

The Relevance of Just War Theory

Nyong Eka Teguh Iman Santosa

First of all I have to say that conflict is a part of life. I cannot imagine the life without conflict exists in this mundane world. And since conflict is always opened to become worse and engage violence, Just War I think will remain taking place in any discussion about violence. But, it does not mean that I see it as a necessity in addressing violence. Insofar I understand just war theory, it seems to stand up on a presumption that violence or we euphemistically call it the use of force as alternative. Once violence is perceived as an alternative for peace of saving humanity, I worry that we will be trapped into classical apology of the just war. I am interested in the term chosen by Lloyd Steffen to characterize combat or use of force as “*a last resort*”,¹ even of course you can call it also as an euphemistic phrase. This term implicitly resembles recognition that the use of force even morally or religiously justified to be taken substantially is “*a transgression*” from the heart or the right path of religion. In other words, the heart or the right path of religion is love and peace, not hatred and violence. Here I must agree with John Howard Yoder when he says that “*Legitimate does not mean good*”, “*Holy does not mean just*”, and “*Justifiable is not sinless.*”²

Along with this standpoint, I know that just war is a concept proposed to fulfill a theoretical and also practical ‘need’ for the use of force against demonic powers threatening humanity. I mean, in fact, I can not deny that there is a ‘demand’ to the use of forces in addressing violence which threatens humanity such as what done by terrorism. Without using force to diminish that kind of threat, the power of terrorism or other demonic groups may get increased significantly and more deadly. That is why I admit that in such degree the use of force is justifiable, at least to ensure that the threat is removed. Mirroring Jorge J.E. Gracia’s theory of textuality, which he proposes the Interpreter’s Dilemma within, I can call it the Just War’s Dilemma.³ In one hand, the use of force actually, in practice, does not mean other than the use of violence as well. So just war here uses the term “*the use of force*” in order to differentiate its violated actions from the opponents’ deeds based on its claim that just war saves humanity for that its violence is justified while others not. But, in another hand, if the use of force is not taken, as mentioned above, it may truly give the demonic powers chances to increase and strengthen their deadly forces against humanity. So, what is the solution? If Gracia proposes the Principle of Proportional Understanding in his theory, I can call it here the Principle of Proportional Use of Force.⁴ The description of this principle can adopt eight criteria listed by Steffen in

¹ Lloyd Steffen, *The Demonic Turn: The Power of Religion to Inspire or Restrain Violence* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 243.

² John Howard Yoder, *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 1996), 11; 12; and 17.

³ Jorge J.E. Gracia, *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 177.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

his book consisting of six *jus ad bellum* criteria and two *jus in bello*.⁵ Those criteria are:

(1) *The war must be sanctioned by a legitimate and competent authority;*
(2) *The cause must be just;* (3) *There must be a right intention and announcement of that intention;* (4) *Combat or use of force must always be a last resort;* (5) *One must have a reasonable hope of success in going to war;* (6) *By going to war one must preserve values that otherwise could not be preserved;* (7) *Noncombatants must be protected from harm (non combatant immunity);* and (8) *A use of force cannot employ weapons or uses of force that are disproportionate to the end of restoring peace (--numbers and combination added).*

Overall, I do realize that just war can be abused as shown by history of just war itself. We can learn from the history of just war such as during the time of *tyrannicide* of Reformation, Enlightenment, and total war, how the war even justified as just war practically in using forces hardly to be controlled.⁶ But, by admitting the evolution of the concept,⁷ we then has a reason to modify just war conceptualization with considering “*the spirit of our age*”. I then agree with Steffen in putting just war as a framework to guide moral reflection and articulate specific criteria of justice, not as a rationalization or justification of violence.⁸ In my mind, this represents a new turn in interpreting what we call just war. According to the spirit of this interpretation, the real demand of human life is justice. “*Justice itself requires that the threat be resisted.*”⁹ But, I think, for resisting the threat violence is never be an alternative. Even in the last effort, we incline to take ‘violence’ or ‘use of force’ as a “resort”, we have a deep understanding and awareness that it is a ‘transgression’ from the heart or the right path of religion.

Finally, in maintaining peace at home, in neighborhood, and the world, we must go back to “the heart” of religion. God revealed religion in the spirit of love and peace, not hatred and violence. It means that religion and its all religious articulations can not be separated from its heart, or it will die and no longer be a real religion. Love, according to Teilhard de Chardin, is the “*only force that can make things one without destroying them.*”¹⁰ And by elaborating Buddha’s teaching, Thich Nhat Hanh believes that “*it is possible to live twenty-four hours a day in a state of love.*”¹¹

⁵ Steffen, *The Demonic Turn*, 243.

⁶ Yoder, *When War is Unjust*, 19-30.

⁷ Stefen, *The Demonic Turn*, 240.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 244.

¹⁰ Sir John Templeton, *Pure Unlimited Love: An Eternal Creative Force and Blessing Taught by All Religions* (Philadelphia & London: Templeton Foundation Press, 2000), 7.

¹¹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2007), 1.