



# Theology in the shadow of the Second Cold War



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# Editorial

This number of *St Mark's Review* considers the important issue of theology and war. We are now over a year into a war between Russia and Ukraine, and appear to be entering a second Cold War after a three-decade thaw. Authoritarian regimes such as those in Russia and China are also lining up in opposition to the West, NATO, and the rules-based international order. In thinking about how to respond to these sobering realities, Christians are fortunate in being able to draw on a deep and rich tradition of philosophical and theological reflection. These include peace traditions that first emerge with Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and develop with early church fathers Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Lactantius. The tradition extends to "just war" theories that emerge in the wake of Emperor Constantine's embrace of Christianity in the fourth century, most notably in Augustine of Hippo's adaptation of earlier Roman thinkers such as Cicero to forge the first Christian synthesis of "just war." Augustine famously defended participation in war when it was undertaken for the good of society and when its end was peace. In the medieval period Thomas Aquinas developed these ideas further, stipulating conditions that needed to be met for a just war: the authority of a sovereign; a just cause; and that belligerents have rightful intentions for good and to avoid evil. Over time such principles were enshrined by secular states in international law regarding the causes and conduct of war. Yet in the long shadow of the Second World War those assessments have become more difficult and complex, especially when changes in modern warfare have produced the horrors of pattern bombing of civilians (which one of the contributors to this number experienced as a child) and the use of catastrophic nuclear weapons.

In all of these contexts, Christians have been formative voices both for peace and for the waging of war with justice and proportionality. Given our current geopolitical realities, as well as these important traditions of thinking about war, the aim of this number is to hear from a range of Christian thinkers on the issue of war—namely, how we might think about it faithfully and respond to it constructively.

Peter Hooton, a theologian and former diplomat with experience in nuclear arms control and counter-proliferation, considers the threats and possibilities of nuclear war. He argues that seeing nuclear weapons as a valid form of deterrent constitutes a kind of denial of the threat of nuclear war. He adds that we must affirm the existential threat of nuclear war by acknowledging a number of realities: that nuclear war is possible; that the nuclear-armed states have no intention of disarming; and that “with this understanding comes an inescapable obligation—the obligation to support all peaceful efforts to rid the world of these terrible weapons whose use, in any circumstances, would be a crime against humanity.”

Aden Cotterill’s article demonstrates the value of listening to the theological reflection of those who experienced Communist rule first-hand during the previous Cold War—in this case Czech theologian Thomas Halík. Cotterill deftly delineates Halík’s robust critiques of Russian bellicosity and the “drug of the pan-Slavic myth,” alongside strident calls for genuine peace. Yet, as Cotterill suggests, Halík is not naïve, contending that “enemies” remains a real biblical category and that there are people that “strive to destroy us.” Halík therefore rejects pacifism, warning that “[i]t is not possible to retreat in the face of violence; it is necessary to protect and defend the innocent . . . One can only turn *one’s own cheek*, if there is hope that it will put a stop to evil, but not the cheeks of others. They must be defended.” For Halík there is a time to “gather stones” and “peace,” but also, regrettably, “a time for war” (Ecclesiastes 3:5, 8).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a leading theologian of the twentieth century whose theology was forged in the crucible of war, is the key conversation partner in Claire Hein Blanton’s article. Blanton explores Bonhoeffer’s vision of what it means to “stand firm” in the midst of war. This is neither a straightforward pacifist position and nor is it a classical “just war” position. Rather, for Bonhoeffer this means being conformed to Christ and “open to the possibility of transgressing societal norms to act on the behalf of the neighbour.” It is also, argues Blanton, a nuanced recognition “that at times traditional modes of ethical thought fall short of Christ-like action.”

Like Bonhoeffer, theologian and pastor Thorwald Lorenzen lived personally through the Second World War, witnessing firsthand its

devastating impact on his family in the wake of the Allied bombing of Hamburg and the subsequent invasion of Germany by Russian Red Army troops. Drawing on his own experience and many decades of theological reflection on war and its impact, Lorenzen urges us to make an intentional decision against war and to participate actively in creating a culture and spirituality of peace. To that end, he articulates a practical program for the creation of such a culture: holding elected officials to account on decisions regarding war, development, and diplomacy; encouraging “peace studies” at universities and schools; and fostering “peace churches” where the focus is on both the “things that make for peace” and the unmasking of ideas and practices that encourage violence and war.

Finally, Doug Hynd’s article draws attention to the impact of war on climate change—an issue he sees as not receiving adequate attention from either commentators on the war in Ukraine or from theologians. Hynd identifies two dynamics that contribute to the risks that military activity poses to contemporary pathways towards current and future emission reduction. The first arises from the difficulty of properly accounting for emissions related to military preparation; the second arises because of the difficulty of achieving substantial reductions in military production and procurement. Hynd argues that this is because of both the vast scale of the political economy of weapons production (the military-industrial complex) and the sacred character of the nation-state as a justification for its defence by means of preparation for war. He concludes, however, with a theological reflection on the nature of hope as an orientation for Christians in a troubled times such as ours.

Taken together, the following articles provide substantial and incisive reflection on the pressing issue of war in our time—and, to adapt an infamous phrase, peace in our time. These articles also offer a model for how we might think about war critically and faithfully, and how we might respond to it constructively. I commend these articles to the readers of *St Mark’s Review*.

Dr Michael Gladwin  
Editor, *St Mark’s Review*  
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