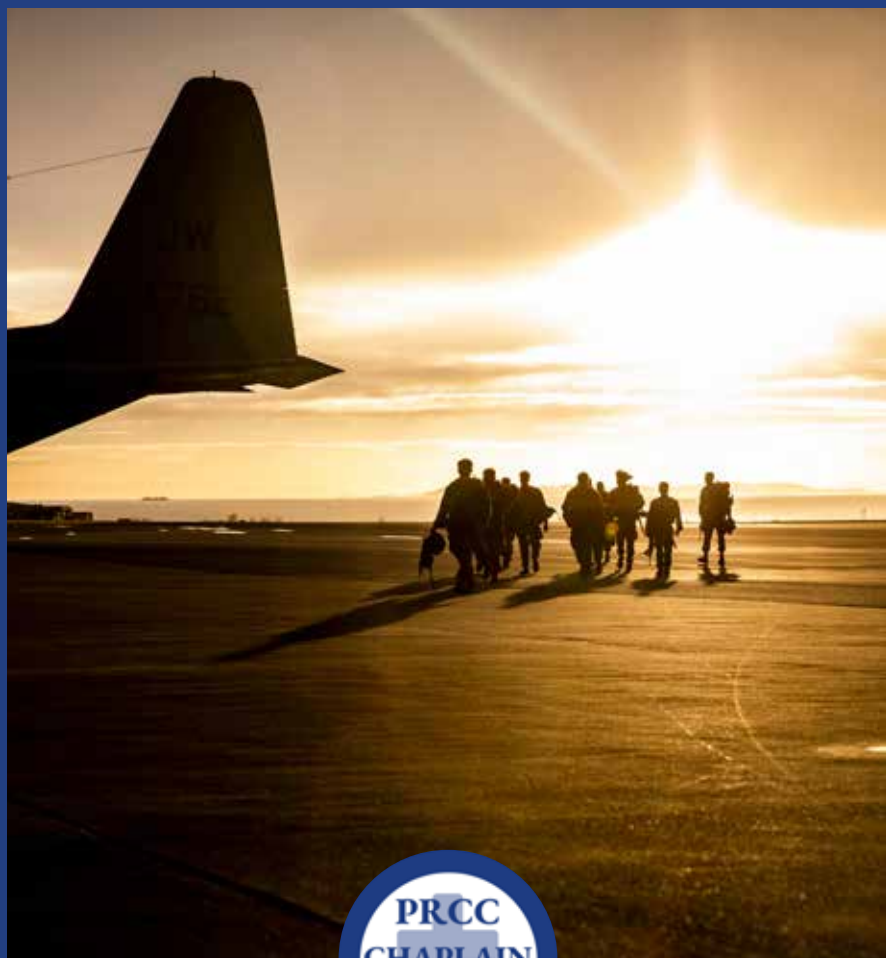


Military & Veteran Church Ministry

AN URGENT NEED TO BE A VOICE
FOR JUSTICE IN WAR



The Resource Mission of the PRCC:

The military is a culture unlike any other. It brings challenges, temptations, and struggles that are unique to its mission. Uncovering what these issues are and addressing them is vital for churches and organizations that are connected to those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces.

To assist civilian ministry, the Presbyterian & Reformed Chaplain Commission (PRCC) offers resources to make the gospel message accessible to military life. What we provide is based on the beliefs (a) that overcoming any challenge in life begins by turning to Christ, and (b) that apart from the enlightenment of the Word and the regenerative work of the Spirit a person will not find their greatest purpose, peace of mind or recovery from sin or afflictions. With this vision, we offer this pamphlet as a way to understand issues confronting military members while pointing to how we can call upon God to bring hope. Please give feedback on what we offer as we want to refine this ministry to bring greater impact in the Kingdom of God.

This pamphlet provides a pressing call for churches to engage in military and veteran ministry by helping its members and our nation understand justice in war. This insight, central to church doctrine and its calling, is missing. We want this material to give insight into how the Church can find its place to support its people.

We are grateful to Dr. Dwight Horn for his authorship of this booklet. It is our hope this will be beneficial to you and your congregation.

Dr. James R. Carter

Executive Director & Endorser, PRCC

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“Killing in War Leaves Veterans with Lasting Psychological Scars, Study Finds”

“All I knew is I hurt inside and I didn’t know why, you know? I didn’t know why I should feel so bad if I didn’t do anything wrong. I was not a baby killer. I was not—I did my job. I did what everybody else did. But always that nagging question, why do I hurt like this?”
[ref. in #1]

These words from a study on the impact of war reveal the incredible turmoil and anguish that comes to those who fought but have no way of understanding what they did in confronting and killing the enemy.^[1] Yet, we should ask, how did this lack of preparation for combat happen? We, individually and collectively as a nation, send patriots to fight our battles. Do we not prepare these people spiritually, morally, and psychologically to answer the inner convictions that come when death and destruction become their job and haunting memory?

This is a question most directly for the Church. Have we taught or trained members on this? Do those within our churches know what it means to take a life and what justifies that act? We likely know the answer and it is more revealing than we want it to be.

Christians are the salt and light of the world. We hold the keys to truth in the Word of God, which is profitable for teaching, conviction, correction, and training in righteousness (II Tim 3:16).

When it comes to war it is time to address what it means to send people to kill our enemies.

In the past, religion was preeminent in addressing the question of what constitutes a just war^[2]. Credit for this is given to Cicero, Augustine, and Aquinas.

John Calvin, *Institutes on Civil Government*

As it is sometimes necessary for kings and states to take up arms in order to execute public vengeance, the reason assigned furnishes us with the means of estimating how far the wars which are thus undertaken are lawful. For if power has been given them to maintain the tranquility of their subjects, repress the seditious movements of the turbulent, assist those who are violently oppressed, and animadvert on crimes, can they use it more opportunely than in repressing the fury of him who disturbs both the ease of individuals and the common tranquility of all; who excites seditious tumult, and perpetrates acts of violent oppression and gross wrongs? [ref. #2]

Cicero offers that nature brings order to human activity as a direct result of God's just rule given to humans: "the origin of justice is to be sought in the divine law of eternal and immutable morality. This indeed is the true energy of nature, the very soul and essence of wisdom, the test of virtue and vice."^[3]

Augustine follows this and focuses on the connection between justice and war.^[4] The goal is shalom, for all to be at rest in the goodness of God: "Peace should be the object of your desire; war

should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may by it deliver men from the necessity and preserve them in peace.” [5]

Augustine also says that a just war should only be waged by rulers and carried out by combatants who ultimately seek peace: “A great deal depends on the causes for which men undertake wars, and on the authority they have for doing so; for the natural order which seeks the peace of mankind, ordains that the monarch should have the power of undertaking war if he thinks it advisable, and that the soldiers should perform their military duties in behalf of the peace and safety of the community.” [6]



Aquinas later picks up the theory in his work, *The Summa Theologica*, and offers what the basis should be for starting a just war: 1) authority of the sovereign who exclusively has the right to declare hostile action; 2) a just cause, i.e., “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 it has seized unjustly”; and 3) a right intent, one that does not stem from “the desire for aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and of uplifting the good.” [7]

These are the beginnings of Just War Theory, which has developed into a fully crafted framework for deciding on whether to wage war. It is based on three principles: *jus ad bellum*—justice before war, *jus in bello*—justice in war, and *jus post bellum*—justice after war. The overall idea is that if a country is to enter conflict, it must regard the rights, dignity, and values of the opposing party at all stages of the engagement.

The necessity of this doctrine came to its prominence at the Treaty of Westphalia, 1648, where nations were given protection from outsiders against the violation of personal and territorial rights. Since then, the Treaty has become the “foundation of the modern international order.” [8]

However, as we know, for some, treaties become irrelevant, as witnessed by continuous conflicts between parties. Thus, after the Second World War, nations came together again and this time they institutionalized the “Just War Doctrine”, providing a framework for how to decide when war is just. The agreement, decided upon in 1945, became known as the United Nations Charter. Its purpose is focused on peace:

We the people of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, ...and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained.”

It is not the purpose of this pamphlet to develop further where Just War Theory stands today and how it has changed and been

If this is of interest, there are ample resources available that tackle this, and I would refer you to chapters 9-11 of my book ^[9], which look in depth at just war and the issues surrounding it.

For our focus, we need to be aware of the importance of justice in war and determine how the Church can engage on this, providing a Biblical viewpoint. Silence on our part does not prepare civilians, military members, or our nation for war. It rather leaves us collectively without a proper view of how to face this day and age where wars and rumors of war abound. ^[10]

We must, therefore, receive the challenge to do our part to make certain that our church members are equipped and knowledgeable on how God views their roles individually and collectively when it comes to our nation going to war and what our part might be in that.

“Veterans’ Perspectives on the Impact of Killing in War”

Many [from war] described “haunting” thoughts associated with their killing: “I still have the pictures in my mind about it, you know. And when we’re talking right now I get—I’m just... sorry for what I did.” ...One Vietnam veteran confessed: “I think about them all the time. I see them in vivid color. I’m still fighting this guy I’ve been fighting for 40 years.” Killing and its moral implications were central to veterans’ haunting memories. [words added, ref is in f.n. 10]





In Deuteronomy, the final book of the Torah, Moses pleads with the Israelites to receive and live in the blessings of God, avoiding the punishment that comes with rebellion. The essence of his message is found in chapter six where Moses says, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” ^[1]

To know God and to recognize Him alone is to be united both with the goodness of creation and with one’s created purpose, all of which are perfectly expressed and retained through love. But will the Israelites heed Moses’ plea and obey? That will be tested immediately as they move toward and into the promised land. They will be faced with the challenge to fight a strong and mighty enemy and in human terms, the prospect of victory will not seem good. Yet, they should not despair as their rebellious forefathers did. For as Moses says, elevate your understanding of what is really going on: “When you go out to battle against your enemies and see horses and chariots and people more numerous than you, do not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, is with you.” ^[2]

If you engage in war under God’s direction, seeking His desire to bring justice, the victory He determines is yours. You go as God’s ambassadors to bring about goodness and righteousness in

keeping with His desire. You stand against evil with a God who reigns supreme.

Notice too, as Moses further relays about going to war for God, the religious leaders should come to the warriors to assure them that God is ordaining this effort—the “Just Call” for battle—by saying: “Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.” [13]

What is vital here is not only the words of encouragement as given by the priests, but that they are offered by this group, the very representatives for God. This unquestionably gives certainty that this is a “just war.” It allows warriors to step off with peace of mind, knowing that as they go into this fight God is with them, establishing righteousness through them.

There is nothing more central to the warrior than to know that he is a just warrior in a just battle with a just cause. It makes his efforts noble and does not lead to self-recrimination.

Unfortunately, that assurance is not provided today. The Armed Forces and the Department of Defense policy that guides and initiates war does not look for this. It grounds the need for war in the Clausewitzian dictum that “war is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse, with a mixture of other means.” [14] It is stated in Joint Policy Publication Doctrine in this way: “War is socially sanctioned violence to achieve a political purpose. War can result from the failure of states to resolve their disputes by diplomatic means.” [15]

Have we moved away from the true intention for war, basing the decision today on a pragmatic decision to seek a diplomatic end rather than any sanctified effort to establish righteousness under God's leading? This seems to be the case.

3

The Importance of Involving The Church

A just war can only be based on a just cause. This must stem from the right intent, as a last resort, and when enjoined by leadership that acts solely to restore righteousness and to stop evil. "It is the final act to restore every aspect of goodness through the rightful execution of lethal power and for the ultimate realization of humanity existing in its proper interrelationships." [16]



Who, we should ask, is best able to determine this? While the legal departments and appointed leaders in the federal and military agencies have the authority to adjudicate this, is it not the religious leaders who should truly have a voice in this decision as they seek

God's wisdom about the justness of some conflict? Certainly not in a way that upturns the separation of church and state, violating the need for each entity to direct its own polity and doctrine.^[17] But specifically for the church, by being a moral beacon, bearing witness to God's truth and guiding all, even those outside religious institutions, toward righteous decisions.



This logic seems so apparent, and that this kind of influence is not as present or impactful as needed has many negative consequences, especially for the actual warfighters. They are the ones on the front lines killing the enemy. They are the ones who particularly need to know that their actions are aligned to ultimate goodness. Without that, once they pull the trigger and take a life, their lives will forever be changed. One day, usually long after they have left the battlefield, their conscience will rise to judge the rightness of their actions (Rom 2:14-16). They will ask themselves then, why they killed those people? Was it just? Am I a murderer? In the absence of spiritual guidance and absolution to resolve these questions—essential assurance not afforded to them before, during or after

war—guilt and conviction will plague them. It takes little effort to find how this plays out with veterans. As one study states:

“Guilt and shame appear to be important mediating factors in the relationship between killing and PTSD, depression, and suicidality. ...[F]or many veterans, the most “haunting and impactful” war events are those involving perceived moral transgressions. Studies of U.S. military veterans show that shame, guilt, and the belief that one has participated in immoral acts are significantly associated with both suicidal ideation and PTSD. Killing, especially but not exclusively the killing of civilians, is thus hypothesized to be an agent of moral injury that contributes to the feelings of guilt and shame underlying some posttraumatic stress, depression, and suicidality. With regard to social and behavioral impacts, ...killing in combat independently predicted post-deployment alcohol abuse, anger, and relationship problems among veterans.” [18]

The raw reality of this is expressed well by one veteran:

“Some of the things I did were totally wrong, you know, in my conscience. But when I was over there... You don’t really care about what’s going on and I was on a power trip.... But then you have to come back and you have to think about that later on and what you’re responsible for and that’s very hard. That comes back to haunt me all the time.” [19]

We are a nation currently involved in shadow wars around this world (Syria, Iraq, Africa...) and we are on the verge of a World War, which so many headlines reveal and for which every military service chief is completely reshaping their forces to confront. Yet, how is the Church involved in shaping the moral compass on conflict? Are religious leaders proclaiming, training, and advising to all who

will listen on justice, righteousness, and goodness as it is reflected in decisions on war? Do we hear their voices in our sanctuaries, preparing congregants to know God's truth on justice in war? If our answer is no, is it not fair to say that religious influence is being lost on this critical issue?

On the military side, we do have chaplains involved in discussions with leaders on topics related to justice, but not in great number. Much more is needed. I know this personally from my time in the service. The importance or connection between justice and war is not a central focus. There is ample attention in training paid to the development of the neuromotor capability to kill. Yet, conjoining that with equal training on how justice is upheld by this activity does not occur.

I discussed this matter with a senior general officer who essentially told me that having his forces understand the moral implications of if they should kill another was not important. He simply needed them to follow orders, "putting steel on target", when directed. I told him rather brazenly, considering his position and protocol, that much more is needed. Combatants need to know that their actions align to justice or else they will one day suffer the consequences of it. They are not excused, I said, because someone orders them to take a life.^[20] They must know that what they are doing aligns to justice. If they do not understand this, though they will follow orders to shoot the

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enemy, one day their anguish for not understanding this issue will come and it will slowly but surely destroy them, I offered.

Our military is the best in the world, and is unrivalled in its ability to maintain peace, protect our nation and the rights of those throughout this world. Yet, when it comes to training on how these objectives align to justice, more needs to be done. This is where the church can become instrumental. We can engage on this issue and provide insight on why, where and when righteousness should be defended. We can be the heralds for God's truth to empower those in the congregation to be influential and thoughtful in conversation on matters of war.



Hopefully, we as leaders in the church see this, and can see that the time for this to occur is now, especially given the increasingly hostile and militaristic conditions around this world.

If we as a church do not engage on all these fronts, we must consider that we might be creating a situation where we leave those who are sent to kill for us to deal with these kinds of questions alone. We could be leaving them powerless and vulnerable to issues about morality and the importance of maintaining holiness.

Perhaps this is occurring to some degree already, and it is why, as one study offers, many combatants leave their faith once they return from war:

*“One veteran, who left his church after Vietnam, pinpointed the moral conflict at the root of his departure: ‘Since when did God decide we were the good guys and they were the bad guys and it was okay to kill them?’ Many decided it was not okay, and some found themselves disgusted with justifications proffered by religious leaders during war: **‘The chaplain is giving a blessing before going out to the field... get some body count for your leaders, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost—whoa—this is a strange game.’** This veteran was not the only one to point out the apparent hypocrisy of religious figures during the war and to identify this as a source of his alienation from organized religion. Disgust with the sanctioned violence of war undermined religiosity for many veterans and convinced some that God could not exist. After Vietnam, concluded one veteran, ‘there is no God.’ A good God, some argued, would not allow so much violence, evil, and injustice. Quipped one Iraq War veteran, ‘If God exists, he must hate Iraqis.’”* ^[21]

When the Church does not help its people discern how war is connected to justice, people disconnect from their faith. It has failed them.

What creates even greater challenges with this issue are misguided religious leaders who are supposed to be trusted moral authorities on questions of war but who are themselves confused on the matter. For instance, I had one chaplain tell me right outside of Fallujah, Iraq, during the battle, that we should not be there because war is evil. That comment was illogical and ill-conceived on several levels.



Yet, another religious leader, in a conversation with a reporter about the legitimacy of going to Iraq and killing Iraqis in their own sovereign nation said:

“No one has the right to wrongfully kill another human being. The fact that the U.S. government has placed them [U.S. servicemen] in a position of kill or be killed does not excuse their killing of an Iraqi who happens to be shooting at them.” Consider a burglar who breaks into someone’s house in the middle of the night. When the owner opens fire, would we praise the burglar for heroically defending himself by shooting the owner? Of course not. Since the burglar has no right to be in the house, he has no right to defend himself by shooting the owner in self-defense. For some 12 years, all too many Americans, including many church ministers, have steadfastly chosen to remain in denial about Iraq by avoiding the central issue — that the United States had no legal or moral authority to attack, invade, and occupy that country and, therefore, that the troops had no right to kill Iraqis.” [22]

What are your thoughts on this? Is this kind of reasoning sound regarding the Iraqi war? Is it correct for our other current military skirmishes where we are killing people in their own territories? What about future engagements? Also, can those in our congregations articulate their positions on what their country is doing to defend justice?

I think as we consider this honestly, we see that we have work to do. We have a role in addressing justice when it comes to war. We must not overlook this part of the calling to be ambassadors for Christ. If we live off the largess of what the military provides when it goes to defend our freedoms and protect our homeland, it seems that we must own our part to support and defend these warriors before they go to war and when they come home.

4

An Example from History: A Voice That Could not be Silenced

Evil prevailed in Nazi Germany when the mainline churches not only failed to call out the racist and genocidal practices of their nation but accepted them. Their acquiescence undoubtedly shaped the misguided activity of the German soldiers who were equally culpable in murdering millions of righteous warriors and citizens through Europe. Evil is not excused because a higher power orders one to participate in it. ^[23]



**Dietrich
Bonhoeffer**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a minister and professor in Germany at the time, refused to follow along with his religious peers. He recognized the depravity of his German nation, and brazenly stood against the sinful desires being accepted. He proclaimed it was the Christian's duty to be an agent for justice, standing against tyranny even in one's own country:

There are thus three possibilities for action that the church can take vis-à-vis the state: first (as we have said), questioning the state as to the legitimate state character of its actions, that is, making the state responsible for what it does. Second is service to the victims of the state's actions. The church has an unconditional obligation toward the victims of any societal order, even if they do not belong to the Christian community. Let us work for the good of all. These are both ways in which the church, in its freedom, conducts itself in the interest of a free state. In times when the laws are changing, the church may under no circumstances neglect either of these duties. The third possibility is not just to bind up the wounds of the victims beneath the wheel but to seize the wheel itself. [24]

Bonhoeffer did not neglect his responsibility as a religious leader to ensure justice. By example and words, he railed against the imperialistic movement in his nation. He further called his fellow citizens to be a part of protecting those being denied basic rights in his homeland and beyond. Finally, he took the extreme measure of facing his nation forcefully, doing all that he could to subvert the evil regime. Not even imprisonment in the face of his resistance silenced his voice. He continued to challenge all to live faithfully in service to God, regardless of the sacrifice. It was for him a part of accepting as his famous book stated, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

One must live and die as a follower of Christ, upholding righteousness in all ways, or else that person shows himself not to be a follower of Christ:

“The cross means sharing the suffering of Christ to the last and to the fullest. Only a man thus totally committed in discipleship can experience the meaning of the cross.” ^[25]

Bonhoeffer in his ardent commitment to fulfill his calling as an ambassador for the gospel lost his life, being hanged for his insurrection. Yet, his legacy carries on. He is an example of the need for all religious leaders and followers of Christ to ensure fidelity to Christ for the sake of righteousness.



We, like Bonhoeffer, must rise and stand for justice. We must defend and teach truth, even in the face of persecution. This certainly means having a voice when our nation is going to war or is in war. It starts in our congregations as we prepare all on whether a war is just and how that should impact each person. We must particularly pay attention to military forces as they go forward to

kill. They need to know that they are just warriors, in a just battle for a just cause or else they should not go. From here, we need to offer wisdom to political and military leaders who are directly involved in the decision to go to war about whether a particular war is right, influencing righteousness in this world as salt and light through our God-given relationships. This must happen soon because the further we move from God as a nation and determine our wars on agendas related to political realism where national interests become primary over moral considerations, the more certain our demise will be. God will not bless such efforts, nor will He bless those involved in it or receiving benefit from it.

“To resist a tyrant is not to resist God, nor yet his ordinance.”^[26]

John Knox

5

Developing a Just War Message

Divine Justice

God is known as He reveals Himself. Holiness is one of those revelations and it is the expression of His purity, being free of any moral imperfection. This attribute is apparent in creation (Rom 1:18; Isaiah 6:3), it is expressed in the written law (Rom 7:12), and it is made aware to us in in our spirit as a guiding ethical force (Rom 2:14).

In our relationship to God, being aligned to the holiness of God is necessary: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”^[27] Having it is to be made righteous, free from sin, which is only possible through Christ (Rom 3:21-26; Heb 9; 10:14), and the



sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.” (Rom. 6).

Divine justice is then connected to this holiness in that it is a “perfection of God by which He maintains Himself over against every violation of His holiness.”^[29] It becomes manifest: 1) as an attitude or expression of God’s eternal rightness in relating to us as the unassailable judge of truth (**rectoral justice**, Deut 32:4; Ps. 9:7-8); 2) as the means by which God punishes evil (**retributive justice**, Ps 51:4; Is 13:11); 3) as the way that God overcomes sin to overturn its effect (**redemptive justice**, (Rom 1:17-18; 3:21-26; 5:6-10; I Cor 6:11; and Heb 9, 10:14); 4) as the process by which God continues to work in those who turn from evil (**restorative justice**, Heb 12:10; Ps 32:5); and 5) as the reflection of God’s grace to provide blessing for righteous acts (**remunerative justice**, (Rom 2:5-16; Ps 18:20).^[30]

In all, justice for God is about preventing and punishing evil while thereby preserving, restoring, and offering goodness in accordance with His sovereign purposes (I Pet 1:3-5; Rom 5:8-11; 9:15-16; 12:19; Prov 3:11-17; Ezek 18:21; Heb 12:5-13; and Jn 1:12-13). For as God, in His perfect nature, can have no part of wickedness, and as God, in His compassionate, loving, and merciful nature, desires reconciliation and blessing to the wayward, justice is the means through which He remains immutable. It finds its fullest expression in Jesus on the cross, displaying God’s justice through love, mercy, wrath, judgement, and compassion all at once.

Earthly Justice as Executed by God

War is an aspect of the **rectoral justice** of God in that it is the expression and execution of divine righteousness. In Deuteronomy 2, we see this carried out in a **redemptive** way in that God uses war to bring blessing and goodness to the covenant children, establishing the Israelites a homeland and thereby, preparing the way for the coming Messiah (Deut 19:1; Gen 12:3; Gen 13:15; 15:18-21; Ex 31; Num 34:1-15; Gal 3:16-17; 3:29; Rom 4:16).

Also, in Deuteronomy 2, we find the **rectoral** justice of God expressed through **retribution** as God uses war to destroy the Canaanites for their wickedness (Deut. 9:1-6). This form of justice is further used by God against His own people elsewhere in scripture. The destruction of the northern (II Kings 17:7-23) and southern (II Kings 25:1-2; Ezek 21) kingdoms by foreign armies are principal examples of this.

How the Church can engage with War: Just War Theology

To kill without a just cause is murder. It is to act in opposition to God's righteous order. When this happens in war, it has consequences. The convicting work of the Holy Spirit and the punishment of God for evil will not fail to bring suffering (Rom 1:18-2:16; Jn 16:7-15). This is revealed in the life of an Iraqi war veteran:

I had a [computer] hard drive that I destroyed. Pictures and stuff like that, next to dead bodies.... Horrible, horrible stuff. Horrible stuff. Us hanging out with dead bodies. At the time, I mean we were rockin' and rollin', we were mean, mean killing machines. Now I look back and I'm, like, God, what were we doing? What were we thinking? ^[31]

This is something that should concern everyone in a nation considering whether going to war is just, both warfighters and citizens. Hence, we must develop a theology that establishes when a just war should take place. While there are three issues that are addressed overall in Just War Theology, we will look only at the first one, *jus ad bellum*. It is the issue which helps to know if and when a war is just to prosecute. Here are the considerations that should be used for this particular consideration:

Jus ad Bellum (Justice before war): establishing a righteous call to go to war.

- **Just Cause:** In biblical times to know that your war was just in the eyes of God was easy to uncover. For Joshua, God simply told him to go into the promised land to fight for the land that God was going to give to him (Joshua 1). With this, the priests led the way and off the people went to bring about God's purposes to establish righteousness and goodness (Joshua 2-6).

In this day, it is more challenging to find God's direction. The way in which truth was revealed then through prophets and priests no longer happens. However, we do have the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:13-15), the instruction in the Bible (Ps 119; II Tim 3:16-17), and insight gathered from trusted religious leaders (Pr 19:20-21; I Pet 5:1-2; Acts 15:6; Titus 1), which help us to find "just principles" upon which to know if war accords with God's Holy will.

For by wise guidance, you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory.^[32]

As to the specifics of what we should focus on as we decide on the justness of war, consider the biblical admonitions (a) to protect

the sanctity and integrity of life as created in the image of God, (b) to ensure defense of property, (c) to overturn oppression and bondage, (d) and to protect all that is righteous, bringing about God's created order of goodness (Ex 20:13-17; Lev 19:11-18; Ps 82:3; 139:19-22; Is 1:17; Zech 7:10; Amos 5:15). With these things in mind, you will be able to take a step in ascertaining if a war is just.

“Learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” ^[33]

- **The Right Intent:** There is danger in war to act upon wrongful motives. For instance, if a nation violates the sovereignty of another nation in some major, intentional, and malicious way, anger arises and the call for revenge can be quickly sounded. Yet, to be vengeful is not a motivation that should drive our action (Rom 12:19). The correct impulse is to restore holiness. Jesus shows this in action when He forcefully removes Jews from the temple when they were defiling it by extorting the true worshippers of God (Jn 2:15). Like David, He displays what right intent is when it comes to force: “zeal for Your house has consumed me.” ^[34]

Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.” The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. ...He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. ^[35]





- **Legitimate Authority:** This part of Just War Theory comes from Romans 13 where Paul makes it clear that God has appointed rulers who are to be the agency through which justice is maintained (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-14). Hence, if a nation goes to war, the state leadership should be the one to make this determination on behalf of its people.

The world community has adopted this principle as critical when it comes to war.^[36] It stops insurrectionists, paramilitary groups, or other non-state actors within a nation from acting without regard for the will of the nation. National interests should be served for the preservation of universal rights, overturning efforts for splinter groups in a nation to act unilaterally.

- **Last Resort:** War is the result of sin by a rogue nation, and it causes those who seek justice to fight against the infidels to silence the opportunity for evil to exist. For just warriors, every part of that effort is noble and good. They sacrifice themselves to bring righteousness and protect the offended. The enemy, however, wreaks havoc in all that they do. They create the environment for war and their efforts in that cause are wholly wicked. They must be stopped.

Yet, before taking that step to war, given the incredible cost, do all possible through peaceful means to stop those committing evil.

For those in the church, this means, as stated, using channels of influence to provide godly wisdom on whether going to war serves the purpose of righteousness.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.^[37]

- **Public Declaration of War:** While the enemy of goodness cannot be alerted as to the start of war, they should know that the resolve of the righteous has come to the point where war is needed. The time has come to stop evil from its untethered path toward destruction. This announcement lets all in a rogue nation know they are aligned to an unjust cause and will suffer, unless they work from within to supplant the leadership, which is taking them down a path to ruin

This step is invaluable to those who fight for justice because it gives them assurance, if war comes about, that they “need” to fight since evil will continue unabated without their intervention. That the enemy remains intractable on its course, even after knowing that lethal force is going to come, shows a dire need to be in war.

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.^[38]

Churches can be involved in the public declaration for war by

helping their people understand the need for war in a particular situation. God has patience when it comes to sin and so must we (Rom 3:25-26; 9:22). Yet, there is a time for war (Eccl 3:8). Holiness needs to be restored (Heb 12:14). If it looks like that time has come, help those in the Church come to this resolve.

- **Seek God's Call to Fight:** This criterion is not in Just War Theory. Yet, it is the most important part. A warrior needs to know through an inner conviction of the spirit that he is fighting this battle for the sake of justice. His moral compass must point him in the direction of going to kill the enemy if they refuse to surrender. To kill a person, as we have considered, is a major event (Gen 1:27). One must know prior to taking that life that this had to be done to defend holiness and stop evil. This step is crucial for that. The Church needs to help its members come to this point.

The nation too must come to a collective conviction that going to war in a particular situation is right. In a democracy, that ultimate decision is entrusted to leaders, elected to their position by the will of the people. Yet, as stated, let religious leaders and all other Christians be active in this discussion through their lines of influence to bring godly considerations on the decision for war.

Just because there is injustice in an area of the world or because the rights of a nation are violated, this does not necessarily mean that war is right. God must direct that decision and His followers must do all possible to engage as the decision is made. But when that decision is made, let each person own that belief for himself. ^[39] That way, he will be able to go to war with a full conviction that it has to happen for the sake of God's holiness (Rom 14:22-23).

- **Proportionality:** War is about the restoration of goodness and the establishment of peace. Whatever it takes to achieve that is the sole aim.

But note, this means being measured as one responds to the enemy. To obliterate a country with nuclear weapons for a terrorist attack that kills hundreds and destroys property is not a proportionate response.

The Church has a role in helping people seek peace and in understanding how to punish evil without destroying the goodness of God's created order. Much of it involves calling a nation not to seek vengeance and not to act impulsively out of anger. Being a voice for reason to the public and calling for the nation to focus on stopping evil while not itself creating evil is key.



- **Reasonable Chance of Success:** This is listed in how one should gauge if a just war is appropriate. This is wrong. When God calls one to stand for justice, it is not the outcome that is in focus, but the need to protect goodness. David shows this with Goliath (I Sam 17). Elijah shows this with the Israelites, King Ahab and

Queen Jezebel, and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18-19). Esther shows this when she goes to speak up for her people (Esther 4:16). In these situations, it was not the assured outcome of success that was in focus but the need to address injustice and protect the holiness of God. That should always be the focus for war. Trust in God to deliver but do not let the odds of success be a factor for whether one should stand for righteousness.

[Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego], if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."^[40]





6

Conclusion

In Genesis 14, when Abram went to war against those who destroyed Sodom and took captive his nephew, Lot, it was evident that his actions were just. The blessing he received after the war from Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, made this certain.

There is a basis for war when its purpose is the restoration of holiness. Yet, since violations of God's moral order are endless, making the possibility for war constant, one should evaluate with every step of the just war criteria to know that the war is right. China violated international law when it invaded American airspace with its spy balloons. Yet, that injustice was not a just cause for war. Hence, to go through the entire process of *jus ad bellum*, justice before war, ensuring that national interests are served and that all are aligned in the decision for war is how God's moral order and the goodness of creation is best served.

Nations are bound to protect the lives and property of their citizens. If these are assailed by force, force may be rightfully used in their protection. Nations also have the right to defend their own existence. If that be endangered by the conduct of other nations, they have the natural right of self-protection.^[41]

-Charles Hodge

When the Church is involved in preparing its people for war and being heralds to the public and its leaders about what constitutes justice in war, that ensures the preservation of justice for all. When the Church is silent, and the question of justice in war is unaddressed, seeds of doubt about killing the enemy can bloom, corrupting the minds and spirits of those who fight:

“One veteran doesn’t know if he killed in combat. He knows he fired over a hundred rounds, and he has seen pictures of himself standing next to bodies he can’t remember”. ...[But] the possibility he killed haunted him. “There was a sense that I was irredeemable,” he said. ...A big reason US veterans come home traumatized, he explained, is that the military creates killers and then expects them to function normally. ...“I had put more death and destruction into the world than I could undo,” he said. Soldiers are told, “Now go home back to your life. But that doesn’t work, because you’re still carrying something that humans aren’t designed to do.” The hardest part about coming home was “trying to learn to be human again”.

The mission for the Church is clear. We are at the front of the battle lines for justice, and we must make clear when God is calling this nation to go to war. When that time comes, let us proclaim God’s message to His people:

Hear, O Israel, you are approaching the battle against your enemies today. Do not be fainthearted. Do not be afraid, or panic, or tremble before them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.’^[42]

About the Author

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The material is written by Dwight Horn. He retired in February of 2023 from 28 years of active duty service in the Navy as a Chaplain (CAPT, CHC, USN, Ret.). His advanced education includes a D.Min, M.Div., M.A., and ThM. He works for the Presbyterian and Reformed Chaplain Commission (PRCC) for Ministry to Veterans. He has authored articles and a book on war, [Emasculating Warriors: A Nation at War with its Warriors](#) (ISBN: 179298443X).

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Endnotes

^[1] Laura Kurtzman, "Killing in War Leaves Veterans with Lasting Psychological Scars, Study Finds", <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2016/12/405231/killing-war-leaves-veterans-lastingpsychological-scars-study-finds>, (December 12, 2016).

^[2] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, by Henry Beveridge, Ch. 20, Of Civil Government (p. 2659), <https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes/institutes.vi.xxi.html.Sec.2661-11>, (11 Nov., 2023).

^[3] Marcus Tullius Cicero, Treatise on the Laws, THE ONLINE LIBRARY OF LIBERTY© Liberty Fund, http://oll.libertyfund.org/EBooks/Cicero_0044.02.pdf, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/Home3/index.php>, (9/15/2005).

^[4] Augustine is the first to use the idea of a Just War, cf., Saint Augustine, The City of God, translated by Marcus Dons, (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), <https://archive.org/details/st-augustine-the-city-ofgod/page/n1/mode/2up?q=lament&view=theater>, p. 834, (20 Nov 2023). "The wise man will wage just wars. As if he would not all the rather lament the necessity of just wars, if he remembers that he is a man; for if they were not just he would not wage them, and would therefore be delivered from all wars. For it is the wrong-doing of the opposing party which compels the wise man to wage just wars; and this wrongdoing, even though it gave

rise to no war, would still be matter of grief to man because it is man's wrong-doing."

^[5] Augustine, "Letter 189 (A.D. 418)", New Advent, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102189.htm>, (15 Nov 2023).

^[6] Augustine, Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon XXII. 75. NPNF 4, (p. 301), by Matthew Phillips, Augustine on Just War, <https://wp.cune.edu/matthewphillips/2017/02/08/augustine-on-just-war/>, (Feb 8, 2017).

^[7] Thomas Aquinas, The Summa Theologica, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, "Question 40 Of War, ARTICLE 1. Whether it is always sinful to wage war?", Second Part of the Second Part: L.39, C.2., https://archive.org/details/SummaTheologiae/page/n4689/mode/2up?view=theater_pp.4690-4691, (20 Nov 2023).

^[8] Christoph Kampmann, "The Treaty of Westphalia As Peace Settlement and Political Concept", International Law and Peace Settlements, published online by CambridgeUniversityPress, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/international-law-and-peacesettlements/concept/0B72AD446B0E=8089BA25932837CDB9BF>, (14 January 2021).

^[9] Emasculating Warriors, A Nation at War with its Warriors (ISBN 978179284433).

^[10] Natalie Purcell, et al., "Veterans' Perspectives on the Psychosocial Impact of Killing in War", Counseling Psychologist, 44 (7), 2016-10-02, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6wg5170z>, p. 21.

^[11] New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Dt 6:4–5.

^[12] New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Dt 20:1.

^[13] New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Dt 20:3–4.

^[14] Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, (London: Dryden House, 1908 -- Stanford University Library, 1969), p. 121.

^[15] GEN Martin Dempsey, Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, (Washington, DC: March 2013).

^[16] Dwight Horn, Emasculating Warriors: A Nation at War with its Warriors, (Middletown, DE: Independent Publishing, 2018), p. 230.

^[17] PCA Administrative Committee. Book of Church Order. PCA Administrative Committee, 2023. Ch. 3-4. The power of the Church is exclusively spiritual; that of the State includes the exercise of force. The constitution of the Church derives from divine revelation; the constitution of the State must be determined by human reason and the course of providential events. The Church has no right to construct or modify a government for the State, and the State has no right to frame a creed or polity for the Church. They are as planets moving in concentric orbits: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). 3-5. The Church, with its ordinances, officers and courts, is the agency which Christ has ordained for the edification and government of His people, for the prop-

agation of the faith, and for the evangelization of the world.

[¹⁸] Natalie Purcell, et al., "Veterans' Perspectives on the Psychosocial Impact of Killing in War", *Counseling Psychologist*, 44 (7), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6w-g5170z>, (2016-10-01), p. 4-5.

[¹⁹] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[²⁰] Augustine starts this idea that combatants are not responsible for their actions when their nations send them to war: "They who have waged war in obedience to the divine command, or in conformity with His laws, have represented in their persons the public justice or the wisdom of government, and in this capacity have put to death wicked men; such persons have by no means violated the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill'". His notion is based on fallacious reasoning, as you would see if you read *City of God*. For instance, he claims that because Abraham was guiltless and considered pious for being willing to slay his son under God's command, so the combatant should be judged the same. The problem clearly is that his answer to why you should kill begs the very issue of who commands it. If God directs one to literally take a life for the sake of justice, which was not incidentally what His command to Abram was, surely that is good (Rom 3:4). But when it comes to national leaders today where God's command is not assured, we must question if they are following God in a decision to go to war. If they are not, the actions stemming from that are evil. The German soldiers who followed the unjust orders of their leaders were not blameless when they took the lives of the innocent. They "chose" to give their allegiance to unrighteous authorities and in the process were guilty of murder with every life they took. Consider the opposing argument on this from scripture where people are told not to follow the unlawful influences: "You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice, ... and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty" (Ex 23:2,7). Also consider these examples where appointed leader's orders were justly not followed because they were unrighteous commands: Saul's bodyguards refused to kill Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:45) and then later, David (1 Sam 22:17); the midwives of the King of Egypt would not kill male-born Israelites, they feared God (1 Sam 22:17); Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all would not worship idols (Dan 3, 6); Mordecai did not pay homage to Haman (Esther 3:1); Rahab protected the enemy of her people, the Israelite spies (Josh 2:2ff); and Obadiah saved God's prophets from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:2). It is clear in all these cases that what is primary in following leaders is God and obedience to Him. That is the truth by which one will be judged. As Peter stated to the religious authorities who commanded him not to evangelize: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Collectively as a nation and individually, our allegiance and obedience is to God and those bringing about His holiness. Again as scripture relates: "Rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good" (Rom 13:3).

[21] Natalie Purcell, et al., "Veterans' Perspectives on the Psychosocial Impact of Killing in War", *Counseling Psychologist*, 44 (7), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6w-g5170z>, (2016-10-01), pp.25-26.

[22] Jacob G. Hornberger, "Guilt, Not PTSD, Is What Afflicts Iraq War Veterans", <https://jmvh.org/article/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-and-killing-in-combat-a-review-of-existing-literature/>, (February 5, 2013).

[23] "We believe it is lawful to be a soldier and to fight wars. Does that mean that every war is just? Of course not! What is a soldier to do when confronted with unlawful commands or to fight unjust wars? What should a doctor or nurse do when the hospital requires him or her to participate in abortions for the sake of convenience? What should a teacher do when required to teach evolution rather than creation as fact? What should a salesman do when asked to shortchange the customer? What should the athlete do when required to compete on the Sabbath? What would happen to the soldier who refuses to obey unlawful commands? That is a weighty question, but remember many Christians in many different vocations have suffered for preserving conscience and determining to obey God rather than men. Pray that we all would have the courage to do so. In the end, we do well not to bind beyond or contrary to the Word of God the consciences of those who would be soldiers. Even so, we believe the responsibility of bearing the sword is weighty. Therefore, we ought to encourage those who do choose to be soldiers with our prayers and counsel and together endeavor with them to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We must each count the cost of following Christ." Cf., Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Questions and Answers, "Should Christians volunteer for military service?", https://opc.org/qa.html?question_id=381, (June 20, 2010).

[24] Michael DeJonge, "How does the church resist an unjust state? Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of resistance", <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/dietrichbonhoeffer-theology-of-resistance/10766546>, (15 March, 2022).

[25] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York, N.Y.: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1979), p. 98.

[26] Bill Muehlenberg, "John Knox and Resistance To Tyrants", *The Standard*, <https://www.thestandardsc.org/bill-muehlenberg/john-knox-and-resistance-to-tyrants/>, (Nov 4, 2022).

[27] [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Le 19:2.

[28] The Hebrew terms for "righteous" and "righteousness" are tsaddik, tsedhek, and tsedhakah, and the corresponding Greek terms, dikaios and dikaiosune, all of which contain the idea of conformity to a standard. This perfection is repeatedly ascribed to God in Scripture, Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:8; Ps. 119:137; 145:17; Jer. 12:1; Lam. 1:18; Dan. 9:14; John 17:25; II Tim. 4:8; I John 2:29; 3:7; Rev. 16:5. Cf., Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, BiblicalTraining.org, <https://www.bing.com/search?q=berkhof+systematic+theology+pdf&q&qs=n&form=QBRE&sp=-1&ghc=1&lq=0&pq=berkhof+systematic+theology+pdf&sc=6-31&sk=&cvid=94194E9F1C844665A65D056D341830B0&gh->

[sh=0&ghacc=0&ghpl=](#), (25 Nov 2023).

[29] Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, BiblicalTraining.org, <https://www.bing.com/search?q=berkhof+systematic+theology+pdf&q&qs=n&form=QBR&sp=-1&gh-c=1&lq=0&pq=berkhof+systematic+theology+pdf&sc=6-31&sk=&cvid=94194E9F-1C844665A65D056D341830B0&ghsh=0&ghacc=0&ghpl=>, p. 81, (25 Nov 2023).

[30] Steven R. Cook, “Theological Categories of God’s Justice”, Thinking on Scripture, <https://thinkingonscripture.com/2019/11/16/theological-categories-of-gods-justice/>, (November 16, 2019).

[31] David Finkel, “The Return”, The New Yorker, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/09/the-return>, (September 2, 2013).

[32] [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Pr 24:6.

[33] [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Is 1:17.

[34] [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Ps 69:9.

[35] [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Ps 96:9–13.

[36] In the Preamble to the United Nations charter, it says: “We the people of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, ...establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, ...to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest.” United Nations, “Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet”, United Nations Charter, Preamble, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>, (16 December, 2023). Also note article 53 of this document.

[37] [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Ro 12:17–19.

[38] [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), Je 18:7–8.

[39] Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Questions and Answers, “Should Christians volunteer for military service?”, https://opc.org/qa.html?question_id=381, (June 20, 2010).

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[41] Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, Volume 3, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1873), <https://archive.org/details/systematic-theolo03hodguoft/mode/2up?q=war&view=theater>, (22 Dec 2023), p. 360.

[42] [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Dt 20:3–4.



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