

**Reflections—11 September 2001**

# LATE NIGHT THOUGHTS ON THE TERRORIST ATTACKS ON AMERICA

By Robert A. Rees

The unmentionable odour of death  
Offends the September night.  
—W.H. Auden, from "September 1, 1939"

For God did not make death and takes  
no pleasure in the destruction of any  
living thing.

—from *The Wisdom of Solomon*

**T**HE WEEKS BEFORE TERRORISTS pulverized the World Trade Center and drove dark scars deep into the side of the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field, I had been thinking about death, violence, and the justice of God. Some of this was inspired by the Gospel Doctrine classes I had been teaching that rehearsed the tragedies of Mormon history—death at Haun's Mill, Far West, Nauvoo, Carthage, the Camp of Israel across Iowa, and the trail of blood along the Platte and Sweetwater Rivers. Then in late August, I attended two memorial services for my dear friend, Eugene England. I was still trying to make peace with Gene's premature death. During the first service, held at the Provo Tabernacle, I began to feel some quiescence in listening to the loving tributes by Gene's friends and deeply touching remembrances by his children and grandchildren. I kept looking up at the rounded dome, the polished oak columns, and the stained glass windows, comforted that we were honoring Gene in a place that represents the pioneer heritage that helped shaped him into one of the great Latter-day Saints of our generation.

At a second service, later that day at the Englands' ward house, I recounted how last winter, when we thought Gene's illness was a mysterious but temporary depression, I had sent him an essay by Mark Slouka from *Harper's* entitled "Blood on the Tracks: Does

Senseless Death Reveal God, or His Absence?"<sup>1</sup>

In his essay, Slouka ponders about the death of Julia Toledo, a young Mormon immigrant from Ecuador, and her four sons who had been killed by an onrushing train while crossing the tracks in Fairfield, Connecticut. His wrestling resonated in my soul, for all of my adult life I have tried to understand the divine logic behind the suffering of innocents and untimely, inexplicable deaths. Slouka's essay raises the kinds of questions about God, his mercy, and his justice that Gene and I often talked about. Several times over the next month or so, we discussed the essay, and then early in the spring, Gene sent me a poem he had composed called "Two Trains and a Dream." In the poem, Gene juxtaposes the story of Julia Toledo and her sons with an episode from President Joseph F. Smith's life. While crossing Wyoming in 1908, President Smith, who was standing on the rear platform of the train, was warned by some spiritual prompting of an impending disaster. At first, he ignored the warning to go back to his seat, but then, hearing it for the second time, he returned just before the train hit a broken rail and most of the cars were thrown off the track. The seated President Smith was unhurt.

Gene's poem recalls a dream in which he tells both of these stories to God and then asks, "Which of these trains, children, was in your hands?" The poem ends with these lines:

I can see some small white scars across  
God's forehead.  
Then tears gather in his eyes, and slowly  
Tears begin to drop like blood from every  
pore.  
I ask again, "Which train is in your  
hands?"

And he sets his face toward me like flint:  
"Both. All."

I have thought of such things during the past weeks as I have tried to come to terms cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually with what happened on 11 September. Were these planes, like those trains, in God's hands? If not, why not? If so, how so?

How do we as Latter-day Saints make sense out of a God who warns a man to return to his seat but apparently doesn't warn a young woman that a train is about to hit her and her children,<sup>2</sup> who apparently answers small prayers about trivial things but often not desperate prayers about ultimate things? There is no doubt those innocent passengers who were commandeered into a living missile were praying with all of their hearts for God to deliver them from their captives. And the prayers to Christ, Jehovah, Allah, Buddha and other avatars of the divine that arose within the doomed buildings must have constituted a virtual United Nations of supplication as fire, smoke, and falling debris enveloped the petitioners.

**H**OW DOES ANYONE who believes in God make sense of such things? In truth, it is impossible to make sense of them. We do not believe in either God or humans if we can accept without a deeply troubled heart the violence, brutality, and despair that occur around us daily. As Rabbi David Wolpe says, "The foremost obstacle to religious belief, the presence of evil in a world governed by a benevolent God, haunts us as surely as it has every generation before us. Perhaps it is more horrible than in times past, for we live in the shadow of our own destruction, and still God is silent."<sup>3</sup> Wolpe adds, "True faith is tortured by the inability to make sense of this world and by a recognition that no single creed will wash away the scars of human anguish or definitively answer the promptings of the human heart and mind confronted by an often unforgiving world."

I contend that God does not expect us to be untroubled by such things as thousands of people trapped in a towering inferno, tens of thousands of children dying of starvation, or millions of women brutalized by oppressive regimes throughout the world. We may somehow be able to accommodate small deaths, the quirky accidents that happen to those we don't know, the inevitable casualties of war, and, perhaps, even the multitudinous ruin caused by various "acts of God." But the magnitude of destruction and devastation



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caused by our own kind that we have no power either to control or prevent troubles our souls, and *should* trouble them.

I don't believe God expects us to accept unquestioningly the tragedies we have lived through these past few months nor the stark, spare, crippling tragedies that constitute the daily lives of millions of people across the globe. He created us as caring beings, hoping we would not retreat into caves of indifference nor hide behind unctuous answers. He knows we must have, to use Wallace Stevens' image, "mind[s] of winter" to witness the chronicles of human suffering and not be both moved and disturbed.

The tradition of questioning God's justice runs throughout the Hebrew scriptures. The most obvious example is Job, but the stories of Abraham, Enoch, Moses, David, and Jeremiah remind us that even kings and prophets engage in such questioning. Abraham challenged God about the destruction of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (or as the New English Bible has it, "Shall not the God of all the earth do what is just" (Genesis 18:25)? Abraham had the audacity both to challenge and to bargain with God, reducing each time the number of righteous people he hoped to find to prevent God from destroying the wicked cities. Abraham's plea was not for God to save just the few righteous, but all the wicked as well if only a few such persons could be found. God did not hold it against these ancients for challenging his justice and mercy; he loved them all the more for doing so.

In the Hebrew tradition, there is also the idea that humans can and do comfort God. Thus a midrashic commentary reverses Isaiah's plea, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God" (Isaiah 40:1), to "Comfort me, comfort me, O My people."<sup>4</sup> As David Wolpe says, in this tradition, "God is not only suffering, but turns to human beings as they so often turn to Him, to salve the wounds of this world. More than once in the Midrash, we find the lovely idea that human beings have it in their power to comfort God."<sup>5</sup>

This is a lovely idea, especially if we take the scriptural injunction to "mourn with those who mourn and weep with those who weep" as including a sorrowful deity. At times like these, we might comfort God by assuring him that we will not seek vengeance

or retribution, that we will not call for bombs or missiles that might maim or kill innocent people, or that we will not harbor hatred for people who caused such colossal evil. We can comfort him as well by pledging that we will increase our love for others, that we will open our minds for greater tolerance and our hearts for greater forgiveness, and that we will strive for more holiness.

## GOD DID NOT hold it against the ancients for challenging his justice and mercy; he loved them all the more for doing so.

And indeed it must be some comfort to God as well as to us that the response of people around the world to the terrorist attack has been an increase in love, understanding, and sacrifice. In a *New York Times* article, Stephen Jay Gould reminds us: "Good and kind people outnumber all others by thousands to one. . . . Thus, in what I call the Great Asymmetry, every spectacular incident of evil will be balanced by 10,000 acts of kindness. . . . In human terms, ground zero is the focal point for a vast web of bustling goodness, channeling uncountable deeds of kindness from an entire planet—the acts that must be recorded to reaffirm the overwhelming weight of human decency."<sup>6</sup>

**I**T IS PERHAPS such outpourings of goodness that provide the clearest manifestation that God is after all in his heaven, even if all is not right with the world. How else can one explain the great effluence of charity, magnanimity, and fellowship we have seen in the past months? How else can one understand why so many millions have risen above their accustomed indifference and routine narcissism to lift the burdens of others? If these are manifestations of God in us, as they surely are, then they must also be manifestations of God himself, for we cannot have more generous hearts than him who created us.

There are always, of course, the easy, sentimental answers that proliferate like wind-borne viruses, such as the e-message a Mormon friend sent called "Where Was

God?" The essence of the message, no doubt sent to millions of computers around the world, was that God was there all right—trying to persuade people not to get on the planes (how else can we explain that the planes flown into buildings were half empty?), influencing people not to go to work at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon that day (after all, thousands more could have been killed if the buildings had had their normal contingent of occupants), and hurrying people out of burning buildings. What doesn't seem to occur to the author of such banal sentiments or to all those who click and forward them to everyone on their e-list is that it presents a God who is well-intentioned and influential, but ultimately powerless to stop such madness. God as helpful neighbor or as angel in disguise cannot inspire ultimate trust.

More troubling to me as a Latter-day Saint were the rumors, again spread quickly on the Internet, that no Mormons were killed or injured in the terrorist attacks. One version reported that of the twenty-five Mormons who worked in the World Trade Center, all had been delayed or detained in going to work that day. Another story, even more bizarre, claimed a number of Church leaders and missionaries had been scheduled to attend a zone conference in one of the World Trade Center towers but that all had been mysteriously kept from getting there in time for the meeting. We now know that five members of the Church were killed in the attacks—two on the plane that struck the World Trade Center, one in the One World Trade Center collapse, and two in the Pentagon. Perhaps it was such stories and the quickness of people to take them seriously that prompted President Hinckley, at the conclusion of the last session of General Conference, to ask the Lord to "forgive our arrogance."

I was pleased that when asked by Larry King how he made sense of the attacks, President Gordon B. Hinckley responded simply, "We don't know why [such things happen]. We don't understand everything." He then added this assurance: "We do know that our Father loves us and watches over us. We do know that life is not only that phase that we call mortality, that there is beyond this life another, which is as real and as certain as is the life that we now live. And that those who have gone beyond will continue and will in fact make preparation for their loved ones who will follow. I have no doubt of this."

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When King asked President Hinckley what words of comfort he would give to those who are angry over losing loved ones, he replied, "Well, you live with it. You try to subdue it. You calm your emotions if you can do so. You plead with the Lord to bless you with a sense of self-control and an overriding faith that, in spite of all of this terrible tragedy, there is hope. There is assurance. There is peace. There is comfort in the word of the Lord, who said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.'"

This is what we do when we can't make sense of senseless death and suffering—we bear witness to one another of what *does* make sense, of what our own experience teaches us about God. As Emerson said, "All that I have seen makes me trust God for all that I have not seen."

We can also comfort one another. A friend wrote that on the morning after the attacks, as his six-year-old daughter watched him weeping over the carnage wrought by the terrorists, she prayed, "Heavenly Father, please bless Daddy to be happy for those who lived, and not just sad for those who died." He said, "Amidst all the tears of the past two months, I've tried to remember the words of her prayer, and to look for the good that can and has come from the tragedies." Knowing how deeply troubled I have been over the events of 11 September and the war that has raged since, my wife gave me a card with a symbol of a dove on the cover. Inside, next to the word "peace," she had written: "If it could be had, I would give it to you."

Such human expressions comfort our hearts and fortify our faith. Without such faith, we are left as orphans on a barren landscape where, to quote Wilfred Owen's bitter war poem, "Greater Love," "God seems not to care." The test of our faith is to believe that God expects us to care greatly even when it may appear that he does not care. Even when a voice deep inside of us argues that if he really cared, he would do something, we know that we must do something, and, beyond this, that what we do is a reflection of him.

The most reassuring scripture I know in times like these is found in Moses. There, Enoch is astonished to see God weeping over his fallen children. Enoch asks God, "How is it that the heavens weep and shed forth their tears as the rain upon the mountains. . . . How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to eternity?" (7:28–29). God's answer is that the misery and doom caused by wickedness compels him to weep:

"Wherefore should not the heavens weep, seeing these shall suffer" (7:37)? But God also weeps because such wickedness must be paid for by his Son: "And [he] which I have chosen . . . suffereth for their sins. . . . Wherefore, for this shall the heavens weep" (7:39–40). Enoch responds by weeping with God.

In the face of an inexplicable tragedy of such magnitude as we have just experienced, most people did not curse God and despair, but rather went in droves to churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples. The *New York Times* reported, "In and around New York right after the attack, houses of worship were more crowded than they have been in years, and attendance has remained high." The same article reported on a poll taken two days after the attack that revealed that 80 percent of those interviewed said "they were likely to pray or attend religious services because of the attacks. . . . Two-thirds of 895 New Jersey residents surveyed September 22 to 26 . . . said they had been feeling religious as a result of the attacks."<sup>7</sup> In hymns and prayers, worshippers of all faiths praised God and petitioned him for his comforting Spirit. They spoke of their loved ones going to be with God and of the consolation such realization provided. I was pleased my own church joined in this spirit by sending messages of reassurance, hope, and peace, and by instructing bishops to plan special sacrament services centered on the tragic events of 11 September.

**M**Y SLEEP IS still troubled by scenes of a Union Pacific train traveling between Green River, Wyoming, and Salt Lake City in 1908 and an Amtrak train going from Boston to Providence in 1999; by a lone body falling beneath a blossom of fire on the eighty-second floor of the World Trade Center; by the open wound in a Pennsylvania landscape; by the faces of thousands of children waiting for parents who will never come home; and by the hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees exiled in camps along the Pakistani and Iranian borders. At the end of his essay, Mark Slouka writes, "There's blood on the tracks. A mother and four sons have died in Connecticut. Reflexively, we reach for the myth. But we've forgotten how to read. And we've forgotten how to believe. And the text has gone dark. And the author, whoever he was, if he was, has left. Necessity and absence are giving birth to something new: a bloodier God, or a truer silence."

But I prefer another vision: A God who sheds blood and tears for Julia Toledo and her sons, for the thousands who died on a

bright dark day in September, and for all the world's wounded and brokenhearted; who holds all the world's trains and all the world's children in his hands; and who never, out of love, completely escapes Gethsemane. Let us comfort him with our weeping.

### NOTES

1. Mark Slouka, "Blood on the Tracks: Does Senseless Death Reveal God, or His Absence?", *Harper's* 300 (June 2000), 89–96.

2. Some might answer that it is perfectly logical since the one was a prophet and the other simply a poor immigrant woman, but if, as we contend, "all are alike unto God" (2 Ne. 26:33), such an answer is too easy. There is no human answer for the inscrutable acts of God nor the existence of tragedies that are not acts of God. We know that God can't always act and still honor the gift of agency, and we know that he can't never act and still claim to be the God of history. It is the illogical (by human standards) and seemingly capricious nature of God's intervention in human affairs that ultimately lies beyond our comprehension and that makes the greatest demands on our faith and trust.

3. David Wolpe, *The Healer of Shattered Hearts: A Jewish View of God* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990), 139–40.

4. "Pesikta de-Rab Kahana," cited in Wolpe, 150.

5. Ibid.

6. Stephen Jay Gould, "A Time of Gifts," *New York Times*, 26 Sept. 2001, A23

7. *New York Times*, 30 Sept. 2001, A29.



### BRIDAL WREATH

A single clump along a sloping hill  
tumbles forward like a fountain  
falling to the valley floor.  
How the boughs askew  
spear morning air—  
a frothy windrow rolling wild  
against a somber lawn-green sea.  
Could we have known  
how these roots loosely thrown  
would break the earth apart  
and shake the meadow's sleep  
careening through the empty hollow  
like a summer child's unbridled laughter?

—JEROME L. MCELROY

# RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PACIFISM

By James P. Sterba

**W**HEN MOST PEOPLE think of pacifism, they tend to identify it with a theory of nonviolence. We can call this view "nonviolent pacifism." It maintains that *any use of violence against other human beings is morally prohibited.*

Nonviolent pacifism has been defended on both religious and philosophical grounds. The New Testament admonitions to turn the other cheek, go the second mile, and love your enemies have been taken to support this form of pacifism. The Jains of India endorse nonviolent pacifism and extend it to include a prohibition of violence against *all* living beings. Philosophically, nonviolent pacifism has also seemed attractive because it is similar to the basic principle "do no evil" found in most moral theories.

In contemporary philosophy, however, it has been argued that nonviolent pacifism is incoherent. For instance, Jan Narveson claims nonviolent pacifism is incoherent because it recognizes a right to life yet rules out any use of force in defense of that right.<sup>1</sup> A strict nonviolence principle is incoherent, he argues, because having a right entails the legitimacy of using force in defense of that right, at least on some occasions. But nonviolent pacifism does not prohibit all force or resistance in defense of one's rights—only that which is violent. Thus, Rosa Parks was non-violently defending her rights when she refused to give up her seat in a bus to a white person in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955.

Some pacifists respond to objections like Narveson's, by endorsing a form of pacifism that clearly does not rule out all force—only lethal force. We can call this view "nonlethal pacifism." It maintains that *any use of lethal force against other human beings is morally prohibited.*

This may have been the form of pacifism

endorsed by Christians in the early church before the time of Constantine. Mahatma Gandhi is often interpreted to be a defender of just this form of pacifism, as rooted in both Christianity and Hinduism. Contemporary philosopher, Cheyney Ryan defends this form of pacifism by arguing that a key difference between pacifists and nonpacifists is whether we can or should create the necessary distance between ourselves and other human beings in order to make the act of killing possible.<sup>2</sup> To illustrate, Ryan cites an incident described by George Orwell in which Orwell was reluctant to shoot at an enemy soldier who jumped out of a trench and ran along the top of a parapet half-dressed and holding up his trousers with both hands. Ryan contends that what kept Orwell from shooting was that he couldn't think of the soldier as a "thing" rather than a fellow human being.

However, I do not believe Ryan's example is compelling as a support for nonlethal pacifism, for it is not clear that Orwell's inability to shoot the enemy soldier was because he could not think of the soldier as a thing rather than a fellow human. Perhaps it was because he could not think of a soldier holding his trousers with both hands as a threat or a combatant.

It is also not clear that Gandhi himself truly endorses this form of pacifism. In his essay, "The Doctrine of the Sword," Gandhi writes:

I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. Thus, when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have run away and seen me killed or

whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted to use, and defended me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence.<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, a form of pacifism that remains relatively untouched by the criticisms that have been raised against both non-violent pacifism and nonlethal pacifism. This form of pacifism neither prohibits all uses of force nor even all uses of lethal force. We can call the view "anti-war pacifism" because it holds that *any participation in the massive use of lethal force in warfare is morally prohibited.*

Some historians claim that this is the form of pacifism endorsed by the early Christian church because (after 180 A.D., but not before) there is evidence of Christians being permitted to serve in the military, doing basically police work, during times of peace. Anti-war pacifism is also the form of pacifism most widely defended by philosophers today, at least in the English-speaking world.<sup>4</sup> Among the members of the U.S. and Canadian "Concerned Philosophers for Peace," anti-war pacifism seems to be the most widely endorsed pacifist view.

In defending anti-war pacifism, philosophers argue it is undeniable that wars have brought much death and destruction in their wake and that many of those who have perished in them are noncombatants or innocents. They also point to the tendency of modern wars to produce higher and higher proportions of noncombatant casualties, making it more and more difficult to justify participation in such wars. They note that at the same time, strategies for nonbelligerent conflict resolution are rarely intensively developed and explored before nations choose to go to war, making it all but impossible to justify participation in such wars.

Much of my own work has focused on anti-war pacifism by developing it alongside Just War Theory. I argue that when Just War Theory is given its most morally defensible interpretation, it can be reconciled with the practical requirements of anti-war pacifism.

## JUST WAR THEORY AND ANTI-WAR PACIFISM

**T**RADITIONAL Just War Theory directs us in our decision-making to pay attention to two elements: we must take care there is both a *just cause* for action and that the actions we are considering constitute *just means*. The first of these,



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just cause, is usually specified as follows:

1. There must be substantial aggression.
2. Nonbelligerent correctives must be either hopeless or too costly.
3. Belligerent correctives must be neither hopeless nor too costly.

Needless to say, the notion of what constitutes substantial aggression is a bit fuzzy, but it is generally understood to be the type of aggression that violates our most fundamental rights. For example, the taking of hostages is usually regarded as substantial aggression, while the nationalization of businesses owned by foreigners is not so regarded. But even when substantial aggression occurs, frequently nonbelligerent correctives are neither hopeless nor too costly to pursue. And finally, even when nonbelligerent actions are deemed to be either hopeless or too costly, in order for there to be just cause for belligerent correctives, these correctives must be neither hopeless nor too costly.

Traditional Just War Theory assumes that in some instances, the just cause requirement can be met, therefore it goes on to specify what might constitute just means:

1. Harm to innocents should not be

directly intended as an end or a means.

2. The harm resulting from the belligerent means should not be disproportionate to the particular defensive objective to be attained.

Just means conditions must apply to *each* defensive action; the just cause conditions must be met by the conflict as a whole.

In my previous work, I have argued that when Just War Theory is given its most morally defensible interpretation, it allows for the following:

1. The use of belligerent means against unjust aggressors only when such means minimize the loss and injury to innocent lives overall,

2. The use of belligerent means against unjust aggressors to indirectly threaten innocent lives only to prevent the loss of innocent lives, not simply to prevent injury to innocents, and

3. The use of belligerent means to directly or indirectly threaten or even take the lives of unjust aggressors when it is the only way to prevent serious injury to innocents.

Obviously, Just War Theory, so understood, is going to place severe restrictions on the use of belligerent means in warfare. In fact, most of the actual uses of belligerent means in warfare that have occurred in the past fail to meet these criteria and are, hence, unjustified. For example, the U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Panama, the Soviet Union's involvement in Afghanistan, and Israeli involvement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip all violate the just cause and just means provisions of Just War Theory as I defend them. Even the U.S.-led Gulf War against Iraq violated both the just cause and just means provisions of Just War Theory.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, one strains to find examples of justified applications of Just War Theory in recent history. India's military action against Pakistan in Bangladesh and the Tanzanian incursion into Uganda during the rule of Idi Amin are two examples that seem to meet the requirements of "just wars," but beyond these, it is difficult to go on.

What my work shows, I believe, is that when Just War

Theory and anti-war pacifism are given their most morally defensible interpretations, both views can be reconciled with each other. In this reconciliation, the wars and large-scale conflicts that meet the stringent requirements of Just War Theory are the only wars and large-scale conflicts to which anti-war pacifists cannot justifiably object.<sup>6</sup> We can call the view that emerges from this reconciliation "just war pacifism."<sup>7</sup> It is the view that claims that due to the stringent requirements of Just War Theory, only very rarely will participation in a massive use of lethal force in warfare be morally justified.

### JUST WAR PACIFISM AND TERRORISM

**W**HAT sort of response to the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C., would just war pacifism favor? It is helpful to first start with a definition of terrorism. Since 1983, the U.S. State Department has defined terrorism as *premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.*<sup>8</sup>

In a recent State Department document in which this definition is endorsed, they have added a discussion of state-sponsored terrorism.<sup>9</sup> In adding this section, it is clear, then, that the State Department now recognizes that not just subnational groups and individuals commit terrorist acts; terrorism can be committed by states as well. With this extension in mind, I offer the following definition of terrorism, which is essentially the same as the State Department's once the focus on subnational groups and clandestine agents is dropped: *Terrorism is the use or threat of violence against innocent people to further some political objective.*

Using this definition, it is easy to understand the attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., particularly the attacks in the World Trade Center, as terrorist acts.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 as well as the earlier bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 are terrorist acts. But what about the U.S. bombing of a pharmaceutical plant in Sudan with respect to which the U.S. government blocked a United Nations inquiry and later compensated the owner?<sup>11</sup> What about the U.S.-sponsored sanctions against Iraq which cause the deaths of an estimated three to five thousand Iraqi children each

## FOUR FORMS OF PACIFISM

### 1. NONVIOLENT PACIFISM. Any use of

*violence against other human beings is morally prohibited.*

### 2. NONLETHAL PACIFISM. Any use of

*lethal force against other human beings is morally prohibited.*

### 3. ANTI-WAR PACIFISM. Any participation in the massive use of lethal force in warfare is morally prohibited.

### 4. JUST WAR PACIFISM. Due to the stringent requirements of Just War Theory, only very rarely will participation in a massive use of lethal force in warfare be morally justified.

month?<sup>12</sup> What about the United States four-billion-dollar-a-year support for Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands that, now in its thirty-fourth year, has resulted in many thousands of deaths? Or, if we want to go back further, what about U.S. support for the Contras in Nicaragua, of death squads in El Salvador, especially during the Reagan years, or the government's threats of nuclear retaliation against the citizens of Cold War enemies should the United States be attacked? Finally, what about the United States' actual use of nuclear weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II, resulting in over one hundred thousand deaths? According to this expanded definition, all of these U.S. actions also turn out to be either terrorist acts or support for terrorist acts.

But even if the United States had not engaged in or supported any terrorist acts, the question of whether it should now be engaged in military strikes against the Taliban in Afghanistan would remain. If the U.S. were to have applied just war pacifism, before resorting to belligerent correctives, it must have made certain that nonbelligerent correctives were neither hopeless nor too costly. I do not believe two weeks of diplomatic activity were sufficient to determine whether it was hopeless to continue to attempt to bring Osama bin Laden before a U.S. court or, better, before an international court of law, without military action. Nor would waiting have been too costly an alternative. If there is any pattern to bin Laden's attacks, it is that it takes almost a year to put one together. The attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania came in August of 1998, the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole occurred in October 2000, and the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have now followed almost twelve months later. So there was no reason to think that if the U.S. did not respond quickly with its military, it would suffer yet another attack.

Rather what seems to have motivated the government's relatively quick military response is not the exhaustion of nonbelligerent options, but public opinion in the United States. The current military response, at the moment, is well received by at least a

majority of American people who want to see their government doing something to get bin Laden and fight further terrorism. But satisfying public opinion polls is not the same as satisfying the requirements of just war pacifism. The U.S. first called its military action Operation Infinite Justice but, in response to those who were uncomfortable with the religious connotations of that term,

certain terms that its continuing political and financial support depends upon Israel's fairly quickly reaching an agreement with the Palestinians on the establishment of a Palestinian state. So many plans for a Palestinian state have been discussed over the years, it should not be very difficult to settle on one of them, once Israel knows that it no longer can draw on the political and financial support of the U.S. to resist a settlement. The evidence of serious negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians will be welcomed by people around the world.

2. The sanctions against Iraq imposed since 1991 must be radically modified to permit sufficient humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people, particularly the children.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, the current

oil-for-food program which was introduced only in 1997 (six years into the sanctions) does not, by the United Nation's own estimate, provide sufficient food and medicine to prevent conditions in Iraq from continuing to get even worse.<sup>14</sup> All this has to change.

3. Now that the U.S. has used military strikes in collaboration with anti-Taliban forces to unseat the Taliban government in Afghanistan, the U.S. must cease its military involvement as soon as a new government can be established there and then rely on police action and economic and political incentives to bring Osama bin Laden and the leaders of the al-Qaida terrorist network before a U.S. court, or preferably, an international court of law.

In brief, the best account of pacifism and the best account of Just War Theory combined in just war pacifism require that in its response to the events of 11 September, the United States must limit its use of military force as much as possible and make clear that it is taking radical steps to correct for related terrorist acts of its own or of those countries it supports, and that it gives nonbelligerent correctives a reasonable chance to work. Only then would it be living up to the moral ideals that could make the nation what it claims to be.

## THE UNITED STATES must limit its use of military force as much as possible and make clear that it is taking radical steps to correct for related terrorist acts of its own or of those countries it supports.

now calls it Operation Enduring Freedom. But our military action is neither just nor does it acceptably promote freedom unless nonbelligerent correctives are first exhausted—and they clearly have not been exhausted in this case.

So even if the U.S. itself had not engaged in any terrorist acts or supported any terrorist acts, there would still be an overriding objection to its relatively quick resort to military force as a response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September. But given that the U.S. has arguably itself engaged in terrorist acts in Sudan and (with the United Nations) against Iraqi children, as well as supported terrorist acts through its political and financial support of Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, and given that these acts of and support for terrorism have served at least partially to motivate the terrorist attacks on the United States itself, the U.S. government must now take steps to radically correct its own wrongdoing if it is to justly respond to the related wrongdoing of bin Laden and his followers—and this is something it has not yet done.

**W**HAT then should the United States be doing if it is to respect the requirements of just war pacifism in responding to the terrorist attacks of 11 September?

1. It should let Israel know in no un-

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## NOTES

1. Jan Narveson, "Pacifism: A Philosophical Analysis," *Ethics* 75 (1965): 259–71.

2. Cheyney Ryan, "Self-Defense, Pacifism and the Possibility of Killing," in *The Ethics of War and Nuclear Deterrence*, ed. James P. Sterba (Belmont, Mass.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1985), 45–49.

3. Mohandas K. Gandhi, "The Doctrine of the Sword," *Nonviolent Resistance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 132.

4. Two excellent defenses are Duane L. Cady, *From Warism to Pacifism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); and Robert L. Holmes, *On War and Morality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

5. The "just cause" provision was violated because the extremely effective economic sanctions were not given enough time to work. It was estimated at the time that when compared to past economic blockades, the blockade against Iraq had a near 100% chance of success if given about a year to work (*New York Times*, 14 Jan. 1991). The "just means" provision was violated because the number of combatant and noncombatant deaths was disproportionate. According to U.S. intelligence sources, as many as 120,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed—a significant number while attempting to surrender. Some U.S. forces referred to this incident as a "turkey shoot." Moreover, what we have learned about Iraq's resistance to the less-stringent economic blockade that followed the war does not undercut the reasonableness of pursuing a more stringent economic blockade on the basis of the available information we had before the war. Moreover, the humiliating defeat of Iraqi forces in the Gulf War may have contributed to the hardened Iraqi resistance to the less-stringent post-war economic blockade.

6. Of course, anti-war pacifists are right to point out that virtually all wars have been fought with less and less discrimination and have led to unforeseen harms. These are considerations that in Just War Theory must always weigh heavily against going to war.

7. For another use of this term, see Kenneth H. Wenker, "Just War Pacifism," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 57 (1983): 135–41. For a defense of a view similar to my own, see Richard Norman, "The Case for Pacifism," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 2 (1988): 197–210.

8. *Patterns of Global Terrorism—2000*. Released by the Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 2001.

9. Ibid.

10. If we use the Just War distinction between combatants and noncombatants, those killed at the Pentagon might be viewed as combatants in some undeclared war.

11. From an Interview with Phyllis Bennis, *Z magazine*, 12 Sept. 2001.

12. "Life and Death in Iraq," *Seattle-Post-Intelligencer*, 11 May 1999.

13. Ibid. According to a UNICEF study done in 1999, if the substantial reduction in child mortality throughout Iraq during the 1980s had continued through the 1990s, there would have been half a million fewer deaths of children under the age of five in the country as a whole during the eight-year period 1991–1998.

14. Ibid.

## SLAYING LABAN: THE MORAL JUSTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE

By R. Dennis Potter

**W**HEN THE SPIRIT tells Nephi to kill Laban, Nephi is reluctant and questions the wisdom of the Spirit's advice (1 Nephi 4:10). But the Spirit reasons with Nephi as follows: "Behold, the Lord slayeth the wicked to bring forth his righteous purposes. It is better that one man should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in unbelief" (1 Nephi 4:13). This convinces Nephi, and he proceeds to decapitate the drunken Laban.

Should Nephi have been convinced? If so, what implications does the acceptance of this argument have for the use of violence by governments and individuals wishing to attain political ends? Herein, I argue that this reasoning should be convincing. Moreover, I argue that this reasoning can be used equally to justify both war and terrorism, implying that there is no morally significant difference between the two.

I have extrapolated the central principle of Nephi's argument as the following:

**PREVENTION PRINCIPLE:** *If we can prevent something bad from happening without thereby causing something equally bad or worse to occur, then we should.*

From the prevention principle, it follows that, if it is worse for a nation to "dwindle in unbelief" than it is for Laban to die, then Nephi should kill Laban. The important point here is not that an unbelieving nation is a bad thing, but rather the abstract point that killing can be justified by the fact that it prevents something worse. This presupposes that we can sometimes compare consequences in such a way that we can determine which ones are better or worse. This presupposition seems fairly plausible to me.

Consider the case of the indigenous rebels: Alfred is an anthropologist who is in a Central American country doing field research. In this country, the government is engaged in a war with indigenous guerrillas.

Alfred comes across a village where the government forces have rounded up twenty of the local natives and are about to execute them without trial. The sadistic leader of the government troops offers to let Alfred shoot one of the natives. In exchange, he will let the others go free. Most would say that Alfred should shoot the native.<sup>1</sup>

Some would say that the only thing that is as bad or worse than the death of one person is the death of another person (or group of persons). They believe that individual lives are to be valued above all else. This entails that it is not worth risking one's own life to escape slavery. And on such a view, the American Revolution, the Civil War, the French resistance, and similar struggles are all unjustified acts of violence. Such a view is probably false. I will thus allow that there can be some things that, under certain circumstances, are more valuable than life, but I can not spell out this position nor give an exhaustive defense of it in this brief essay.

**T**HE prevention principle agrees with the requirement of proportionality in traditional Just War Theory. This requirement states that one condition for fighting a just war is that we must be convinced that it is likely that the overall result of fighting the war will be better than the overall result of not fighting it. This is similar to a combination of principles 2 and 3 in James Sterba's account (see page 68). Arguments based on the prevention principle disagree with Just War Theory on the basis of the theory's other requirements.

First, Just War Theory requires that there be a *just cause*. Now this is something more than just the notion that the war would be beneficial overall. This is the idea that someone has done something to wrong the country or group that is considering using violence. The problem with this requirement is that it is obsessed with the past. We need to



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forget what has happened and figure out what we can do to make the future better. Furthermore, the "blame game" usually goes back several generations, and endless disputes can be had about who really started things. What we should focus on is whether or not using violence now will bring about the best overall result.

Second, Just War Theory requires that certain conditions be met in the way the war is fought. One condition is the idea of proportionality, and this, we have already pointed out, is essentially identical to the prevention principle. However, the other condition is that there be a distinction between innocents and non-innocents and that we do everything that we can to avoid killing innocents. This is problematic because it is not clear how to determine who counts as an innocent. What if a civilian works for a company that builds electrical devices that are eventually used in weapons? For similar reasons, it is not very clear what the distinction between combatants and non-combatants would be. However, an advocate of the argument from the prevention principle can still argue that persons who have very little to do with the opponent's cause should be harmed only rarely. This is because proportionality dictates that harming such "relative" innocents will seldom be for the greatest benefit. For instance, the Provisional IRA, for example, tried to reduce the number of "innocents" killed by their attacks, even though they did not do everything that they could to eliminate such deaths.

For many, the prevention principle might sound "cold-hearted." But what does this mean? It might mean, simply, that the prevention principle is rational. This is no objection to it. Alternately, the charge of being "cold-hearted" might mean that the prevention principle is not sensitive to people and their desires. But this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, on such a view about when violence is justified, we have to take into consideration every single person that may be affected by the violence. This would include those persons on the other side of the conflict. Indeed, the prevention principle entails that, in some cases, we must allow more of our own soldiers to die. For example, suppose that a military commander has two options. In the first option, he can fire bomb the

opposing camp killing virtually everyone in it (fifty thousand deaths), but losing relatively few, if any, of his own men and women. In the second option, he can use ground forces to invade the opposing camp causing less overall death, but risking relatively many deaths of his own soldiers. Suppose that both options lead to accomplishing the goal of the war. If so, then the general should choose the second option since it leads to less overall death.

is that war is carried out against combatants and terrorism is carried out against non-combatants. We have already hinted about ways this distinction is vague. But more important, it is, again, not a moral distinction. Both military and civilian casualties involve the loss of human life. In both cases, people lose their chance at a future life that they might have valued. One is not more intrinsically valuable than another. To suppose that we should kill only combatants is to suppose that their lives are worth less than non-combatants. We should kill only those whose deaths will lead to the best overall consequences. In some cases, this will be innocent or non-combatant lives. Perhaps in most cases, violence against combatants will be best, since it reduces the enemy's ability to cause more casualties. But this does not, in principle, rule out attacks against non-combatants. Sometimes this will be the most effective means of causing the best overall result.

Some Latter-day Saints might object to over-emphasizing the prevention principle because it contradicts other scriptures. Most notably, D&C 98. This section describes a recipe for figuring out when it is permissible to go to war. Essentially it states that we should not use physical force against another unless we have been attacked more than three times by our adversary. This might seem to contradict the prevention principle which says that we can use physical force if we have a good reason to believe that it will prevent more harm than it will cause. However, the recipe for war in D&C 98 and Nephi's prevention principle are not necessarily contradictory.

Initially, it is important to note that verse 32 says that the law contained in this section is the very law the Lord gave to Nephi. To see how they don't contradict, we need to note the difference between a *recipe* and a *principle*. A recipe gives you a set of rules to follow. Following it is a mechanical process. Recipes help people who might have a difficult time following a principle. A principle can be difficult to follow since it does not specify what to do in each situation. Hence, we often adopt recipes, or "rules of thumb," to help us follow principles. As a recipe, D&C 98 can help us to better follow the prevention principle. Indeed, after three attacks from an enemy, we have good reason to be-

## WHAT IS THE PRICE of freedom, justice and equality? This is surely not an easy question. . . But should we be surprised that a morality of violence is not tidy? Nephi's story is not tidy.

**W**HAT does the prevention principle say about war, terrorism, and other acts of political violence? There is controversy about the essential nature of terrorism. On some views, there is an essential distinction between war and terrorism; on others, they overlap. My view is that any supposed distinction between them is morally superficial. One distinction that some might offer is that war is waged by states while terrorism is carried out by small groups. This, some might say, is the moral difference between them. Perhaps the reason for this would be that states are more likely to be principled in their decision to use force, while individuals or groups would be less principled. Still, this would not be a good reason to believe that the state/small group distinction is a moral one. Indeed, history shows that states can be very unprincipled (the Roman Empire) and small groups can be very principled (the African National Congress). Also, since states are not usually directly controlled by its citizens, we cannot argue that states must answer to the people and small groups do not. Moreover, even in democracies, the fact that state leaders are elected by the people does not make it more likely they will do what is in the best interest of all affected. This only makes it more likely that any war will be in the best interest of the citizens of that particular state.

Another distinction between war and terrorism which some consider to be important

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lieve that there will be further attacks, and so we have a good reason to believe that if we retaliate, we might prevent further harm.

Possibly the prevention principle would condemn the methods employed by the U.S. in Afghanistan, and it would definitely condemn those used in the Gulf War, because this principle makes no distinction between our own lives and those of the enemy. In both of these wars, the calculus used by the U.S. is to minimize the deaths of American soldiers and not to minimize the number of *overall* deaths. In the Gulf War, we were willing to use force (killing at least one hundred thousand Iraqis) to protect our oil interests in Kuwait. But then when it came to supporting the Kurds' rebellion against Hussein—a rebellion we encouraged—we balked. The prevention principle claims when fighting a war, we should consider the interests of the enemy equally, and those of all others involved. This idea reminds us of the Dalai Lama's claim that we can justify violence only in the event that it benefits the person to whom it is directed. But it is not quite the same since it also allows us to consider our own interests as well. The prevention principle might require that we sacrifice more of our own—but it might not.

Another criticism of the current military action in Afghanistan is that we could probably achieve similar results without using force. Everyone agrees that it might take years to find Osama bin Laden, if we find him at all. But it is not clear that we could not have acquired bin Laden via negotiation with the Taliban. We spent no more than three weeks in the effort. If so, then we could achieve the same results without killing so many civilian Afghans. In this instance, the prevention principle would entail that this war is not justified. Even if bin Laden is found relatively quickly, it is not clear that this will eliminate the kinds of terrorist attacks as we saw on 11 September. Indeed, many agree with bin Laden's views and methods. We will not catch all of them by attacking Afghanistan. Therefore, it is far from clear that the prevention principle would justify attacking Afghanistan. However, if by attacking Afghanistan, we show those who harbor terrorists that they will pay a substantial price, then perhaps governments will be more likely to turn terrorists over to international courts, thus reducing the amount of terrorism. Thus, it is also far from clear that the prevention principle condemns the U.S. war against the Taliban.

D&C 98 would justify the war if we could claim the Taliban is a close partner of the enemy who attacked us. This is not an implausible claim if we take a liberal reading of what counts as being involved in the attack of another. However, on this liberal reading, the friend of my enemy is always also my enemy. This interpretation could cause problems for a nation's foreign policy. On a more conservative reading of what it is to be part of the enemy that attacked the U.S. on 11 September, only bin Laden's organization could be considered the enemy.

The prevention principle might entail that some "terrorist" actions around the world could be justified. For instance, many claim that U.S. foreign policy is self-interested and is, hence, damaging to countries in the Middle East. In fact, they argue, it causes loss of freedoms, disenfranchisement, and even death. Many people have died in Iraq because of this foreign policy. Many have died in Israel. If this is true, and if acts of terrorism against U.S. targets will cause the U.S. to modify its policy, then these acts might be justified under the prevention principle. For this to be the case, however, the acts of terrorism must cause less damage than that which is directly tied to the foreign policy. The attack on the U.S.S. Cole killed seventeen Americans. This pales in comparison to the number of Iraqis who die from starvation because of the embargo against Iraq. Of course, the number dead in the attacks on the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania is significantly higher. In this case, the pay-off must be higher as well. It would be hard for the prevention principle to justify the attacks on the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon, since the losses were so incredibly high.

"Terrorism never brings real policy changes," one may object. But this is wrong. Both the Provisional IRA and the PLO have been at negotiating tables only because of the threat of a return to violence. The Provisional IRA has essentially been successful in their war. The Good Friday Agreement affords the

nationalist population in Northern Ireland the ability to ensure that they have equal treatment. Whether this is worth the cost of the "war" (approximately three thousand lives since 1969) is a very real and difficult question. Many nationalists would say that it is worth that cost. More lives were lost in the American Revolution, and most would argue it was worth the cost. What is the price of freedom, justice and equality? This is surely not an easy question, and so it is not easy to say that the Provisional IRA's war was not justified. Similar considerations may very well apply to Yasser Arafat's PLO, Nelson Mandela's ANC, El Salvador's FMLN, the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Basque ETA, and so on.

To be sure, the prevention principle does not offer an easy solution to the questions that confront us. At least, it is not as easy as policy-makers in Washington or the activists on the front line of the anti-war movement want to make it appear. But should we be surprised that a morality of violence is not tidy? Nephi's story is not tidy. It challenges our moral sensibilities. It makes doing the right thing a complicated and difficult matter. But this untidiness also makes the prevention principle more likely to be correct, I suspect. And while it might seem to tell us not to rush to judgment against the U.S. military or even terrorist organizations, it also tells us that those who decide to use violence should not take their moral calculations lightly. For all the good intentions those who elect to use force may have, they may turn out to be tragically wrong. And Americans can now, after 11 September, understand the cost of such tragedies.

### NOTES

1. From Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," *Twentieth-Century Ethical Theory*, Steven Cahn and Joram Haber, eds. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1995), 457–575. Williams uses this to argue against Utilitarianism. But it seems clear to me that in this case, our moral intuitions seem to support Utilitarianism.

### Pontius' Puddle



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