policies for U.S. forces."<sup>50</sup>

Second, a careful examination of the responsibilities for the Combatant Command Chaplain as contained in Joint Publication 1-05, *Religious Ministry Support for Joint Operations*, reveals the need for including religious and moral issues in the extensive pre-war deliberative planning and training. Opportunities should be created to ensure the broad range of religious and moral issues will be addressed and all possible levels of coordination are established prior to hostilities. For example, should the Combatant Command Chaplain's first working contact with the Component Command Chaplains be when deployed for combat or military operations other than war, the potential is strong for a decreased level of contribution to religious and moral concerns of the commander, not to mention a loss to the unity of effort. Many of the key issues described in this paper may be overlooked by an operational staff which is simply focused on religion in traditional forms of "chaplain service." Increased awareness of these issues during education and training for joint operations, including at the Component Command levels, would help to resolve the unique religious and moral concerns as well as contribute significantly to the operational commander's mission.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout American history Christianity exercised a profound influence on when and how the nation's wars were fought. None of the changes brought about by modern warfare or the vast technological advances have diminished this role. In many ways these changes are complicating the moral issues and making the responsibility of the commander much more arduous. Instantaneous communications, vital for command and control functions as well as for maintaining popular support at home, brings the reality of combat into every American home. Americans now, more than ever, are sensitive to why and how military force is exercised. Casualties (American,

Coalition, and innocent civilians), unnecessary collateral damage, battlefield behavior of personnel (including adherence to the Laws of Armed Conflict and the treatment of Prisoners of War), post-war responsibilities, and operational targeting priorities are to be understood as important concerns for the church. The strong moral conscience of the American religious community will naturally be expected to continue its evaluation of military actions and to exert a powerful influence the national military decision makers. But again, the church's contributions to the "American Way of War" needs to be viewed positively by the commander because the intent is to preserve a moral character in the way wars are fought. The church seeks to ensure that America participates in wars, and also in operations other than war, with the moral dignity of the nation intact. Therefore, with the prospect strong that future wars will include a decisive role for religion, today's operational commanders would be wise to understand, respect, and plan for the vital role Christianity will have in these conflicts.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> Russell Weigley, The American Way of War (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1973), xxii.
- <sup>3</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, "Decisive Force: A New American Way of War?" Strategic Review, Winter 195, Vol. XXII, No. 1, 23.
- <sup>4</sup> Peter F. Herrly, "Joint Warfare: The American Way of War," Military Review, Department of the Army, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Volume LXXII, February 1992, No 2, 10-11.
- <sup>5</sup> U.S. Joint Staff, Joint Pub: 1-05: Religious Ministry Support for Joint Operations, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office: 3 August 1993), I-1.
- <sup>6</sup> Sun Tzu, The Art of War, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84.
- <sup>7</sup> Department of the Navy, NWP 1-14M: The Commander's Handbook of the Law of Naval Operations (Norfolk: Naval Doctrine Command, October 1995), 5-1 - 6-3.
- <sup>8</sup> John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, Ethics For A Brave New World (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 349.
- <sup>9</sup> Robert G. Clouse, ed., War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 11.
- <sup>10</sup> Charles Hodge, Romans (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 408.
- <sup>11</sup> Feinberg, 345-346.
- <sup>12</sup> John Jefferson Davis, Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985), 230.
- <sup>13</sup> Feinberg, 346-347.
- <sup>14</sup> Roland H. Bainton, Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 85.
- <sup>15</sup> Feinberg, 347.
- <sup>16</sup> James Turner Johnson, "The Broken Tradition," The National Interest, Fall 1996, 29.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.
- <sup>18</sup> Feinberg, 348.
- <sup>19</sup> Clouse, 129.
- <sup>20</sup> John T. McNeill, ed., Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), Book IV, Chapter XX, Section 11.
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Walzer, Just and Unjust Wars (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977), xiv, 246.
- <sup>22</sup> David R. Smock, Religious Perspectives on War: Christian, Muslims, and Jewish Attitudes Toward Force After the Gulf War (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1992), xv.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.
- <sup>24</sup> Ronald A. Wells, ed., The Wars of American: Christian Views (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 190-191, 198.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 187, 191.
- <sup>26</sup> Johnson, 33.
- <sup>27</sup> Smock, 7.
- <sup>28</sup> A. J. Bacevich, "Morality and High Technology," The National Interest, Fall 1996, 39.
- <sup>29</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 127.
- <sup>30</sup> Philip Shenon, "Out of Saudi View, U.S. Force Allows Religious Their Rites," The New York Times, 22 December 1990, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

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- <sup>32</sup> Lynda Richardson, "Religious Sensitivities in Saudi Arabia Keep Troops' Observances Low-Key," The Washington Post, 16 December 1990, A57.
- <sup>33</sup> Laura Sessions Stepp, "Bush and Saddam's Holy War of Words," The Washington Post, 3 February 1991, A22.
- <sup>34</sup> Bainton, 188-189.
- <sup>35</sup> Wells, 220-21.
- <sup>36</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, Volume 2 (Garden City: Image Books, 1975), 92.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.
- <sup>38</sup> Bainton, 209-210.
- <sup>39</sup> Wells, 147-161, 175, 191.
- <sup>40</sup> John Dart, "Episcopalian Bush Opens Religious Counteroffensive for a Just War," Los Angeles Times, 2 February 1991, F16.
- <sup>41</sup> Waltzer, 113-114.
- <sup>42</sup> John Elson, "Apocalypse Now?" Time, 11 February 1991, 88.
- <sup>43</sup> Lisa Beyer, "Three Ethical Dilemmas," Time, 4 February 1991, 48.
- <sup>44</sup> NWP 1-14M: The Commander's Handbook of the Law of Naval Operations, 6-3.
- <sup>45</sup> Paulette V. Walker, "Soul Searching. . . and Serving," Army Times, 8 August 1994, 6.
- <sup>46</sup> Donald W. Shea, "Ministry in the Eye of the Storm," Army, September 1994, 55.
- <sup>47</sup> Paul R. Wrigley, "The Impact of Religious Belief in the Theater of Operations," Naval War College Review, Spring 1996, Vol XLIX, No. 2, 88-89.
- <sup>48</sup> R. Jeffrey Smith, "U.S. Military is Pressed About Civilian Casualties," The Washington Post, 3 February 1991, A23.
- <sup>49</sup> Smock, 5-6.
- <sup>50</sup> Wrigley, 90, 92.

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