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# PROVIDENCE

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## REINHOLD NIEBUHR & THE PROBLEM OF PARADOX

By MARC LiVECCHÉ

## THE GREAT WAR & THE DAWN OF THE AMERICAN CENTURY

By JOSEPH LOCONTE

## WILL CHRISTIANITY SURVIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST? A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

By KENT R. HILL

ALSO: ROBERT NICHOLSON LOOKS EAST TOWARD THE SYRIAN CRISIS • MARK TOOLEY CONSIDERS CHRISTIANS & EMPIRE • LUBO ONDRASEK PAYS TRIBUTE TO JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN • MICHAEL NOVAK IS COMMEMORATED • WAYNE SCHROEDER CALLS CHRISTIANS TO PEACE WORK • THORIN OAKENSHIELD MAKES A DEATHBED CONFESSION • DOUGLAS BURTON REPORTS ON MOSUL • AMITAI ETZIONI PRESCRIBES MORAL TRIAGE • HERMAN MELVILLE REMEMBERS THE BATTLE OF SHILOH • & ALAN DOWD REFLECTS ON AMERICA'S LONG DEFENSE OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

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WINTER 2017 | NUMBER 6

## FEATURES

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# 4

MARC LIVECCHÉ  
REINHOLD NIEBUHR  
& THE PROBLEM OF PARADOX

---

JOSEPH LOCONTE

THE GREAT WAR & THE DAWN  
OF THE AMERICAN CENTURY

# 16

---

# 26

KENT R. HILL  
WILL CHRISTIANITY  
SURVIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST?  
A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

---



Portrait of Reinhold Niebuhr by Hannah Strauss, original commission, 2017. A pensive Reinhold Niebuhr considers the scene before him, surrounded by iconic images from the Second World War. While referencing historical events, horrific locations, and the machinery of warfare, these images also suggest the focal points of Niebuhr's internal conflicts as he wrestled with his own theological and ethical conceptual dilemmas. Immediately behind Niebuhr is an amphibious assault, with warfighters disembarking a landing craft and wading toward a shoreline already engaged with the fire, smoke, and din of battle. Above him, bombers swarm in deadly formation. Below are rendered scenes depicting the hated guard towers and dreaded gate of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan. Taken together, these scenes begin to describe the reach, the moral and political complexity, and the devastation of human conflict.

## ESSAYS

---

- AMITAI ETZIONI**  
MORAL TRIAGE **38**
- MARK TOOLEY**  
CHRISTIANS & AMERICAN EMPIRE **43**
- ALAN W. DOWD**  
A SHIELD FOR FAITH **46**
- WAYNE A. SCHROEDER**  
JUST CALLING:  
THE CHRISTIAN BASIS  
FOR A CAREER IN PEACEMAKING **57**
- LUBOMIR MARTIN ONDRASEK**  
JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN:  
AN AUGUSTINIAN AT WAR **66**
- DOUGLAS BURTON**  
THE BATTLE FOR MOSUL  
& THE END OF HISTORY **72**

## REVIEWS

---

- DANIEL STRAND**  
PARADISE LOST:  
ON THE POWER OF NOSTALGIA  
IN POLITICS  
Mark Lilla's *The Shipwrecked Mind* **76**
- MATT GOBUSH**  
PARADIGM LOST  
Richard Haass' *A World in Disarray* **78**

## AD ORIENTEM

---

- ROBERT NICHOLSON**  
MORALITY & THE CRISIS IN SYRIA **81**

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FEATURE

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# REINHOLD NIEBUHR & THE PROBLEM OF PARADOX

MARC LIVECCHÉ



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In September 2010, by his own admission, Marine Lt. Timothy Kudo abetted in the slaying of two unarmed Afghan teenagers.<sup>1</sup> On patrol, Kudo was leading his squad toward a village when a nearby farmer suddenly dropped his shovel and seemingly ran for his life. Alarmed, the squad scattered for cover just as the staccato pulse of machine gun fire erupted from somewhere around them. The shooting ceased and no enemy combatants could be seen, but the Marines quickly repositioned, advancing toward likely enemy ambush points. After a fleeting glimpse of a possible Taliban fighter, the Marines converged on a nearby building and divided; one team launched an assault inside the structure while a second formed a security perimeter outside.

Suddenly, two men approached on a motorcycle from a hill above the squad—a position of deadly tactical advantage over the Marines. As the riders neared, they either did not understand or simply ignored the patrol's repeated commands to stop. Escalating force along standardized lines, the Marines redoubled their efforts: they fired a smoke grenade in warning, shouted halt, and waved the bike away. The riders slowed, seemingly hesitated, and then continued, crossing the trigger line toward the Marines. Too close. In a heartbeat, a set of misconceptions gave further appearance of an attack: sticks the riders held were, at the distance, confused for rifles and the motorcycle's chrome, reflecting the sun in bright flashes, gave the appearance of muzzle bursts. The Marines opened fire.

Kudo recalls, "The motorcycle sparked where the rounds slapped the metal and drove into the bodies. The bike stopped. The men fell... We ran to the motorcycle. One Marine made a quiet plea, 'Please let them have weapons. Something. Anything.'" But it was not to be.

One of the dead appeared no older than sixteen.

## WARRIOR PRAYERS

The American Protestant theologian and public intellectual Reinhold Niebuhr is probably best known as the steadfast defender of democracy against the totalitarian evils of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's fascist and communist regimes. Indeed, Niebuhr came to increased national prominence in the lead up to the Second World War by making the case for American intervention against Nazism. To help his doing so, he inaugurated a new publication, *Christianity & Crisis*, which he committed to the proposition that "the Christian faith offered no easy escape from the hard and sometimes cruel choices of such a world as ours; but that it did offer resources and insights by which our decisions could be made wisely and our responsibilities borne courageously."

Shortly after Japanese Zeros had dropped from the December skies over Hawaii, forcing America's entry into the war, Niebuhr published an editorial entitled "Our Responsibilities in 1942", in which he suggested that it was to America's own good that we had been "finally forced to be loyal to interests beyond our own." National threats had at last "strengthened our reluctant will and overruled our recalcitrant will", goading us to now do what we ought already to have done. "We have been thrown into a community of common responsibility", Niebuhr suggested, "by being engulfed in a community of common sorrow."

However much Niebuhr might have rejoiced over the moral rousing of American power, he did not rejoice in its need to be roused. Harboring no illusions that the "very grim" task ahead would be characterized by anything other than "blood, sweat, and tears", Niebuhr knew that if the totalitarian monsters were to be defeated, it would require "every area and every resource" of the free world to gather against them. Moreover, for the Christian, he also understood war to have theologically terrible costs, involving

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a necessary renunciation, if partial, of the ethics of Christ.

Nevertheless, for his part Niebuhr pledged to his readers that in the struggle ahead he and his journal would “continue to interpret the world in which we are living in the light of our common faith”. It was the only service by which he could see his way through the present cataclysm.

Niebuhr’s vocation to bring faith to bear on our view of the world is perhaps nowhere better captured than in his Serenity Prayer. This famous orison has been variously misattributed to a remarkable range of personalities including Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi, Helen Keller, and Mother Goose. Almost as numerous are the various versions of the prayer. The one I offer here is itself cobbled together from several different renderings:

Father, give us the grace to change with  
courage what must be altered,  
serenity to accept what cannot be helped,  
and the wisdom to know the one from  
the other;  
living one day at a time,  
enjoying one moment at a time,  
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,  
taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is,  
not as we would have it, trusting that You  
will make all things right,  
if we surrender to Your will,  
so that we may be reasonably happy in this  
life,  
and supremely happy with You forever in  
the next.

A foretaste of his journal, Niebuhr crafted the prayer in the early 1930s, just as American churches were beginning to grapple with how to respond to the growing specter of Hitlerism and Japanese imperialism. For Niebuhr, the advent of WWII found him, again, moving to disabuse himself of his own rather cyclical fidelity to pacifism, which came and went in successive undulations since before the First World War. Against the pacifist sentiment and calls for isolationism dominate among his fellow Christians, Niebuhr insisted on a realistic response to the political crisis, one willing to dirty its hands to avoid catastrophic evil.



While much of this rightly positions Niebuhr in the stream of Christian realism, it is against his promotion of dirty hands that this essay is necessarily pitted. Rooted in Niebuhr’s dialectic between love and justice, alternatively cast as the tension, or contradiction, between love and responsibility, the Niebuhrian current of Christian realism results in what I will argue is a catastrophic paradox.

The paradox itself can be summarized as follows. The moral vision of the New Testament, specifically as revealed in the life of Christ, declares the Law of Love to be the normative ideal for Christian behavior. Given the conditions of history, however, this norm is impossible to follow. Alongside the Impossible Ideal is the possibility of approximating those ideals. Given these options, in the face of



sufficiently grave political evil, the Law of Love requires that we overrule love.

Just how all this works out can be seen by referring back to the Serenity Prayer, which in a general way lays bare the bones of Christian realism in its Niebuhrian form. In what follows, I will first explicate the prayer to better grasp the Niebuhrian paradox. With that in hand, I will reconnect us with the terrible experiences of Timothy Kudo, and show why this paradox is such a calamity.

## FACTS ON THE GROUND

In Niebuhr's prayer, realism's core commitment is found in the petition for the grace, courage, and serenity to take "this sinful

world as it *is*, not as we would have it". Take the second bit first. How *would* we have the world? In Niebuhrian terms, surely, we would have a world which abides by the Law of Love; one characterized by altruism and other-centered acts of self-donation. In Niebuhr's view, "the pacifists are quite right in one emphasis. They are right in asserting that love is really the law of life."<sup>2</sup> The Christian ethical idea—as displayed in the life of Christ—calls uncompromisingly for love without qualification. Niebuhr continues:

It is very foolish to deny that the ethic of Jesus is an absolute and uncompromising ethic. It is...an ethic of "love universalism and love perfectionism." The injunctions "resist not evil," "love your enemies," "if ye love them that love you what thanks have you?" "be not anxious for your life," and "be ye therefore perfect even as your father in heaven is perfect," are all one piece, and they are all uncompromising and absolute.<sup>3</sup>

This obviously requires radical self-sacrifice. Love means not simply nonviolence (*pace* most species of pacifism) but *nonresistance* to evil altogether, supported by unilateral absolutism in the face of injustice. In practical terms, love means the rejection of all forms of self-assertion or coercion in human relationships. The ideal of love, fueled by the "sublime naiveté of the religious imagination",<sup>4</sup> relinquishes moral judgment to look with impartiality toward the evil and the good.

But notice, even Niebuhr's description of the ideal world already admits that the law of love is not operative. "Non-resistance", "self-sacrifice", "absolution"—each term betrays the fact that something abides in the world that does not, itself, meet the ideal. Hence the first clause, the determination to take "this world as it is". Niebuhr understands there are those who acknowledge the fact of sin while nevertheless decrying his fatalism, insisting that the real problem is that "the law of love has not been preached persuasively enough". Such hardliners declare that "there is no conflict of interest which cannot be adjudicated".

Against such wishful thinking, Niebuhr rejects the idea that "pure moral suasion could

[solve every]...problem”. Considering the circumstances of the day, Niebuhr suggested that “if we believe that if Britain had only been fortunate enough to have produced 30 percent instead of 2 percent of conscientious objectors to military service, Hitler’s heart would have been softened and he would not have attacked Poland, we hold a faith which no historic reality justifies.” Therefore, the continued presence of recalcitrant injustice, “requires discriminate judgments between conflicting claims.”<sup>5</sup> Failure to provide such judgments, attempting to universalize Christian benevolence despite the malevolent insistence of some to do violence against the innocent, is to abandon the requirements of concrete neighbor-love.

This is because the Christian must hold that our neighbor, every neighbor, is worthy of love. To love something means, at least ultimately, that we desire to see it flourish. History, we’ve seen, proves that things tend not to flourish on their own. They have to be helped. No human being can long flourish if those basic goods necessary to life are unavailable. So then our task becomes trying to find the best ways to bring those goods within reach. In turn, neighbor-love implies concern for the good of our neighbor’s neighborhood, for context matters, and human beings suffer or prosper under conditions conducive to one or the other.

In place of the simplistic pursuit of the Law of Love, Niebuhr insists, love requires instead an ethic of responsibility.

## THE COURAGE TO ALTER

With this in view, Niebuhr’s opening request for “the grace to change with courage what must be altered” is a call to action. The Christian realist recognizes that the exculpatory witness of history makes plain what must be altered. Considering just the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *Encyclopedia of Genocide* calculates:

In total, during the first eighty-eight years of the century, almost 170 million men, women, and children [noncombatants] were shot, beaten, tortured, knifed,

burned, starved, frozen, crushed, or worked to death; buried alive, drowned, hanged, bombed, or killed in any other of the myriad other ways governments have inflicted deaths on unarmed helpless citizens and foreigners.

Some years back, I attended the ceremonies in Oswiecim, Poland, commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi concentration camps. At the end of the formal program, they began reciting over a loudspeaker the names of the dead. The endeavor was to continue until every name was read. During the next several hours during which I walked the grounds, the reading continued apace, and I thought to calculate just how long that awful litany would continue. Imagining they had all the names of the approximate 1.2 million people who were murdered there, and assuming it takes a single second to read each name, the recitation would have continued for 13.8 days. Nearly 14 days of names from the Auschwitz camps alone.

The manifestation in public and private life of certain words—order, concern, community, justice, responsibility, and love—tends toward the welfare of the innocent, while that of others—disorder, atomization, solipsism,



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injustice, desertion, and indifference—tends toward their annihilation. Therefore, Niebuhr was clear as to the purpose of political authority. Without divinizing government or even suggesting it is godly, he understood its divinely appointed task to include securing the conditions necessary for justice, order, and peace, political goods without which no other goods—such as life or health—can long endure.

Such political responsibility is grounded in the individual. That bit in Genesis in which humanity is revealed to be formed in the image of God and given dominion over all the earth signals a divine mandate. We have delegated responsibility—partial not ultimate—in history for the conditionals of history. But when faced with a choice between love or justice, the similarity between State and individual commitments ends. Unlike the individual, for whom love is binding, when the State must choose between the unachievable ideal of the Law of Love and an ethic of responsibility through which it is possible to achieve an efficacious, if only approximate, measure of justice, Niebuhr considers it inappropriate—not simply unrealistic—to expect, indeed to even desire, the State to act self-sacrificially or to transcend justice in favor of mercy. Such unilateral dismissal

of the facts on the ground can lead only to greater catastrophe. Political authorities must choose the possible over the impossible.

## WHAT CANNOT BE HELPED

Of course, “taking the world as it is” requires a recognition of limits. Our willingness to fight injustice must be qualified by an attendant humility acknowledging that some things, for any number of reasons, simply cannot be altered. “Give us”, Niebuhr pleads in the face of this, the “serenity to accept what cannot be helped”. Niebuhr addresses at least two such obdurate realities.

First, quite simply, we cannot contend against every evil out there. There are times when—despite our best intentions, desires, or efforts—we do not have the power to change or overcome our adversary’s will. In a world of competing interests and limited resources, even the most powerful or altruistic of nations cannot do everything nor avoid completely the irony of unintended consequences that accompanies all human activity. We botch, and we break, even as we attempt to mend.

One salutary outcome of this should be a realistic modesty of purpose. History, finally,



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doesn't depend on us. Our business is to resist evils, to do no harm, and to help—*where we can*. We needn't believe it in our power to attain any kind of final justice, order, or peace. Rather, we must be impatiently content with decent approximations. There is reason to be resolute about this, for our brief survey of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history ought to confirm for us the horrors that result when human beings grasp for an ultimate role in history.

Second, and this will introduce the focus of my critique of Niebuhr, he insists we cannot alter the fact that by seeking justice we become complicit in evil. This is not only because of the impurity of our wills—corrupted, as is our enemy's, by the fact of sin—nor only because of those unintended consequences that betray our aspirations. Rather, Niebuhr insists, it is because it is impossible to be responsible to the political needs of our threatened-neighbor without dirtying our hands. There is no avoiding this:

We cannot refuse to make a decision between political answers to a problem because each answer is discovered to contain a moral ambiguity...We are responsible for making choices between greater and lesser evils.<sup>6</sup>

What this amounts to, for Niebuhr, is that the Law of Love, as demonstrated by the life of Christ, is, as a guide to international relations, both practically impossible and dangerous in practice. Summarizing Niebuhr's view, Robin Lovin writes:

The point is made at first against a particular kind of Christian idealism, but in the end, the warning applies to idealisms of every kind: "Given the complexities of the human situation, a moral ideal alone cannot dictate what we ought to do...To devote oneself exclusively to determining and proclaiming the right thing to do," cautioned Niebuhr, "is most probably to render oneself powerless in the actual course of events."<sup>7</sup>

Impotence in the face of Nazism and Japanese militarism's totalitarian threats was not an option. We must, Niebuhr asserted, "strive for justice even if...forced to use means, such

as self-assertion, resistance, coercion...social conflict and violence...which cannot gain the moral sanction of the most sensitive of moral spirit."<sup>8</sup>

This is not, as some read Niebuhr, to abandon love completely; rather, it is a grave concession that "the ideal principle must be sacrificed to guarantee its partial realization."<sup>9</sup> Nor is this to say that Niebuhr chose the world over his moral principles or even, simply, that he chose the principle of justice over the principle of love. Justice, however paramount, must be brought under the control of love. "Any justice which is only justice", Niebuhr stresses, "soon degenerates into something less than justice."<sup>10</sup> Love must remain the "motive of social action", qualifying every application of



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justice even as love spurs its own rejection. This is the only way Niebuhr could see to account both for the fact of the supremacy of the Law of Love as well as the fact of sin.

It was the only way that he could see the Christian faithful having any effective role at all in helping to prevent the recitation of a full fourteen days of names, or a fifteenth, or a sixteenth.

## THE PROBLEM OF PARADOX

As I've already noted, Niebuhr had a rather on-off relationship with pacifism. He claimed to be a pacifist up to the start of the First World War, abandoned it after realizing the need to conquer German belligerence,

embraced it again after reflecting on the horrors of the conflict and deciding he was “done with the war business”, and then rejected it again and finally in the face of Nazism. Nevertheless, even as he railed against pacifist leanings before WWII, he never really gave pacifism up in principle. Given the example of Jesus, Niebuhr maintained that the Christian norm is non-resistance against evil. Therefore, waging war against Nazi fascism and Japanese militarism remained a morally evil enterprise—it was simply less morally evil than not waging war. Niebuhr rejected—or postponed—the Law of Love as ineffective, not wrong. This is a meaningful difference, for the warfighter especially.

Warfighters, because they are human beings, are at the same time both invariably sinful and yet capable of astonishing acts of other-centered self-donation. But in the Niebuhrian universe, the goodness of duty and of meeting one's martial responsibility is found in doing what ought never to be done. On the battlefield, the consequence of the Niebuhrian paradox between love and justice is made most clear: “It is not possible to move in history without becoming tainted with guilt.”<sup>11</sup>

Timothy Kudo left Afghanistan in 2011. Time passes, but memories remain. The slain Afghan teenagers are never far from his mind; their deaths remain a source of lasting anxiety.

It's been more than two years since we killed those people on the motorcycle, and I think about them every day. Sometimes it's when I'm reading the news or watching a movie, but most often it's when I'm taking a shower or walking down my street in Brooklyn.<sup>12</sup>

No one should question whether Kudo's remorse at the slaying of unarmed civilians is appropriate; its absence, surely, would be anathema. Naturally, more needs to be said about context and justification and about who is truly culpable and where various degrees of blame ought to be apportioned, including acknowledging the causal links between such unintended killings and insurgency tactics



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intentionally designed, in part, to lead to precisely such accidents. Nevertheless, the killing of children must engender rueful despair in any circumstance, and deep shame and guilt in some. Lament is always therefore a proper presence. But, crucially, the teenagers' deaths are not the only ones that haunt Lt. Kudo. Rather, he appears to be as traumatized at having killed enemy combatants as he is unarmed bystanders.

While he was never the trigger-puller, Kudo considers himself every bit a killer, and this fact in itself plagues him: "I never shot someone but I ordered bomb strikes and directed other people to shoot." Here he recalls the first time a Marine unit patrolling several miles away radioed for permission to fire on someone in the process of burying a roadside bomb. As the ranking officer, the decision fell to Kudo, and after deliberating he ordered the shot. Such events would come to typify his combat experience, and he looks back with horror at how easy it was to kill from a distance. Looking back, Kudo gives a somber assessment: "I didn't return from Afghanistan as the same person. My personality is the same, at least close enough, but I'm no longer the 'good' person I once thought I was." He continues:

When I joined the Marine Corps, I knew I would kill people. I was trained to do it in a number of ways, from pulling a trigger to ordering a bomb strike to beating someone to death with a rock. As I got closer to deploying to war...my lethal abilities were refined, but my ethical understanding of killing was not. I held two seemingly contradictory beliefs: Killing is always wrong, but in war, it is necessary. How could something be both immoral and necessary? I didn't have time to resolve this question before deploying. And in the first few months, I fell right into killing without thinking twice. We were simply too busy to worry about the morality of what we were doing.

Kudo's judgment that "killing is always wrong, but in war, it is necessary" is raw Niebuhrianism. In light of new understandings of combat trauma, it is also disastrous.

Readers of *Providence* will already be familiar with moral injury,<sup>13</sup> a proposed subset of PTSD that manifests not in symptoms associated to life-threat—such as hypervigilance, paranoia, and the like—but rather in symptoms such as shame, remorse, guilt, sorrow, and despair. Over time, clinicians have pointed toward several causes, including doing or allowing to be done something that goes against deeply held moral beliefs. The number one predictor for moral injury is having killed in combat, and there is no statistically significant distinction between the accidental killing of a non-combatant and the killing of an enemy within the laws of armed conflict and the framework of the just war tradition.<sup>14</sup> This would cohere with the belief that "killing is always wrong, but in war it is necessary". The problem is that the number one predictor of suicide among combat veterans is moral injury. That's to say, a bright line can be drawn between having killed in battle and combat veterans killing themselves, even long after those battles have ended.

Thus, my primary critique of Niebuhr is that he wrongly renders the very business of war-fighting morally injurious, and it is killing those who fight our wars.

## MORAL PORTAGE

Some have called Reinhold Niebuhr the father of Christian realism, in at least its modern framing. But not all Christian realists are Niebuhrian. Happily, there are different streams of this rich tradition, some of which afford us the ability to maneuver away from the twin hazards of the Niebuhrian paradox and thus avoid both the rocky shoals of rejecting love as well as the swirling whirlpool of rendering ourselves powerless against the conditions of history. In recovering Christian realism, and with a certain Augustinian undercurrent, we owe a debt of gratitude to Niebuhr for having brought us a good distance in the right direction. But on the question of the precise moral nature of war, there are surer, more morally navigable waters.

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In particular, the deeper Augustinian stream of Christian realism runs best through Thomas Aquinas. In Thomas, and in those who carry important currents of his thought forward—including the late scholastic Spaniards Francisco Suárez and Francisco di Vitoria, and, leaping forward, Paul Ramsey and Nigel Biggar—one can find tools capable of more nuanced moral reflection than on offer from Niebuhr.

The Christian realist in Thomistic waters, for instance, will not countenance the notion that the just war tradition counsels the performance of lesser evils. Instead, we discern that evil comes in different kinds, involving important distinctions between moral and non-moral evil. Moral evil—the intentional, unholy, privation of goodness—is an offense against God; it’s what used to be called “sin”. As such, Thomas reminds us it may never be freely and knowingly chosen—neither for the sake of justice nor anything else.<sup>15</sup> In this, Thomas is merely calling to mind the biblical witness regarding moral action: including John’s prescription to imitate good not evil, and Paul’s principled insistence to overcome evil with good, as opposed to further evil.<sup>16</sup> Because these verses are focused on ethics, the evil that is in mind here is clearly moral evil—sin.

But what of the other—non-moral—kind of evil? This returns us to the mention of evil as privation, made a moment ago. Evil-as-privation understands evil as the loss or diminishment of some essential good. Endorsing this privative view, Nigel Biggar stresses that killing another human being is always to cause an evil, because it deprives the victim of the *good* of life. He rightly presses this notion all the way down, applying it even to the killing of someone “who has let himself grow monstrously corrupt—think Hitler, Stalin, or Pol Pot”. That their death *seems* to involve the loss of nothing good is only because they have “so misdirected their lives that”, for most of the rest of us, their losing the *good* of life “amounts to a moral gain rather than a loss.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, while to kill a person is always to cause an evil it is not always to do a wrong. Biggar explains:

History is sometimes very unkind to us and forces us into the position of not being able to do anything without becoming responsible—in some sense—for causing evil. I can kill you out of contemptuous hatred, intending nothing less than your annihilation, constrained by no necessity, and with no proportionate reason to prefer another’s life to yours. Or I can kill you without malice, with respectful and manifest reluctance, necessitated by love for others, and with sufficient reason to prefer their lives to yours.<sup>18</sup>

Maintaining this distinction between non-moral and moral evils allows for the possibility that different kinds of evils issue in different kinds of consequence, that moral evil alone incurs moral guilt to the doer of the moral evil. Meanwhile, committing actions that result in a non-moral evil does not, at least not intrinsically. The removal of a child’s gangrened leg, for instance, is an evil, for it involves the loss of the essential good of bodily integrity and function. But if the hard deed is done by an honest surgeon with the aim of securing the child-patient’s health, then in the act of surgery no moral wrongdoing has occurred. In fact, the non-moral evil results from a moral act, and the proper response to the surgeon is gratitude. His skill, though not the necessity of employing it, is to be celebrated. Contrast this with the sadist who steals into the same child’s hospital room and chops away the gangrened leg for kicks. It makes no difference that the leg was due for removal—the sadist’s carving is a moral evil, a wrongdoing, and a guilt-worthy act.

To continue down this stream of moral reasoning would see us encounter further distinctions: between different kinds of killing; between intending, aiming at, and wanting particular kinds of outcomes; and between evil acts that are worthy of sorrow and even regret at their having to be done and those that ought to end in moral injury. *Pace* Niebuhr, the Augustinian stream of Christian Realism introduces no new moral legislation. Nor does it postpone old ones. Indeed, Niebuhr’s delaying sacrificial love because of its current impossibility doesn’t make much sense. In that future day, when



the conditions of the life are such that sacrificial love will be possible, sacrificial love presumably won't be necessary—there won't be any evil in the face of which self-sacrificial non-resistance will be required. But, surely, love is relevant *now*, and therefore it must remain the direct motive of all our actions *now*—not just in some future, far-off day. Because of the conditions of our world, including our own hearts, the full character of love will not be displayed. But our moral actions, at any given moment, strive to best approximate this fullness. That's to say, our criteria is never which action is the lesser evil, but which is the greatest achievable good. Such distinctions can help warfighters endure the moral bruising field of battle without becoming irreparably morally injured. If so, then we need to conclude that while Niebuhr's stream of Christian realism is good, Biggar's is, well, better.

None of this is to suggest easy solutions for Timothy Kudo's moral anguish. But it does allow for the Christian, or moralist, to justify use of lethal force on grounds other than lesser (moral) evils. In disentangling the very business of warfighting from moral injury, we may begin to unburden warfighters from unnecessary burdens of guilt. At the very least, in distinguishing actions that issue in sorrow from those that issue in sin, we may uncover different sets of remedies to address different kinds of wounds. P

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(Endnotes)

1 These events are described by Timothy Kudo in a *New York Times* op-ed, "On War and Redemption", dated November 8, 2011, and again in a *Washington Post* op-ed, "I Killed People in Afghanistan. Was I Right or Wrong?" dated January 25, 2013, and in an *Associated Press* article, "I'm a Monster: Veterans 'Alone' in their Guilt", by Pauline Jelinek, dated February 22, 2013.

2 Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist", in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 113–14.

3 *Ibid.*, 106.

4 Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Scribner's, 1960), 53.

5 Andrew Flescher, "Love and Justice in Reinhold Niebuhr's Prophetic Christian Realism and Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics of Responsibility: Treading between Pacifism and Just-War Theory", *The Journal of Religion*, no. 1 (2000): 28.

6 Reinhold Niebuhr, "Theology and Political Thought in the Western World", in *Reinhold Niebuhr: Major Works on Religion and Politics*, ed. Elisabeth Sifton (Library of America, 2015).

7 Robin W. Lovin, *Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995), 6.

8 Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Conflict Between Individual and Social Morality", in *Reinhold Niebuhr: Major Works on Religion and Politics*, ed. Elisabeth Sifton, 1st Ed. edition (New York, NY: Library of America, 2015).

9 Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 196.

10 Niebuhr, "The Conflict Between Individual and Social Morality".

11 "The Bombing of Germany", in: Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 222.

12 Unless stated otherwise, all of Kudo's quotations are taken from: Timothy Kudo, "I Killed People in Afghanistan. Was I Right or Wrong?" *Washington Post*, accessed December 5, 2013, [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com).

13 See Timothy S. Mallard, "The (Twin) Wounds of War", in *Providence's Fall* 2016 issue; and my "The Fifth Image: Seeing the Enemy With Just War Eyes", Summer 2016, and "Kevlar for the Soul: The Morality of Force Protection", Fall 2015.

14 The one qualification is that many who suffer moral injury *have* experienced, directly or not, the accidental killing of civilians. The question then is to what degree such accidental killing grounds one's perception of all lethal combat action.

15 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, n.d., see, for example, 1a-2ae.6-17.

16 Consider 3 John: 11 and Romans 12:17, respectively; and further on, Romans 12:21 and, earlier, 3:8.

17 Nigel Biggar, *In Defence of War* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 92.

18 *Ibid.*

THERE IS MORE IN YOU OF GOOD THAN YOU KNOW,  
CHILD OF THE KINDLY WEST.

SOME COURAGE AND SOME WISDOM, BLENDED IN  
MEASURE.

IF MORE OF US VALUED FOOD AND CHEER  
AND SONG ABOVE HOARDED GOLD, IT  
WOULD BE A MERRIER WORLD.

*Deathbed confession of*  
THORIN OAKENSHIELD *to* BIBLO BAGGINS



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DOMINION /də'mɪnyən (IS NOT)  
DOMINATION /dəmən'nāSH(ə)n/

“Let us make mankind in our image; and let them have dominion over all the earth...” Called to share the Divine likeness, human beings were made to exercise rule in the form of dominion: delegated, providential care—responsibility—for the conditions of history, in history. Such care is characterized by other-centered acts of self-donation. This contrasts sharply with domination. Since the Fall in the Garden of Eden, human beings have been afflicted by the *libido dominandi*—we have been ruled by the lust to rule. Domination is characterized by self-centered acts of other-donation that feed our hunger for power, advantage, and glory through the forced submission of the powerless to our will.

The political-theological patrimony of the Christian intellectual tradition, including just war casuistry, helps guide human beings back to the just exercise of our governing vocation. In our private and public lives, including through the work of government, human dominion is approximate, limited, and imperfect. Following after God’s work of creating, sustaining, and liberating all of creation, human beings exercise power with the aim of peace, characterized by the presence of justice and order as oriented toward genuine human flourishing.

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