



As a national symbol of the French Republic, Marianne, personification of liberty and reason, is an icon of freedom against every form of tyranny or dictatorship. As a feminine allegory, she symbolized the break with the old monarchy headed by kings. She is displayed throughout France, in pride of place in town halls and courts of law, on coins and stamps, and on official documents.

MORAL CLARITY IN A TIME OF TERROR

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The common observation is that the November attacks in Paris were “senseless,” “irrational,” and “misguided” violence. Nothing could be further from the truth. Christianity can help explain what happened on that Friday the 13th as well as what is to be done.

Before we look at some Christian contributions that can deepen our understanding, it is wise to first repeal the use of words like senseless and irrational. The perpetrators clearly had their senses about them in planning and executing this highly coordinated and well-executed attack. Moreover, there was a “point” in these attacks: to terrify the French populace and harass the French government and its allies. The attacks were at least somewhat successful in doing so.

Liberal pundits use those terms (i.e., “senseless”) because they themselves, as observers, cannot make sense of what happened. Christianity, in contrast, can provide us with a clear lens with which to scrutinize the Paris attacks. They were deliberate, unrestrained, unprovoked, and unlawful (extra-judicial) mass murder perpetrated by sadistic criminals on unsuspecting, legally innocent civilian victims.

Christianity can sum it all up in a single word: evil.

How does the Christian know it is evil? The word has largely fallen out of favor as a frank

indictment of individual sin. Instead, we often hear of “social ills,” “structural evil,” and similar phrasing, all of which suggest that “evil” is something outside a person that happens to a person, usually as the result of chance, misfortune, or unenlightened social norms. Evil, progressives tell us, is a social construct.

The Bible gives a different, multifaceted view of evil as real and personal. When considering Abdelhamid Abaaoud and his henchman in the 11/13 attacks, most Christians, although not all, recognize that the rejection by violent Islamists of Jesus Christ as Lord is at the root of all contemporary evil. Beyond the religious politics associated with Islamic State and its ilk, the Bible clearly states the intention of our adversary: “For the thief comes to kill, steal, and destroy...”¹

Kill. Steal. Destroy. That is the game plan of the Enemy, who is often depicted as a hungry predator. The focused purpose of all forces that counter the objectives of the Christian God is destructive. It is evil to murder, steal, cheat, and destroy the principal Creation, “in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”²

Thus, as Jean Bethke Elshtain reminded us, Christianity allows us to make right distinctions, such as between good and evil.³ In the Paris case, the actions of the murderers were evil, whereas the use of force by law enforcement, which will be discussed later, was good.

Second, Christianity provides us with guidance about how to react. Christians are to respond with love, both individually and collectively.

What does it mean to respond to evil with love? Are Christians supposed to “turn the other cheek” and invite terrorists to kill again? Of course not. Echoing Martin Luther, C.S. Lewis succinctly refuted pacifism as irresponsible: “Does anyone suppose that our Lord’s hearers understood him to mean that if a homicidal maniac, attempting to murder a third party, tried to knock me out of the way, I must step aside and let him get his victim?”⁴

When we think about employing love, we need to think in terms of what political scientists call two different “levels of analysis:” the *individual* level and the *collective* level.⁵ Above all, the individual Christian should be motivated by love. This is manifest in many ways such as through prayer for survivors, the wounded, witnesses, the families of the lost, and those in authority dealing with the situation. Prayer can also be more widely offered on behalf of government, security, and law enforcement personnel that they be wise, protected, and effective in promoting the common weal. Prayer can be directed against those who would kill and against the conditions that spawn destruction and violence. Finally, prayer can be offered about our own intentions: that we have right intentions in our actions and that God brings peace to the heart of victims lest hatred, bitterness, and vengefulness poison hearts. We must pray for health and healing for all, including adversaries like ISIS that have a murderous religious ideology.

Love can also motivate a nearly limitless number of actions by individuals and families, such as providing material assistance such as

monies to victims’ funds and the like. This is what Paul (1 Cor. 13) and Augustine (City of God) called charity (*caritas*: neighbor love).



A symbol of freedom, the political significance of the pileus has also been used as an apologetic for assassination. Immediately after the murder of Caesar in 44 B.C., the Senatorial conspirators—the self-acclaimed “liberatores”—sought to rally the Romans in the Forum using a pileus atop a pole as a sort of standard in hopes of persuading the people that Caesar’s death meant liberty and the salvation of the Republic. Brutus utilized the image in the same way in this “Ides of March” denarius. (public domain)

But it is to the collective forms of neighbor love that we must turn. How do human collectives, and the leaders who serve the public, actualize neighbor love? How does a president, a legislator, a policeman, or a soldier enact neighbor love in his God-given vocation? Augustine observed that it is lawful for legitimate political authorities to use force to right a past wrong, punish wrongdoers, or prevent future wrongs. The actions can be motivated by the willingness to serve and protect one’s fellow citizens and to see justice established.

Augustine, in letters to public officials and soldiers (Publicola, Boniface), wrote that it is not death itself that is the greatest evil, for we all will face death sooner or later.⁶ Rather, the evil in war is when it is motivated—or we are overcome by—lust, greed, hatred, and fear. The moral warrior is motivated by love, whether it be righteous indignation over past wrongs, a desire for justice, a love for humanity, or a calling to protect and defend the weak.

Christian just war theory, which today is the basis for the international law of armed conflict (e.g., Geneva Conventions), developed over the past two millennia to provide guidelines for leaders and warriors. It was developed largely by Christian thinkers reflecting on the application of Biblical

principles to the real world: Ambrose and Augustine during the late Roman Empire, Aquinas during the wars of Islamic expansion and Crusades, Vitoria and Suarez during the Spanish Conquest, and many others. Thus, it should be no surprise that all of the major Christian religious traditions embrace some form of just war thinking (Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, Reformed, and most Baptists).



These French revolutionaries are wearing the *bonnets rouges*, also known as the *Phrygian cap*, which represents the *pileus*—the felt cap of ancient Rome symbolically given to manumitted (emancipated) slaves. Note that Marianne is depicted wearing just such a cap. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

More specifically, just war thinking considers two things: under what conditions is it moral to go to war (*jus ad bellum*) and how violence can be employed and restrained during war in ways that comport with just war principles (*jus in bello*). In recent years, I and others have developed models for *jus post bellum* as well.⁷ Just war thinkers acknowledge the difference between unlawful, unrestrained violence by non- or sub-state actors (criminals, terrorists, pirates) and lawful, restrained force in the hands of legitimate political authorities. Hence, just war thinking begins with three *jus ad bellum* criteria: *legitimate authority* acting on a *just cause* with *right intent*. Practical and prudential, secondary *jus*

ad bellum considerations include: *likelihood of success*, *proportionality of ends*, and *last resort*. Criteria regarding *jus in bello* conduct include: *proportionality* of means and tactics proportionate to battlefield objectives which limit harm to civilians, other non-combatants, and property (*discrimination*).

Christian just war theory provides a targeted lens for thinking about the Paris attacks. The killers violated every just war principle. Governments responding to the crisis, in contrast, were living up to their responsibilities.

Thus, when considering the Paris attacks of November the 13th, Christianity provides moral clarity in more than one area. Christianity helps us identify the actions and motivations of the terrorists as evil and immoral. Against such evils, Christianity calls on responsible authorities and those over whom they govern to take action and provides a standard against which to prompt, evaluate, and restrain our individual and collective motives and behavior.

In Paris and beyond, Christianity continues to be relevant in the age of terrorism. P

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(Endnotes)

1 John 10:10.

2 Genesis 1:27

3 This is a principal argument of Jean Bethke Elstain, *Just War Against Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

4 Quoted in J. Daryl Charles and Timothy J. Demy, *War, Peace, and Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), p. 253.

5 This framework was first provided in Waltz's 1959 *Man, the State, and War but a formal, short treatment can be found in Kenneth Waltz (2000), 'Structural Realism after the Cold War', International Security, Vol. 25, no. 1, 5-41.*

6 Augustine's letters are freely available online, such as at: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102189.htm>.

7 Patterson's principles of *jus post bellum* are *Order, Justice, and Conciliation*. See *Ending Wars Well: Just War Theory in Post-Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012) and *Patterson, Ethics Beyond War's End* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).