

Simon J. Joseph, *The Nonviolent Messiah: Jesus, Q and the Enochic Tradition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. 351 pp.

Robert Emmet Meagher, *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014. 161 pp.

Stanley Hauerwas, *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011. 208 pp.

To what degree may Christian followers justifiably condone violence? These three books, each addressing different eras and artifacts from Christian texts, history and ethics, make the case for claiming wider ground in traditions of nonviolence. Simon Joseph develops a biblical hermeneutic of nonviolence derived from his textual analysis of messianic portrayals in Judaism and early Christianity. His investigation leads him to assert the originality and centrality of Jesus' command to love enemies. Robert Meagher traces the history of theological minority voices' misgiving and mistrust of ecclesial/state violence throughout the centuries of growing triumphalism in Christian Just War Tradition. "Moral Injury," the ethical wound of conscience experienced by those who are exposed to war, is as old as war itself, and only is exacerbated by our inability to speak truthfully about the evil of war. Finally, Stanley Hauerwas probes the saturation of just war rhetoric in the contemporary United States to raise suspicion about the idolatrous dynamics of American "ease with war." In the end, and taken together, these three books provide a formidable resource for study and theological deliberation regarding how and why Christianity became the maidservant to cultures of war. According to these authors, traditions of nonviolence, and misgivings and suspicion regarding the sanctioned shedding of blood, are central to the understanding and practice of Christianity, and deserve to be taken more seriously by researchers and practitioners alike.

### *The Nonviolent Messiah: Jesus, Q and the Enochic Tradition*

Is it possible to disentangle the advocacy of nonviolence in early biblical and other textual Jesus traditions from the violence in both Davidic messianism and apocalyptic eschatology? To put the question more bluntly, “Did the historical Jesus have a hidden violent streak?” (23) Biblical scholar and professor of religion Simon Joseph asks what we can learn about the historical Jesus and the early communities of followers from trying to sort through these “fundamental paradoxes and ambiguities in the biblical tradition.” (xii) Indeed, what do these tensions reveal about the nature of Jesus’ central message? In this extensively researched and comprehensive study, Joseph argues, “If Jesus was consistent about anything, it seems to have been his commitment to nonviolence.” (230) In the end, the author encourages a recovery of the importance of Jesus traditions of nonviolence as a hermeneutical key for better understanding of the historical Jesus, for “If Jesus was *consistently* nonviolent, then violent Jesus traditions would have little to no claim to being authentic.” (50)

Joseph carefully builds his argument in a way that is very accessible to nonspecialists, almost as if he were writing a mystery novel. At the same time, this book’s detailed footnotes and bibliography demonstrate his meticulous care to address the concerns, intricate analyses and discoveries of a wide diversity of biblical scholars. The argument unfolds in three parts. In Part I, Joseph focuses on the relationship between the historical Jesus and questions of violence by sorting through key issues found in the Gospel(s), Paul’s writings and Q. His analysis of the origins and development of the earliest Jesus traditions highlights important links between Q, Luke and Isaiah 61. All of these resources point to “an exegetical tradition” that heralds “an eschatological new age of peace, salvation, healing and debt-forgiveness: the Jubilee year” (20). At this point a central prong of Joseph’s

argument comes to the fore: *This* was Jesus' central message, he asserts, during his own life. It was not until after Jesus' life had ended that "The Gospel of Jesus became the Gospel of Christ crucified" (22). Of course, such a claim necessitates that the author address contradictory texts in which Jesus would appear to encourage (or has been understood by tradition and scholars to encourage) violence, in particular apocalyptic divine violence.

Thus, in "Jesus and the Swords" Joseph carefully works his way through analysis of a variety of early texts in their literary, historical and theological contexts, that have been used to promote the notion of a violent, or at least militant or revolutionary Jesus. Was the Kingdom of God synonymous with a revolution that was unimaginable without bloodshed and violence? (35). Joseph sorts through the various types of violence we encounter in these texts: a) the *political violence* suffered by Jesus at the hands of the Romans; b) *divine violence* requiring Jesus to atone for human sin; c) *demonic violence* facing "the powers"; d) *eschatological violence*, through which the end time is imagined as a time of judgment and ensuing violent punishment and vengeance. (27) His central assertion is as follows: "The disciplined principled practice of nonviolence is distinctive *and* characteristic of this historical Jesus." (38-39) At least three pieces of evidence are marshaled by Joseph for this claim: first, the practice of nonviolence is attested to by Jesus' teachings in Q; second, additional textual evidence related to Jesus' nonresistance during his arrest supports his commitment to nonviolence even at the risk to his own life; and third, the centrality and importance of this tradition is emphasized through an "indisputable historical tradition of early Christian pacifism" (39). Joseph notices that not only are the consequences of Jesus' nonviolence ignored and marginalized in mainstream contemporary society, even in historical Jesus research there is surprisingly little attention to this subject (41). As opposed to simply acknowledging this strain of nonviolence in the Jesus traditions, Joseph's intention in this

book is to take this further, to “apply it as a criterion of authenticity to the Jesus tradition as a whole. . . and to the Jewish matrix in which Jesus lived.” (50)

Part II reassesses the historical and literary evidence for the messianic identification of Jesus (97). Both Paul and Q, Joseph argues, understand Jesus alternatively as *Christos* or “anointed,” but not in the messianic tradition of a Davidic king. (124) The author traces the separation of two lineages of Q that divide the tradition of Jesus’ teachings into “the way of the kingdom” and “Jesus as the son of man” who returns as heavenly judge to punish the wicked. (144) He finds “a missing link” in another early text, the Enochic *Book of Parables*, a pre-Christian Jewish text from the early first century, that brings together a number of diverse “messianic templates”: a) the Davidic messiah and warrior-king; b) the Suffering Servant of Isaiah; and c) The figure of Wisdom. This “conflation of themes” shows how biblical, eschatological and divine narratives of violence “. . . were reinscribed into the Jesus tradition at a remarkably early stage in development.” (160)

But another early source, the *Animal Apocalypse*, from 165 B.C.E., portrays a different messianic tradition and eschatological lineage. Here we see an “eschatological Adam” whose regeneration is a “catalyst for the transformation of all humanity,” a messiah whose job description is not to judge, go to war, or die, but “to *transform*.” (174) Rather than apocalyptic judgment and punishment/vengeance, we find emphasis on a messianic age through which an ideal humanity is promised, through “. . . the regeneration of the original divine human design” in Genesis, the *imago dei* (181). Moreover, Joseph argues, the Adamic/son messianism of this type flourished in Jewish (Christian) Palestinian communities that were known to Paul, influencing Paul’s views of Christ as “inaugurating a new creation.” (189)

Finally, in Part III, Joseph’s argument grows to a climax with his investigation of the kingdom teachings in Q; as he claims, the theme of the kingdom of God “. . . is the central

theme of Jesus' ministry." (197) In Q, Jesus teaches love of enemies, based on a vision of God *not* as violent, vengeful or punishing, but loving and merciful towards all. For Joseph, the command to love enemies cannot be sufficiently underscored in terms of its importance: he claims, "Jesus' command to love enemies requires a fundamental reevaluation of the Jewish messianic traditions attributed to Jesus." (216) "The true follower of Jesus," according to Q, "practices love of enemies in order to *become* a 'son of God.'" (225) In this way Joseph contrasts two strands of early Jesus messianic tradition, *both* based in Jewish understanding and practice, that conflict with one another: a) the end times' vengeful and punishing judge *and* b) the transforming Adamic messiah. In the end, for Joseph, these two strands of tradition are not compatible. The first strand, the *judge*, represents the gospel narrative that developed *about* Jesus; whereas, the second strand, based in the *love of enemies* command, and growing out of "a radical universal Jewish vision *within* first-century Palestinian Judaism," is the gospel that Jesus taught and proclaimed, and that still speaks today to both Jews and Christians. This gospel unequivocally emphasizes ". . . a universal and unconditional love for all . . ." (228)

### ***Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War***

Clergy and theologians often are warned to be suspicious of studies of the historical Jesus that portray the figure of Jesus as too closely mirroring current values and norms of any given society and culture. But it could be said that Joseph's Jesus research and conclusions fly in the face of most of the history of Christendom and its ethics regarding violence and war throughout the centuries. As Robert Emmet Meagher emphasizes in *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War*, at least since the time of Constantine, the majority of Christians have insisted on trying to minimize ". . . the obstacle that theologians faced when attempting to construct a Christian case for killing, state killing, whether in war

or in a court of law”: the command to love one’s enemies. (71) Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo “constructed the theological bridge” between what Meagher describes as “New Testament pacifism” and “the militarism of post-Constantinian Christianity” (71), and it is a bridge that largely has proved to be extremely durable through all the succeeding centuries, indeed, up to the present time. As Meagher describes the contemporary United States, “War has become our natural posture, our national default position, and we are more or less comfortable with it and its consequences.” (1)

A classics scholar and professor, Meagher’s intention is to unravel the history of Christian Just War thinking and tradition in order to “reveal the roots” of the ubiquitous phenomenon of *moral injury* in war, from its ancient beginnings in Greece, throughout the Christian centuries and all the way to contemporary America. (5) Though the term “moral injury” only was coined in the last decade by psychological researchers, the human experience it attempts to describe and address is found throughout world literature of war, even as far back as the ancient Greeks. Meagher defines “moral injury” as “. . . the transgression, the violation, of what is right, what one has long held to be sacred – a core belief or moral code – and thus wounding or, in the extreme, mortally wounding the psyche, soul, or one’s humanity” (4). The mother of Noah Pierce, who killed himself after returning from two deployments in Iraq, described this kind of wound as one that “kills you from the inside out” (5).

Thus, Meagher’s deepest reason for writing this book is to set into sharper relief the sustained voices raising “misgivings over shedding blood” in the history of Christianity, even with regard to wars that appeared to be “necessary.” This sense of an uneasy conscience endured through so much of Christian history, alongside growing Christian triumphalism with regard to violence and war; but according to Meagher, our contemporary ways of war in

United States demonstrate little if any capacity for moral uneasiness with our own practices of violence. It is this lack of debate in our own time, our certainty that “. . . a war against evil cannot possibly be itself evil . . .” he contends, that gives rise to and exacerbates the epidemic of moral injury. (12) The veterans of our ongoing wars are like the proverbial canaries in the coal mine: their struggles with moral conscience, and the growing mountain of data regarding the disabilities and ethical deformations they face, thrust the unwelcome question in citizens’ faces: “Is there no place, then, for repentance?” (14).

Along the way of this history, Meagher explores not only the ancient Greeks, but also the New Testament period, Imperial and Christian Rome, Medieval Christianity and Early Modern Europe, as he traces the “two minds on the question of Christian participation in war.” (112) The church remained confused or in conflict regarding whether state violence could be advocated by Christian conscience until the late twelfth century, Meagher claims. But Pope Gregory VII resolved the “deep dissonance over the moral legitimacy of warfare” by declaring it not only “necessary” but also “honorable” and “meritorious.” (112)

Meagher illuminates how even as Just War tradition developed and was consolidated in much of Christianity, at the same time, many pieces of historical evidence show that minority voices in Christianity consistently voiced discomfort and distrust of Christian advocacy of violence. Nevertheless, if killing is forbidden by the command to love one’s enemies in the New Testament, under Ambrose and Augustine it came to be sanctioned, as long as it was in the service of the state. If for Thomas Aquinas war was “the lesser of two evils,” eventually enlisting in the legions became something seen as praiseworthy, even “a privilege reserved for Christians.” (99)

Meanwhile, the tradition of pacifism endured, but often in “pugnacious” ways, according to Meagher, with pacifist Christians advocating for violence as long as it was enacted by

others. He writes, “Christians had, from the beginning, been quietly grateful for the ‘necessary’ wars fought for their safety and benefit by the pagan, idolatrous legions of Rome.” Eventually, once Christians had power over the empire, their promotion of war rose further as they began to describe war not only as “just,” but “glorious” and finally, “holy.” (99) The journey – from Jesus’ command to love of enemies, to killing one’s enemies in the name of God -- was complete.

Similar to the charge raised by Simon Joseph regarding historical Jesus research and its avoidance of the command to love enemies, Meagher muses about the way in which Christian theological development through the centuries largely managed to avoid the same command, except “. . . to neuter (Jesus’) words with the subtle knife of allegory.” (110) Christians consistently turned to the narratives of David the warrior-king in the Bible “. . . for inspiration and support.” (110) But also throughout this history, Meagher contends, certain Christian theologians consistently raised questions regarding “intent” with regard to violence. For with development of Just War tradition, supposedly, “. . . war issues waivers to its participants, free passes as it were, to take each other’s lives with impunity; but it has never been that simple . . .” (11)

In the end, Meagher claims, “Just War theory is a dead letter.” (129) However, this is not to say that nations and even Christians will not find war to be “a necessity” at times. Meagher’s argument is not for absolute pacifism, but for a more honest accounting of war as a human political failure and inevitable sin, in other words, a human activity that always involves encounter with evil and need for repentance. Though JWT was intended to limit war and refine intentions for advocating violence in extreme situations, we must judge the use and abuse of just war moral deliberation more by its consequences, which according to Meagher, “. . . have overstepped every limit imaginable, save human extinction, which we



have risked and to which we have come perilously close.” (130) For Meagher, the only justifiable way forward lies in more closely listening to combat veterans who are trying to tell us about their experiences of losing not only their humanity, but also indeed, their souls, as a result of exposure to war. Setting aside the rhetoric of the just war is, for Meagher, “an exercise in honesty” that itself is necessary if we are to engage the serious work of creating moral alternatives to war. (143, 150)

***War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity***

In many ways, Stanley Hauerwas, in his book *War and the American Difference: Theological Reflections on Violence and National Identity*, picks up where Meagher leaves off. For here Hauerwas draws upon his considerable body of work in narrative ethics to analyze the destructive consequences of current just war rhetoric and assumptions in the United States. He endeavors to show how the story of Christianity negates the assumptions about war that we make as a nation, and claims that our national attitudes about war are nothing short of idolatrous, even as they are deeply morally compelling for citizens. As he says, the purpose of his book is “to convince Christians that war has been abolished in the cross of Christ.” This leads him to a further quest, to deliberate how Christians should live in “a world of war” as “a people who believe that war has been abolished” (xi).

The place to start is with Hauerwas’ analysis of the morally compelling status of war in the United States. He asserts that people in the U.S. have an “unproblematic way we address and understand war.” (4) This is an important point that could be taken even further, to address the monolith of U.S. militarization. Ours is largest military many times over in the world, with more than one thousand overseas military bases and over 700 domestic ones. The military budget of the U.S. dwarfs any other in the world; we are a country that

continues regularly to utilize armed force of many different kinds and scales. One is reminded of Meagher's assessment about war as "our national posture." But examining American attitudes about war more deeply causes confusion. Why do so few Americans raise questions about our outsized military and propensity for armed force? Hauerwas claims that Americans are "... easy with war." Further along he puts it more strongly, claiming that American exceptionalism connected to war is "... our most determinative moral reality." (34)

How can this be so? Hauerwas has more than one answer to this question. First, he asserts that American ease with war has to do with American lack of a common story. We insist on individual choice regarding whatever orienting story seems best to us, in contrast with the Christian church's immersion in a story about Jesus of Nazareth, described by Hauerwas as "a story not of our own making." In contrast to the shaping effect of the Christian narrative, mainstream American society "... shares no goods in common other than the belief that there are no goods in common other than avoiding death." (18) For Hauerwas, it is this same fear of death that unites us as Americans, and that is at the basis of our foreign policy. As he writes, "'Freedom'... names the attempt to live as though we will not die." (19) This dynamic gives rise to an increasing need for war as a death-denying mechanism in American culture, Hauerwas concludes.

I admit that I have some trouble following Hauerwas' logic here. For elsewhere in this analysis, Hauerwas explores a different way to respond to the question: why are Americans "easy" with war? And this second pathway of exploration is one that goes to the root of American attitudes and sense of identity as citizens: the story about "the sacrifice of war." As Hauerwas writes,

... a society must receive the giving up of self by those who have fought

and died; this authorizes conceptions of an ideal community, it energizes a society to flourish, it inspires it to resist extermination, it weaves the networks of obligation that make society cohere. War is a sacrificial system that is crucial for the renewal of the moral commitments that constitute our lives. (xv)

As Hauerwas explores *this* story, especially through its development in the experience of the American Civil War, the connections between “the sacrifice of war,” American ease with war, and a common moral identity for American citizens become clear. The experience of the Civil War defined and united the nation, as Hauerwas says, “the story of the transformation of the Civil War from limited to total war is also the story of how America became the nation we call America.” (27)

Christian sacrificial formulations deeply informed and influenced the development of this same national narrative. From President Lincoln as a Christ figure, to the many sermons comparing the war to “a vicarious atonement” made for the developing nation; to the growing need to somehow justify and sacramentalize the unbearable and overwhelming accumulation of destruction and death in the war, and through the sacrificial commemorations that developed both during and after the war, including those that continue up to the present day, “sacrifice and the state became inseparably intertwined.” (29-31)

This is our national story, yet we tend not to think consciously of it in this way, certainly not as consciously as we do other stories that shape us as citizens, such as those about the separation of church and state, or the freedom of religious choice. These stories tend to push other (quasi)religious factors to the background. While the rhetoric of “the necessary sacrifices of war” regularly appears in historical, political and popular discourse of all kinds,

this language rarely is examined in terms of the role it plays in just war analysis. The sacrificial metaphor at the heart of citizenship and inextricably tied to war has incredible power, all the more so because most citizens are unconscious of its active impact in our lives. In fact, we tend to be blithely unaware of the contradictions between assumptions regarding “the separation of church and state” and these other deeply (civil) religious and sacrificial narratives of war-culture that profoundly shape our way of life and citizenship in the United States. I appreciate Hauerwas’ beginning attempts to unravel *this* narrative, and suggest that we must take his work further and investigate the links between war and sacrifice more deeply if we are to truly understand the morally compelling nature of war for people in the United States.

Hauerwas explores the consequences that were cemented in the experience of the Civil War and beyond, quoting historian Mark Noll: “War is America’s altar, our church.” (34-35) War is a defining component in the story of American exceptionalism, such that the compulsion toward war increases in ratio to American sensibilities about war as our most dynamic moral reality. In other words, we are *predisposed towards war* by way of our own narratives and sensibilities about our national identity. In addition, the dying and killing of war become attached to certain understandings of redemption, both personal and national. Through the sacrifices of war the nation achieves and maintains its transcendent status. Hauerwas quotes President Lincoln in this regard: “The baptism of blood in war unveils the transcendent dimensions of the union.” (28) By the time of the end of the Civil War, war had hardened into a sacramentalized endeavor. One wonders how far off this is from earlier centuries’ Christian practice of killing “in the name of God,” such as Meagher deftly portrays.

Hauerwas’ efforts to reveal the sacrificial and morally compelling status of war in the

United States provides an opening for him to raise important questions for just war theorists who would brand pacifists as “unrealistic.” He writes, “Attempts to justify wars begun and fought on realist grounds in the name of just war only serve to hide the reality of war.” (34) The national story we tell ourselves is that our democracy enables us to place more limits on war than more authoritarian societies. But like Meagher, Hauerwas claims that our just war discourse largely is a kind of co-dependent cover for our true ailment: “Lack of realism about realism by just war advocates has everything to do with their being American,” he writes. (26) It is much less any neutral calculus of just war theory and much more the redemptive purpose we give to the dying and killing of war that guides and undergirds our ways of violence and war. (32) Just war deliberation and rhetoric finally are little more than a mask, “. . . an attempt to control the description, `war.’” (32) In other words, to understand the dynamics of sacrificial war-culture in the United States, we must investigate our language and how it shapes our very ways of knowing, for “War possesses our imaginations, our everyday habits and scholarly assumptions.” (47).

The book additionally includes chapters that suggest alternative ways forward, and meditations/reflections on nonviolence theory and practice. For example, Hauerwas includes a chapter that expands upon his colleague Enda McDonagh’s suggestion regarding one strategy to counter the bulwark of just war thinking and its self-imposed discipline and paucity of imagination: develop a different rhetorical formulation. “Start a discussion about war that would make war as morally problematic as slavery,” he suggests, comparing “the abolition of war” with earlier moral growth of the nation regarding consensus about the importance of “the abolition of slavery.” (38) In addition, at another point Hauerwas makes reference to a tantalizing suggestion from Jonathan Schell: we need an “alternative imaginary” to help us untangle ourselves from the logic and rhetoric of war and the

imperatives of the war system. (51).

But Hauerwas' own imagination regarding alternative imaginaries does not appear to extend to the theological framework we find here. Though he calls war a "counter-liturgy" to the work/liturgy of the church, he remains firmly attached to Christian notions of sacrifice as central to his own understanding of redemption. He writes, "Christians believe that the sacrifice of the cross is the end of sacrifice. We are free of the necessity to secure our existence through sacrificing our and others' lives on the world's altars." (56). Though he would like to end the morally compelling use of sacrificial narratives and practices that undergird American ways of war, in the end, Jesus of Nazareth's death as "sacrifice" will continue to be central theologically, as he writes, "I hope that my attempt to re-describe war as an alternative to the sacrifice of the cross at once illuminates why war is so morally compelling and why the church is an alternative to war." (xvii)

In the end, Hauerwas convincingly sheds light on the problem of the moral compulsion and attraction to war that are stimulated through sacrificial formulations, and that move readily across the boundaries of state, religion, popular culture, economy and the military. These sacrificial constructions form a bulwark that not only supports but also requires ongoing militarism and war. He advocates the importance of locating "peaceful practices" to resist and reconfigure our ways of understanding and action. (54) But sacrifice nevertheless remains firmly embedded in his own theological rhetoric and understanding, as he writes, ". . . any alternative to war must be one that sacrifices the sacrifices of war." (55) He suggests that the sacrifice of Jesus ". . . overwhelms our killing and restores to us a life of peace." (69) Hauerwas thus seems to be of a mind with other Christian theologians who stress that the problem is not sacrifice per se, but the *wrong* kind of sacrifice. One wonders if this will be sufficient for effective address of American assumptions embedded in our

thoughtless rhetoric about “the necessity of war-as-sacrifice.” Instead of glorifying suffering through sacrificial cognitive metaphors, what about taking Schell’s recommendation further? In that case we not only would rethink our national rhetoric, but our theology as well. Is it possible or wise to attempt to break out of all the sacrificial imaginaries that have such a deep hold on us, not only in our lives as citizens but as Christians too? One alternative way forward is to search for cognitive metaphors that resist the attraction of sacrificial war-culture, by thinking more deeply about the role of sacrifice in *every* arena of our lives, religious as well as civil. In this way, our imaginations may ignite to the task of (re)creating not only social, but also theological imaginaries to empower a rehumanized vision/incarnation that breaks out of the constraints of just war rhetoric, and sacrificial war-culture.

Finally, such thinking brings us back full circle to the portrait of the historical Jesus we find in Simon Joseph’s research -- a Jesus/*Christos* whose central vision and mission is not to atone through death, punishment, or divine vengeance – but who reveals the very being of the divine as the transformative and insistent call to love enemies, to the very end.