

THE GOLDEN RULE AND WAR

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One might suppose that the Golden Rule would favor the pacifist over the just war theorist. After all, war seems so clearly at odds with a rule of love. None of us is keen on suffering violent death in combat, so it would seem perverse to suggest that we could open fire on someone else in accordance with the Golden Rule.

But I am not at all persuaded that the Rule serves the pacifist. On the contrary, it could prove bothersome to him. And it could well be the case that the Christian soldier might take the Rule with him to war.

I hope to demonstrate that this notion is not so strange after all. I hope to show that, even when involved in battle, the disciple of Jesus Christ can embrace the Golden Rule with integrity.

Beginning with a brief statement of the argument, this article will next consider some possible objections to it. Finally, we will look at a few ways in which the Rule might be applied to armed conflict.

This will only be an introductory sketch. A good deal of what might and should be discussed will simply have to wait for another day. But I trust that enough of substance will appear to warrant further inquiry.

The Argument

In this century, peace has been more deadly than war. Consider this accounting:

War is hell. Nobody doubts that. War means death, destruction of families, cold, hunger, and the subjection to harsh authority. So why is so much of mankind at war? One answer is that peace is itself difficult. The very evils we associate with war have fallen upon mankind more fully in

times and places well removed from battlefields and in conditions conventionally called peace. Especially in this century, the victims of peace outnumber the victims of war.

Perhaps thirty-five million people, of whom twenty-five million were civilians, have died as a direct consequence of military operations since 1900. These people have been killed by armies, navies, and air forces using the latest equipment and techniques. The soldiers who died this way suffered before their demise as well as during their final minutes. Nonetheless, they not only had a fighting chance, but their governments were also making at least some efforts to keep them comfortable. Even civilian victims were afforded some measure of protection.

During the same period, however, at least 100 million human beings have been killed by police forces or their equivalent. Almost never using heavy weapons but relying on hunger, exposure, barbed wire, and forced labor to kill the bulk, the rest were executed by shooting them with small arms, by rolling over them with trucks (a favorite technique in China around 1950), by gassing them, or, as in the Cambodian holocaust of 1975- 79, by smashing their skulls with wooden clubs. These 100 million usually suffered for months or years before the end and perhaps suffered most of all by their helplessness in the face of monstrous acts committed against them and their families. Those who killed these 100 million men, women, and children did not have to overcome resistance, much less armed resistance. Because the victims could not (while others would not) make war on their own behalf, the killers did their killing in peace. Regardless of whether the victims were Armenians, Jews, Tutsis, Ukrainians, Chinese, or Cambodians, the stories of these historic horrors of peace are very similar.¹

It is indisputable that military victories can result in the imposition of dreadful, murderous rule. We have all heard of Stalin, of Pol Pot, of Idi Amin. We have all imagined what Hitler might have done had he not been stopped.

The rule of these terrible men was secured by soldiers. Some of their troops were informed enthusiasts. Others were dupes. Many were pressed into service against their wills. All, however, were tools of tyranny.

How might I as a Christian citizen view such soldiers? Must I hate them all and look for a pretext to annihilate them? Or must I, on the other hand, stifle my own indignation at their actions and steadfastly refuse to stop them by force of arms?

What is the counsel of the Golden Rule? In Luke 6:31 we read, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." (NIV) So the question stands before the Christian, "What would I want others to do if I were to join in the military service of murderous tyrants?"

¹ P. Seabury and A. Codevilla, *War: Ends and Means* (New York: Basic, 1989) 6-7.

The Christian answer seems clear--"Stop me! Do not let me succeed in my efforts at establishing or defending a malevolent regime."

This is not to say that you would desire to be killed. Certainly you would want others to employ every effective means short of that, beginning with education, persuasion, diplomacy, and deterrence. But if all else were to fail, if it were clear that the only recourse was violence, then the noble thing to wish for yourself would be death. You would, in other words, rather die than succeed in such an enterprise.

If that is what you would wish for yourself, might you not act accordingly toward one you faced across the battlefield? Might you not legitimately meet the other's advance with fire?

What favor would you be doing the enemy by letting him proceed unhindered? Of course you would be preserving his life for the present, but you would also be allowing him to do something terrible. Is this the demand of love? Not at all. Love for another does not insist that you acquiesce as he deepens his own guilt. You certainly would not want that for yourself. You would want someone to intervene, forcibly if necessary. Might you not then do the same for him?

Is it possible to kill a man in love? Tolstoy thinks not:

There are actions which are morally impossible, just as others are physically impossible. As man cannot lift a mountain, and as a kindly man cannot kill an infant, so a man living the Christian life cannot take part in deeds of violence.²

M. Simons concurs:

Peter was commanded to sheathe his sword. All Christians are commanded to love their enemies; to do good unto those who abuse and persecute them; to give the mantle when the cloak is taken, the other cheek when one is struck. Tell me, how can a Christian defend scripturally . . . war, striking, slaying . . . ?³

Even such an able just war theorist as P. Ramsey suggests that love is forced to be selective:

Thus do we come to the first fork in the road for Christian conscience. Some at this point will take the path of pacifism, focusing their attention

² This is part of a letter from Tolstoy to an American lawyer, E. H. Crosby. It is from the book *What Would You Do?* (ed, J. H. Yoder; Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1983).

³ From "A Reply to False Accusations," in *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (ed. by J. C. Wenger; Scottdale, P A: Herald, 1956). This selection was reprinted in *War and Christian Ethics* (ed. A. Holmes; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975).

in Christian love upon the enemy. Others at this point will justify participation in war, focusing their attention in Christian love upon the victims of the hostile force that is abroad in the world.⁴

I suggest in response and in contrast that it is possible to love all concerned in choosing to go to war. The Golden Rule can teach us that we may fight, and as we shall see, how we might fight.

I do not argue that one will feel sentimental tenderness in the heat of battle, that every act of war is justified, that love typically abounds in firefights. What I do propose is this: it is conceivable that a Christian could sincerely enter into combat under the law of love for his enemy as expressed in the Golden Rule.

Such love for his adversary is not, of course, the Christian's prime reason for fighting. It is not as though love for the enemy overflows in enlistment, training, and attack. Rather the Christian soldier is pre-occupied with defending justice, allies, and liberties. In these defensive efforts, he is not forced to abandon regard for his foe.

Objections

It will surprise some that the Golden Rule itself has critics. What could be more worthy, more universally appreciated than the Rule? But philosophers have not left well enough alone. They have raised prickly questions that we do well to consider. In so doing, we get clearer insight into the very nature of the Rule.

There are, of course, others who would espouse the Rule, but who would find my argument unpersuasive. I will present a sampling of possible concerns from their camp, and, I hope, show that my position is hardier than they, at the outset, suppose.

Objection 1. It is obvious that foreign soldiers do not in fact wish to be killed by us. The Rule requires us to honor their sensitivities. So it is impermissible to fire upon them.

Response: The Golden Rule says no such thing. Instead we have here what M. Singer calls the Rule's "inversion." It goes, "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them."⁵

It is not difficult to see the flaw in this reading of the Golden Rule. Singer spells out the difficulty as follows:

Let us suppose that we should do unto others as they would have us do unto them. What sort of conduct would this require of us? Well, for one thing, if you want me to assign to you all of my property, then this rule

⁴ P. Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Responsibility* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1968) 501.

⁵ M. Singer, "The Golden Rule" *Philosophy* 38 (1963) 294.

implies that I should do so, for it requires me to do unto you as you would have me do unto you, and in this case you would have me sign over to you all of my property. If your demands should be increased, and you want me to be your slave for life, and do your every bidding, the rule would require me to do this. Such requirements are absurd, and the rule that leads to them can be no better. Under such a rule, no woman's "virtue" would be safe from the desires of any importuning male. Indeed, rape would be morally impossible, since no one would have a right to resist. This reasoning leads irresistibly to the conclusion that this "rule" leads to consequences that are absurd and morally wrong. But let us now reverse the application of the rule. The rule actually applies to both parties, to the transaction and not just to me. It applies to everyone alike, for it requires everyone to do unto others as they would have him do unto them. So if I should want you to assign to me all your property, or to be my slave for life, then you are required to do so. If A wants you to do x, and B wants you to do y, and x and y are incompatible with each other, the Rule still requires you to do both. The Rule therefore leads to impossible results, and is actually impossible to apply. It is tantamount to: "Always do what anyone else wants you to do," which in turn is equivalent to a universal requirement of perfect or absolute altruism, the absurdity of which is so manifest as not to require detailing.⁶

So then, it is not pertinent that the enemy soldier would prefer to attack without interference. The Golden Rule does not demand that I serve his actual desires.

Objection 2. The Golden Rule fails to protect us from the agent with perverse values. Corrupt in his own preferences, he projects these preferences on others, and acts accordingly, doing harm or withholding good.

Response: In our discussion of objection one, we focused upon the actual desires of the enemy. Here we turn our attention to the desires of the person who would apply the Golden Rule. We will concern ourselves with a particular kind of agent, one with twisted values.

I. Kant noted such characters and faulted the Rule because of them:

It cannot be a universal law, for it does not contain the principle of . . . duties of benevolence to others (for many a one would gladly consent that others should not benefit him, provided only that he might be excused from showing benevolence to them). . . ."⁷

⁶ Singer, 296.

⁷ I. Kant quoted in A. T. Cadoux, "The Implications of the Golden Rule," *International Journal of Ethics* 22 (1912) 273.

Consider the case of the hermit. He wants to be left alone and so he makes no effort to help others. His basic values are antisocial, and, by attributing these values to other people, he is perfectly free to ignore them, no matter how needy they may be.

Picking up on Kant's observation, L. J. Russell brings forth other troublesome examples. It would seem that the Rule:

Authorizes the quarrelsome person who loves to be provoked, to go about provoking others, and the person who hates friendliness and sympathy to be cold and unsympathetic in his dealings with others; it authorizes the man who loves to find himself in a network of intrigue and sharp dealing, to deal with others habitually in this way.⁸

In this same vein, F. Feldman calls to our attention those who desire pain: "We surely do not want to allow the masochist to torture others simply on the grounds that he would not object to being tortured by them!"⁹

Such counterexamples force us not to reject the Golden Rule, but to qualify it, to interpret it. It requires that we have in hand a proper set of standards before we attempt to use it. As P. Weiss eloquently put it, "The Golden Rule is pyrite and tinsel if men do not know what is good, and if what is good for one man is not also good for the rest."¹⁰

Among the principles of scriptural interpretation is the requirement that every passage must be read in light of the full body of Scripture, that an interpretation must fit with the other things that the Bible says. So with respect to the Golden Rule, we cannot read it to permit torture or indifference to the plight of the needy. The Bible clearly condemns cruelty and promotes charity.

Augustine took this into account in his formulation of the Rule: "Whatsoever good things you wish that men should do unto you, do you also unto them."¹¹ This move is akin to that of substituting "murder" for "kill" in the sixth commandment. It clarifies. Just as Exodus 21 shows that there is no absolute prohibition against killing in Exodus 20, the moral teachings of Christ prevent us from treating the Golden Rule as a *carte blanche* for the perverse.

In this particular discussion we have not, of course, demonstrated the fitness of the Rule for war. Instead, we have considered the very

⁸ L. J. Russell, "Ideals and Practice," *Philosophy* 17 (1942) 110,

⁹ F. Feldman, *Introductory Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1978) 100,

¹⁰ P. Weiss, *Man's Freedom* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950) 140-41.

¹¹ Augustine, quoted in J. Wattles, "Levels of Meaning in the Golden Rule," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 15 (1987) 113.

validity of the Rule itself, and have shown it to be, when properly understood, workable for the Christian agent.

Objection 3. The Golden Rule is so vague as to allow a variety of contradictory commands. I have no doubt that you can twist the Rule to justify your warmongering. It all depends upon how broadly or narrowly you word the action in question.

Response: J. Wattles provides us with an ice cream parlor illustration.¹² It goes something like this: John takes Jane out for ice cream. Since his favorite flavor is Pralines and Cream, he feels obliged to buy her just that. After all, that is what he would want if she were doing the buying. Never mind that she does not like Pralines and Cream. Pralines and Cream it will be.

G. B. Shaw saw just this difficulty. It drove him to propose a reverse Golden Rule: "Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes might be different."¹³

To avoid this imposition of taste, Singer and others have urged that we distinguish the particular from the general application.¹⁴ The Rule must be lifted above the level of pure taste. For instance, we might say that, in something as innocent as buying ice cream, I should honor the preferences of the recipient. That is what I would want them to do for me. So now John has warrant, by the Golden Rule, to buy Jane her favorite, Rocky Road, instead of Pralines and Cream. It all depends upon your level of generality.

We must be careful though in resolving the issue in the direction of generality. That too can get us into trouble. Consider the blunder of Melville's Ishmael in abandoning the particulars of his faith to make general application under the Golden Rule. Here we find two characters in *Moby Dick* together after supper:

[Queequeg] then went about his evening prayers, took out his idol, and removed the paper fireboard. By certain signs and symptoms, I thought he seemed anxious for me to join him: but well knowing what was to follow, I deliberated a moment whether, in case he invited me, I would comply or otherwise.

I was a good Christian: born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth-pagans and all included--can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit

¹² Wattles, 117.

¹³ C. B. Shaw, quoted in W. Leys, *Ethics for Policy Decisions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1952) 76.

¹⁴ M. Singer, "Golden Rule" *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (ed. P. Edwards; New York: Macmillan, 1967) 3.365-66.

of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship?--to do the will of God?--to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do me--that is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently I must then unite with him in his: ergo, I must turn idolator. So I kindled the shavings; helped prop up the innocent little idol, offered him burnt biscuit with Queequeg: salamed before him twice or thrice, kissed his nose; and that done, we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world.¹⁵

The Golden Rule cannot prescribe the worship of idols or the imposition of unwanted ice cream flavors. How precisely shall we determine the appropriate level of generality in application? To answer this let us simply return to the corpus of Scripture. If your application conflicts with the clear teaching of the Bible, then you have reduced your application to absurdity. The second commandment prohibits Ishmael's action, so his response to Queequeg cannot be what Jesus intended by his Rule. And Jesus strongly opposed the Pharisees' suffocating system of man-made prescriptions for the minutiae of life. He would laugh at one who supposed that the Golden Rule gave him the warrant to "legislate" ice cream choices.

We have, then, a negative check on misconstruing the Rule's level of generality or particularity--conflict with Scripture. But the positive side is obvious. The rule must be applied so that Scriptural values are honored.

What then of an application of the Rule which permitted the killing of a foreign soldier? Would this conflict with Scripture?

That, of course, is a critical question. But it is one that would take us far beyond the scope of this article. For our task is not to present and review the biblical base for arms bearing, e.g., Luke 3:14, Rom 13:4. This has been done admirably by such writers as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Suarez, Vitoria, Grotius, Locke, and Ramsey. Instead it is to demonstrate that Luke 6:31 can take its rightful place among the verses that qualify and shape a Christian for certain forms of warfare.

Objection 4. If you were an enemy soldier, then your perspective would be different. If, by the Golden Rule, you are to take his place in your imagination, then you must assume his viewpoint as well, so that the test can be fair. Surely, from his viewpoint, being fired upon would not be a good thing.

¹⁵ H. Melville quoted in J. Gould, "The Not-So-Golden Rule," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 1 (1963) 10-11.

Response: It is not difficult to see that this is again the "inversion" of the Golden Rule rather than the Rule itself. For if you are forced to assume the values of the other soldier, then you are forced to respond to what he in fact wants. And we have already shown this to be in error.

M. Robins makes the point by means of an illustration from the Middle East:

. . . Let us suppose that a Zionist is venting his moral outrage at the recent acts of Arab terrorists. . . . We would be invited to believe that for the Zionist to universalize his moral judgment by putting himself in the place of the terrorist, he would have to imagine himself to have both the Arabs' "inclinations" and "ideals." But this would indeed make the imaginative role-shift incoherent if its whole point is to be a challenge of the Zionists' ideals and principles, which, *ex hypothesi*, conflict with the Arabs' ideals. For it would lead us to believe that to judge an act from the point of view of someone else's principles (which are contrary to our own) is somehow a test of the morality of your own principles.¹⁶

In other words, such a shift offers no moral test at all. It is simply an automatic repudiation of your own position, constituting capitulation instead of moral reflection.

It is surprising how popular this particular shift has become in the discussion of war. It smacks of relativism. Yet a good many Christians fall prey to it in their consideration of war and, I might add, in their reflections on the fate of the unevangelized. "What," they ask, "would you do if you were raised in that alien culture, surrounded by teachers and pressures you yourself have not had to face? How can you judge them or consign them to a terrible fate?"

They answer their own question with something like this, "We are all just going by the light we have. Let us not be harsh or arrogant in suggesting that we are right and they are wrong."

So we are asked to refrain from judgment. But to do so is surely intellectual suicide, what A. Bloom calls "the closing of the mind." It ignores the spirit of Romans 1 and 2, which makes each person's accountability to God's standards clear.

Let me reiterate emphatically that the Golden Rule does not require us to jettison our values in deference to those of another. Rather, we are to scrutinize our own ideals and behavior by an imaginative journey into another's predicament.

None of this is to say that our nation's performance in war has always been noble. Neither is it to say that our foes have always been

¹⁶ M. H. Robins, "Hare's Golden Rule Argument: A Reply to Silverstein," *Mind* 83 (1974) 579.

ignoble. It simply affirms the fact that not all parties to armed dispute are moral equals, that there are morally relevant differences among armies, despite a generous distribution of sincerity across battle lines. Sincerity and upbringing can no more excuse a Brown Shirt or a Black Sepembrist than it can a Lieutenant Calley.

Objection 5. You have addressed the problem of the self-serving person, e.g., the quarrelsome man, who would twist the Rule to his own selfish desires. But what about the self-sacrificing zealot? Must we be captive to his fanaticism? Is your Christian who goes to war under the Golden Rule just one of these fearsome characters?

Response: In *Freedom and Reason*, R. M. Hare takes pains to distance himself from what he calls the "fanatic," a person so intoxicated with his ideals that he could wish himself harm, if necessary, in their implementation. He uses the example of a Nazi who

. . . accepts the principle that the characteristics which Jews have are incompatible with being an ideal or pre-eminently good (or even a tolerably good) man; and that the ideal, or even tolerably good, society cannot be realized unless people having these characteristics are eliminated.¹⁷

Hare then proposes an experiment touching the Nazi:

We say to him, "You may not know it, but we have discovered that you are not the son of your supposed parents, but of two pure Jews; and the same is true of your wife; and we produce apparently cast-iron evidence to support this allegation. Is he at all likely to say--as he logically can say--"all right then, send me and all my family to Buchenwald!"¹⁸

In the discussion that follows, Hare walks all around this Nazi, considering his possible states of mind. And it is here that we find a clearcut difference between the Nazi and our Golden Rule warrior. This is important for our argument, since, on the face of it, the two are similar. Both would be willing to face death if the tables were turned, and so they feel liberty to bring death when the tables are not turned.

The distinction is this: the Nazi cares nothing about the interests of the Jew. He merely has a "hygienic" interest in the good of society. The Golden Rule warrior, on the other hand, is not serving some utopian ideal which cares nothing for the individual. He is, in part and in fact, acting in the interest of the individual he faces across the battlefield. He is acting to prevent that person from accomplishing

¹⁷ R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

something evil. His aim is not to obliterate all people with certain tendencies or values. He would rather that no one would be killed. But, failing all else, he would stop the evil deed with violence.

Of course, other Scripture would prevent us from ever using the Golden Rule to justify racial extermination, but Hare's case is worth consideration in its own right because of the quality of self-sacrificial zeal it features.

Objection 6. As noble as it may sound, your description of the man willing to be killed to prevent evil is a fantasy, a theoretical construct. Men do not in fact will that, and so cannot honestly apply the Rule in this way to the case of others.

Response: While it is true that humans are normally driven by a powerful instinct for self-preservation, there are strong biblical models of abandon. Moses and Paul uttered striking sentiments of self-forgetfulness.

The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." So Moses went back to the Lord and said, "Oh what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now please forgive their sin--but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." (Exod 32:30-32)

"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel." (Rom 9:2-4a)

It is not, then, a psychological impossibility for a man to will his own death for the sake of good or the amelioration of evil. Nor is it a perverse sentiment. Rather, it can be a high expression of love to be willing to lay down even your life for a cause.

We have spoken of wholesale corruption of the Golden Rule by Nazis, masochists, and hermits. But there is a more subtle cheapening of it which can occur among ordinary Christians. As we slide down the scale from the grandeur of Moses and Paul, we find fearfulness and caution.

If, for instance, a man finds the thought of losing his job terrifying, then he could be adamant in preserving the employment of others, even when the company cannot afford them, or their performance is abysmal. He puts himself, with all his sub-Christian anxieties, in their positions, and is paralyzed with dread. So he cannot bring himself to do what must be done.

It is curious that his paralysis at this point is automatically seen as evidence of sensitive love. Instead it might well be an indication of idolatry. By attributing so much of his security to his job and by

doubting the power of God to provide for him apart from that job, he misplaces his trust. In this craven attitude, he is in no position to apply the Golden Rule.

On the other hand, there is the man whose distress at the thought of temporary unemployment is minimal, and whose trust in the providence of God is maximal. He finds some of the histrionics and maneuverings over job loss puzzling. And his willingness to end another's employment is not a sign of lovelessness but of his own freedom from anxiety over such matters. He cannot imagine desiring continued employment when it is injurious to the company. Should he presuppose baser sentiments in others? Surely the Golden Rule does not ask that of him.

In a similar vein, a man's pacifism could conceivably reflect an idolatrous interest in self-preservation. Just as he could scarcely accept his own death, were he up to something terrible, he can scarcely will the enemy's death, even when that other soldier is securing a reign of terror. For if he himself unwittingly promoted a reign of terror, he would surely want to be spared at all costs. His physical life would be too dear to him to think otherwise. And so the Golden Rule is skewed by weakness in this instance.

This is not to say that most patient bosses and pacifists are moral weaklings. It is to suggest that what may pass as love may well be idolatry, and that what may pass as insensitivity is really the outgrowth of personal liberty of soul.

At our best, we are not self-indulgent. This is true of our imaginative projections according to the Golden Rule as well as to our actual life choices. At our best, we have the liberty both to take and to suffer stern action as needed. It is only in this attitude of self-denial that our appeal to the Golden Rule, in war, rises above hypocrisy.

Objection 7. Say what you will, killing in war is a matter of hatred, not love. In the heat of battle, you desire the ruin and not the good of your enemy. War is inescapably mean spirited.

Response: There is no such thing as the combat attitude, just as there is no such thing as the mail-delivery attitude, the football attitude, or the cake-baking attitude. People enter into activities with all sorts of perspectives, spirits and intentions. War is no different. Some folks are businesslike, some are sorrowful, some are terrified, some are thrilled, some are vengeful, some are detached, some are driven by team spirit, some are numb. Some think about the fatherland, some about medals, some about wounds, some about their buddies.

It is not my task to argue that most soldiers do in fact care for the enemy. My aim is rather to suggest that one might enter into combat with a general sense that he is doing the enemy good by preventing him from accomplishing something awful.

It would, of course, be a mistake to dwell on the actual feelings of a Christian soldier as he pulls the trigger. For love is not essentially a matter of feeling. It is instead a dogged commitment to what is best for the other, however, you may feel.

Finally, to substantiate the claim that hatred need not be one's motivation in combat, I give you some token accounts of mental life in combat:

Numberless soldiers have died, more or less willingly, not for country or honour or religious faith or for any other abstract good, but because they realized that by fleeing their posts and rescuing themselves, they would expose their companions to greater danger. Such loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale. . . .¹⁹

For J. Roberts, the war held: no personal hostility whatever. Indeed, when an enemy position had been taken, one tended to take the same attitude of care and welfare to the dead and wounded as if they belonged to our own side. There was an abhorrence of any maltreatment of prisoners. . . when they had put up a good fight. . . .²⁰

E. Junger, too, strove to maintain professional standards. "It has always been my ideal in war," he wrote, "to eliminate all feelings of hatred and to treat my enemy as an enemy only in battle and to honour him as a man according to his courage. . . ." ²¹

"I felt neither hatred nor friendliness towards the Argentinians," said Corporal H. Siddall of 45 Commando. "I simply thought about the job in hand, and they happened to be in the way of getting the job done."²²

Objection 8. If you were killed in combat, you, as a Christian, would go to heaven. So loss of physical life would not be the tragedy it is to non-Christians. The soldier you face, however, is likely a lost man. So by killing him, you send him irrevocably to hell. This cannot be love.

Response: First, note that this enemy soldier is doing just that sort of thing himself. He too is dispatching folks to hell. For some of your own comrades in arms are unsaved. By killing them he is doing more than serving tyranny. His actions have dreadful, eternal consequences as well. But let us return to his plight. He may well be facing the Judgment unprepared.

Let us consider the criminal who is guilty of a capital crime. For all we know, the threat of death is more likely to convert him than the absence of this threat. For instance, a T. Bundy on death row is more

¹⁹ J. G. Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) 40.

²⁰ R. Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York: Free, 1985).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 370.

²² *Ibid.*, 371

likely to be saved than a Bundy on the lam. It is only by actual executions that we impose the requisite spiritual seriousness on death row.

Similarly, in war, we may well net more enemy conversions than we would through laying down our arms. Who can say? It is quite possible that my willingness to open fire on a man's position is just what it takes to force him to turn to God. "There are no atheists in foxholes" is indeed hyperbole. But it is not nonsense.

If it is the threat and not the bullet that converts, would it not be better to attempt near misses rather than hits? To this, we can only say that such sham resistance would pose no threat at all, and so would erase the enemy's concern.

Application

For the Golden Rule soldier, annihilation of the enemy is not the aim. His interest lies, rather, in preventing the enemy from doing terrible things. If this can be done short of killing, so much the better. As we close our discussion, let us look at a few representative techniques for breaking the enemy's will to fight.

Political Action

Deterrence of, rather than response to, armed aggression is of course highly desirable. This has been the point to NATO.

Any potential aggressor must assume that, in the event of hostilities, it faces the combined military and political weight of all member nations. In the 1930s this is exactly what Hitler became convinced he would never have to face. It was what Europe lacked in that traumatic summer of 1914 that culminated in the guns of August.²³

When we send an unambiguous message that invasion will meet with collective response, then an adventuresome army will more likely stay home, and killing will be unnecessary.

Current events in Eastern Europe suggest that armed containment not only bottles up hostile armies, it also buys the time needed for corrupt governments to crumble from their own perversity.

S. Tzu proposed that the "supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."²⁴ Accordingly,

²³ D. Abshire, *Preventing World War III: A Realistic Grand Strategy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988) 19.

²⁴ S. Tzu, quoted in Seabury and Codevilla, 184.

The means chosen to further that cause may be unbloody. Planting information in the right places in an enemy country and fanning the subsequent flames, using agents of influence to tear down some and build up others in the enemy camp, using one's power in international markets to affect an enemy's economy--none of these measures will necessarily spill blood. Nevertheless, they can be real measures of warfare if they are pursued as such.²⁵

Decisiveness

Once entered, a shooting war must be executed with boldness. To act otherwise is to will that the bloodletting continue at length and that the acts of evil aggression multiply.

There is no case in history of a war won through the piecemeal commitment of resources. Victory comes when the enemy's will to fight is broken by a specific defeat. The whole point of strategy is to figure out what that defeat would be and to inflict it.²⁶

It is more humane to press for victory than to temporize once the acts of aggression have begun.

Harassing Fire

Physical exhaustion and lack of sleep are powerful debilitating forces. A World War II commando wrote of Normandy:

A man would lean back in his trench as I spoke to him and become unconscious before my eyes. Another, standing in his slit trench, fell asleep on his feet and slithered slowly to his knees, to finish huddled in the corner; still holding the mess-tin from which he had been eating as exhaustion overcame him.²⁷

One means of disrupting precious sleep is the use of harassing fire. The anxiety and the vigilance that random artillery fire forces upon the enemy will take its toll on his will to fight.

The use of nonlethal gases can serve a similar purpose. "Respirators are curiously dehumanizing: identifying familiar and trusted faces becomes difficult behind the rubber equivalent of the medieval pig-faced bassinet. Eating and drinking are tricky. . . ." ²⁸ Add to this the heat and discomfort of these contraptions, and you have cause for discouragement.

²⁵ Ibid., 12-13.

²⁶ Ibid., 101.

²⁷ Holmes, 125.

²⁸ Ibid., 213.

Then there is the use of "bogey weapons," whose effectiveness depends not so much upon their actual lethality as upon their power to intimidate.

Aeroplanes are most effective against morale. They frighten; they exhaust; they break nerves. They do not, usually, in fact kill many men. The dive bomber is the classic example of this in the Second World War. The Junkers 87 Stuka suffered from numerous technical disadvantages: it was slow, and dangerously vulnerable in air-to-air combat. But its shrieking sound--a deliberate psychological warfare ploy--and its sinister gull-winged silhouette helped to make it far more frightening than the casualties it inflicted really warranted.²⁹

As stern as these various measures may seem, they are designed to minimize the killing, to permit the greatest number of soldiers to quit the battlefield having done the least amount of evil.

Disruption of Supply

Von Clausewitz wrote of the wear and tear of service in the field. Such "friction" can wear an army out without there being battles at all. Describing the western front of World War I, D. Winter said that "the real enemy was the weather and the side-effects of living rough."³⁰ Anything that can be done to enhance the play of the elements on the enemy will help to weaken him. So the destruction of tenting or other shelter would serve to undermine his ability to continue.

Brigadier General B. Ferguson highlighted another factor: "I would say without hesitation that lack of food constitutes the biggest single assault upon morale. . . apart from its purely chemical effects upon the body, it has woeful effects upon the mind. One is the dismal condition of having nothing to look forward to."³¹

Food, of course, is more than taste and nutrition. "The preparation and consumption of food is as much a social ritual as it is a physical necessity. Cooking and eating take up slack time, break an otherwise interminable day into tolerable spans, and provide high spots whose anticipation lends point to an otherwise bleak existence. They bring men together and reinforce group identity."³²

We have spoken here of demoralization. We could go on to include the psychological impact of disrupted delivery of mail, pay, and fresh clothing. We should not forget the crippling of mobility and firepower by the destruction of petroleum products, of vehicles, and

²⁹ Ibid., 211.

³⁰ Ibid., 209.

³¹ Ibid., 126.

³² Ibid., 128.

of ammunition. A hungry, soaked soldier who has expended his ammunition and whose truck is stalled by the roadside is much less likely to press on than his well-fed, well-equipped counterpart.

Moral Restraint

If an army intentionally kills noncombatants or denies the enemy the right of honorable surrender, then it strengthens the enemy's contempt, by which it fights on. It may seem that a program of annihilation would be effective in breaking the enemy's will.

But this sort of behaviour, whether it results from rational calculation, personal or collective fury, or even criminal malice, invites reprisals and risks initiating the ghastly round of atrocity and counter-atrocity, with rumor playing its own deadly part. In his book *Humanity in Warfare*, Geoffrey Best quotes a line from John Roebuck's review of Napier's *Peninsula War*: "Cruelty begets cruelty--one atrocity creates another, by way of reprisal--and national animosity is kept alive and heightened by a desire to gratify personal hatred and revenge."³³

Our Golden Rule soldier then goes out of his way to give the enemy no cause for righteous indignation.

Conclusion

Christians go to war to defend interests and people they deem worthy of protection by arms. They naturally love their families, their nation, and their buddies. But what of the enemy? Might they love him as well?

We have seen that the Golden Rule provides the Christian an avenue for entering war without suspending regard for the enemy. It gives him a way to move beyond anger and contempt to what has been called in another context "a severe mercy." It is a mercy that he himself would wish for himself were he to become the lethal instrument of a wicked cause. It is a mercy which he himself may impose.

Postscript

These thoughts should serve to focus our hearts all the more on the cause of world evangelization. For it would be comforting to know that each soldier we might be forced to meet on the field of battle had been exposed to the Gospel, and that he had heard it clearly and made his choice. By not hesitating to proclaim the whole

³³ Ibid., 388.

will of God (cf. Acts 20:26-27), we provide the opponent the antidote to spiritual destruction. If he will not receive it, then it is clear upon whose hands the blood lies.

Before we are Golden Rule warriors, we are properly Golden Rule fishers of men and passionate supporters of such Christlike fishing in all the nations.

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