

Just War Tradition and Buddhism

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Abstract

Just war, a concept stemming from Christian theological scholarship, has become part of the Western social and political lexicon. This article examines how Buddhism as a non-Abrahamic faith has dealt with just war thinking. To this end, it specifically analyzes some of the recent scholarly studies of just war ideology in relation to the civil war in Sri Lanka. It is argued that just war thinking is essentially a question of how issues of religion and politics are handled in Buddhist countries.

Keywords

Buddhism, violence, religion, politics, culture and ethics

Introduction

Is there such a thing as a just war? The question pertains to the ethics and legitimacy of using aggressive force against human beings, or more specifically, waging war. The moral reflection on war, which is none other than *organized violence*, the deliberate systematic causing of death and destruction, has resulted in two streams of thinking. One relates to pacifism in its religious or secular forms. Religious pacifism is mostly associated with Buddhism, Jainism and also strands of Christian thinking, represented by St. Francis of Assisi and, later, Martin Luther King. Other notable pacifists like M.K. Gandhi and Nelson Mandela have advocated secular pacifism and have maintained that non-violence is a powerful moral force in itself which can win the hearts and minds of aggressors. Both forms of pacifism can be overlaid by an idealism which, while rejecting any right to war, 'relies upon pragmatic arguments to advance the cause of peace [by] institutional means' (Murnion 2007: 33).

The other stream of thinking about organized violence is the just war tradition which draws mainly on Christian theological theorizing in defending the use

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of force. Whereas militarism presupposes a right to war and the ability to prosecute warfare without any limitations such as a law of warfare, just war thinking has been primarily about the morality of military violence. The just war tradition, according to Johnson (1992), has reflected a religious ideology as a justifying cause of war. Considering that war does not go well with the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, this brought to the fore questions of the moral limits of human savagery and acts of brutality in times of war. In other words, there was a clear acknowledgement that 'war is at least *prima facie* wrong and requires justification' (Childress 2001: 216). The notion of *just* and *unjust* wars gained currency in the West only after the fusion of religion and politics and the rejection of the notion of a *holy war* following the religious wars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

It was against this background that Christian thinkers and theologians from St. Augustine in the fifth century to St. Thomas Aquinas and, later, Vittoria, Suarez, Grotius and others laid the groundwork for just war thinking (Johnson 1997; Murnion 2007). The early just war theorists were drawn mostly from the Catholic tradition, and sought to argue that the 'love of one's neighbour' as laid down in Scripture 'may justify or even require the use of killing force against wrong doers' (Regan 1996: 6). However, more recently just war thinking has been influenced by Protestant scholars and also other developments relating to secular states dealing with the 'rights of sovereignty and territoriality' (Johnson 1997: 13) and the rules of war. There has been a renewed interest in the just war tradition in considering the challenges to the morality of warfare arising from the growth of new forms of warfare and organized violence such as non-state terrorism, insurgency and intrastate conflicts. Consequently, just war thinking remains an 'irreplaceable framework for assessing both the prospect of engaging in war and the merits of various forms of warfare' (Murnion 2007: 23).

The just war tradition serves to draw attention to the longstanding moral unease felt not just among Christians but also all other religions about the killing of human beings and even the wanton killing of animals in the wild. There is an underlying concern among all faiths, ethicists and secular scholars about the need to control and limit war, 'even to forbid it and always to remember the adversary's humanity' (Guthrie and Quinlan 2007: 8). While all religious traditions contain some just war thinking, it is mainly the Abrahamic faiths, particularly the Christianity and the Islam, which have evolved 'moral values, rules, and understandings to govern and restrain the use of military force' (Regan 1996: 6). As a rule, when a state goes to war, serious believers in religion have considerable difficulty in reconciling the articles of their faith relating to moral values and an ethical code of conduct with killing people termed as *enemy*. What this indicates is the assumption that there is a 'prima facie duty of acting justly and pursuing justice ... [while] engaging in particular actions' (Childress 2001: 217) in warlike situations. Hence the need to recognize that the morality of engaging in wars specifically refers to the rules of war. This article presents a brief overview of the contemporary

expositions of just war thinking and examines how a non-Abrahamic faith like Buddhism deals with issues of war and morality raised by the just war tradition.

War and Morality in Just War Thinking

In recent years, particularly since the Vietnam War, the just war discourse has been embroiled in the politics and morality of engaging in war. It is against this background that the classic work of the American philosopher, Walzer (2000), sought to bridge the gulf between politics and morality by situating the political factors within a set of moral considerations. They provide the context in which the notion of just war is understood and have been central to just war thinking and, particularly, the practice of international law. This distinction pertains to the principles governing the right to war or the decision to wage war (*jus ad bellum*), and those relating to the conduct of the war or how to fight the war (*jus in bello*). The rules of just war thinking are essentially rules of moral permissibility, which indicate to participants in warfare what is allowed and what is not; they also specify as to when it is permissible to go to war and how the war is conducted. In short, the just war discourse straddles two related dimensions—the right to war or the causes of war and the lawful conduct of the war. These two dimensions or principles are logically independent in the sense that a *just* war may be fought unjustly and, equally, an unjust war may be fought in strict accordance with the rules of war (Walzer 2000). In other words, the lawfulness of a war, for which states are mainly responsible, does not have any bearing on the justice in the conduct of the war, which rests primarily with the combatants—the soldiers and their superiors.

In order to determine whether a war is deemed to be lawful or morally defensible and justifiable, it is necessary to follow the criteria regarding the ‘right to war’ or *jus bellum*. The criteria relate to right authority, just cause, proportionality, right intention, action of last resort and reasonable prospect of success (Guthrie and Quinlan 2007). Whenever armed hostilities are undertaken by a legitimate authority (for example, a legally constituted state) it is a prime requirement that this is in pursuit of a *just cause*, in that the aim is to make reparation for a loss or undoing a wrong militarily. A *just cause*, it is understood, is the pursuit of an objective, an aim, by means of a war against those who have made themselves ‘morally liable to military attack’ (McMahan 2009: 5). Besides, it is also a requirement that the decision to go to war is taken as a last resort and with right intention after exhausting all options including a negotiated settlement of issues. Furthermore, in addition to ensuring that there is a reasonable prospect of success, *jus bellum* criteria also demand proportionality, that is, that the force involved in waging war should not be disproportionate to the end to be achieved. However, of all these *jus bellum* criteria, nearly all just war theorists attach priority to a *just cause*.

The other dimension of just war thinking (*jus bello*) concerns the 'conduct of the war' or 'how to fight' and is based on two key requirements: one refers to *discrimination* and the other to *proportionality* (Guthrie and Quinlan 2007). Discrimination requires that every effort is made to avoid deliberate attack on innocent civilians or, stated simply, that 'combatants must confine their intentional attacks to legitimate targets' (McMahan 2009: 12). A cardinal principle of *jus bello* is the doctrine of civilian immunity, that is, that civilians (non-combatants) can never be directly targeted and killed. The proportionality requirement, as in *jus bellum*, insists that no unreasonably heavy harm is done by using more force than necessary. Stated differently, both in *jus bellum* and *jus bello* it is expected that 'the bad effects of the war [do not] outweigh the good' (McMahan 2009: 18).

All these criteria relating to *jus bello* are indicative of the moral responsibility that soldiers themselves have to bear. This differentiation between *jus bellum* and *jus bello* is helpful to draw a 'line between the war itself for which soldiers are not responsible and the conduct of the war itself for which they are responsible, at least within their own sphere of activity' (Walzer 2000: 38). Put simply, the point of 'just war theory is to regulate warfare, to limit its outcome, and to regulate its conduct and legitimate scope' (Margalit and Walzer 2009: 21).

These just war principles have been invoked more recently by theologians and others to defend combating terrorism and counter-insurgency measures (such as in Kosovo, the Gulf War, the Iraq conflict, the Sinhalese–Tamil ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka which became a civil war, etc). For instance, President George W. Bush declared that the US-led intervention in Iraq was in pursuit of a *just cause* and morally justifiable as its main aim was to defend human freedom or what was termed defence of 'our way of life' against the tyranny of a ruthless dictator, Saddam Hussein. Overall, the political rhetoric of *just cause* was to protect and preserve the treasured values which, some have suggested, provide 'the only justifying case for the use of force in the western moral tradition' (Johnson 1992: 57). Furthermore, it was also stated, albeit on highly contested grounds, that the Iraq War became a battle of *last resort* (a *jus bellum* criterion). Besides, it was expected to have the support of the Iraqi people who had suffered for long under the tyrant's brutal regime.

However, Richardson (2006) makes the pointed and telling observation that the Iraq War is a classic instance of the use of the military to solve a political problem. Considering that the political culture of the United States was officially committed to a separation of religion and the state and that the purported *just cause* of the Iraq War was hardly defensible within the dictates of the just war tradition, this war framed in religious terms amounts to a virtual *holy war*. In the light of the heightened militarism of the Bush era in the United States, Stanley Hauerwas (2001), a respected American theologian, has called upon all Christians not to be defined by religious narratives or pressures coming from the political community; instead he has condemned 'all forms of patriotism, nationalism and state worship'.

There has also been considerable disquiet as to whether the *jus bello* criteria were met in the conduct of the Iraq War (Singer 2004). There has been mounting criticism that the force exercised on the civilians has been disproportionate and that the conduct of the war was in direct violation of international conventions, such as the provisions of Geneva Conventions pertaining to the treatment of prisoners of war, measures of intimidation against civilians, etc. These conventions on the rules of conduct stem from the principles of the just war tradition and were later incorporated in the body of international law enforced by the International Court of Justice.

But the sad lesson we have been given in recent times, not just from the Iraq War but also from the conflict in the Gaza Strip, is that as military technology becomes more and more powerful, the protection of civilians becomes a critical issue for those responsible for conducting modern warfare (de George 2007). With the firepower currently at the disposal of the military, it is rarely possible to conduct a war without attacking targets (which may or may not be exclusively military ones) and avoid civilian casualties. Many have argued that this kind of ruthless military strategy, using missiles or cluster bombs, blurs the just war boundary between regrettable and intentional harm to civilians. However, any conflict today based on the just war doctrine would have to confront the grim reality that innocent civilians do get killed or are grievously harmed.

More recently, the decree that all efforts be made to avoid attacking civilians has been introduced to give the just war notion some degree of moral legitimacy. This line of thinking reflects the tensions in the just war tradition between political and military necessity and having to act within moral commitments sought in the Christian scriptures. Pacifists and conscientious objectors within the Christian tradition bear witness to the need to act always in conformity with biblical commandments and God's commitment to peace in the world.

Even if one discounts the reality of 'absolute pacifisms', the practical demands of statecraft have to contend with demands of Christian ethics and morality. Hauerwas' call to Christians not to be defined by their political community serves to highlight the interplay between religion and politics that one witnesses in many sites of contemporary conflicts such as in Kashmir, Assam or Sri Lanka.

Unlike in the Christian West, in Islam, there is no concept of separation of Church and State as compared to what emerged following the Reformation. The just war discourse in Islam is associated with the notion of *jihad* and its deontological ethics, but it has been a matter of differing interpretations whether *jihad* is 'recommended as a struggle' or is an obligation (Rashid 2008). However, it is generally understood that a deontological view of morality sets a premium on duty and obligation to obey moral scriptures.

Admittedly, *jihad* is defensible only in defined circumstances and has its own limits as to when and how it could be executed. Nevertheless, in practice, *jihad* has a different meaning as a collective or individual duty, an obligation cast upon every individual whether one is a soldier or not (Johnson 1997) to defend Islam and the state. This certainly bears comparison with state-imposed conscription in

the Christianized countries of the West where conscription is cast as a collective obligation or duty imposed by a legitimate authority such as the state, in grave and emergency situations affecting national interests.

War, Conflict and Buddhism

Where does Buddhism as a non-Abrahamic faith stand on the question of war and conflict and, more specifically, the just war tradition? Buddhism condemns war unreservedly as an evil and attests to its utter futility in gaining a meaningful resolution of any conflict. This is clearly revealed in the Buddhist texts referring to the Buddha's intervention in the conflict between two kingdoms for the right to use the waters of the River Rohini. In the words of the Buddha: 'Why on account of some water of little worth would you destroy the invaluable lives of these soldiers, [and the Buddha goes on to caution that] victory arouses enmity and the defeated live in sorrow' (quoted in Jayatilleke 1969: 43). Non-violence or *ahimsa* as a cardinal ethical principle, originates from the first of the five precepts in the Buddhist ethical code. This relates to non-injury of living or 'sentient' beings and imposes a firm commitment to abstain from intentional harm or killing any other sentient being directly or by the agency of another person. The value placed on non-injury is strengthened by compassion as a motive underlying this precept (Saddhatissa 1970).

The absolute importance attached to this precept in the understanding of the Buddhist attitude to war and conflict is well summarized by Harvey, who points out that non-violence and peace are 'strongly represented in its value system [which is] endowed with rich resources for use in resolving conflicts' (Harvey 2000: 239). Buddhism as a religion may justifiably claim to be unique for not engaging in violence for its propagation or proselytization through the use of force or coercion of any form. The only sense in which there is any notion of a righteous war (*dharma yuddha*) is a war fought with ideas, the message of peace without bullets or military armour but with love, compassion, tolerance and benevolence. The doctrine of non-violence as practised by monks like Thich Nhat Hanh of Vietnam and Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia stands out as an exemplar in contemporary Buddhism (Harvey 2000).

However, Buddhist pacifism needs to be understood in the light of the principles of Buddhist ethics and social philosophy in the exposition of good and evil, right and wrong and 'what is justice and are our duties, obligations and rights' (Jayatilleke 1972: 13). The Buddhist ethics too, as in the Western intellectual tradition, is governed by the principle of moral autonomy or individual moral responsibility. This is well expressed in the dictum: 'By oneself alone is evil done, by oneself is evil avoided and by oneself is one saved' (Dhammapada, quoted in Jayatilleke 1972: 49). But soldiers directly involved in warfare bear the full

responsibility for their actions; others who are not directly involved too are not entirely free of guilt or wrongdoing (Harvey 2000).

Moral responsibility is not overridden by any notion of 'military necessity', which would seriously impinge on the morality of conduct. Besides, such a view would vitiate the basic principles of international law as well as *jus bello* criteria of morality, that is, acceptable conduct in warfare which legitimates the means used to achieve the objectives of war. The just war tradition, as previously noted, insists that the conduct of war is governed by independent standards or criteria, the most prominent of which 'concerns the treatment of innocent persons against the intentional killing of such persons' (Holmes 1992: 224).

Similarly Walzer (2000), a leading just war theorist, agrees that irrespective of the *jus bellum* status of the war or the right to war, soldiers are morally responsible for acts which, researchers say, clearly fall 'within their own sphere of activity' (Walzer 2000: 38). These pertain to such acts as how soldiers treat innocent civilians by protecting their rights as well as taking care of the well-being of any prisoners they may take into their custody. This, above all, presents the moral problematic of ends and means which, according to the Buddhist ethical and moral code, is readily resolved by emphatically asserting that ends such as the reason for going to war alone do not justify the means employed in the conduct of the war. In other words, just as in the just war tradition the *jus bello* criteria relate to the conduct of war, the Buddhist ethics too agree that soldiers are morally responsible for their acts (Walzer 2000: 38).

Likewise, the Buddhist ethics also include the *jus bello* criteria of discrimination and proportionality in that there is a presumption against the use of indiscriminate and/or excessive force and, more importantly, that the consequences of actions are relative to the motives and intentions, and the nature of acts performed on whom and how. For instance, the Buddhist canon identifies several conditions that need to be considered in determining whether the act of killing or injuring is wrongful or immoral. First and foremost, the act should relate to a sentient being and the person committing the act should be aware of this fact. Other factors pertain to intention or resolve to kill or harm by some appropriate means (Saddhatissa 1970).

The rationale of the Buddhist moral code reflects the teleological and relativistic nature of the Buddhist ethics which, unlike the deontological and absolutist ethical traditions, evaluates and appraises the moral consequences of any act or deed and its rightness or wrongness by motive and intention (*cetana*). While intention is only a necessary condition in evaluating the rightness or wrongness of any action, the sufficient conditions pertain to the nature of the act, whether it is appropriate and relevant. The distinction here between necessary and sufficient conditions points out the need, in Buddhism, to distinguish between ultimate long-term benefits and immediate pragmatic outcomes when one acts wrongfully but out of good intentions (for example, abortion to save the life of the mother) (Jayatilleke 1990).

Buddhism and Just War Thinking

There is a consensus that, unlike the Christian tradition, there is no place in Buddhism for a *holy war* or a just war. In a succinct analysis of the canonical literature in the *Theravada* tradition, Premasiri (2003: 6) concludes that the 'idea of a just war or righteous war involving the use of weapons of war and violence is conspicuously absent in the Buddhist canon' in its exposition of ethical principles and moral code of conduct. While affirming strongly that abstaining from harming or depriving the life of a sentient is a cardinal tenet of the Buddhist moral code, the Buddhist teachings nevertheless testify to the reality of conflict in human society and the extensive pain and suffering that such conflicts engender.

More importantly, Buddhist social philosophy highlights the need to understand how such pain comes to be inflicted, by identifying the root causes of conflict, violence and attendant suffering. These refer to the three basic motivational forces or causal conditions, namely, greed (*loba*), hatred (*doha*), and delusion (*moha*) or ignorance in determining the dynamics of human behaviour. Material deprivation is also seen as a critical factor in the unfolding of conflict and violence in society (Harvey 2000). The Buddhist texts, in addition, point out the ways of handling conflicts in human society by generating a correct understanding of their genesis and identifying skilful actions needed to resolve them.

The modes of conflict resolution also refer to such considerations as 'the importance of conciliatory methods of resolving conflicts before embarking on war' (Premasiri 2003: 10). In particular, they stipulate actions that are appropriate and adaptable to the particular circumstance. Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia, for example, has personified this practice of Buddhist social philosophy. As the author has argued elsewhere (Jayasuriya 2008), these strategies of conflict resolution became part of the armoury of Buddhist politics and statecraft.

Nevertheless, even though 'the timeless message of Gautama, the warrior prince [had been] for non violence' and there was no concept of a *holy war*, at times, Buddhism has appeared 'to legitimize the recourse to violence and just war' (Faure 2002). A classic instance of this is the defence of the honour and justice of military aggression offered by the illustrious Zen Roshi, Shaku Soen.¹ Tolstoy, in an anti-war essay published in 1904, quotes Soen as saying that:

Even though the Buddha teaches not to take another's life, he also teaches that all sentient beings through the exercise of infinite compassion will be united and thereby obtain final and ultimate peace. As means towards harmonizing of the incompatible, killing and war are necessary (quoted in Sharf 1995: 149).

Interestingly, in justifying the Japanese military aggression, Soen identified the ethics of Zen Buddhism as being consistent with the spirit of Japanese culture embodied in the legend of the Samurai. This was, of course, Soen's justification for claiming that after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, Zen was 'the ideal doctrine for the rising generation of modern Japan' (Sharf 1995: 113).

Similarly, the association of Buddhism with nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments arising from a national consciousness is clearly evident in contemporary Sri Lanka, which experienced the civil war as a result of the ethnic conflict between the majority Sinhalese community and the minority Sri Lankan Tamils. The tacit approval of the war by a sizeable section of the Buddhist clergy and laity has presented many Sri Lankan Buddhists with a *moral problematic* of justifying violence and intolerance in the context of a normative presumption of peace and non-violence in the Buddhist scriptures.

This moral dilemma is erroneously referred to as ‘just war ideology’ by Bartholomeusz (2002) who somewhat erroneously terms the phenomenon as ‘just war ideology’. He presents an empirical study of how some segments of the Sinhalese Buddhist community—monks and laity—have sought to defend the civil war in terms of a religious ideology (Little 1999). While locating his study in the framework of just war ideology, Bartholomeusz fails to consider an important dimension of just war thinking, namely, *jus bello* or the conduct of the war which, as stated earlier, warrants more consideration than *jus bellum*.

Using an anthropological approach structured along the lines of a narrative analysis based on the work of Hauerwas (1986), Bartholomeusz documents the ways in which the Sri Lankan Buddhists have sought to provide a moral justification of the war. The research draws on interviews with politically oriented monks and Sinhalese nationalists of the post-colonial state, who have sought to defend their approach and attitudes to the civil war primarily in religious terms, bordering on a *holy war* or national crusade. Briefly, this study, which is cast in the mould of Tambiah (1992), makes some useful observations on how the Sinhalese Buddhists have sought to characterize the civil war in Sri Lanka.

The research methodology of the study is characteristic of what has aptly been termed the ‘anthropology of Sinhala Buddhism’ (de Silva 2006), as it seeks to construct ‘Buddhism’ exclusively in terms of the practice of that religion (Gombrich and Obeyesekera 1988). The focus on popular Buddhism (de Silva 2006; Jayasuriya 2008) concentrates on the analysis of religion as a social and cultural phenomenon in a specific context and generates such concepts as ‘Thai Buddhism’ or ‘Sinhalese Buddhism’. The logic and rationale of this mode of analysis is grounded in terms of binary categories such as ‘great and little tradition, or doctrinal/historical and lived/practiced’ (de Silva 2006), and assumes that ‘real Buddhism’ is to be found in Buddhist practices, that is, Buddhism as ‘experienced on the ground [rather than on] how Buddhism is regularly presented’ (Bartholomeusz 2002: xx). Without entering into the finer points of this theoretical controversy about ‘what can count as Buddhism’, we would be well advised, following de Silva (2006), to leave Buddhists to say what Buddhism is and allow social scientists to explain how the Buddhist tradition gets mobilized in various social and political projects.

The research data analyzed in Bartholomeusz’ study are based on information obtained from a select group of respondents, including monks and laity. They also draw to a lesser extent on archival and library material in documenting how certain

Sri Lankan Buddhists have sought to defend the right to engage in an armed conflict with a rebel Tamil group, the LTTE, which fought for a separate state. Focusing exclusively on one facet of the just war tradition, the right to war (*jus bellum*), the author identifies two broad approaches in attempts to provide a moral justification of the war. Whereas one approach is based on a reading of the *Theravada* canonical literature, the other leans heavily, if not exclusively, on post-canonical historical narratives, in particular the *Mahavamsa*. Importantly, arguing along the lines of ‘narrative-analysis’ by Hauerwas and Jones (1989), the data obtained from both approaches as ‘embodying’ Buddhist stories are examined in the language of narrative discourse.

Those who leaned on the Buddhist canon sought justification of the war in texts such as the *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta*, cited by Bartholomeusz and subjected to loose and almost anecdotal interpretation. On the basis of these data drawn from the Buddhist canon, Bartholomeusz observes that several respondents, despite affirming strongly the doctrine of non-violence, qualified themselves by accepting some amount of violence as a protective or defensive measure. This is also acknowledged by Harris (1994) who, in a more probing analysis of the canonical texts on the question of violence, shows that Buddhism, while not approving of such violence, seeks to understand its occurrence by evaluating the motives for such actions. As observed earlier, from the point of moral consequences, it is clearly stated that ‘defensive violence is less bad than aggressive violence’ (Harvey 2000).

The other line of argument of Sri Lankan Buddhists, which is fully documented, consists of an analysis of religious stories drawn from historical narratives such as the *Mahavamsa*. Following Hauerwas and Jones (1989), Bartholomeusz applies the ‘idea of narratives’ in the context of religious stories to show how Sinhalese Buddhists use them. He also employs the narratives drawn from the canon and the historical chronicles (such as the *Mahavamsa*) to defend the dharma or the Buddhist ethics in shaping their attitudes towards the war. The *Mahavamsa* is a mythical-historical narrative dating from the sixth century BC, which refers extensively to the legend of the warrior king Dutugemunu, revered not only for his victory over an alien *damila* (Tamil) king Elara, but also for fortifying the relics of the Buddha. The latter was in confirmation of the historical legend that the Buddha himself on a visit to the island decreed that Sri Lanka be cherished for ever as the home of Buddhism and the sacred island belonged to the Sinhalese. Positing a conjunction of race, nation and culture/religion, the *Mahavamsa* contains ‘the seeds for a war ideology’, which resonates strongly to this day. This is what purports to lay the foundations of a national and religious consciousness built on the assumption that the ‘island of Sri Lanka and its inhabitants [are] the guardians of Buddhism [and accorded] divine protection’ (Seneviratne 1997: 8).

It is assumed that the compelling logic and power of this historical narrative overrides any normative doctrinal prescriptions against engaging in violence or warfare. Juxtaposing two competing normative prescriptions—non-violence and the injunction to protect the *dhamma* (Buddhism)—several respondents in this

study felt that they had a *prima facie* duty to protect both *dhamma* and the Sinhala nation. Accordingly, Sinhalese Buddhists such as those quoted in this research are not just supportive of the government in conducting the civil war, but are personally and morally committed to engage in this war as ‘a *prima facie* duty’, overriding any moral commitment such as to non-violence, peace and harmony. This reference to *duty* incidentally prompts Bartholomeusz to conclude erroneously that the Buddhist ethics can be characterized in deontological terms. In Buddhism, duties are not prescriptive modes of conduct; they are rather morally desirable ways of acting to be followed by an individual.

There is no doubt that the national consciousness implicit in the culture of the majority Sinhalese community embodies the belief that Sri Lanka is the designated sanctuary of Buddhism which belongs to the Sinhalese Buddhists (Seneviratne 1997) This conflation of religion and ethnicity has been central to the construction of a *Sinhala identity* or the authentic *self*, which is differentiated from the other, the unauthentic Sri Lankans. In the process of indigenization, the Sinhalese Christians, Anglicans and Catholics alike have sought to bring the Christian culture closer to the Sinhalese culture (Bartholomeusz and de Silva 1998). But the Tamils, like all the others, live there ‘only by the good grace of Sinhalese Buddhist sufferance’ (Devotta 2007: 1). Hence, threat to territorial integrity means threat not only to the nation and the unique standing of Sri Lanka as the home of Buddhism but also the authenticity of Sri Lanka, that is, the *Sinhala culture*.

According to Bartholomeusz, the attack on *Sinhala culture* was perceived to be the *just cause* of the civil war. Concurrently, it signified the pursuit of a *just order* as posited by just war scholars (Bartholomeusz 2002). This bears comparison with the *Mahavamsa*, which says that King Dutugemunu did not go to war for glory but for a *just order* to protect the *dhamma*. However, the scope and validity of these historical narratives not only in legitimating the just war thesis but also in explaining the conflict with the LTTE are contested (Abeysekera 2002; Brekke 2009). Admittedly, Bartholomeusz’s analysis merely underlines ‘an oft repeated theme in contemporary Sri Lankan political and religious rhetoric about the war and its justification’ (Bartholomeusz 2002: 4).

But from an analytical point of view, this conceptualization and mode of analysis have very limited utility as they draw pointed attention to one facet of this conflict, namely, an ethno-religious dimension of identity politics (Little 1999). This dimension may well include the role played by cultural and religious narratives or stories in shaping the moral decisions of individuals when confronted with ethnic predicaments. However, these ethno-religious factors cannot be considered in isolation and need to be placed in relation to a variety of other socio-political factors to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Tamil–Sinhalese political turmoil. As Olsen (1993) rightly observes, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has been analyzed from a variety of perspectives, including identity politics and the revival of both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms in the post-colonial era.

Overall, what the narrative-analysis highlighted by Bartholomeusz presents is, not just the conceptualization of an ethical dilemma confronting Sinhalese

Buddhists, but also the complex socio-political dynamics in restoring peace and harmony for a divided nation. Put differently, the subtext of his study is to ‘free Buddhism from romantic ideas about South Asian religion, South Asian pacifism and South Asian non-violence’ (Bartholomeusz 2002: 67). Bechert (2003) emphatically rejects this language of discourse, which he claims is based on a flawed narrative-analysis of texts and chronicles in framing our understanding of the religious consciousness. Accordingly, Buddhists are urged ‘to return to the values as taught by the Buddha himself and found in the ancient canonical texts’.

Religion and Politics in Buddhist Countries

What the foregoing analysis demonstrates vividly is the extent to which ‘the Buddhist law’ in many countries of South and Southeast Asia has had ‘to bow to reasons of state’ (Faure 2002). This highlights the interaction between religion and politics which has been ‘central to an archive of literature ... in South Asia’ (Abeysekera 2002: 67). The just war thinking implicit in the Buddhist canon has therefore to be located more generally within the broad discourse on religion and politics (Wuthnow 1998), especially as it relates to the Buddhist countries of South and Southeast Asia. For this reason, it is imperative that the approach to war and conflict in Buddhist countries be linked to principles of statecraft, all of which in a way purport to be based on moral righteousness and extol ‘the virtues of forbearance, tolerance, forgiving and non violence’ (Guruge 2005: 186).

Furthermore, these Buddhist countries derive much of their thinking in this regard from Emperor Asoka’s exposition of statecraft in the third century BC. This spelt out ‘a clear demarcation between the ‘Two Wheels of the Dhamma’ [that is, the mundane or *lokiya* and the transcendent or other-worldly or *lokuttara*] which allowed the worldly ruler to work in concert with the monastic hierarchy’ (May 2003: 141). This demarcation, reflecting the Buddhist understanding of secularism (Jayasuriya 2008), was framed strictly within the Buddhist compendium of social and moral philosophy built around the concepts of moral righteousness and the cardinal tenets of *ahimsa*.

The Buddhist approach to statecraft, originating from Emperor Asoka and considered as the ‘Asokan paradigm’ (May 2003), serves to clarify the nature and character of the relationship between religion and state in *Theravada* Buddhism. This was clearly framed within the spirit of humanism and as an adherence to the principles and practices of the rule of law and deliberative democracy (Jayasuriya 2008). The Asokan paradigm maintained that the ruler and the state were closely linked with the monastic order (the *Sangha*) and the people in not only sustaining religious institutions but also, more importantly, the ruler. While ‘religion was not separate from the state, it was not only closely identified with it, supporting but also supported by it; unlike Christianity, however, Buddhism as a whole does not have any central doctrinal authority’ (Harding 2007: 2).

A striking feature of this triangular interrelationship of the ruler or state, the *Sangha* and the community was that the *Sangha* and its institutions did not have a formal relationship with the state. This skilfully engineered model helped to promote reciprocity between the state and the *Sangha* or the 'Church' (Jayasuriya 2008) and helped to legitimize the authority of the ruler or state. Interdependency for mutual benefit was the guiding and compelling principle underlying this reciprocal relationship. In simple terms, the *Sangha* could not survive without any political support, be it from a monarchy or a republic.

This foundational Buddhist model of church and state relations based on the Asokan paradigm, as Tambiah (1976) observes, has been subject to change in countries such as Thailand. More importantly, Tambiah makes the valid point that the *Theravada* doctrine of kingship has been highly resilient, that it has sought in Thailand, to integrate the spiritual and mundane in matters of statecraft. This was achieved by considering the ruler or king as *bodhisattva* (cosmic liberator) and *chakravatti* (terrestrial emperor). May (2003) regards this as a variant of the Asokan paradigm, a subtype, which he identifies with the Kanishka paradigm. In this model of statecraft the two wheels of the *dhamma* 'become one with the total incorporation of the sangha and dhamma into the state ideology' (May 2003: 142). In other words, there was an 'amalgamation of *rajastham* (individual acts and application by the King) and *dhammasthanam* (absolute moral law)' (Tiruchelvam 1993: 35). This integration of the spiritual and the mundane has gained tangible expression in Thailand's recent constitutional reforms with the 'use of Buddhism to create legitimacy [and even on occasion] moulded Buddhism itself ... to suit the purposes of the state' (Harding 2007: 4).

However, a unique and commendable feature of this classical model of statecraft was the absence of any claim for Buddhism to be regarded as state religion. Asoka himself made no such claim but on the contrary strove steadfastly to ensure 'religious freedom by supporting not just the Buddhist monks but ascetics of other religious sects' (Harvey 2000). Perhaps, more remarkable was Asoka's predisposition to espouse what is now referred to as an interfaith dialogue by endeavouring at all times to negotiate differences between different faiths and religious orders through participation and consensus-building. This political philosophy underlines that in conflict resolution, the Asokan paradigm sought to achieve peace and social harmony by giving visible expression to Buddhist principles and practices in a public space of critical discussion where there was a pluralism of viewpoints and arguments that constituted public opinion.

US President Barack Obama, in framing a new foreign policy and distancing himself from the Bush era, advocates the importance of negotiating and engaging in dialogue with those demonized as belonging to the 'axis of evil'. This policy stance is consistent with the logic and rationale advocated by Richardson (2006) in combating terrorism. She rejects forcefully the Bush approach as an example of 'American exceptionalism run amok' (Erdal 2009). Instead of deploying the military and 'beating the bad guys', Richardson proposes a more modulated approach which 'seeks to understand terrorists [as] people like you and me'.

What emerges from the foregoing analysis is that the socio-political ideas, implicit in the Asokan model of statecraft and also in the dynamics of the separation of Church and State, can be compared with the secularization of religion in the West, which is regarded as a post-Enlightenment phenomenon (Jayasuriya 2008). The principles and values of the European Enlightenment, such as equality, tolerance of dissent, freedom and justice, as this author has argued elsewhere (Jayasuriya 2008), were remarkably congruent with the political philosophy of Asoka. As Sen (2005) rightly observes, the Asokan model was firmly committed to 'public communication and discussion' in an 'open society'.

Democracy in the Asokan paradigm, understood as a way of thinking and acting, implies a rational commitment to freedom, equality and tolerance in a plural society, profoundly open minded, if not agnostic. This form of democracy and social theorizing is fundamentally a secular ideal which served as an 'ideal type' model for many Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. It was, as we have seen earlier, resilient in the Thai adaptation of Buddhism to the monarchy and the state. Elsewhere, as in Sri Lanka, the Asokan paradigm generated a kind of pragmatic 'accommodative secularism' (Bartholomeusz 1989) in determining states' compliance with some forms of religious practice. At the same time, the *Sangha* was readily available to act as the moral conscience of the community, thereby ensuring the accountability of the rulers. This was clearly evident in the recent action of many Burmese (Myanmar) Buddhist monks against the authoritarian generals at the helm of the state.

This demonstrates the extent to which Buddhism is regarded as a religious-philosophical system, which eschews all forms of violence and is deeply committed to peace and harmony. It may be 'relative' by virtue of having to bow to reasons of state. Nevertheless, on the whole Buddhism 'remains more tolerant than other great ideologies' (Faure 2002) and is able to incorporate much of just war thinking especially of *jus bello* or justice in the conduct of warfare. Furthermore, the Asokan paradigm, as in the Western democratic model, sought to build mutual trust and confidence by engaging in negotiations and pursuing democratic codes of conduct, including conflict resolution. It is astonishing to note how the principles of Asoka's statecraft are as valid today (for Buddhist countries) as when they were first propounded about two thousand years ago.

Note

1. Shaku Soen was a Japanese Buddhist honorific and a proponent of the 'New Buddhism' movement that arose in Japan during the Meiji period (1868–1912).

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