



**Hess, Richard S., and Elmer A. Martens, eds.**

***War in the Bible and Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century***

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This volume of collected essays has its roots in a conference sponsored by the Association for Christian Conferences, Teaching, and Service and the Biblical Studies division of Denver Seminary in February 2004. The conference was designed specifically in light of the invasion of Iraq, which had taken place one year earlier, and set for itself the agenda of exploring “the teaching of biblical ethics regarding modern war” (viii). The contributors include three Old Testament scholars, two professors of Christian ethics, one systematic theologian, and two U.S. and British military officers. Though vocationally diverse, the authors primarily represent either pacifist or just-war positions and operate consistently from a conservative evangelical Christian perspective.

The book itself is not divided into sections, yet the essays generally move from pacifist treatments to just-war discussions. There is a brief, two-page preface (as well as author and scripture indices). The issues related to the justifications of and responses to the 2003 invasion of Iraq loom large over the essays, and the just-war discussions are dominated by the specific case of the United States’ involvement in the “war on terror.”

The opening essay (“Christianity and Violence”), by Miroslav Volf, provides the conceptual orientation for the volume as a whole. Beginning from the recognition of

religion's influence on society, brought clearly into view through the events of September 11, 2001, Volf poses the basic question of whether the Bible, monotheism, and Christianity in particular, legitimize and even advocate warfare. Answering in the negative, he argues that the "misuse" (15) of Christianity to promote violence results from a "thin" reading that removes elements of scripture and belief from the "thickness" of their rootage in the original and historic tradition of the Christian faith, with its "inner logic" (15) constituted by convictions such as *creatio ex nihilo* and Trinitarian conceptions of monotheism. Ultimately for Volf, the culprit responsible for such misuse is the Enlightenment concept of religion, which reduces the historic Christian tradition to a nondescript religiosity that serves only a therapeutic role for life that is ultimately defined by factors such as national and economic interests. The problem created by certain violent aspects of the biblical texts and Christian faith can be obviated by interpreting these elements within the overarching construal of a Trinitarian and apostolic formulation of the Christian tradition. While Volf's discussion interacts with a number of divergent voices (e.g., Regina Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997]), his arguments do not escape such perennial difficulties as the ideological nature of the historic Christian tradition and the import of Holocaust studies.

Richard S. Hess ("War in the Hebrew Bible: An Overview") moves away from Volf's constructive direction to the historical and descriptive. In spite of the title, the essay does not offer an extensive survey of the dimensions of war in the Hebrew Bible but examines recent studies devoted to the moral questions raised by particular biblical portrayals of war (e.g., the role of Yahweh as the model warrior). Hess argues against the notion that the diverse biblical traditions about war are irreconcilable and glorify war in unacceptable ways (see, e.g., John J. Collins, "The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence," *JBL* 122 [2003]: 3–21). Rather, he proposes that there is a basic "moral tenor" to the Hebrew Bible's depictions of war that conceives of war as a "necessary evil" sometimes required by the sovereignty of God in order to struggle against cosmic evil (31).

Elmer A. Martens and M. Daniel Carroll R. follow with two studies devoted to demonstrating that contextual analysis of scripture leads Christians to adopt a pacifist stance. Martens's contribution, "Toward Shalom: Absorbing the Violence," surveys biblical texts to argue that the consistent aim of God's activity is to establish shalom ("an all-embracing well-being," 34) and that the cross of Christ displays the method of "absorbing the violence" (33) by which this shalom can be accomplished. Heavy notions of divine sovereignty and justice lead him to view the biblical portrayals of human violence at the direction of God as mechanized outworkings of the "built-in order of the universe" (45) in which God is only indirectly involved, and the portrayals of God's own

violence as moments when the divine condescends to a less-than-ideal practice in the interest of the larger cause of justice. Contemporary Christians, however, should conclude that God's occasional willingness to act violently for the sake of justice means that they should not engage in any violence of their own. Whereas Hess and Martens interpret violent biblical texts in terms of the larger fabric of scripture as a whole, Carroll's essay, "Impulses toward Peace in a Country at War: The Book of Isaiah between Realism and Hope," operates from his specific experiences in Guatemala from 1982 to 1996 and his reflections upon particular passages in Isaiah (esp. 32:1-8). He argues that Christian reflection on issues of violence must begin from the question of Christian identity and mission, rather than from the question of the justness of war. In his view, the words of Isaiah in the midst of the Assyrian crisis of 701 B.C.E. provide an example in which a prophetic voice opposes the realism and pragmatism that seem to demand war and rather calls for an alternative social order that sees beyond the current conflict in light of a particular eschatological hope. From this perspective, a pacifist stance is "the only possible ethical option for Christians" (59).

The next essay, by Daniel R. Heimbach, begins a series of three chapters that interact directly with issues arising from the U.S. involvement in the Iraq war. Heimbach's contribution ("Distinguishing Just War from Crusade: Is Regime Change a Just Cause for Just War?") opposes that of Carroll, although not explicitly, arguing that Christian validation of just war has been the long-standing tradition of the church and is "totally faithful to Scripture" (79). Rather than arguing this case, however, Heimbach assumes the question that the volume aims to address, as he takes for granted that governments have a moral obligation to stop evil by using war if necessary. From this starting point, his essay is concerned to establish the difference between a just war and a crusade vis-à-vis the question of just cause for the war in Iraq. Just war must be a response to a wrong actually suffered and precludes the notion of preemptive violence. He identifies the Iraq war as just in light of the terms established for the end of the first Gulf War in 1991.

Tony Pfaff's essay, entitled, "Noncombatant Immunity and the War on Terrorism," is one of two written by military personnel (it even begins with a disclaimer that his views do not represent those of the U.S. Department of Defense). Taking his point of departure from the difference between the criminal model and the war model for pursuing terrorists, Pfaff mines the history of the just-war discussion among theologians to argue that modern terrorists should be pursued as criminals (rather than enemy combatants) unless their actions constitute an attack on the "political sovereignty and territorial integrity of a particular nation" (105). Even when the war model is justified, however, it must be tempered by the just-war notions of proportionality and double-effect.

Ian G. C. Durie's contribution, "Terrorism: What Is It and How Do We Deal with It?" claims that just war is the "unashamedly Christian" ethic, although it is permissible for some Christians in certain circumstances to align themselves with pacifism and other "humanist" ethics (115). Governments have the right to respond to terrorism within the limits of just-war doctrines, but the church bears the responsibility to call both terrorists and governments to account for ways in which they violate practices of justice. While the essays by Pfaff and Durie provide interesting insight into the ways in which members of military establishments work with elements of the Christian theological tradition, their arguments at times rely on the practice of biblical proof-texting and arise out of particular theological notions such as the distinction between a divine "permissive will" and "direct will."

The final essay, by Glen H. Stassen ("Just Peacemaking Reduces Terrorism between Palestine and Israel"), moves in a different direction altogether and likely holds the most promise for stimulating further research (see his earlier edited work, *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* [Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1998 and 2004]). Stassen looks beyond the questions of pacifism and the justifications for war to propose that Christians are obliged to engage in intentional peacemaking practices. He draws the formulations of such practices from both biblical texts (e.g., the Joseph stories in Gen 42–50) and contemporary situations (e.g., the Israeli-Palestinian conflict). Stassen's concluding chapter combines with Volf's opening essay to give the nonviolent trajectory the primary framing voice in the volume as a whole.

A collection that wrestles with so many weighty issues is sure to be of value to many audiences. On the one hand, the conservative evangelical orientation (see x), as well as the engagement with military ethics, make this work informative as a snapshot of the approaches operative within such circles. On the other hand, this well-defined orientation limits the volume's ability to make a significant contribution to the broader discussion of war, violence, and religion. Similarly, the four-year delay in the publication of the essays potentially limits their contribution, as many of the issues addressed, especially concerning the Iraq war, were fresh in 2004 but seem staid in the present context. Most significantly, the collection suffers from a lack of coherence and organization. The volume contains no bibliographies for individual articles or the whole, and the editors have supplied no substantial introduction or conclusion. The different elements of just war, pacifism, terrorism, and the Bible are addressed by the essays but rarely come into direct engagement with one another. The chapters devoted to pacifism, for example, give the impression of being a different discussion from that which is occurring in the just-war essays, and some of the just-war treatments explicitly bracket out pacifist perspectives from consideration in their discussions. The result is an insightful collection of discrete

treatments, but one that does not draw the reader into an integrated and systematic conversation among the various voices.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, Hess and Martens have produced a volume that illuminates once more the numerous issues involved in the intersection of the Bible, theology, ethics, and the practices of modern nation-states. Given the poignancy of these issues, this volume should be considered by all those interested in that conversation.