

Self-Defense and the Christian

Rodney J. Decker, Th.D.

Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, PA
<NTResources.com>

AN EXPLANATION

For several years I have been becoming increasingly uneasy regarding the violence in our country that has been expressed in terroristic attacks in public settings, especially in schools and churches.¹ The Virginia Tech shooting was the first specific situation that raised these questions in my mind, and it culminated with the theater shooting in Colorado the summer of 2012.² I began to consider whether it was wise and prudent for Christians to prepare themselves for self-defense in terms of both training and equipment, for their own protection, yes, but also for the protection of family and those with and among whom they might minister and fellowship on a regular basis. The questions that arose were not the sort that are typically bandied about on the web, but rather were theological. Does a Christian have the right to carry some means of lethal force and to use such to defend himself or others in the face of an attack?³

I was aware of little discussion at this very personal level. I was familiar with the theological/ethical questions at the national level—the questions revolving around just war versus pacifism—but little dealing with personal self-defense. Kevin Bauder's essay⁴ following the Colorado shooting finally nudged me to decide that I must address these

¹ This article was originally written for a Faculty Forum at Baptist Bible Seminary on April 14, 2014.

² More recently, of course, has been the shooting of elementary children and teachers in Sandy Hook, Connecticut on December 14, 2012. Though that shooting gained the most attention at the time due to the ages of the victims, it was not different in principle from previous mass shootings, though the politicians used the emotional leverage of children being shot to advance their agendas. Such shootings tend to disappear from the public eye not long after the initial excitement dies down and another such shooting occurs. How many people now remember the Amish school children who were murdered in 2006? Or that it was the third such school shooting that week? There were multiple school shootings in 2013.

³ In this context I am speaking about *American* Christians (since many others are citizens of countries that do not allow them that option). I refer also to a gun (typically a handgun) since that is the most effective and most common choice for self-defense weapons. The principles involved are the same regardless of the specifics, whether a baton or a knife carried by a Christian today or a sword in earlier centuries.

⁴ "Lessons from Colorado," *In the Nick of Time*, 27 July 2012, <<http://www.centalseminary.edu/resources/nick-of-time/in-the-nick-of-time-archive/390-lessons-from-colorado>> (accessed 17 April 2014).

questions for myself. As a result, I began reading whatever I could find in print on the subject. The more I read, the more I realized that there was a wide spectrum of credibility in what has already been written. There was much that was sensational, belligerent, and poorly informed. There was also a substantial gap in credible biblical perspectives. As I continued to read the self-defense literature, I began to identify credible authorities (persons, organizations, books) on the legal and pragmatic issues involved,⁵ but found nothing substantive of a theological nature.⁶ Although as I initially wrote this long introductory paragraph, I had not yet completed my study (indeed, it had hardly begun), I realized that this was far more complex a subject with far greater ramifications than I had ever suspected. The legal implications alone were sobering in the extreme. Some of my journey I share below.

INTRODUCTION

In which of the following situations, if any, would you consider it acceptable or appropriate for a Christian to exercise lethal force⁷ or to condone such force by a fellow Christian?

- (1) A foreign nation launches an unprovoked military attack on another country for the sole purpose of gaining control of either valuable natural resources or to gain control of a strategic military position. This is not the threat of such an attack, but an actual invasion in which force is being used and people are being killed, both military and civilian. Do the people of the nation under attack have the right to defend themselves with military force even if that means that many of the invaders will be killed? May Christians serve in the military and participate in such deadly force?
- (2) A terrorist group not officially sponsored by any national entity is detected in the act of implementing an attack against unarmed civilians by means of large explosive

⁵ Two of the key players here are Massad Ayoob and the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network. The most important of Ayoob's books are *In the Gravest Extreme: The Role of the Firearm in Personal Protection* (Concord, NH: Police Bookshelf, 1980) and *Gun Digest Book of Concealed Carry*, 2nd ed. (Iola, WI: Gun Digest Books, 2012). There are some other reliable writers as well as helpful organizations, but the two cited here appear to me to be the standard by which others are judged. See also the brief bibliography of recommended reading at the end of the article.

⁶ The best attempt to present a biblical view of the subject that I have found thus far is Richard Seim, "The Bible and Self-Defense," an article in the newsletter of the Armed Citizen Legal Defense Network, 2008, available at <<http://www.armedcitizennetwork.org/the-bible-and-self-defense>> (accessed 19 January 2013). Though the article contains some helpful material, it does not reflect an adequately nuanced view of the relevance of the OT. Similar in this regard is Charl Van Wyk, *Shooting Back: The Right and Duty of Self-Defense* (Torrance, CA: WND Books, 2006).

⁷ By "lethal force" I mean the use of physical resistance in an effort to halt a violent attack which resistance has the potential to (and may) result in the death of another person. The term, of course, could also refer to an aggressor's use of force, but in the present context I am inquiring regarding a Christian's response to such an act.

devices, a nuclear device, and/or poison gas, any of which would result in the death of hundreds if not thousands of people.

- (3) Unknown attackers invade a conference center where a large political rally is being held and kill hundreds of people with machine gun fire and grenades.
- (4) A heavily armed gunman opens fire in a public setting, shooting people at random
- (5) An attacker(s) invades a church's building during a worship service and shoots the pastor as well as many congregants, killing or wounding many people.
- (6) A gunman, in the process of an armed robbery, shoots someone and threatens to shoot more people.
- (7) Several people armed with knives enter a church service just as the ushers finish collecting the offering and demand all the money.
- (8) An armed assailant breaks into a home during the night, holds the husband at gunpoint, and proceeds to rape his wife.
- (9) Several husky teenagers surround an older man walking with a cane and demand his wallet.
- (10) Gang members verbally attack a man and his wife on the street, using abusive and graphic language to describe the woman in an obvious attempt to provoke the man into a fight.
- (11) Several men attack, for no obvious reason, another man who is physically fit and active. Using baseball bats they beat him into the ground and appear intent on continuing the attack.
- (12) A pastor who has had a lengthy and sometimes fruitful ministry to gangs in an inner city setting encounters a particularly belligerent gang member who is either drunk or high. In the process of sharing the gospel with him, the gang member both assaults him verbally, mocking Christianity and cursing Jesus, and deliberately insults the pastor with a backhand slap across the face.

The list could obviously go on nearly indefinitely with a wide range of scenarios in addition to the dozen described above or many variations of these. The examples cited here are all realistic situations in the world, and all could be illustrated with news clippings from recent years. Such news reports raise the question of self-defense in a painfully real way. Most Christian discussions of the general topic of self-defense focus on the first scenario and relate to debates regarding the validity of just war theory in its various permutations. That is not the focus of the present essay, though the questions are inter-related.⁸ Nor is my present concern with the question of the Christian's defense (individually or collectively) against a tyrannical ruler. Here the concern is not the state or matters of warfare. Rather I am interested to probe the more personal questions of an individual's right to defend himself or herself and the related question of a church's right (or responsibility?) to

⁸ "Self-defense against individuals is just war on a small scale" (Chris Bird, *The Concealed Handgun Manual*, 6th ed. [San Antonio: Privateer Publications, 2011], 361). For a theological perspective on just war theory and some helpful bibliography on that subject, see Mike Stallard, "A Biblical Defense of Just War Theory," *JMAT* 10 (2006): 92-114.

provide for the protection of its members.⁹ In doing so I am primarily interested in Christian aspects of the question—theological, moral, ethical questions. I will not address specific political questions, though some general observations regarding our cultural setting are inevitable.¹⁰

We live among other depraved sinners in a fallen world where evil is undeniable.¹¹ A consequence of that is the inevitable violence committed by some people upon others. It has been that way from the beginning when Cain murdered Abel. Contemporary technology enables violence on a much greater scale.¹² It does no good to deny the existence of violence (an impossible illusion), nor is it responsible to avoid thinking about how one would respond to a direct, personal encounter with violence, especially when one is the direct object of such viciousness. Christians living in the United States are fortunate not to face routinely the sort of atrocities that are common in some other parts of the world. That security, however, does not excuse negligence of thoughtlessness, for even here, despite a lesser statistical probability, bad things do happen to God's people.

To address these questions I will first examine a series of Bible passages that are either relevant to the questions raised or that have been claimed by some to be relevant.¹³ There

⁹ As the current form of this essay has developed, it has become obvious that the corporate ministry issues will have to await further treatment in a separate paper. A short appendix has been included to suggest some of the issues involved, but no sustained argument has been offered along that line.

¹⁰ Political questions, of course, depend on the laws where one resides. American Christians enjoy the protection of the US Constitution. In regards to self-defense that document states, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" (*Bill of Rights*, Amendment 2 to the US Constitution, <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html>). Most countries do not provide such liberty, especially as it relates to self-defense and "bearing arms." Such legal liberties or limits effect how Christians may implement their decision regarding self-defense, but they do not determine such a decision. Christians living, e.g., in England, have no legal option to carry a handgun for self-defense if they were to decide that self-defense was their Christian responsibility.

¹¹ I assume this without argument in this essay since it is the historic position of Christian orthodoxy. There have, of course, been various aberrant positions among professing Christians (e.g., some have denied original sin and depravity). Likewise some non-Christians, whether secularists or adherents of other religions, assume the inherent goodness of human beings, though this is not a universal conclusion.

¹² The level of technology is not the issue. Yes, semi-automatic weapons can kill more people faster than a muzzle loader. The issue, however, is one of sin, not technology. Those who propose to ban particular forms of technology face the contradictory problem of other technologies such as the Internet that enable just as much social mayhem as modern firearms. The Internet may not be directly lethal, but it can assuredly be used to accomplish deadly ends. One cannot logically be a "gun-Luddite" and not also be an "Internet Luddite."

¹³ Though there have not been many discussions of these questions, a number of those which I have read offer untenable treatments of the passages in question. This might be because their authors do not have a substantive biblical-theological foundation (e.g., well-intentioned, but untrained folks) or they fail to distinguish changes in the way God administers his creation, most commonly by the old covenant relationship of God and his people in the OT and the new covenant since the cross. As will be evident in my discussion, I assume that the Law as a legally binding covenant was terminated at the cross. (That does not make the OT irrelevant to Christians nor to the current discussion.) I also assume that today the Christian is related to God on the basis of the new covenant, though even that conclusion is not essential so long as it is recognized that the old covenant reigned only from Moses to Jesus. For a substantive discussion of Jewish views of relevant

are relatively few such texts that address the question of self-defense directly.¹⁴ Following that examination, I will attempt to synthesize a coherent Christian view of the subject, though that will require somewhat more abstract theological integration rather than exposition.

Old Testament Texts

In terms of the OT texts discussed here, it is important to realize that many of these texts are part of or under the jurisdiction of the old covenant. Though they may establish general principles in regard to God's view of self-defense, they are not in themselves normative in governing the conduct of anyone who is not under the legal jurisdiction of that OT law.¹⁵

It has been claimed that Genesis 2:15 teaches that "the right of self-defense predates the fall of Adam and as such it is one of the universal rights of man."¹⁶ That text states, "The LORD God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." To deduce the right of self-defense, it is necessary to understand "to take care of" (לְקַח אֲחֵרָהּ) in the sense of "guard" (which it could mean in an appropriate context¹⁷) and to conclude that this authorizes guarding oneself from any and every possible threat. Yet this is found in a description of pre-fall Eden. From what or whom is Adam guarding the garden? The Patrick Henry and John Henry appeal to a defense against Satan and then extend that assumption to any future aggressors post-fall. The presumptions and conclusions seem rather dubious. How would one defend oneself against the attack of a spirit being? Certainly not by physical means. Nor is there any indication that this general statement can legitimately be transferred to other domains post-fall. It would appear to be more likely that the verb should be understood in the sense of "to take care of" is almost all English translations agree (NASB, NIV, ESV, NET, NRSV, NJB, REB, CEB, etc.) and as the parallel with "work/farm it" (לְעַבְדָּהּ) implies.

OT texts, see David B. Kopel, "The Torah and Self-Defense," *Penn State Law Review* 109 (2004): 17–42. Since much of that article discusses later Jewish views, I have not interacted with it extensively here.

¹⁴ Delineating a biblical view of such matters is not contingent upon "finding" (or perhaps "creating") a large number of potential references and making them fit the desired conclusion. Far better to be cautious and have only a few passages which are clear than to make Scripture a "nose of wax."

¹⁵ Many discussions of this topic come from writers who either do not understand the hermeneutical implications of such matters and simply "pick and choose" from Scripture whatever they like, or in some cases they assume a formal hermeneutical system such as covenant theology in which the OT is assumed to apply directly to the NT church. Though this later position is widespread, the present writer rejects such supersessionism.

¹⁶ Patrick Henry and John Henry, "The Bible and Gun Control" (By the authors, n.p.: n.d.), 33. (As of Oct. 2013 there is a copy at <http://diarmani.com/Articles/Th%20Bible%20and%20Gun%20control.pdf>).

¹⁷ HALOT, 4:1581–84.

Genesis 14 has also been used to support personal self-defense.¹⁸ This is the account of Abraham rescuing Lot who has been kidnapped by raiding parties. Though the principles involved might well be relevant at a national level (Abraham was essentially the head of a tribal group at this point that was distinct from other similar political entities at the time), it is a stretch to apply the corporate actions of a tribe to an individual (despite Abraham and Lot being named as individuals). To then appeal to this being a Christian principle of the “resurrection age” since the account is referenced in Hebrews 6–7, where Melchizedek is supposedly identified as Jesus,¹⁹ reflects an odd form of hermeneutics. There may be related principles here, but if they are, they should first be treated at the level of national just war theory before a tertiary application to individual self-defense is attempted.

With Exodus 22:2–3 we have a clear reference to self-defense under the old covenant: “If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him, but if the sun has risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him” (ESV). In this case law example the thief is said to “break in.” Though we tend to think of an aggressor “breaking and entering” through a door or window, the specific situation in view in Exodus 22 is actually “digging through” (בִּפְתָּח הַחֵטֶר) the wall of a mud brick dwelling. Given the historical, cultural setting following the conquest, such a scenario may well have entailed digging into the lower level of a residence where cattle and other possessions were kept,²⁰ the family residing on a second floor above this area.²¹ In such a scenario there may have been a watchman guarding the cattle below, or the homeowner may be aroused from the floor above. In either case, the law assumes an altercation in which the owner kills the invader. There is no statement as to the details of the confrontation. It is enough that there has been a home invasion and the aggressor has been killed—whether intentionally or accidentally is immaterial in this particular case law.²²

¹⁸ Henry and Henry, “Bible and Gun Control,” 39–40. Likewise Nehemiah 4 is used in a similar manner by Richard Seim, “The Bible and Self-Defense,” ch. 3, 2008, <<http://armedcitizennetwork.org/the-bible-and-self-defense>> (accessed 18 April 2014). Proverbs 24:11–12 might be relevant to the defense of others (“Rescue those who are being taken away to death”), but the proverbial nature of the statement and minimal context makes it difficult to use as a basis for any teaching regarding self-defense. Likewise Ecclesiastes 3:3, 8 (“a time to kill ... a time for war”) cannot be pressed into service at this point since there are no specifications given as to when those times may be.

¹⁹ “Whoever Melchizedek is, he is, at least, an extremely close type of Christ, as identical as possible, if not actually identical and his blessing is equal to the blessing of the resurrected Christ himself” (Henry and Henry, “Bible and Gun Control,” 66).

²⁰ Note that the context refers explicitly to cattle in verses 1 and 4.

²¹ The legislation was actually given during the wilderness wanderings when the people lived in tents, but the intent was to provide legal guidance for the post-conquest period in the land, thus the assumptions of constructed buildings. Later history evidenced very different home styles and social contexts as Jewish society became more urbanized (NT times, e.g., would have been quite different, whether in major cities such as Jerusalem, or even the smaller towns of Galilee).

²² The syntactical pattern of “case law” is obvious throughout this text with its repeated $\square\aleph$ and ׃ . If this is indeed intended as “case law,” then the intent is to provide a general scenario that is also applicable in other similar situations, e.g., a nighttime thief breaking into a more remote sheep pen guarded by a watchman

In this situation the homicide is judged to be a case of justified self-defense so long as it occurred at night.²³ No explanation is given as to the justification for the verdict, only that the homeowner does not have bloodguilt, i.e., he is not subject to being killed by the aggressor's family in retaliation and need not flee to one of the cities of refuge (Num 35). The assumption may be that at night the intentions of the aggressor are not clear (whether only robbery or murder, or robbery which too easily turns to murder on being discovered). It could be assumed that the thief was armed, if only with the tools of "digging through" — certainly adequate to be used for murderous purposes if provoked.²⁴

The situation is different during the day. Though justified at night, there is no such provision "if the sun has risen on him," i.e., on the thief. The specifics are not clear in this case. The limitations of verse 3 may simply forbid killing someone caught in burglary during daylight hours, or it may forbid revenge killing (tracking down the thief and killing him later that day), or it may assume that the night thief did make off with property, but was later apprehended.²⁵ Resolution is not necessary for the present purposes; regardless of the specifics in verse 3, there is a clear basis for justifiable homicide in self-defense in at least one situation in this text.

New Testament Texts

Luke 22:35–36, 38 is the only direct NT statement about self-defense. Jesus had previously sent his followers on various missions with restrictive instructions regarding what provision and equipment they were allowed to take with them. In sending out the 12, no staff, bag, bread, money, or extra shirt was permitted (Luke 9:3). When he sent out the

even if the thief is not actually digging through the mud wall of a residential dwelling, or in an urban setting, breaking into a merchant's shop.

²³ That verse 2 relates specifically to a nighttime attack is only evident in light of the contrast with verse 3; the text does not say that explicitly. NIV makes the implication from verse 3 explicit in verse 2 for clarity ("If a thief is caught breaking in at night and is struck...").

²⁴ Traditional Jewish interpretation of this text may be illustrated from the comments in *The Chumash*: "Verses 1 – 2 teach that, when necessary, one may kill to save his own life, but may not kill if only his property is at risk. The Torah illustrates this law through the case of a thief who is caught tunneling into a home. Since it is obvious that a householder will fight to protect his property, it may be assumed that the thief is ready to overpower him and kill, if need be. Consequently, the householder may act on the principle that . . . , *if someone comes to kill you, act first and kill him*. If the householder kills his presumed pursuer, therefore, he is not guilty of homicide since he is considered to have killed in self-defense. The verse explains this concept by stating that *there is no blood-guilt* for killing the burglar; it is as if he had no 'blood,' for he had already forfeited his life (*Sanhedrin 72a, Rashi*)" (Nosson Scherman, *The Torah: Haftaros and Five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings*, in *The Chumash*, The Stone Edition, ed. N. Scherman and M. Zlotowitz, 11th ed., [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000], 427; Exod 22:2 – 3 *ad loc*).

²⁵ "It might be thought that this refers to the early dawn or early day, when he [the homeowner] might recognize the thief, or frighten him away unrecognized, or with the help of others capture him. But inasmuch as further on it is assumed that the thief has already accomplished his theft, the expression probably means: If some time has elapsed" (J. P. Lange, "Exodus," in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 1876; trans. P. Schaff [repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.], 2:91).

72, purse, bag, and sandals were disallowed (Luke 10:4). These were not, however, intended as permanent, normative commands for all believers for all time. That is clear since Jesus contrasts (ἀλλά νῦν, v. 36) these earlier restrictions with what would be necessary following the cross. The original instructions had been intended to teach them to trust God for their needs (Luke 22:35). Although faith is still needed, in Luke 22:35–36, 38 Jesus explicitly commands his followers to take the sort of provisions they were previously asked to leave at home: “if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag” (v. 36a). But now a new item is added to the list. They are told to buy a sword (μάχαιρα), even if they have to sell their cloak to do so (v. 36b). This was not a butter knife for their bread or a paring knife to peel apples. The μάχαιρα was “a relatively short sword or other instrument, *sword, dagger*” (BDAG, 622) which is most commonly referenced in the NT as an instrument used for killing, whether actual or potential (e.g., Mark 14:43; Luke 21:24; Acts 12:2; 16:27; Heb 11:37; Rev 13:10).²⁶

Although the specific purpose of the sword is not stated, the implication seems clear: the disciples should be prepared for their ministry as they are once again sent out following Jesus’ death and resurrection whether with money (“purse”), provisions (“bag”), or means of defense (“sword”).²⁷ Though we have no specific incidents recorded in Acts in which we are told that they actually used a sword in self-defense,²⁸ they were to be prepared for such exigencies. As I. Howard Marshall comments, “The saying brings out the extreme plight of the disciples. A garment for wear at night was an utter necessity; to give it up for a sword implies that dire circumstances are at hand.”²⁹

Despite the seeming force of the context and the parallel and very nonmetaphorical instructions to take purse and bag, many commentators insist that the statement regarding the sword must be taken metaphorically. This appears to be based, not on the context, but on a precommitment to a pacifist position. Once one assumes that Jesus “eschews all violence,”³⁰ then any contrary conclusions must be “adjusted” to fit the preconceived conclusion. Among the major commentators who chose this option, there is no substantive

²⁶ The “relatively short” qualifications in BDAG’s definition contrasts the μάχαιρα with a δολιχάορος, the long sword or ῥομφαία, a large, broad sword.

²⁷ Traveling armed was not uncommon in the day and culture. Josephus refers to those who διὰ δέ τῶν ληϊστῶν ἔνοπλοι (“on account of thieves were armed,” *War* 2.125). Although the Mishnah forbid carrying a sword or other weapons on the Sabbath (*m. Šab.* 6.4), the implication is that they may and were carried otherwise. The same text cites R. Eliezer as referring to such weapons as man’s “adornments,” though others describe them as a reproach—so there were differences of opinion even then! Although it relates to acts of war rather than personal self-defense, it is well attended that many (although not all) the Jews of the Second Temple period would engage in battle on the Sabbath if the choice appeared to be fight or die (see Josephus, *Ant.* 13.12 – 13; 14.63; 18.323 – 24 and 1 Macc 2:39 – 42).

²⁸ This is a reason sometimes cited for taking the reference metaphorically (David Garland, *Luke*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 871), but arguments from silence are indecisive.

²⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 825.

³⁰ Garland, *Luke*, 876.

defense given beyond a statement of pacifism.³¹ At times the argument becomes a diatribe filled with loaded, emotional terms that take the place of evidence. Garland is perhaps the most extreme example of this. He portrays the interpretation of Jesus' statement about taking two swords to be a choice between a metaphorical statement that the disciples "will need every resource they have" (except, of course, a sword!) and those who would "live by the sword ... become expert in war" (871), of whom "it is laughable to think Jesus pronounces them combat ready" with two swords (872), who are "armed to the teeth ... in case God lets them down" as they are "engaged in an arms race and counterviolence ... via strong-arm tactics ... with brass knuckles" (875). Such purple prose will sway anyone who thinks the choice is between pacifism and militaristic description, but that is a false dichotomy. Certainly Jesus is not advocating violence or a pugnacious approach to ministry. There is an alternate understanding that fits the context and social setting that makes much better sense of the text: Jesus may well be preparing his followers to travel some dangerous roads as they carry the gospel message across the Roman Empire. In doing so, Christians have just as much right to defend themselves against highway robbers as anyone else. As Nolland puts it, "The sword is thought of as part of the equipment required for self-sufficiency of any traveler in the Roman world. Nothing more than protection of one's person is in view."³² This is not a covert, violence-oriented mission, but one that assumes that if violently assaulted, one has the right to protect himself.

The disciples apparently understood the need for these items since they promptly produced two such weapons (v. 38) without the need first to go and sell a cloak to buy them. Carrying a self-defense weapon was not a new concept to these men. Jesus does not rebuke them for having these swords, but he does indicate that two were apparently adequate for the group of twelve (ἱκανόν ἐοῖν, "it is enough," v. 38b); not everyone need be armed, but some should be.³³

It is sometimes objected that later that night when his disciples offered to put their swords into play and Peter did draw his sword and clip off an ear, they were rebuked by Jesus (Luke 22:49–51): "Put your sword back in its place ... for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matt 26:52). The conclusion is drawn that Jesus was now forbidding self-defense. The point is poorly taken. First, interpreters should not assume that Jesus is so fickle as to have changed his mind about the utility of carrying a sword within the space of a few hours. He did not tell Peter to get rid of his sword, but to put it back in its place, i.e.,

³¹ In addition to Garland, see also Marshall, *Luke*, 825 ("the saying is a call to be ready for hardship and self-sacrifice"); Darrell Bock, *Luke*, 2 vols., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994 – 96), 2:1747 ("a symbol of preparation for pressure"); and Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 571 ("they must be thoroughly equipped and armed at whatever cost with an unbreakable courage and determination, so that they will not relinquish the struggle").

³² John Nolland, *Luke*, 3 vols. WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989–93), 3:1076.

³³ Some try to deflect the force of the statement "it is enough" by making it a reprimand, "Drop it," calling an end to a misunderstood conversation (So Garland, *Luke*, 872; see also Marshall, *Luke*, 827), but BDAG gives no basis for any such idiom, and TDNT bluntly says that "the only difficulty is that we lack the necessary linguistic support for this view" (K. Rengstorff, s.v., ἱκανός, TDNT 3:295); the supposed parallels that are often cited are neither exact nor do they have similar meaning.

keep it. Second, the specific context is Jesus' imminent substitutionary death in fulfillment of OT prophecy and God's plan—something that Jesus has just indicated to them in the middle of the earlier discussion about swords (Luke 22:37) and of which he subsequently reminds them (Matt 26:53–54). Jesus never intended that his disciples defend him with swords from going to the cross. That was a necessary part of redemption. He could have easily escaped death by calling on the angels (Matt 26:53) or exercising his own power, but that was not his purpose. This particular setting, however, says nothing about the original point of their being adequately prepared for their coming ministry. Third, that Jesus' destiny to die for the sins of the world precluded his avoiding the awful events about to unfold says nothing about the experience of his followers whose death would not be redemptive for others. Theoretically, were Jesus to have chosen not to die, God's plan would have failed, but for his followers to avoid death has no such consequences. If they fled persecution (as they did in Acts 8), the gospel was spread elsewhere. Were they to defend themselves against unprovoked, violent aggressors, they would be able to continue to share the gospel.³⁴ Fourth, even the seemingly broad statement about drawing and dying by the sword does not relate to the purpose for which Jesus intended for them to obtain a sword. Yes, those who would live this way, drawing a sword unnecessarily, must be prepared to die by the sword.³⁵ Peter had been unwise in this regard, thinking he was defending his Lord against aggression, yet in doing so was contravening God's purpose.³⁶ Initiating violence is not condoned³⁷ and those who do so risk the loss of their life if they attack someone armed with a sword and greater skilled in its use; that is the point of Jesus' statement. Carrying a weapon capable of providing such a deterrent (in this instance, a

³⁴ Kopel draws another parallel from Jesus' experience. Jesus did not defend himself in the Jewish or Roman trials, yet Paul did just that on numerous occasions. Kopel's point is well taken: Jesus' example was not normative in this regard for his followers ("Is the Best Defense a Good Book?" *America's 1st Freedom*, Feb. 2007, 56–57).

³⁵ The parallel sentiment in *Tg. Isa.* 50.11 is similar: "Behold, all you that kindle a fire, that take a sword, go, fall into the fire you have kindled and on the sword you have taken. From my memra you have this: you shall return to your destruction."

³⁶ Were not *Jesus* the one in charge in the garden, Peter would surely have been arrested for his action. Jesus, however, heals the man's ear and instructs the armed mob to let the disciples leave.

³⁷ This is a generalization that "violence everywhere reproduces itself" (W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997], 512). Jesus' statement does not, however, condemn all violence, only the initiation of unprovoked aggression.

sword) discourages such attacks.³⁸ Defending oneself against life-threatening aggression is not in view here.³⁹

Objections

Much of the discussion regarding the Christian and self-defense is couched in negative terms by those opposed to any such use of force. That is, the positive argument for such action is countered by proposing general principles that are thought to oppose it. There are several common objections along this line.⁴⁰ Some appeal to the prohibition, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exod 20:13). Were this a blanket prohibition of all killing, the argument would have force, but the intent is clearly to prohibit murder since other killing is explicitly commanded by God (e.g., Gen 9:6, Exod 21:12-17, 28-32). The NT command to “love your neighbor” (Matt 22:36-40) is sometimes cited as if this precluded any form of self-defense. But which is the more loving act? To defend one’s family (or any group of people) by killing a depraved person intent on killing the entire group? Or by “loving” the aggressor and allowing him to kill unchecked, thus taking the life of many people? No, in such cases the most loving thing to do is to stop the attack by any means possible or necessary, even if that means taking the life of the perpetrator.⁴¹

In connection with his statement of the Golden Rule, Jesus commands his followers, “Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matt 5:38-39; Luke 6:29). Though the particulars can be read one of two ways (this is either a back-handed slap or a left-handed slap, in either case a calculated insult), this is not a matter of self-defense. One’s life is not in danger. In such situations Jesus tells us not to retaliate. Interestingly, in the only such instance recorded in the Gospels (John

³⁸ This conclusion may be verified in our contemporary American culture. A survey of criminals has shown that “60% of convicted felons admitted that they avoided committing crimes when they *knew* the victim was armed. 40% of convicted felons admitted that they avoided committing crimes when they *thought* the victim was armed” (Smith, *Gun Facts*, 29, citing statistics from James Wright and Peter Rossi, “Armed and Considered Dangerous: A Survey of Felons and Their Firearms” [Aldine, 1986]).

³⁹ Kopel comments that this text is “a warning against violence as a way of life, rather than as a flat-out ban on defensive violence in all situations” (“Is the Best Defense a Good Book?” 56).

⁴⁰ I have not attempted to document many of the suggestions noted here. Though that is likely possible in printed literature, my selection comes from wide browsing on the Internet and reading the most common objections that are found on many sites where these matters are debated vigorously. Most do not deserve the distinction of being quoted, but the arguments are repeated continuously.

⁴¹ Kevin Bauder makes this point powerfully in his essay following one of the Colorado shootings: “Some have suggested that a believer should willingly exchange his life for the life of an assailant. They reason that the believer, if killed, goes straight to heaven, but if the assailant is killed he loses every opportunity for salvation. . . . No, the theory is terribly myopic, in part because it takes no account of further harm that the assailant will do, both to believers and unbelievers. Granted, application of the means of self defense within the Century 16 Theater may have ended the assailant’s opportunity for salvation. Not being able to apply that means, however, ended the opportunities of many more people. Given a choice, it would be better to see the perpetrator being carried out and a dozen others granted the chance to repent” (“Lessons from Colorado”).

18:22-23),⁴² Jesus is so slapped and he *rebukes* the one who struck him rather than turning the other cheek! That would seem to imply that this is not an all-inclusive statement that covers every possible scenario. It is sometimes appropriate and sometimes not.⁴³ No statement is made here as to the appropriate response to aggression intended to take one's life.

Romans 12:17-22 is also sometimes used to justify a pacifist position: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge, I will repay,' says the Lord." On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." The assumption appears to be that self-defense is evil; thus if one is violently attacked and one defends oneself, one has repaid the evil doer with evil. That assumes, however, that all such defense is, indeed, evil. If, however, God allows the defense of life, the argument is facile. The tone of the passage is not one of legitimate defense, but one of revenge and repayment. That is quite different from defending one's life. God promises to handle the punishment end of such situations and has ordained human government as part of the means of accomplishing that end (Rom 13:1-7). To live peaceably with others is certainly commanded *so far as it depends on you*, but it does not always work that way. At times an aggressor intrudes his evil intent into one's life in such a way that peace is not possible. It may at times be possible to minister to an "enemy" by feeding him or giving him a drink to show him the love of Christ, but that is not feasible when he has a knife at your throat—or the throat of your wife.

Other Considerations

One might wish for more clear texts in the NT that are addressed explicitly to the question of self-defense, texts that address specific situations such as are found in the Law (see the discussion of Lev 22 above). Since we do not have such data without forcing texts to discuss matters they are not intended to address, a Christian perspective of the question of self-defense must, of necessity, be more indirect. Rather than an exegetical basis in biblical theology, we must shift to the questions of theological integration asked by systematic theology and ethics. These must be tied, as much as possible, to biblical texts and principles, but they cannot claim the level of warrant as questions of, e.g., the deity of Christ. These questions also come embedded in particular social contexts. That is, the sort of questions and answers considered will vary widely from an American setting with Second Amendment considerations to a totalitarian setting where believers live and

⁴² Kopel points this out ("Is the Best Defense a Good Book?" 43). One might object technically that John 18 does not specify that Jesus was struck on the right cheek, but those appealing pacifistically to Matthew 5:38 would typically object to any retaliation regardless of the specific nature of the slap, so the point is moot.

⁴³ This should not be read as "situation ethics," but as the application of biblical wisdom in judging various situations just as a fool is to be answered or not depending on the situation (Prov 26:4-5).

minister with no such legal protections. That does not make the conclusions reached invalid, though it will suggest that some of them will be limited in applicability.

The explicit biblical warrant noted thus far includes one specific text in the law which allowed for self-defense against an intruder in a home invasion as well as an implicit NT text that appears to justify believers carrying defensive weapons. The two texts together would seem to warrant the conclusion that NT principles have not contravened the principle of self-defense found in the Law, but have rather validated it for the post-Law period.⁴⁴ Other texts considered were either not relevant or taught principles quite different from pacifist concerns often based on them.

Contemporary Social and Pragmatic Concerns

We will first address some of the concerns of contemporary American society and note implications of American social setting. These issues are today discussed almost entirely in terms of defensive weapons, most commonly handguns, though any lethal weapons (knives, long guns, etc.) are relevant. Consequently that terminology may appear below in place of swords or self-defense in general. The principles are the same for all such scenarios. (The following discussion of social concerns reflects the author's personal opinions; not all are provided with specific warrant since a defense would extend the essay to undue length.)

First, as Americans (whether Christian or non-Christian) we have inherited a legal protection to "keep and bear arms" under the Second Amendment.⁴⁵ Though I will not discuss the historical origins of that amendment for the sake of space, it deserves to be cited in full: "A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed." Though frequently

⁴⁴ This raises, of course, the question of the relevancy of the Mosaic Law, both outside Israel in OT times and in the NT. The issues cannot be explored here in any detail. Suffice it to say that there is some continuity in the regulations of the Mosaic Law and in the Law of Christ (i.e., the new covenant). Some provisions have been changed (e.g., a restricted place for worship, the sacrificial system, etc.) and others remain constant (e.g., the need for worship, prayer, holiness, etc.), though not due to continuity of the Mosaic/old covenant. If we are not to muzzle the ox based on parallel commands under the old and new covenants (Deut 25:4; 1 Tim 5:18), then there may well be continuity in individual standards or requirements. The point here is that a clear provision for self-defense under the Law is apparently continued under the Law of Christ.

⁴⁵ Erler points out that "In the District of Columbia v. Heller [2008], the Supreme Court handed down a decision that for the first time held unambiguously that the Second Amendment guaranteed an individual the right to keep and bear arms for purposes of self-defense. Writing for the majority, Justice Scalia quoted Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England, a work well known to the Founders. Blackstone referred to "the natural right of resistance and self-preservation," which necessarily entailed "the right of having and using arms for self-preservation and defense" (Edward J. Erler, "The Second Amendment as an Expression of First Principles," *Imprimis*, 42.3 [March 2013], 5, (accessed 19 May 2014) <http://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/file/archives/pdf/2013_03_Imprimis.pdf>). (Snyder argues that "the Bill of Rights does not grant rights to the people, such that its repeal would legitimately confer upon government the powers otherwise proscribed. The Bill of Rights is the list of the fundamental, inalienable rights, endowed in man by his Creator, that define what it means to be free and independent people, the rights which must exist to ensure that government governs only with the consent of the people" (Jeffrey R. Snyder, "A Nation of Cowards," *The Public Interest*, Fall 1993, 12; also available at <http://rkba.org/comment/cowards/html>).

treated in modern discussions as if the reference were to the National Guard or the military, the intent of the amendment is individual (“the people”), the militia being understood, not as a government entity, but as the collective citizenry who would take up arms in defense of the security of a free state.⁴⁶ This perspective is not intuitive for twenty-first century America where there has been a standing army for many years and the pre-military days of the colonial militia have been long forgotten, but this does not change the meaning of the Second Amendment.⁴⁷

Second, there is no doubt that our culture is undergoing massive social change.⁴⁸ Until the middle of the twentieth century, social discourse in America assumed a Judeo-Christian ethos and values (though the United States was never a “Christian nation”). That consensus has disintegrated and our culture continues to wander ethically, politically, and socially with no moral compass. As a result violence has increased both internally and externally. Americans face not only terrorist threat, but also periodic mayhem at the hands of evil people within. In one sense, there has always been internal violence as murderers have wrecked their hate on others. Due to the mobility and increased technical sophistication of our society along with increased population (particularly in urban areas), the opportunity for mass violence has increased considerably. Whether that results in terrorists flying airplanes into skyscrapers or the murder of multiple people in a public setting, the resulting fear has greatly affected our society. There are, so far as I know, only two reactions possible (other than wringing one’s hands and doing nothing). Either the people demand that government attempt to protect them from all possible calamities and accept

⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion on these conclusions, see “The Right to Keep and Bear Arms: Report of the Subcommittee on the Constitution of the Committee on the Judiciary,” United States Senate, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., February 1982, US Government Printing Office 88-6180 Washington: Washington, DC.

⁴⁷ The more recent activist approach to reinterpreting the Constitution and the Bill of Rights has clear parallels with similar moves in biblical hermeneutics, yet there is no basis for meaning apart from the meaning expressed in writing by the original author, whether of Scripture or any other document. As Erler well says, “The notion of collective rights is wholly the invention of the Progressive founders of the administrative state, who were engaged in self-conscious effort to supplant the principles of limited government embodied in the Constitution. For these Progressives, what Madison and other Founders called the ‘rights of human nature’ were merely a delusion characteristic of the eighteenth century. Science, they held, has proven that there is no permanent human nature—that there are only evolving social conditions. As a result, they regarded what the Founders called the “rights of human nature” as an enemy of collective welfare, which should always take precedence over the rights of individuals. For Progressives then and now, the welfare of the people—not liberty—is the primary object of government, and government should always be in the hands of experts. This is the real origin of today’s gun control hysteria—the idea that professional police forces and the military have rendered the armed citizen superfluous; that no individual should be responsible for the defense of himself and his family, but should leave it to the experts. The idea of individual responsibilities, along with that of individual rights, is in fact incompatible with the Progressive vision of the common welfare” (Erler, “The Second Amendment,” 3).

⁴⁸ For a recent assessment of this social change, see Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White in America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown Forum/Random House, 2012). The focus on “white America” is intended to demonstrate that this is not a racial problem, i.e., white versus black versus Hispanic, etc. For an older assessment that it still relevant, see Robert H. Bork, *Slouching toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: ReganBooks/Harper Collins, 1996).

the resulting loss of liberty that entails, or the people must take greater responsibility for their own protection. Unfortunately, government cannot protect the people from everything. There is no way that evil can be prevented. Government may administer justice after the fact (which hopefully discourages the repetition of evil acts), but it can rarely prevent tragedies. Though many people like to believe otherwise, the police have no legal responsibility to protect anyone and are rarely able to stop a crime for the simple reason that they are not omnipresent.⁴⁹ Nor can they respond rapidly enough in most instances to arrive before evil acts are committed, not even in cities, to say nothing of rural areas where it may take considerable time just to drive to the scene.

Third, legislation and control of lethal weapons are often counterproductive. In an attempt to stem violence, politicians frequently ban particular weapons. The favorite target in recent years has been the attempt to ban handguns, large capacity magazines, and “assault weapons.”⁵⁰ The rationale for such actions is that these are the weapons often used in crime.⁵¹ Unfortunately, passing such laws rarely has a positive impact on crime rates since criminals do not abide by the laws.⁵² The only people affected are law-abiding citizens

⁴⁹ The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals (*Bowers v. DeVito*, 1082) ruled that there is no Constitutional right to be protected by the state against being murdered by criminals or madmen” (cited by Robert H. Boatman, “The Constitutional Right and Social Obligation to Carry a Gun,” <<http://www.ironwordranch.com/>> [accessed 19 May 2014]). “Most people readily believe that the existence of the police relieves them of the responsibility to take full measures to protect themselves. The police, however, are not personal bodyguards. Rather, they act as a general deterrent to crime, both by their presence and by apprehending criminals after the fact. As numerous courts have held, they have no legal obligation to protect anyone in particular. You cannot sue them for failing to prevent you from being the victim of a crime. Insofar as the police deter by their presence, they are very, very good. Criminals take great pains not to commit a crime in front of them. Unfortunately, the corollary is that you can pretty much bet your life (and you are) that they won’t be there at the moment you actually need them” (Snyder, “A Nation of Cowards,” 2-3).

⁵⁰ The category of “assault weapon” is mythical. There is no standard definition, and most laws proposed using the term end up making a wide range of standard hunting and sporting guns illegal—guns that have rarely if ever been used to commit the types of crimes the law is attempting to address. “Assault weapon” is an invented term. In the firearm lexicon, there is no such thing as an ‘assault weapon.’ The closest relative is the ‘assault rifle,’ which is a machine gun or ‘select fire’ rifle that fires rifle cartridges. In most cases, ‘assault weapons’ are functionally identical though less powerful than hunting rifles, but they are cosmetically similar to military guns” (Guy Smith, *Gun Facts*, 6.2, 2013 ed., pdf, 1 <www.gunfacts.info> [accessed 19 May 2014]).

⁵¹ The facts here are disputable. More violent crimes are committed without guns or with smaller handguns than those with large capacity magazines and certainly more than those which use long guns. “90% of all violent crimes in the U.S. do not involve firearms of any type” (Smith, *Gun Facts*, 30, citing statistics from Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, 1998). “Criminals are over five times more likely to carry a single shot handguns as they are to carry ‘assault weapons’” (Smith, *Gun Facts*, 3, citing “Firearm Use by Offenders,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 2001).

⁵² What *has* made the a significant difference in the crime rates in some states is passing legislation allowing for concealed carry of handguns (most states now allow this, though some are extremely restrictive in their policies). In some states this has resulted in dramatic drops in the number of homicides in subsequent years. “Thirty-nine states, comprising the majority of the American population, are “right-to-carry” states. Statistics show that in these states the crime rate fell (or did not rise) after the right-to-carry law became active (as of July, 2006)” (Smith, *Gun Facts*, 21). In Florida after passing a concealed carry law, “the homicide rate fell from 36% above the national average to 4% below” and “in Texas, murder rates fell 59% faster than

who are negatively affected in their access to the ability to defend themselves against the criminals.⁵³

Fourth, although the particulars differ somewhat by state, there are clear legal guidelines in the United States as to what constitutes lawful self-defense.⁵⁴ The American citizen is allowed to legally defend himself against attempts to take his life. This is not unique to the United States but is the extension of a long legal history that goes back to the English Common Law⁵⁵ as well as European and Reformation⁵⁶ legal precedent and further

the national average in the year after their concealed carry law passed. Rape rates fell 93% faster in the first year after enactment, and 500% faster in the second. Assaults fell 250% faster in the second year" (ibid., 22).

⁵³ Thomas Jefferson said, "Laws that forbid the carrying of arms. . . disarm only those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crimes. . . Such laws make things worse for the assaulted and better for the assailants; they serve rather to encourage than to prevent homicides, for an unarmed man may be attacked with greater confidence than an armed man" (cited by Henry, "The Bible and Gun Control, pt. 2, The Bible and Guns in America," 68).

⁵⁴ On the particulars, see Andrew F. Branca, *The Law of Self Defense*. 2nd ed. (Maynard, MA: By the Author, 2013) or in abbreviated form, "When is Deadly Force Justified?" ch 2. of *What Every Gun Owner Needs to Know about Self-Defense Law* by Marty Hayes (Onalaska, WA: Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network, 2012); pdf available at <http://www.armedcitizensnetwork.org/images/stories/Hayes-SDLaw.pdf>. (Both Branca and Hayes are attorneys.) This is true whether a citizen is within or outside his home, but only when his life is in danger. There is no legal justification for using lethal force for the defense of property (e.g., car theft, pickpockets, etc.) in most states. There is greater latitude in the home due to the "castle doctrine" than outside it, but even on the street lethal force may be used if an individual is, e.g., attacked by a gang wielding baseball bats or chains. In each case their must be "ability, opportunity, and jeopardy" of an attacker to inflict death or grave bodily harm.

⁵⁵ English Common Law may be seen in Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*: "Homicide in self-defense. . . upon a sudden affray, is also excusable rather than justifiable, by the English law. This species of self-defense must be distinguished from that just now mentioned, as calculated to hinder the perpetration of a capital crime; which is not only a matter of excuse, but of justification. But the self-defense, which we are now speaking of, is that whereby a man may protect himself from an assault or the like, in the course of a sudden brawl or quarrel, by killing him who assaults him. . . This right of natural defense does not imply a right of attacking: for, instead of attacking one another for injuries past or impending, men need only have recourse to the proper tribunals of justice. They cannot therefore legally exercise this right of preventative defense, but in sudden and violent cases when certain and immediate suffering would be the consequence of waiting for the assistance of the law. Wherefore, to excuse homicide by the plea of self-defense, it must appear that the slayer had no other possible (or, at least, probable) means of escaping from his assailant" (4 vols. [London: Strahan, 1825], 4:183-84, book 4, "Of Public Wrongs," ch. 14, "Of Homicide").

⁵⁶ "The man who meets with highway robbers, by whom no one is murdered without the consent of the will of God, has the power in accordance with the authority of the laws to resist them in self-defense which incurs no blame because no one forsooth has (received) a special command from God that he meekly allow himself to be slain by robbers" (Theodore Beza, *De jure magistratum: On the Right of Magistrates over Their Subjects and the Duty of Subjects Towards their Rulers*, 1574, Ch. 5, Q7, Answers, f.; trans. Henry-Louis Gonin, ed. Patrick S. Poole <<http://www.constitution.org/cmt/beza/magistrates.htm>> (accessed 19 May 2014); may also be found in *The Right of Magistrates over Their Subjects* [repr., Fig Books, 2012], Q7, Kindle loc. 904/1094). See also the summary of Luther's views of self-defense in David Kopel, "Luther and the Christian Duty to Defend Innocents," 17 November 2005, <<http://davekopel.com/corner/>>

back to Roman law in the Code of Justin and even earlier Roman law.⁵⁷ As Bauder points out, “When governments cannot protect their citizens, it becomes prudent and even necessary for citizens to attend to their own protection. People have no obligation to permit themselves to be struck down by predators and evil men. On the contrary, they have a right to defend their lives, limbs, and property.”⁵⁸

Fifth, U.S. citizens have the privilege of participating in the political process. Those who choose to do so may endeavor to influence the legal standards of their country. This right belongs as much to Christians with their (typically) more conservative social values as it does to non-Christians, whether conservative or liberal in their views. Whether an individual chooses to exercise this right or not, it is an option available in this country to an extent perhaps greater than in any other country in the world. Although we currently have many freedoms, that may not always be the case since a majority of our fellow citizens may decide that the desire for security is more desirable than the desire for freedom. Should this situation change, then the Christian must submit to government and live under the law. There are two alternatives. First, declare a specific law unjust, thus choosing to disobey it (recognizing that one would pay the penalty for doing so if caught). Second would be outright rebellion should a government prove to be a tyrant, but that is an extraordinarily serious matter and would require very widespread agreement in a population to bring about change.⁵⁹ Should, in future years, our country face that dilemma, Christians would

corner-archive2005.htm#Luther_and_the_Christian_Duty_to_Defend_Innocents> (accessed 23 April 2014).

⁵⁷ Though predating the Code of Justin, the Roman constitutionalist and senator Cicero said, “There exists a law, not written down anywhere but inborn in our hearts; a law which comes to us not by training or custom or reading but by derivation and absorption and adoption from nature itself; a law which has come to us not from theory but from practice, not by instruction but by natural intuition. I refer to the law which lays it down that, if our lives are endangered by plots or violence or armed robbers or enemies, any and every method of protecting ourselves is morally right. When weapons reduce themselves to silence, the laws no longer expect one to await their pronouncements. For people who decide to wait for those will have to wait for justice too—and meanwhile they must suffer injustice first. Indeed, even the wisdom of the law itself, by a sort of tacit implication, permits self defence. Because it does not actually forbid men to kill; what it does, instead, is forbid the bearing of a weapon with the intention to kill. When, therefore, an inquiry passes beyond the mere question of the weapon and starts to consider the motive, a man who has used arms in self defence is not regarded as having carried them with a homicidal aim” (Marcus Tullius Cicero, “In Defence of Titus Annius Milo,” in *Selected Political Speeches of Cicero*, trans. Michael Grant, 215–78, 3rd, Penguin Classics [New York: Penguin, 1989], 222). See also Bruce W. Frier and Thomas A. J. McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Family Law* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004).

⁵⁸ Bauder, “Lessons from Colorado.”

⁵⁹ “The Declaration specifies that when government becomes destructive of the ends for which it is established—the ‘Safety and Happiness’ of the people—then ‘it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.’ This is what has become known as the right of revolution, an essential ingredient of the social compact and right which is always reserved to the people. The people can never cede or delegate this ultimate expression of sovereign power” (Erler, “The Second Amendment,” 4). And again, “The Declaration also contains an important prudential lesson with respect to the right to revolution: ‘Prudence . . . will dictate,’ it cautions, ‘that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.’ It is only after ‘a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariably the same Object,’ and when that object ‘evinces a design to reduce [the People] to absolute Despotism,’ that ‘it is their right, it is

need to decide, as they did at the time of the American Revolution, if the issues involved justified their participation.

Theological and Ethical Concerns

Evil and violence are real in our world. Since the sin of our first parents, humankind has lived in rebellion against God. The ethical portrait of our world in Romans 1:18-32 is an ugly one. Despite the truth of God being plain, humans have consistently disobeyed. That is only “natural” to a totally depraved sinner—it reflects his nature which is “only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Despite the biblical description, the attitude of most of our fellow citizens is that people are basically good and that they act badly as a result of being forced into bad circumstances. Yet Bauder acknowledges, “In a fallen world, the existence of evil must be taken into account. Christians should allow no naïve utopianism to stand unchallenged. Evil is alive and well on planet earth.”⁶⁰ This is not the mindless evil of naturalism, “red in tooth and claw,”⁶¹ but culpable evil that is answerable to God’s justice.

As a result of this evil, there is violence in the world; there has been since Genesis 4 and there will be so long as sinful people exist. This is more readily apparent at some times and in some societies than in others. It is particularly graphic in our modern world, though that is due in part to modern media which capitalizes on the sensational—and violence is much more sensational than peaceful matters. Though we may idealize some periods of past history, violence has always been present. Even with such qualification, however, it does appear that we live in one of the more violent periods in history. The scale of violence has been increased geometrically due to modern technology which has the potential to obliterate entire populations in very short order. Humans are not more evil than before; they just have more “convenient” means of demonstrating their malice.

The solution to violence is not “peace” or nonresistance, for that simply makes greater space for the evil doer to do evil. At times it is necessary to use violence to stop or prevent

their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.’ Here the Declaration identifies the right of revolution, not only as a right of the people, but as a duty as well—indeed, it is the only duty mentioned in the Declaration. The prudential lessons of the Declaration are no less important than its assertion of natural rights. The prospect of the dissolution of government is almost too horrible to contemplate, and must be approached with the utmost circumspection. As long as the courts are operating, free and fair elections are proceeding, and the ordinary processes of government hold out the prospect that whatever momentary inconveniences or dislocations the people experience can be corrected, they do not represent a long train of abuses and usurpations and should be tolerated. But we cannot remind ourselves too often of the oft-repeated refrain of the Founders: Rights and liberties are best secured when there is a ‘frequent recurrence to first principles’” (ibid.,5).

⁶⁰ Bauder, “Lessons from Colorado.”

⁶¹ “Who trusted God was love indeed / And love Creation’s final law / Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek’d against his creed” (Alfred Lord Tennyson, “In Memoriam A. H. H.,” 1850, canto 56). Tennyson’s question is how humans can believe in God’s love and also in the violence that they see in the world around us.

violence. This may be more obvious at the national/international level,⁶² but it is also true at the personal level. Bauder comments,

Sometimes the restraint of violence calls for violence. The cliché that violence always begets violence is an affectation of navel-gazing mystics and the Woodstock generation. Sometimes violence, when it is rightly administered, brings an end to violence. Sometimes the just exercise of violence is the only way to end unjust violence. Sometimes peace is achieved through strength. No qualitative difference exists between calling on someone else (such as the police) to exert force in one's behalf and exerting force for one's self. If they were consistent, people who object to using violence against violence would never call for the police when they were being assaulted.⁶³

At the level of self-defense this use of violence may be necessary to preserve life: one's own or that of others. The failure to act violently to stop violent aggression will, in some cases, perpetrate greater violence as the aggressor is allowed to continue a violent killing spree. A Christian does not relish the thought of taking a life, nor do many, perhaps most, non-Christians.⁶⁴ Only the violent aggressor scoffs at the life of others. Though life should not be viewed as "sacred" (that places too high a value on it; it is not on the level of divine/sacred things), human beings have been created in the image of God and all life is precious. That life, however, may be forfeited if employed in evil and violence against one's fellow.⁶⁵ The clearest such statement involves the judgment of capital punishment by government (Gen 9:6; Rom 13:1-5, etc.), but in dire circumstances the individual is also permitted to take life.⁶⁶ This was clearly encoded in the Mosaic Law and implied in Jesus'

⁶² On this see Stallard, "A Biblical Defense of Just War Theory."

⁶³ Bauder, "Lessons from Colorado." See also Snyder, "A Nation of Cowards": "Is your life worth protecting? If so, whose responsibility is it to protect it? If you believe that it is the police's, not only are you wrong—since the courts universally rule that they have no legal obligation to do so—but you face some difficult moral quandaries. How can you rightfully ask another human being to risk his life to protect yours, when you will assume no responsibility yourself? Because that is his job and we pay him to do it? Because your life is of incalculable value, but his is only worth the \$30,000 salary we pay him? If you believe it reprehensible to possess the means and will to use lethal force to repel a criminal assault, how can you call upon another to do so for you?" (3).

⁶⁴ Writing as a police officer and shooting expert/trainer, Ayoub acknowledges that "those of us who have seen violent death up close, who have seen what high-powered bullets can do to living human tissue, have a horror of inflicting that nightmarish, never forgotten damage on a human being. Perhaps the only more terrifying prospect is that such a fate befall us or our loved ones. This is why we, a representative cross-section of America's population, keep deadly weapons for personal defense" (*In the Gravest Extreme*, 129).

⁶⁵ Ayoub contends that "the citizen has the right to kill in defense of innocent life; the dead attacker waived his own right to live when he threatened to wrongfully deprive a victim of his" (*ibid.*, 1). He does not write from a biblical/theological perspective, but his moral claim is consistent with that outlook.

⁶⁶ Ayoub explains that in his classic book "the emphasis is not so much on the taking of a life as the relieving of threat to life. Far from encouraging the reader to take life, [this book] advises great practical and moral restraint in the use of the lethal power the reader already possesses. I believe that the taking of one

instructions to carry defensive weapons on at least some occasions. If that may be “easier” in mechanical terms today, it is no less dreaded by someone who seeks to obey God. Pulling the trigger is sometimes legitimate, but the use of deadly force should never be easy and should never be taken lightly or done without full realization of the consequences, both morally and legally.⁶⁷

We must accept the fact that we do not live in a perfect world and will not do so until Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom. In the meanwhile we must live as God commands and be prepared to face the realities of an imperfect society. Though we or others may strive for an improved social and political environment—and may achieve some measures of success at times—our hope must not be in an earthly utopia brought about by our efforts. No political party will ever solve the world’s problems nor right the injustices and instances of violence that mar our world today. Postmillennialism is far too optimistic of human nature. Premillennialism, though not negative toward social involvement at several levels, is the only view of history and eschatology that offers a realistic, ultimate hope of a perfect society within history, and that will come only when Jesus comes. Until then, “while evildoers ... go from bad to worse” (2 Tim 3:13), we may well need to sell our cloak and buy a sword.

APPENDIX

Should a Local Church Provide Armed Security at Services?

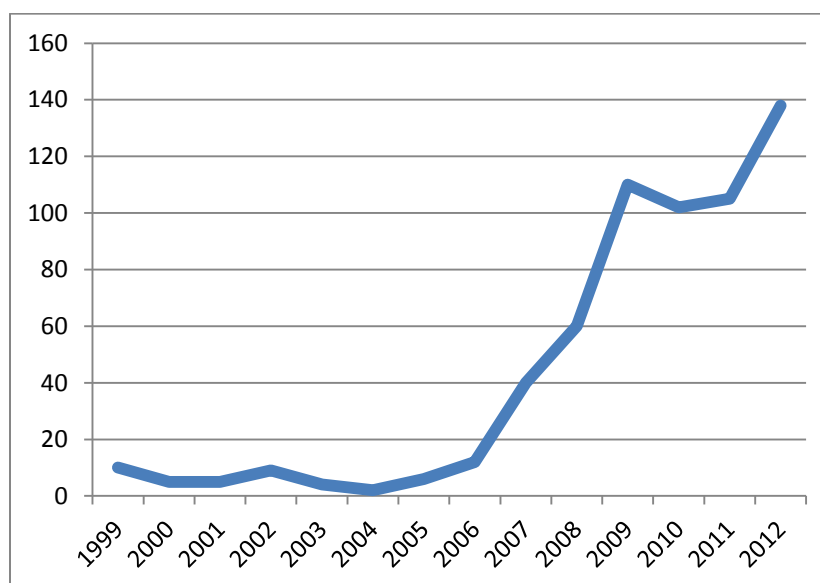
This section, originally intended to be an integral part of this essay, is only an introduction to a related topic, but it has turned out to be one which demands a full-length paper in its own right. In such a paper, I would argue that in our current cultural situation the church not only may, but *should* make active preparations for the eventuality of violence entering the assembly.⁶⁸ In the last 15 years there have been 696 “Deadly Force

citizen’s life by another is an unnatural act, justified only as a last desperate escape from grave criminal danger” (ibid., 3). Legally, “American laws universally condone homicide *only when undertaken to escape immanent and unavoidable danger of death or grave bodily harm*” (ibid., 10; italics are all caps in original).

⁶⁷ These statements assume that a particular situation escalates to the ultimate point of killing an aggressor. The ultimate decision to take a life must be accepted as potentially inevitable before any such confrontation begins, but it should be realized that often this is not necessary. It is not uncommon that the visible threat of force by someone defending himself will deter the criminal from carrying through his threats. To be confronted by an armed citizen is rarely the goal of the aggressor who typically presumes that his prey will be unarmed and helpless. As Bauder points out in his response to the Century 16 shooting, “The predator ... did not plan to shoot up a police station. He planned his assault for a location filled with disarmed, defenseless victims” (“Lessons from Colorado”).

⁶⁸ At present the only good discussion of such issues of which I am aware is Carl Chinn, *Evil Invades Sanctuary: The Case for Security in Faith-Based Organizations* (by the author, 2012). This is neither a “how to do it” book nor a biblical/theological study; rather, it addresses the question of why a church or other Christian organization ought to take the matter of self-defense seriously. The statistics cited in this appendix are either from the book or from updated figures on Chinn’s website (<<http://carlchinn.com>>).

Incidents at Faith-Based Organizations in the United States” from 1999 through July 2013. Of these, 39% resulted in fatalities of those other than the attacker (a total of 817 people were killed or injured and 355 died) and in 60% of the cases guns were used by the aggressor/s. Of these, 228 occurred inside the ministry’s building; the remaining 459, on property outside the building or at the location of a ministry event.⁶⁹ Those statistics should be enough to sober the church member most skeptical of providing church security. When these incidents are plotted chronologically, the increase in such violence is alarming (only the 14 complete years from 1999-2012 are plotted here):



Nor can we Baptists assume that it is “the others” who are caught up in such events, for the listing by denomination shows that Baptist ministries have the highest such number: 157 (22%) of the total. These trends are relatively recent. Chinn observes,

Historically, the majority of violent aggression has been directed at individuals or small groups of people known to the attacker. Over the past four decades, however, America has seen an increasing frequency of attacks aimed at larger groups of people unknown to the attacker. One of the first of these random attacks was the August 1, 1966 University of Texas shooting when Charles Whitman shot forty-five people (killing fourteen and wounding thirty-one). Between 1966 and October 16, 1991 when George Hennard gunned down forty-five (twenty-three of whom died) in a Luby’s Cafeteria in Killeen, Texas, there were few other such instances. Since 1991 there has been a significant increase in the frequency of such violence against crowds; occurring in malls, office buildings, schools, open roads, open spaces, and churches.

⁶⁹ The statistics are compiled by Carl Chinn, <http://www.carlchinn.com/Church_Security_Concepts.html>. Specifics of each event (place, date, details, etc.) may be found at http://www.carlchinn.com/Deadly_Force_Incidents.html.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, homicides involving *groups of victims* increased (as a ration of total homicides) by 42% from 1976 to 2005 (homicides by *groups of offenders* in the same analysis increased by 76.5% in the same time period). Many *spree killers* such as Eric Harris (Columbine) and Seung-Hui Cho (Virginia Tech) shared a driving hatred of the faith which is contagious to group or individual extremists. It is just a matter of time before we see another mass attack in a religious setting.⁷⁰

To appeal to “trust God” in such situations is inconsistent. We install fire alarms in church buildings to warn people of imminent danger.⁷¹ We wear seatbelts when we drive to church—or take teens to a sponsored event. Both are precautions against danger that we take despite the fact that we trust God in both situations. We establish policy to guard against abuse in our ministries (and hopefully run background checks) and obtain liability insurance for unforeseen events or unexpected lawsuits. Making provisions for a response to a medical emergency or a violent intrusion of a church service is no different. Yes, we trust God, but we are also responsible to prepare wisely to potential situations that may bring harm to the people gathered for worship.

This does not mean that ushers should wear handguns or that we install metal detectors at the entrances. It does mean that we ought to be cautious and observant and think in advance about how we would handle a potential nightmare situation—even if we think the likelihood of such an event is relatively remote. As our society continues to increase security and “harden” targets with more aggressive protection, whether with armed guards or by adding various preventive measures to make the location less attractive to criminal activity, the “soft” targets that have not taken any such measures are more vulnerable and more attractive to violent aggressors who rarely plan their attacks on places where they know there is security present.⁷² Chinn observes, “Religious organizations have lagged behind by discounting security, luring more criminal activity toward churches and other religious groups. It is time to harden faith-based targets in measured steps.”⁷³

What Should I Do as an Individual?

⁷⁰ Chinn, *Evil Invades Sanctuary*, 5.

⁷¹ Fire may well be caused by arson or a bombing while a church service is in session; this has happened multiple times in American history. In 2008 there were 1,890 structure fires of religious property of which 15% were arson contrasted with only 5.57% of all structure fires in the same period. The problem is of sufficient magnitude that there is a National Church Arson Task Force that was established by Congress in 1996. (See Chinn, *ibid.*, 18–21).

⁷² At times our society’s attempts to “harden” targets is counterproductive. Some think it is prudent to ban handguns in certain public places and thus they post signs indicating that guns are not allowed (as if a criminal will obey such a sign!). The net effect of such actions is to advertise to an aggressor that the location is a “soft” target that will provide no resistance to his nefarious intent.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

If you come to the conviction that you should consider some form of self-defense for yourself, your family, or your ministry, what should you do? The first step is to study carefully the biblical basis for such a decision. You must be convinced that it is a step that is biblically authorized. Do not assume that this is the case simply because this paper suggests that to be so. This is not an easy question, and explicit texts are not abundant. You may decide that my arguments are unpersuasive. I have tried to use only clear texts and have avoided a large number of others that have often been marshaled (especially on various Internet sites), but I do not claim a definitive conclusion.

Having reached such a consensus, you then need to decide what form of self-defense you consider most appropriate. Some will choose some form of manual combat (karate, judo, etc.), a baton, pepper spray, or others, a firearm. Regardless of one's choice, it is essential that you get high quality training. There is nothing more dangerous than a sincere, but untrained or poorly trained person attempting to "do some good." This is just as true of what might seem to be the simplest tool: pepper spray. There are good training courses that will make a substantive difference in all such methods. The further up the technology scale you go, the more important is such training.

Especially if you consider carrying a firearm, it is not only practically desirable, it is legally essential that you undergo multiple training sessions at several levels on an ongoing basis and this by recognized experts in the area, both experts in the use of such force and also legal experts. Much of this training needs to be "hands on" and include extensive training on a firing range. It is not adequate to have a friend "teach you how to shoot" or even to read a good book. Reading is a good start, and if you read the right books (see the recommendations below), you will tremble at the legal implications of having to use deadly force. It is not a pretty picture. You should retain a lawyer who specializes in self-defense issues and who will agree in advance to represent you in the event of a shooting. That will require a preliminary interview with the attorney (and perhaps a legal fee) and will probably result in the recommendation that you take specific training. That would be worth whatever fee is charged. Initially avoid almost all Internet sites on the subject. There is a wide variety of such material, but the value and reliability is mixed. Reading several of the books recommended below first will enable you to identify less reliable advice that could result in legal complications.

Recommended Beginning Reading (Individual)

Ayoob, Massad. *In the Gravest Extreme: The Role of the Firearm in Personal Protection*.

Concord, NH: Police Bookshelf, 1980 (ISBN: 0936279001). This is a classic, though some details regarding specific firearms and loads are not dated. Ayoob is one of the most highly respected authorities in these areas and an expert witness in the field. His advice (in both books listed here) is no nonsense, very practical, and based on years of experience in both police work and in the court system.

———. *Gun Digest Book of Concealed Carry*, 2nd ed. Iola, WI.: Gun Digest Books, 2012 (ISBN: 9781440232671).

Bird, Chris. *The Concealed Handgun Manual: How to Choose, Carry, and Shoot a Gun in Self Defense*. 6th ed. San Antonio: Privateer, 2011 (ISBN: 9780965678483). Over 500 pgs. of helpful advice written by a former crime reporter.

- Branca, Andrew F. *The Law of Self Defense*. 2nd ed. Maynard, MA: By the author, 2013 (available on Amazon; ISBN 9780988867703). As the title implies, this attorney-written book addresses the legal issues involved in self-defense.
- *Hayes, Gila. *Personal Defense for Women*. Iola, WI: Krause Books/Gun Digest Books, 2009 (ISBN: 9781440203909).
- *Jackson, Kathy. *The Cornered Cat: A Woman's Guide to Concealed Carry*. Hamilton, MI: White Feather Press, 2010 (ISBN: 978-0982248799).
- Martin, Michael. *Concealed Carry and Home Defense Fundamentals*. Woodbury, MN: Key House Press, 2012 (ISBN: 9781515482388). This is not as technical as Ayoob's works, but it is heavily illustrated with full color photos and provides an accessible introduction that may be helpful for those who are less familiar with such matters (a woman's perspective and illustrations are also included).
- Walters, Mark, and Kathy Jackson. *Lessons from Armed America*. Foreward by Masaad Ayoob. Hamilton, MI: White Feather P, 2009. (ISBN: 9781453685556).
- See also the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network for additional resources at <http://www.armedcitizensnetwork.org/>.

*Note: I have not read the two books marked with an asterisk (other than the excerpts available on Amazon.com), but base the listing on the reputation of the authors and reviews of these books. They both address the issue of self-defense from a woman's perspective.