

REVIEWS



“Bob Meagher lays out a provocative argument: That ‘just war,’ as a theory and set of principles to guide us in battle, is effectively dead. He tangles with the perverse assumption, passed down through the ages, that there is a just way of taking another person’s life, that killing in wartime is somehow different from murder in peacetime. That just war originates in Christian theology, and invoked in a speech by an American president accepting a Nobel Peace Prize, is even more puzzling. Meagher grapples with not just the collective moral crisis nations go through when they use violence to achieve political ends, but also how ex-soldiers grapple with their own consciences over their actions in the heat of battle, or what he calls ‘moral injury.’ He comes at the subject not as a pacifist but as an ethicist, marshaling impressive evidence, from the works of St. Augustine to Camus, to make his case. The book recounts the harrowing stories of soldiers who struggle to cope with what they’ve done in combat, what they’ve seen, and the scars that stay with them in their postwar lives. **Elegantly written and easily accessible to lay readers—his prose unburdened by any military jargon or acronym-soup—*Killing From the Inside Out* is an ideal read for anyone curious about American adventurism abroad, the future of civil-military relations, and the human—and moral—toll of war.**”

Lionel Beehner is founding editor of *Cicero Magazine* and former senior writer at the Council on Foreign Relations.

“There is a logical tension in the twin ideas that killing is immoral and war is necessary. Professor Meagher has diligently traced the logical, theological and political arguments that have shaped this debate in Western societies for the past two thousand years. **His book has never been more relevant than in our era where advanced weaponry has made too many people heedless of the costs of battle.** I hope that his work illuminates for us that in the world of perpetual conflict we have created it may be time to restore order.”

Timothy Kudo

Former U.S. Marine infantry officer who served tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Dr. Meagher's book *Killing From the Inside Out* resonates deeply with my own experience of war in Iraq, and with the emotional distress I felt in its wake. His account of the dark history of ‘Just War’ theory is a brilliant and lucid explanation of how that doctrine has been used since its creation, not as an earnest attempt to distinguish just from unjust wars, but as a discursive device used to manipulate public opinion and martial support for Christian-based war narratives. **The ugly catch, that Dr. Meagher has so forcefully demonstrated for us, is that with ‘Just War’ doctrine as the basis for our wars, and with the ‘good against evil’ rationale for fighting, there comes a moral apocalypse in the aftermath for the veterans who have done the fighting and who, upon coming home, are left with no cultural or social means for contending with the horrors they've witnessed and the violence they've taken part in, all at the behest of a largely indifferent nation.** *Killing From the Inside Out* is an urgent message for all the populations of Western society; America is not the first nation to invoke ‘Just War’ doctrine to propel its violent policies and it surely won't be the last. Let this book serve as the means by which we resist such morally dubious claims for war.”

tyler boudreau served twelve years in the Marine Corps infantry, deployed to Iraq in 2004, and is the author of *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*.

“For more than 10 years I have been working with former combatants in different parts of the world, grappling with the profound human cost of their involvement in war/violent political conflict. The dominant discourses of ‘post traumatic stress disorder’ and ‘just war’ really do not capture the deep wounding, the soul fragmentation and inner darkness that many of them continue to be haunted by, especially those who come from religious backgrounds. Prof. Meagher’s book comes like a much needed breath of fresh air—shining sensitive light on this darkness; pointing with nuanced language to the depth of human wounding in war; highlighting in particular the complicity of the ‘just war’ tradition in this inner injuring and the difficulties of healing. In this really important book **Prof. Meagher combines his own practical wisdom from many years of working with combat veterans with decades of high quality scholarship.** As a reflective practitioner I strongly recommend this book to anyone truly interested in transforming the human cost of war.

Dr. Wilhelm Verwoerd, a veteran international peace and reconciliation worker, is Director of Beyond Walls (www.beyondwalls.co.uk), Cape Town Area, South Africa, and a member of the Fetzer Institute NGO Advisory Council. His books include: *My Winds of Change* (foreword by Nelson Mandela); *Equity, Mercy, Forgiveness: Interpreting Amnesty within the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*; and, with Alistair Little, *Journey through Conflict Trail Guide*.

“Thank you Professor Meagher for this honest and courageous precision-guided missile to the heart of just war theory, exposing the institutional and state fear that has inflated and launched this barrage balloon, which over centuries has diverted attention from the truth that there is no such thing as a just war, but just power-hungry greed and insecurity, which lead to just revenge, and worst case for our veterans and others, just suicide.

Creation and humanity need us to get out of our comfortable trenches and take this challenge very seriously, to give hope to tortured minds, hearts and souls, and help us all find just peace.

Rev. Andrew Rawding

Graduate of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, former combat infantry officer in South Armagh, Northern Ireland and, after ordination to the priesthood, Royal Marine chaplain, who served with Royal Marines and U.S. Marines in Afghanistan.

“The soul of the United States is infected by its addiction to unending war. The suicide rate among soldiers and war veterans has reached epidemic work. **Bob Meagher’s seminal and timely work, with its reach from antiquity to today, shows that there never was a just war that would leave its participants unscarred.** We live with the terrible consequences of a process from 325 CE when Christian values began to be transposed with imperial values. None of us are hard wired for war, so when we kill each other there will be moral and spiritual injury no matter how justified the war may be.”

Father Michael Lapsley, SSM, is Founder and Director of the Institute for Healing of Memories, Cape Town, South Africa, author of *Redeeming the Past: My Journey from Freedom Fighter to Healer*.

“Professor Meagher has steered us through minefields of thought on just war and justified killing, sacrifice and collateral damage, moral injury and its consequences on individuals and society. His expertise in truth and justice, and extensive experience interviewing individuals and writing about moral injury serve to sharpen our understanding as we help our veterans to wellness. **Meagher has written the essential rebuttal to Just War theory. This book should be read by scholars, warriors, clergy, politicians, and anyone caring for those suffering from moral injury related to military service.** It is an exceptional tour of Western thought on war and killing, and their justification by our military, religious and political leaders.”

Kimberly P. May, MD, Col (retired), USAF Medical Corps, is a graduate of the National Defense University and author of “The Role of Just War Theory in the National Security Strategy of the United States. She is currently a staff physician with the Veterans Administration Medical Center of Central and Western Massachusetts.

“In the field of conflict transformation and peace-building there is a recognized gap between grassroots practitioners who have lived through violent conflict and are working with its legacy, and academics who are considered to be ‘experts’ while lacking significant on-the-ground experience. Bob Meagher is one scholar who bridges this gulf with integrity, clarity, compassion and challenge. *Killing from the Inside Out* is a brilliant example of his ability to chart the development of Just War Theory and consider it in the light of the lived experience of human beings sent into battle across the centuries. He doesn’t swamp the reader with the vast scope of his personal knowledge but helps us trace easily and engagingly the attitudes to violent conflict and its moral status from the time of the wars of ancient Greece, via the emergence and rise of Christianity during the time of Imperial Rome and forward through the writings of key figures to the present day. He draws fascinating, thought-provoking and, some might say, disturbing parallels between war-making and love-making from a male perspective. He takes seriously the understanding of service personnel deployed as combatants to conflict zones across the world, whose experience illustrates why Just War Theory is dead. **I found this book gripping, illuminating and prophetic. In a so-called civilized world where we continue to accept all too easily the killing of innocents in war, and the sometimes devastating long-term impact on those young people we send into battle to kill on our behalf, it is utterly timely.**

Ruth Scott—Anglican priest, author, BBC broadcaster, lecturer, mediator—co-facilitates a life histories workshop designed for use in situations with communities caught up in violent conflict or its legacy, most recently in the Middle East, and runs workshops for survivors of sexual violence and female genital mutilation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Egypt. In 2009, as a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellow, Ruth spent 8 weeks in Israel and the West Bank exploring transformative relationships across that conflict divide. Her fourth book, *The Power of Imperfection*, will be released in November 2014.

“For millennia, young men (and increasingly women) have been told that war is a place in which they will win glory and honor. When soldiers write about their battlefield experiences, however, one notices a fundamental disconnect between their perspective and the way in which war is popularly conceived. **By and large, soldiers discover on their own that little is gained in war and all too much is lost. It is no long stretch, then, to indict the intellectual tradition of just war in this cultural dissonance, that the moral pain suffered post-combat is in part inflicted by communities and voices who do not know the true nature of war.**

“Just war was initially a pastoral response to the problem of martial pain by a North African bishop who fielded conflicted correspondence from the highest ranking of soldiers. Instead of turning to three centuries of church history built upon the experience of soldier saints and military martyrs, Augustine turned to a pagan jurist. Just war as a

theological project was doomed from the start, and Dr. Meagher provides here for us its two thousand year long obituary.

“Not all have given up hope that the tradition may have something to contribute positively to the actual well being of soldiers, as Augustine’s pastoral instincts should be commended. It cannot be denied however, that, though Dr. Meagher’s criticisms of the just war tradition cut to the core, they are sorely needed. One need not agree with him that it be torn up from its roots to be profoundly challenged by his work here. His writing wonderfully balances scholarly research with literary tact and will be appreciated by academic and popular audiences alike.”

Logan Mehl-Laituri

Former Sergeant E/5, U.S. Army, decorated Iraq veteran, author of *For God and Country (In that Order)* and *Reborn on the Fourth of July*.

“Under the skilled hand of this master of the classics, the ancient Greeks cross the eons to bring their wisdom into our time on issues of vital importance—war and its trail in the souls of killers and their communities. **This is the resource for understanding how the religion of the Prince of Peace came to support war.** Robert Meagher brings us leaders of the early Christian church, showing us how Christianity came to excuse if not promote the industrialized and anonymous killing that war has become, and weaves in the struggles of current military veterans who struggle for inner peace having done what they were told to do. He manages all this in a manner that gives not despair, but life!”

Amy Blumenshine, PhD, is a Diaconal Minister in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, called by the Minneapolis Area Synod to address the suffering of veterans and their families. She founded the Coming Home Collaborative which has been working since 2005 to engage communities of faith to enhance the re-integration experiences. Dr. Blumenshine is a co-author of *Welcome Them Home — Help Them Heal: Pastoral care and ministry with service members returning from war*.

“**Specialists in the field will welcome this book, not only because of its provocative argument, but because there are gems that will enrich even advanced readers’ knowledge or thinking.** Those who are mostly familiar with international law and secular Just War Theory will find the brisk, sound survey of developments in chapters 4–6 informative; those specializing in the Christian-ethical approach to war will find provocative thoughts in the discussion of Greek literature in chapter 1–3. Even for specialists in Christian ethics or history, the way the author brought out the connections of love and war in Greek literature and then looked at developments in early Christian

thought should prove stimulating. I am not aware of other works that have explored this so well.

I think the book will appeal to people who think about the problem of war from any angle, including philosophical, theological, historical, political, and literary. **The book has an accessible style married to serious content that will work well for both beginning and advanced readers.** I can see many professors who teach about war and peace—again, from a number of disciplinary angles—procuring the book for their own edification, and then many adopting it for courses.

The book will definitely work for both undergraduate and graduate student audiences in any courses that touch on war. The Introduction and Conclusion and chapters 2 and 3, in particular, are rich with conversation topics. As someone who teaches a basic undergraduate religious-ethics course on war and peace, I would be very interested in assigning this book for the way it puts the charge against Just War Theory so pointedly and for how it could set an ongoing problem for such a course. I can also see courses from philosophy and political-science angles using the book.”

Brian Stiltner (Ph.D., Yale) is Chair of Philosophy, Theology, and Religious Studies, Sacred Heart University, and coauthor of *Faith and Force: A Christian Debate about War*.

“Such Christian thinkers as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas crafted Just War Theory (JWT) in order to limit war. In *Killing from the Inside Out*, Professor Robert Meagher, a poetic writer and brilliant classical scholar, leverages history to provocatively argue that the opposite has actually occurred and JWT has served only to legitimize and inspire war. JWT, he convincingly contends, has also made it tragically easy to deny the existence of moral injury, a condition that commonly afflicts combat veterans and profoundly and negatively affects psyches. How can combat veterans feel guilt or shame, many wonder, if the war they fight is just? Thus the help these afflicted warriors desperately need is withheld from them. **Another fundamental truth this bold, beautifully written, and erudite work powerfully conveys is the following: war kills not only those it buries in the ground; it just as surely kills those souls who march home, heads held high while the music plays and their loved ones cheer, yet feeling inside they are forever lost.**”

Lieutenant Colonel Douglas A. Pryer is an active-duty counterintelligence officer who has deployed to Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. He is the author of the book, *The Fight for the High Ground: The U.S. Army and Interrogation During Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003 - April 2004*.

“Truth often hides, Robert Meagher reminds us, *in Killing from the Inside Out*, especially when the truth challenges our myths, for example the myth that one can kill another human being and not be damaged by so doing. The truth is no one leaves the battlefield unwounded. **Killing wounds the soul. But what if it’s a “just war”? Meagher argues convincingly that to put the adjective “just” in front of the word “war” is self-deception.**”

Jim Forest co-founded the Catholic Peace Fellowship in 1964 and from 1977 through 1988 was Secretary General of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Currently he serves as International Secretary of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship. His books include *The Road to Emmaus: Pilgrimage as a Way of Life*, *Ladder of the Beatitudes*, *Praying with Icons*, *Living With Wisdom: A Biography of Thomas Merton*, *All Is Grace: A Biography of Dorothy Day*, and *Loving Our Enemies: Reflections on the Hardest Commandment*.

“*Killing From the Inside Out* examines suicide—the form self-inflicted death resulting within as we acquiesce to war. Author Robert Emmet Meagher argues persuasively ‘just war’ is a modern myth, and to kill another is to kill a part of self. **This is a thoughtful, timely, and needed book.** We need to look war in the eye as our nation, Meagher points out, is on a perpetual warpath. We call it, ‘the war against terrorism.’

Meagher cites historical thinkers, modern sages and veterans back from battle. He makes us think and think again as we consider war and its pernicious effect, not only ‘out’ there, but ‘inside’ here, inside our singular and collective souls. **Read this book. Then ponder it. Then act on it. It just might save a soul – your soul.**”

As one of the few American correspondents who spoke Vietnamese, **Thomas C. Fox** covered the war for TIME, *The New York Times* and the *National Catholic Reporter*. He now serves as NCR publisher. His Books include: *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church*, *Sexuality and Catholicism*, and *Iraq: Military Victory, Moral Defeat*.