SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

affinity
gospel churches in partnership

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FREEDOM WORTH FIGHTING FOR

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SOCIAL ISSUES BULLETIN

News, Articles and Reports from the Social Issues Team

ISSUE 62 – OCTOBER 2026

Freedom Worth Fighting For

CONTENTS

Editorial		2
A Critique of Christian Pacifism	Tim Dieppe	5
SASRA: Caring for UK Armed Forces Since 1838	Martin Gliniecki	13
The Challenge of Moral Certainty in a Just War	Martin Gliniecki	17
Autonomous Weapons, AI and Moral Conscience	Jeremy Peckham	24
Update from The Christian Institute	Sam Webster	36
Current Bioethics Issues – September 2026	Dr Calum MacKellar	38

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Editorial: Freedom Worth Fighting For

In this issue of the *Social Issues Bulletin*, we present four articles that explore issues related to warfare.

Tim Dieppe's article (p. 5) on Christian pacifism considers whether or not Christians can ever support or be involved in violence on behalf of the state. He examines approaches to war found in the Old and New Testaments, the Early Church and C.S. Lewis, concluding by arguing that the burden of proof for pacifism lies firmly with the pacifist.

Martin Gliniecki's first article (p. 13) explores how SASRA's mission – which is to spread the saving knowledge of Christ among serving personnel – particularly complements the moral component of the Ministry of Defence's understanding of both fighting power and military capability.

Martin Gliniecki's second article (p. 17) considers how the changing character of war affects the moral component of fighting power and, in asking our troops to fight, how we should also prepare them for the realities of war, so that they do the right thing and are less likely to be traumatised by the aftereffects of conflict.

Jeremy Peckham's article (p. 24) outlines how a Christian Anthropology informs our thinking on the ethical questions surrounding AI, with particular focus on what AI is and how it compares to human nature. He also consider what the Bible teaches about engaging in war and then discusses how that perspective (together with a biblical understanding of God's nature as well as the International Conventions on The Laws of Armed Conflict) form a basis for resolving some of the ethical dilemmas surrounding the development and the use of AI in weapons.

Alongside these four articles, we also include an update from The Christian Institute about some of their recent cases (p. 36) as well as Dr Calum MacKellar's latest review of current bioethics issues (p. 38).

A Critique of Christian Pacifism

By Tim Dieppe

What is Christian pacifism?

I recently re-watched the film *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016) with my teenage son. This remarkable true story is about the American combat medic Desmond Doss who, as a Seventh-Day Adventist, refused to use a weapon of any kind. Somehow, he still managed to qualify as a combat medic. He went on to become the first conscientious objector to be awarded the Medal of Honour for his service in the Battle of Okinawa in 1945. Doss repeatedly prayed: "Lord, please help me get one more," as he rescued injured men from the combat zone. He is officially credited with saving 75 men during the battle. The film closes with an interview with Doss himself shortly before his death. It is an inspiring story with a powerful Christian message.

Interestingly, Doss had a strong conviction that the war was just – but he had an equally strong conviction that he should not carry a weapon or take a human life. Understandably, the other soldiers found it very difficult to respect his views on nonviolence, but they did grow to admire his bravery in the battlefield.

Understanding Doss's view helps us to realise that there are a range of views on pacifism and non-violence. It is one thing to personally decide that you will not use a weapon against another; it is another to oppose all warfare for any reason. In this article, I am defining a Christian pacifist as one who is opposed to all forms of warfare or violence. I suggest that this is what is usually meant by pacifism.

The focus of this article will be on whether Christians can ever support or be involved in violence on behalf of the state. There is a separate, but related question about whether Christians should ever defend themselves or their loved ones with violence if necessary. That is not the focus of this article.

Biblical arguments for pacifism

Old Testament

It is not really possible to make a biblical case for pacifism from the Old Testament. Deuteronomy has a whole chapter on how to go to war (Deut. 20). Multiple battles are related in the historical books, and God is clearly supportive of Israel in many of these battles which are portrayed in terms of good against evil. King David writes that God "trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle" (Ps. 144:1).

Pacifists sometimes appeal to the sixth commandment which in the KJV and RSV reads: "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13). Most modern translations, however, translate this as: "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13 NIV, ESV, NASB, NRSV, NET). The NET footnote explains: "The verb תִּרְצָח (*ratsakh*) refers to the premeditated or accidental taking of the life of another human being; it includes any unauthorized killing (it is used for the punishment of a murderer, but that would not be included in the prohibition)."[1]

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1 'Bible Gateway Passage: Exodus 20:13 - New English Translation', Bible Gateway, accessed 18 September 2026, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2020%3A13&version=NET.

Specifically, the semantic domain of the Hebrew word used does not include killing in warfare. What the sixth commandment prohibits is murder. It does not prohibit execution or killing in warfare.

Any biblical defence of pacifism is going to have to rely on some New Testament texts and argue for a fairly radical ethical discontinuity on this subject between the Old and New Testaments. One could go so far as to say that it will inevitably be verging towards Marcionism in ethical approach.

The Sermon on the Mount

The Christian case for pacifism relies heavily on a few key verses from the Sermon on the Mount. First, Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers." (Matt. 5:9) Christians are called to be peacemakers, whether this involves making peace between individuals or nations. We are to be peaceable people and people who promote peace. This instruction does not, however, necessarily imply that all warfare is wrong.

Second, Jesus said: “But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.” (Matt. 5:39) This appears to advocate an ethic of non-violence. But we should put this verse in context. The verse before is the *lex talionis*: "You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth." Jesus then elaborates by saying that we should not resist an evil person. This injunction is one of six examples where Jesus is reinterpreting the law. Or perhaps it is better to say that he is expounding the spirit of the law. He expands the law against adultery to say that lust is wrong. He expands the law against breaking oaths to say that everything we say should be trustworthy. Here, he expands the *lex talionis* by saying that it is not a license to retaliate.

Earlier in the same sermon, Jesus insisted that he had not "come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfil them." (Matt. 5:17) The *lex talionis* is not abolished. The *lex talionis* is there to limit the legal penalties for crimes. The legal principle is that no one should be punished with more severity than was involved in the crime they committed. But my point is that the *lex talionis* applies to the laws of the land and the courts, not to individuals. Jesus was saying that this does not justify personal retaliation. This is no more than was already said in context where the *lex talionis* is found in Deuteronomy 19:21. Deuteronomy 19:15-21 is about a crime committed against someone. The parties are to appear before a court to have the dispute judged – personal retaliation is not allowed.

The *lex talionis* remains in place to limit retribution in the courts so that punishment is proportional to the crime. The instruction to individuals not to retaliate does not change that. It does not mean that the courts should not punish someone who assaults you. The government should still punish the wrongdoer, but the individual shouldn’t take justice into their own hands. There is no place for vigilantism in the Bible.

It is crucial to realise this distinction between the duties of individuals and the duties of governments. Individuals should not punish or retaliate. But governments should administer justice, including retributive punishments. Jesus calls us as individuals not to resist an evil person– but does not mean that a nation should refrain from having a police force or a judiciary. Neither does it mean that Christians should refuse to participate in the police or the judiciary. Nor does it mean that nations cannot have armed forces which at times engage in warfare for the restraint of evil.

The third verse from the Sermon on the Mount cited in support of pacifism is just a couple of verses later: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matt. 5:43-44)

Nowhere does the Bible instruct people to ‘hate your enemy.’ That was a wrongful extension of the law by the Pharisees. Jesus is here expanding on the instruction to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev.

19:18) Once again, though, in context, it is clear that this command to "love your enemies" is personal rather than political. Jesus is addressing the crowd. Just a few sentences later, he illustrates the point by saying: "if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others?" (Matt 5:47) All the instructions in this context are to individuals. They do not negate the duties of governments. It is wrong to confuse personal duties with political responsibilities. This distinction has long been recognised by interpreters of the Sermon on the Mount through the ages.[2] An individual requirement to love your personal enemies does not entail that national warfare is necessarily wrong.

Romans 12

Similar principles would apply to Romans 12:14-21, where we are instructed to "bless those who persecute [us]" and not to repay anyone for evil. That does not mean that governments should never seek to restrain or punish evil. Paul approves of the magistrate's punishment of wrongdoers just a few verses later in the very next chapter (Rom. 13:4). It is worth remembering that chapter divisions were not in the original text, so the passages should be read together. So, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21) is immediately followed by: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. . . . for he does not bear the sword in vain." (Rom. 13:1-4) Read in this way, it is clear that the command to overcome evil with good is a command to individuals which does not negate the responsibility of governments to be a 'terror' to those who do evil, and to use the sword if necessary.

Note that it is the same Greek word, κακός, which is translated 'evil' in Romans 12:21, translated 'bad' in Romans 13:3, and translated 'wrong' and 'wrongdoer' in Romans 13:4 (ESV). Thus, while individuals should overcome evil with good, rulers are a terror to those who do evil, and they bear the sword to carry out God's wrath on those who practise evil. The role of individuals and of the state is clearly differentiated here.

Furthermore, Romans 12:19 says: "never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.'" This is a command to individuals. Just a few verses later in Romans 13:4 we have: "For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer." Cognate Greek words are used in both verses for 'vengeance' and 'wrath'. Paul is saying that individuals should leave the state to avenge and carry out God's wrath. That is a duty of the state, but not of individuals. In context, these verses are actually opposed to pacifism.

Use of a sword

Another key verse used to defend pacifism is Jesus's rebuke of Peter when he cut the ear of the servant of the High Priest. Jesus rebuked him saying: "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Matt. 26:52; c.f. John 18:11) Peter was wrong to use his sword in this instance. His action was rash, without even waiting for Jesus to answer the question about using swords (Luke 22:49). Jesus knew his time had come. He was not going to fight against God's plan now. His disciples should have recognised this. Jesus was not leading an army or a rebellious mob as he expressly states in the same context (Matt 26:55). He was expecting to be betrayed, arrested, and led to his death.

Jesus's use of the phrase "all who take the sword will perish by the sword," is clearly a proverbial saying. It plays off Genesis 9:6, which says that those who shed human blood should have their blood

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2 See: David Corey and Daryl Charles, *The Just War Tradition* (Regnery Gateway, 2023), 235n82, perlego.com/1/book/4154451.

shed by humans. The saying is repeated in a different form in Revelation 13:10. The point is that generally speaking, violence begets violence. Rash use of a sword, or any weapon, is always wrong.

Elsewhere, Jesus speaking proverbially says: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Matt 10:34) Earlier, Jesus told his disciples: "if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one." (Luke 22:36) When his disciples said, "here are two swords," he replied: "That's enough." (Luke 22:38). This instruction to carry swords strongly implies that Jesus supports people using weapons in certain circumstances. Perhaps in self-defence, or to defend a vulnerable person who is being attacked. Although there are figurative and allegorical readings of this passage, I do not find them persuasive. In any case, a pacifist reading of scripture more or less *requires* a non-literal reading of this passage; whereas a non-pacifist can read it literally, figuratively or even allegorically in support of a Two Swords doctrine.[3] If taken literally, his instruction about swords here makes it very hard to argue that Jesus was a strict pacifist.

Biblical passages against pacifism

The clearest passage against pacifism in the New Testament is where John the Baptist is asked by some soldiers: "And what should we do?" (Luke 3:14) He answers, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay." It is very significant that he does not say that they should quit being soldiers for the Roman Empire. Neither did he tell the tax collectors to stop collecting taxes for the Romans. The implication is that Jesus is endorsing the validity of Christians serving in state armies and, indeed, in other civic roles for governments.

When on trial before Pilate, Jesus stated: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." (John 18:36) Jesus's kingdom is not a worldly political kingdom like the kingdoms of the world. We should not try to make it such. But Jesus says that, if it were a worldly political kingdom, then his servants would have fought for it. This is a neutral statement about the fact that the kingdoms of the world do sometimes wage war. No moral judgment on this fact is made by Jesus. The morality of this fact is not discussed.

Pacifism in the Early Church

Roland Bainton, in his influential book, *Christian Attitude toward War and Peace*, makes this striking claim: "The three Christian positions with regard to war . . . matured in chronological sequence, moving from pacifism to the just war to the Crusade. The age of persecution down to the time of Constantine was the age of pacifism to the degree that during this period no Christian author to our knowledge approved of Christian participation in battle."[4]

Several other writers have made similar claims.[5] On close examination of the Church Fathers, this claim does not stack up. While many Church Fathers emphasised living peaceably, this does not necessarily imply opposition to participation in warfare.

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3 The theory that the swords together represent spiritual and temporal power, a particularly popular interpretation in medieval theology.

4 R.H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), 66.

5 See discussion in: Corey and Charles, *The Just War Tradition*, 23-28.

Tertullian, in his *Apology*, argues that Christians are model citizens, writing: "We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you."[6] This implies that it was widely recognised that there were some Christians in the army. Tertullian also refers to an event known as the 'Thundering Legion' when soldiers (who were fighting in the Twelfth Legion under Marcus Aurelius) were running out of water. The soldiers knelt to pray, upon which there was thunder which caused their water supply to be refreshed and the enemy to flee. Tertullian writes: "You will see by examining the letters of Marcus Aurelius, that most grave of emperors, in which he bears his testimony that that Germanic drought was removed by the rains obtained through the prayers of the Christians who chanced to be fighting under him."[7]

Eusebius also reports this miracle, saying that the "story is related by non-Christian writers."[8] This is clear recognition that it was well known that Christians were in the army. There is no hint from either writer that they believed Christians were wrong to serve in this way.

Clement of Alexandria writes: "But for a man bare feet are quite in keeping, except when he is on military service."[9] There is no objection to participating in military service here either. Lactantius, writing of the battles of Constantine, says, for example: "The hand of the Lord prevailed, and the forces of Maxentius were routed."[10] It is hard not to read this as an endorsement of participation in warfare.

Dionysius of Alexandria wrote that the martyrs known to him included: "men and women, both young men and old, both maidens and aged matrons, both soldiers and private citizens—every class and every age."[11] By this description, soldiers could be Christian martyrs.

There are a small number of pre-Constantinian tomb inscriptions of Christians who are named as soldiers in the Roman army. As Bainton himself notes, these inscriptions "prove that the Christian communities where these men were buried did not prohibit the recording of the military profession on their tombs."[12] They also show that there were at least some Christians who were unashamed of serving as soldiers.

I am not saying that there were no Christian pacifists amongst the early Church Fathers, but I am saying that there was widespread recognition and acceptance of Christians serving in the military, contrary to the claims of Bainton and others.

It is only later, once we get to Augustine, that we start to get a just war theory properly articulated. That is not the topic for this essay, beyond noting that the just war tradition has been widely accepted through church history ever since.[13] The Thirty-Nine Articles explicitly states that it is lawful for Christians to participate in war,[14] as does the Westminster Confession.[15]

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6 Tertullian, *Apology*, 42. (ANF 3:49).

7 Tertullian, *Apology*, 5. (ANF 3:22).

8 Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.5 (NPNF2 1:220).

9 Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, 2.12 (ANF 2:267).

10 Lactantius, *On the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died*, 44. (ANF 7:318).

11 Dionysius of Alexandria, *Extant Fragments*, 2.1 (ANF 6:96).

12 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 69.

13 Corey and Charles, *The Just War Tradition*, 1-22.

14 Church of England, 'Articles of Religion,' art. XXXVII, *The Book of Common Prayer*, accessed September 11, 2026, churchofengland.org.

15 *The Westminster Confession Of Faith*, (Jazzybee Verlag, 2012), 'Of the Civil Magistrate'.

C.S. Lewis on Pacifism

C.S. Lewis wrote an essay called 'Why I am not a pacifist', which is included in the collection of essays titled *The Weight of Glory*.[16] The essay was originally a talk delivered to a pacifist society in Oxford sometime in 1940.[17] There is no record of how this talk was received by that society, but credit to them for inviting him to give it!

Lewis first argues the point purely from reason. He agrees that, putting it mildly, "war is very disagreeable."[18] But he argues that no one can prove that "wars always do more harm than good."[19] Citing various historical examples he states: "It seems to me that history is full of useful wars as well as of useless wars."[20] No one can prove that every war was useless.

Lewis then moves on to consider whether war is the greatest evil in the world. He agrees that "war is a very great evil."[21] But Lewis argues: "The doctrine that war is always a greater evil seems to imply a materialist ethic, a belief that death and pain are the greatest evils. But I do not think they are."[22] Here he is implying that it is not a Christian position to believe that death and pain are the greatest evils. He is quite right. Thomas Madden, in his review of Riley-Smith's helpful book on the Crusades, puts it this way: "the concept that violence is intrinsically evil belongs solely to the modern world. It is not Christian."[23] These statements are worth reflecting on. Violence is not intrinsically evil. It depends on the context. A materialistic culture will tend to view violence and death as the very worst evils, but a Christian culture will not. Is the popularity of pacifism directly related to the popularity of materialism?

Lewis is very dismissive of the view that we could prevent wars if only we could increase the popularity of pacifism. He points out, "Only liberal societies tolerate Pacifists." He then continues: "In the liberal society, the number of Pacifists will either be large enough to cripple the state as a belligerent, or not. If not, you have done nothing. If it is large enough, then you have handed over the state which does tolerate Pacifists to its totalitarian neighbour who does not. Pacifism of this kind is taking the straight road to a world in which there will be no Pacifists."[24]

You could say this kind of pacifism is self-defeating. The more pacifists you get in a state, the more likely that state will be taken over by a state that does not tolerate pacifists! You can't abolish war by pacifism.

Lewis concludes his essay by arguing that the weight of both human and Divine authority stands clearly against the pacifist position. With the reasoning above and the weight of the vast majority of human thinkers and Christian interpreters throughout history being against pacifism, Lewis is confident in not being a pacifist.

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16 C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (London: Harper One, 1980).

17 Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 18.

18 Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 72.

19 Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 73.

20 Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 74.

21 Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 78.

22 Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 77.

23 Thomas F. Madden, 'Inventing the Crusades', *First Things*, 1 June 2009, https://firstthings.com/inventing-the-crusades/.

24 Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 78.

The burden of proof is on the pacifist

Myron Penner argues that pacifists bear the burden of proof to justify their beliefs before they can expect any others to accept them.[25] This is because of the apparent moral failure of pacifism to value public safety appropriately. A Christian non-pacifist will believe that it is immoral not to intervene to protect lives in cases of terrorism, for example. Should police really not have acted to protect lives in the 2025 Manchester synagogue attack? Surely we are grateful that police used force to arrest Edward Little when on his way with a gun to attempt to kill Christian preacher Hatun Tash? Many similar examples could be cited.

While a Christian pacifist will argue that followers of Christ ought to reject violence in all forms in every circumstance, the Christian non-pacifist will argue that followers of Christ ought to reject violence in all forms in almost every circumstance. This places the burden of proof squarely on the pacifist to demonstrate that there are no circumstances in which violence is ever justified.

Violent intervention saves lives

Many examples could be cited when violent intervention has saved lives. In addition to the examples above, one thinks of the Iranian Embassy siege in 1980. Last year I read Ben MacIntyre's gripping account of the siege which was deservedly a bestseller.[26] The terrorists took 27 hostages. Negotiators tried to string out the process. After six days, one hostage was executed and his body thrown outside. At this Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher authorised the SAS to raid the embassy. After 17 minutes of high drama broadcast live on television, five of the six terrorists were killed, one was captured, and all but one of the remaining hostages were rescued. This violent action undoubtedly saved lives.

Former Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, in his recent book, *Can We Be Great Again?*, cites British military intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000 as "a textbook example of successful military intervention."[27] Civil war had been raging for years, costing an estimated 75,000 lives, and causing two million people to lose their homes. The Revolutionary United Front frequently captured civilians, including children, and brutally hacked off their limbs.

Charged with evacuating British and other non-combatants, Brigadier David Richards stretched the meaning of his orders to commit British forces to help the government in Sierra Leone defeat the rebel forces. He pulled together a coalition of forces and proceeded to take on the militia. This went well, until eleven British soldiers were taken captive by a rebel group. After two weeks of unsuccessful negotiations, a daring rescue operation was carried out which successfully saved all the hostages, with one British fatality. Shortly afterwards the rebel groups agreed to a ceasefire. Since then, says Hunt, "for the last twenty years, the country has been a beacon of stability in West Africa."[28] The burden of proof is on the pacifist to explain why violence in such cases was not justified.

Theologian Matthew Flannagan, who is from New Zealand, cites an example of a 22-hour long terrorist shooting spree in Aramoana in 1990.[29] The terrorist killed 13 members of the community, including four children, and injured three others before he fired at police. The police returned fire and fatally wounded

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25 Myron A. Penner, 'The Pacifist's Burden of Proof,' *Philosophia Christi 7*, no. 1 (2005).

26 Ben MacIntyre, *The Siege* (London: Penguin, 2024).

27 Jeremy Hunt, *Can We Be Great Again?: Why a Dangerous World Needs Britain* (Swift Press, 2025), 30.

28 Hunt, *Can We Be Great Again?*, 30.

29 Matthew Flannagan, 'Thank God for the New Zealand Anti-terrorist Squad,' *Philosophia Christi 18*, no. 1 (2016)

him. Flannagan raised this case in a panel discussion with some pacifist-leaning theologians who were evasive in their responses. They did not want to approve of the killing of the terrorist, but neither did they want to condemn it. I suggest these theologians failed to meet the burden of proof which rests on the pacifist position.

Conclusion

The primary mistake of Christian pacifism is to read commands in the Bible intended for individuals as if they are commands for the state. I have tried to demonstrate in this article that that is not the case. The other mistake is to assume that the early church was entirely pacifist. That is also not the case. Pacifism, it seems to me, is very hard to justify in the face of countless examples where use of force appears justified and certainly saved lives. I conclude, therefore, that Christians ought not to be pacifists.

Tim Dieppe works as Head of Public Policy at Christian Concern. He joined Christian Concern in 2016 initially focusing on Islamic affairs, but his remit quickly broadened to other areas such as education, the sexual revolution, and beginning and end of life ethics. Tim regularly writes articles for Christian Concern and appears on national radio and TV to present a Christian perspective on relevant issues.

SASRA: Caring for UK Armed Forces Since 1838

By Martin Gliniecki

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) recognises that military capability depends fundamentally upon the quality and wellbeing of its people. Its policy describes personnel as Defence's most important asset and presents their care as both a moral responsibility and an operational necessity. Contemporary Defence doctrine adopts a holistic understanding of wellbeing, encompassing physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions, while emphasising that responsibility for the welfare of military personnel rests with the Chain of Command, supported by healthcare professionals, welfare agencies and the Armed Forces chaplaincy. This commitment reflects an understanding that operational effectiveness is strengthened not only through sound doctrine, training, equipment and leadership, but also through resilience, trust, moral conduct and a sense of purpose.

Given that the role of the MOD is to protect the nation and help it prosper, these qualities, together with ethical cohesion and integrity, contribute directly to a moral component of warfighting capability and effectiveness, or fighting power. It is within this component, caring for the whole person, that the Soldiers' & Aviators' Scripture Readers Association (SASRA) has made its distinctive contribution since 1838. Working alongside military chaplaincy and welfare, SASRA seeks to strengthen the spiritual and moral wellbeing of serving personnel through its work of Christian evangelism, pastoral care and faithful presence among those who serve our nation. Its ministry illustrates how spiritual care can contribute to the moral foundations upon which effective military service and national defence ultimately depend. Britain's Armed forces need to be ready, both physically and spiritually, for every eventuality, which is why SASRA's motto is 'Be Ready', drawn from Matthew 22:44.

For today's Armed Forces, fighting power is more than military capability. Superior weapons, advanced technology and rigorous training all increase the likelihood of success, but they are insufficient on their own. UK Defence doctrine has long recognised that fighting power rests upon three mutually supporting components: the conceptual, the physical and the moral. Frequently, the moral component is the most decisive because it concerns:

1. The will to fight;
2. The courage to endure adversity;
3. The ethical use of force;
4. The conviction that military service is directed towards a purpose greater than self-interest;
5. And, if necessary, the will to sacrifice oneself.

It is within this moral dimension that SASRA has served for 188 years. While SASRA is first and foremost a Christian evangelistic ministry, its fruits are an important contribution to the spiritual welfare, resilience, confidence and integrity of military personnel. And it does so not through military command and control, but through the quiet, consistent presence of Scripture Readers living and working alongside soldiers and aviators.

SASRA summarises its mission simply: to spread the saving knowledge of Christ among serving personnel. Every Scripture Reader is a military veteran who has subsequently sensed God's call into evangelistic ministry. As they live and work alongside serving personnel, they seek to introduce them to a practical experience of the Christian faith. Scripture Readers are distinctive by being neither detached visitors nor commissioned military chaplains. Rather, they intentionally share the daily rhythm of military life, serving 'behind the wire' and building trustworthy, long-term relationships. Their effectiveness lies not simply in organised events or Bible studies, but in their consistent

availability for ordinary conversations, difficult deployments, family pressures and personal crises. Such relational ministry has profound implications for the moral component of fighting power.

As well as success, military doctrine recognises that morale is sustained by confidence, purpose, leadership, comradeship and shared values that cannot be manufactured solely through instruction, training or discipline. They emerge from character, which in turn is shaped by deeply held beliefs about truth, responsibility, sacrifice and hope. SASRA approaches these questions unapologetically through the Christian gospel. Its Basis of Belief affirms the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, salvation through Jesus Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. However, SASRA does not present Christianity as a moral philosophy but as spiritual renewal – the foundation from which morals, moral courage and faithful service grow. This theological foundation distinguishes SASRA from secular wellbeing initiatives. Contemporary welfare programmes addressing psychological health, resilience and emotional wellbeing are complemented by SASRA engaging questions of meaning, forgiveness, identity, purpose, hope and eternity – questions that frequently become acute during military service.

British troops routinely encounter experiences that test the deepest convictions of the human heart, mind and soul: prolonged separation from family, exposure to danger, responsibility for life-and-death decisions, moral injury, grief and uncertainty. Technical competence alone cannot answer the existential questions that often arise in such circumstances. SASRA's ministry therefore combines evangelism with pastoral care. Scripture Readers listen carefully, provide friendship, study the Bible with those who are interested, encourage Christian fellowship and, where appropriate, signpost individuals towards medical, welfare or chaplaincy services. This integrated approach recognises that spiritual and pastoral care are complementary rather than separate, with the latter flowing from gospel ministry rather than replacing it.

Scripture Readers seek to offer truth and purpose through a relationship with Jesus Christ, while supporting those experiencing anxiety, trauma, despair or isolation. The Association believes that long-term spiritual formation contributes to resilience by equipping individuals to face future trials with enduring hope. This reflects an important distinction because, whereas resilience is often defined as the capacity to recover after adversity, Christian hope goes further by providing an enduring framework within which suffering itself acquires meaning. For believers, identity rests not ultimately upon military success, career progression or operational achievement, but upon God's grace revealed in Jesus Christ.

This spiritual perspective contributes to the moral component of fighting power in four practical ways.

1. It reinforces integrity. Scripture Readers consistently encourage personnel to live according to biblical principles, demonstrating honesty, humility, compassion and self-control. These align naturally with the values and standards expected of every British sailor, soldier and aviator, which build trust within military teams.
2. It strengthens moral courage, which involves more than physical bravery under fire. It also includes the willingness to make difficult and unpopular ethical decisions under pressure, resist wrongdoing in the heat of the moment, and accept personal cost for doing what is morally right. Christian discipleship nurtures precisely these qualities by teaching obedience to God before convenience or popularity.
3. SASRA fosters community. Loneliness remains a significant challenge for many serving personnel, particularly following relocation, deployment or posting to unfamiliar units. Through Bible studies, fellowship groups and informal hospitality, Scripture Readers help individuals discover supportive communities where they are known personally rather than simply by rank or appointment.

4. SASRA encourages servant leadership. The New Testament model of leadership, exemplified by Jesus Christ, emphasises humility, sacrificial service and concern for others. Such leadership strengthens cohesion because it builds confidence that authority exists for the good of the whole team rather than personal advancement. This is recognised in the motto 'Serve to lead' of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, where Army officers train.

Perhaps most significantly, however, SASRA helps answer a question every generation of military personnel must eventually confront: what makes freedom worth fighting for? Military power can secure national borders, deter aggression and protect democracies, yet those achievements ultimately serve something greater than themselves. Freedom is valuable because it enables human beings to flourish in truth, justice, compassion and responsibility. Detached from those moral realities, freedom risks becoming mere individual autonomy.

SASRA's ministry reminds serving personnel that the deepest foundation of freedom is spiritual. Christianity teaches that genuine freedom begins with reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ and is expressed in lives characterised by love of neighbour, self-sacrifice and faithful service. Within this vision, military service becomes not merely an occupation but a vocation exercised under God's authority for the protection of others. For this reason, SASRA's contribution extends beyond individual wellbeing. By nurturing character, strengthening hope, encouraging ethical conduct and proclaiming the gospel, Scripture Readers contribute to moral cohesion within which military effectiveness is optimised.

SASRA expresses this objective clearly in its charitable purposes. Alongside advancing the Christian faith, these seek to promote the social, moral and spiritual welfare of His Majesty's Forces by (as stated previously) introducing personnel to a practical experience of the Christian faith, befriending servicemen and -women, encouraging Christian witness, facilitating Bible study, providing pastoral support and contributing to the moral component of fighting power. These ambitions should not be misunderstood. SASRA does not claim that Christian faith automatically produces better soldiers, nor that pastoral ministry replaces professional military training. Rather, it argues that spiritually grounded men and women are better equipped to serve with integrity, resilience, compassion and hope. They are more likely to endure hardship without losing purpose and to exercise military power within a coherent moral framework.

In an age marked by increasing uncertainty, complex security threats, and growing pressures upon the mental and spiritual wellbeing of service personnel, SASRA's ministry remains remarkably relevant. Technology is again transforming the character of warfare – look at drone use in the current Ukraine-Russia conflict – but the nature of both war and the human heart both remain unchanging. Every generation requires courage, hope, forgiveness, purpose and moral conviction. By living among those who serve, faithfully proclaiming the gospel, providing patient pastoral care and working alongside Armed Forces chaplaincies, SASRA continues to strengthen not merely the individuals it encounters, but the moral foundations upon which enduring fighting power depends. In so doing, it helps ensure that the defence of freedom is sustained not only by capability and courage, but by character, conviction and the enduring hope found in Jesus Christ.

In summary, SASRA supports the moral component of fighting power across our Armed Forces by sharing the life-changing gospel found in Jesus Christ. While military effectiveness depends upon the integration of physical, conceptual and moral components, the latter is ultimately sustained by character, purpose and resilience rather than capability alone. Scripture Readers provide spiritual and pastoral care by living and working alongside serving personnel, building trusted relationships and presenting the good news within the unique context of military life. Its ministry complements the work

of military chaplains and other military welfare and wellbeing assets, to build and enhance our Armed Forces' moral component of fighting power.

The Christian discipleship SASRA delivers nurtures virtues such as integrity, humility, moral courage, compassion and servant leadership; qualities that strengthen unit cohesion, ethical decision-making and resilience under pressure. By encouraging personnel to ground their lives in the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, SASRA contributes not only to individual wellness but also to the moral foundations upon which enduring fighting power depends. Freedom is sustained not merely by military strength but by the values and convictions that justify its defence. Through faithful evangelism, relational pastoral care and spiritual formation, SASRA helps to ensure that those entrusted with defending our nation's freedoms are equipped with the moral and spiritual resources that make those freedoms truly worth fighting for.

Martin Gliniecki is a veteran soldier, trained bomb disposal officer, former civil servant and chemical engineer. He came to faith later in life, where his love for lifelong learning helped in completing his Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford, Faculty of Theology – his thesis covering a Christian view of discrimination in war. Martin currently leads the Soldiers' & Aviators' Scripture Readers Association (SASRA), which provides spiritual and pastoral support to our Armed Forces.

You can learn more about SASRA's growing work with our Armed Forces at sasra.org.uk.

The Challenge of Moral Certainty in a Just War

By Martin Gliniecki

"For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer." (Rom. 13:4)

The Christian just-war tradition (CJWT) provides a moral framework to assist in determining when the use of military force is justifiable, as well as the moral conduct of its combatants. Emerging from Christian thinkers such as Augustine and later refined by Aquinas, it has further developed to balance the Christian commitment to peace with the responsibility to protect justice and the innocent. Once war is engaged then conduct – meaning discriminating between combatant and non-combatant, and all military actions being proportionate – must be morally attainable if war is not to degenerate into all-consuming hellishness.

The nineteenth-century military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, was first to articulate, in a holistic approach, both the nature and character of human conflict. He argued that the fundamental nature of war – the use of violence or force for political ends – is immutable. For him "[f]our elements form the climate [or nature] of war: danger, exertion, uncertainty, and chance."[1] However, the character of war, how war is fought, changes over time: the strategies planned, the policies derived, the tactics, techniques and procedures executed as well as the equipment, both hardware and these days software, and the way it is deployed and used. Look how the development of the rifle, artillery, chemical weapons, trench warfare, the tank, aircraft, blitzkrieg, nuclear weapons, insurgencies and, in recent years, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and now drones have all changed how war is fought, demonstrating that the character of war continually evolves.

So, if our nation is worth fighting for, and war has a just cause, with the right intention and called by a legitimate authority (UK Government), thereby upholding the basic tenets of CJWT, then it must also be conducted morally, with UK troops upholding the highest standards, even where international and national law is lacking or ambiguous. Those same combatants, however, deserve honourable decision-makers, the best moral foundations, the best education and training, and the best equipment and support possible. In military terms, that is the optimal fighting power, which is the ability of our Armed Forces to shape, contest and fight; it represents three interrelated components of the moral, conceptual and physical.

The following essay considers how the changing character of war affects the moral component of fighting power and, in asking our troops to fight, how we should also prepare them for the realities of war, so that they do the right thing and are less likely to be traumatised by the aftereffects of conflict. It focuses on the discrimination between combatant and non-combatant, ensuring that only the former is intentionally targeted and that as much as possible is done first, to prevent collateral damage to non-combatants and civilian facilities, and second, to ensure that any attack is proportionate to the intended outcome. In so doing, it offers the potential to build resilience in combatants and lessen the potential aftereffects on the mind and issues with mental health.

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1 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton University Press, 2008), 'On Military Genius', https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/735246.

The UK Armed Forces' values and standards, which every service member is expected to adopt, are totally compatible with CJWT and the laws of war. The Army's for example are: respect for others, integrity, courage, discipline, loyalty and selfless commitment. Soldiers that do not demonstrate such values and standards are generally unsuccessful in developing their careers, either removing themselves or being removed from service, if necessary, by lawful discharge following an offence or behaviour that brings the Army's reputation into disrepute. However, and notwithstanding holding to a set of such values and standards, moral decision-making can be very difficult, as can distinguishing combatant from non-combatant in modern conflict, which has evolved a new lexicon of terminology to assist in describing the evolving character and types of war, or parts thereof, including new wars, unequal wars, small wars, hybrid war, fourth-generation warfare, war among the people, grey zones and so on. For discrimination and proportionality to be effective, combatant behaviour is key.

Referring to the British Army's values and standards, a former head of the British Army, General Sir Nicholas Carter, stated that the role of the Army "is to close with and kill the Queen's enemies, and we have to have that at the forefront of our mind, but equally we cannot accept unacceptable behaviour."[2] Similar comments were made last year on unacceptable behaviour by the current head of the British Army, General Sir Roly Walker.[3] Indiscriminate targeting is clearly unacceptable behaviour in war, as is not minimising collateral damage. However, discrimination in modern conflict is much more demanding and obfuscate than in more conventional conflicts where one's enemies are easily distinguishable. Current moral discourse and doctrines on discrimination are inadequate for combatants on the modern battlefield.

Historic conventions and the laws of war have not kept pace with its changing character, which is to be expected. The prohibition of chemical weapons, for example, was not ratified for over 80 years after their first introduction during World War One. The UK's latest publication covering the law of armed conflict, Joint Service Publication 383,[4] goes back to 2004, and while amendments have been made, they are insufficient in clarifying rules for distinguishing combatant from non-combatant in complex modern conflict. With international law not keeping pace with the fast-changing character of war, moral revision, updating laws and conventions are essential, because the military doctrines of nations are based on and directed by adherence to them, which in turn guide ethical tactics, techniques and procedures for fighting troops.

All nations have a moral obligation and responsibility to prepare their forces for the potential horrors of conflict and provide them with the physical, conceptual and moral tools to perform their tasks – that is to optimise their fighting power according to the laws of war – including discriminate targeting and minimising collateral damage. They also have a responsibility for their mental wellbeing after conflict and protection from vexatious and unlawful claims. Consider the example of former soldier Dennis Hutchings, who faced prosecution over the 1974 shooting of John Pat Cunningham during the Northern Ireland Troubles. He had already been investigated several times and cleared, yet was pursued again more than four decades later, despite his age and poor health. Hutchings denied wrongdoing and said he had acted as a soldier on duty. He died in 2021, aged 80, after contracting Covid-19 while his trial was underway. Witnessing troops and veterans fearful of reprisals and unsupported by the Government is unlikely to encourage recruiting, even at a time of great need.

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2 'Army Head Launches "crackdown" on Bullying and Harassment', UK, *BBC News*, 4 September 2015, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34148307.

3 See for instance: 'Baked-in Behaviour: Army Boss Lays Bare the Challenge of Training Recruits Who Already Hold Negative Views of Women', *Soldier Magazine*, April 2025, https://soldier.army.mod.uk/issues/april-2025/updates/baked-in-behaviour.

4 'Manual of the Law of Armed Conflict (JSP 383)', GOV.UK, Ministry of Defence (UK), 28 August 2013, https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/jsp-383.

Lessons can be learned to improve fighting power in all three components (that is, the physical, conceptual and moral) to reduce physical and mental injury. During the latest wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, British forces recognised their shortcomings in the physical component of fighting power. Main battle tanks, for example, were of limited use during the insurgency that followed the initial conventional campaign in Iraq in 2003 – as they were similarly during the whole Afghanistan campaign. The UK's modified patrol vehicle in Iraq, the SNATCH Landrover, colloquially known as the 'mobile coffin' by troops because of its limited protection against IEDs and other insurgent weapons, was totally inadequate for this new character of war. Quickly, new ranges of patrol and troop-carrying vehicles were developed, with greater ground clearance and v-shaped hulls to reduce and deflect the blast from IEDs. Bar, slat or stand-off armour, which resembles grills or metal meshes, were attached to vehicle exteriors at a stand-off distance, designed to initiate rocket propelled grenades prematurely. The design means that the shaped-charge warhead, focusing explosive energy into a thin penetrating 'jet', degrades sufficiently before reaching the intrinsic armour of the vehicle so that total penetration is not attainable.

Likewise, a conceptual component for defeating the IED network holistically was developed for this character of war, based on tackling three lines of operation simultaneously:

1. Defeat the device;
2. Train the force;
3. And attack the network.

There remains, however, between the moral and conceptual components, a shortfall in morality, law, conventions and doctrines that adequately distinguish combatants from non-combatants; sufficient, that is, for it to be readily interpretable by soldiers. Greater clarity is necessary to:

1. Prevent innocent deaths and maintain the support of local civilians;
2. Prevent the effects of trauma and disorder caused by troops witnessing their own initiated collateral damage;
3. And reduce the likelihood of soldiers being hounded and traumatised by inquiries years, if not decades, after their occurrence (such as Dennis Hutchings).

The UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) established the Iraq Historic Allegations Team (IHAT) to review and investigate allegations of abuse by UK Armed Forces personnel in Iraq, consistent with its obligations for compliance with the European Convention of Human Rights. Following a ten-month parliamentary inquiry, IHAT was condemned and the MOD blamed for facilitating spurious cases against British troops. The Inquiry chairman concluded that "there has been an almost total disregard of the welfare of soldiers and their families. The MoD must take responsibility for allowing this to happen."[5]

Combatants can be severely traumatised by unwittingly killing civilians to a level associated with the context of their deaths. Professional and well-trained troops are aware that unintended incidents occur in conflicts, which they can endure as a feature of its immutable nature. Similarly, the foreseen but unintended killing of civilians as collateral damage is a situation that most combatants are able to tolerate as a reality of the horrors of war. However, no matter how unintended a civilian's death, the soldier's trauma, suffering and speed of recovery following such an event will depend largely on their reflecting clear observance to lawful orders, the inevitability of the civilian casualties as consequence of achieving a military objective (unintended, whether foreseeable or not), and the fog of war that surrounds such activities. What is clear is that the levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicides in serving military personnel and veterans have increased during and following conflicts

5 Robert Mendick, 'Iraq Abuse Inquiry to Shut after MPs Find It Has "Directly Harmed Defence of Our Nation"', *The Telegraph*, 10 February 2017, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/10/iraq-abuse-inquiry-has-directly-harmed-defence-nation-andmust/.

in Iraq and Afghanistan and, while the reasons are complex and multiple, one component is their reflections on collateral damage.

A consequence of failing to provide clarity to discrimination is to add to the increasing number of serving soldiers and veterans suffering PTSD, stress-related illnesses and suicide. In 2012, "BBC Panorama learned that 21 serving soldiers killed themselves… along with 29 veterans",[6] while 44 service personnel died in Afghanistan. Furthermore, investigations into violent offending by veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts conclude that PTSD "is also a risk factor for violence."[7] Compared with regular forces, "Reservists have an increased prevalence of mental illness post-deployment."[8] However, some research shows remarkable resilience within UK military personnel despite considerable exposure to multiple traumatic events in recent conflicts, with the stark exception of alcohol misuse on return, which can lead to a mix of violence, sexual offending, family breakdown, homelessness and gaol.

As awareness of stress-related illnesses has grown, nations have sought to identify and address causes and mitigate effects. Following on from the work of psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, who worked with Vietnam veterans and first coined the phrase 'moral injury', William Nash, a retired US Navy psychiatrist developed the concept further, to assist with understanding the self-harm phenomenon. For Nash and colleagues, moral injury arises from: "Potentially morally injurious events, such as perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations may be deleterious in the long-term, emotionally, psychologically, behaviorally, spiritually, and socially."[9] In other words, the sense of moral certainty is broken. A deduction is that the greater the moral certainty, the less likelihood of combatants suffering psychological damage from exposure to the worst excesses of conflict, leading to self-harm and even suicide.

Establishing a greater moral certainty during peacetime enables its continuance during conflict. CJWT is a mature moral framework and a developed form for today has the potential to assist in establishing greater moral certainty. Western culture's CJWT, accompanied by values and standards that emanate from it, enable moral decisions when they need to be made quickly, sometimes instantly, and when the rules are less than clear. In turn, a developed form of CJWT can deliver greater moral certainty and clearer moral decision-making surrounding discrimination and collateral damage. Nash also notes that, rather than fear of death in battle, it is feelings of shame and guilt associated with moral injury that often cause psychiatric problems in conflict.[10] Alongside the deaths of colleagues, which are recognised as a primary source of psychological trauma, psychiatrists identify guilt as another significant contributing factor, particularly when service personnel become aware that a military action has resulted in the collateral deaths of civilians, especially women and children. The right intention to minimise collateral damage also helps reduce the effects of moral injury.

This example of strategic intent – with collateral damage directly related to moral injury and stress-related illnesses – refutes any premise that UK forces would benefit from a lenient or permissive

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6 'UK Soldier and Veteran Suicides "Outstrip Afghan Deaths"', UK, *BBC News*, 13 July 2013, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23259865.

7 Deidre MacManus et al., 'Violent Offending by UK Military Personnel Deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan: A Data Linkage Cohort Study', *The Lancet* 381, no. 9870 (2013): 907, http://thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(13)60354-2.pdf.

8 Deirdre MacManus et al., 'The Mental Health of the UK Armed Forces in the 21st Century: Resilience in the Face of Adversity', Review, BMJ Military Health 160, no. 2 (2014): 125–30, https://doi.org/10.1136/jramc-2013-000213.

9 Brett T. Litz et al.,'Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy', *Clinical Psychology Review*, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, vol. 29, no. 8 (2009): 695–706, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2009.07.003.

10 Litz et al., 'Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans'.

attitude to collateral damage or retribution. It is militarily and practically counterproductive to harm civilians because soldiers lost through stress-related injuries, caused even partially by witnessing collateral damage, are no longer available to perform military tasks. After sentencing the first British soldier ever to be convicted of a war crime in 2007, the judge, Mr Justice McKinnon, said that not only was the reputation of British troops harmed but also that it "could put the lives of other British service personnel at risk and hamper future operations."[11] With external bodies also aware that purposely harming civilians is militarily counterproductive – in seeking the hearts and minds of the population and, in this case, preventing future trauma for military witnesses to such events – the need for greater moral certainty grows. The negative impact on the livelihoods of veterans, who suffer stress-related illnesses from experiencing collateral damage, further counters any suggestion that British forces do not sincerely seek to discriminate and minimise collateral damage.

Soldiers, therefore, need revised physical, conceptual and moral components, skills and tools to achieve their military objectives discriminately in modern conflict; education, training and direction that is more clearly defined and easily interpretable, enabling the minimising of collateral damage, preventing their own moral injuries and the consequences of stress-related illnesses. Writing in 2008, Michael Mazarr summarised the inadequacy of applying US military forces to asymmetric conflict as follows:

> As smart, adaptable, and courageous as U.S. military officers and men and women clearly are and will be, asymmetric challenges demand asymmetric responses—political, economic, cultural, informational, and psychological tools, tactics, and techniques allowed to work organically over time, not retrained military forces whose true purpose is to fight and win wars, which are different enterprises. The strategic trap is obvious: Furnished with a vast, expensive, skillful military tool, policymakers will use it again and again, as they have been doing, without confronting the tougher challenge of shifting resources into nonmilitary tools of statecraft.[12]

Mazarr is surely right in appreciating that the challenges of asymmetric war require targeted responses, which try to capture and address all the components that create and fuel it. He is right to concede that conventional military personnel are not ideally prepared to achieve some of the "political, economic, cultural, informational, and psychological tools, tactics, and techniques" necessary to overcome the challenges of modern conflict – they prepare and train for conventional war. He is, however, naïve to withhold military force from his list of asymmetric responses – the challenges that he identifies exclude a significant fighting component, otherwise it is not war. The latest conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and against ISIL[13] demonstrate this abundantly, and no matter the fighting power of weaker sides in an asymmetric war, using military or improvised ordnance, enforcing security is essential and a particular skill of militaries. While weaker sides continue to pose a war-fighting capacity, stronger forces will need to defeat them, requiring discriminate targeting and establishing a secure setting in order to enable "nonmilitary tools of statecraft."

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Britain and its allies have evolved smaller armies, with multiple roles, in complex hostile environments and with evermore scrutiny. It is likely that soldiers will continue to deploy across the full spectrum of conflict, from high-intensity conventional war

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11 Steven Morris, 'First British Soldier to Be Convicted of a War Crime Is Jailed for Ill-Treatment of Iraqi Civilians', UK News, *The Guardian*, 30 April 2007, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/may/01/military.iraq.

12 Michael J. Mazarr, 'The Folly of "Asymmetric War"', *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2008): 38, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/twq08summermazarr.pdf.

13 The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

to peacekeeping and every hybrid and asymmetric variant in between, and simultaneously. If the modern combatant must perform duties commensurate with these challenges and implement right actions, with limited preparation and laws that are currently centred on conventional conflict, then a morally sound base on which to deliver virtue ethics is an optimal toolkit. They deserve moral preparation, belief in the integrity of the law, clear orders that are easily intelligible for the level of their competencies, and trust that they will not be hounded in future years for their moral and lawful actions at the time.

In conclusion, if we accept that Britain is worth fighting for and needs a military to deter its enemies and, if necessary, defend its people, then its combatants need clarity of orders, responsibilities and boundaries to achieve military objectives, which reduce ambiguity in thought and action, and in turn enable efficiency, effectiveness and minimal casualties; reducing the likelihood of stress-related disorders, resulting from their experience of collateral damage is a corollary. Put another way, trauma and disorder, caused in part by witnessing collateral damage, are less likely if rules of engagement are clearer and more interpretable, and combatants are morally robust and attuned to their values and standards. A sound moral framework, such as CJWT, underpins development in the laws of war and conventions and, in turn, formulation of military doctrines, reflective of those morals in the contemporary age. Discrimination in modern war needs to be developed and interpreted so that it enables and even compels combatant compliance, is easy to interpret as stated, but also can be more clearly recognisable and verifiable as right intention by a third party – maybe artificial intelligence has a role to play here.

Combatants dispatched to apply military force must believe and have the confidence to know that, should their discriminatory actions lead to foreseen but unintended collateral damage, those same actions were morally and legally supportable, and are not open to future bogus claims and scrutiny. When there are shortcomings in the laws of war, as there always are, and our sailors, soldiers, aviators and marines are at war, then there must be a moral framework to guide them. Troops cannot be made accountable now or anytime in the future, when acting morally, if laws are unavailable or ambiguous in the contemporary context that they find themselves. For Aquinas: "And yet even those who make sinful use of the sword are not always slain with the sword, yet they always perish with their own sword, because, unless they repent, they are punished eternally for their sinful use of the sword."[14] Hence combatants need to 'use the sword' without sinning – and by God's grace, they will be saved.

Finally, the CJWT assumes that even a just war remains a tragic consequence of living in a fallen world. While militaries battle, non-combatant Christians, whether they support war or not, are called to engage spiritually with it through prayer. In Exodus 17:8-13, Joshua fights the Amalekites while Moses intercedes before God. The victory is linked both to the military action and to prayer.

After British forces were forced to retreat to Dunkirk in 1940, King George VI called for a National Day of Prayer on 26 May 1940. Millions responded and two events immediately followed. First, a violent storm arose over the Dunkirk region grounding the Luftwaffe, which had been causing thousands of British casualties on the beaches. Second, a great calm descended on the Channel. Together, these prayer-answered interventions allowed hundreds of tiny boats to sail across the Channel and rescue around 335,000 soldiers. This was the 'the miracle of Dunkirk'. Prayer for our Armed Forces personnel is just as necessary today, for the sailors onboard HMS *Dragon*, the soldiers in Estonia and aviators in Qatar, as well as every other combatant on operations or preparing for operations in the UK and abroad. We know that God answers prayer, our troops are worthy of prayer, and Christians in our nation are

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14 St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Part II* (Jazzybee Verlag, 2012), 'First Article [II-II. Q. 40. Art. 1]', https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/1071840.

encouraged to pray for those that selflessly commit to protecting Britain and its overseas territories, even unto death. Let us unite in prayer for our Armed Forces, that those who defend our nation may know God's protection, wisdom and peace, and also for every opportunity to bring Christ's hope, comfort and gospel truth to those who serve our nation.

Martin Gliniecki is a veteran soldier, trained bomb disposal officer, former civil servant and chemical engineer. He came to faith later in life, where his love for lifelong learning helped in completing his Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford, Faculty of Theology – his thesis covering a Christian view of discrimination in War. Martin currently leads the Soldiers' & Aviators' Scripture Readers Association (SASRA), which provides spiritual and pastoral support to our Armed Forces.

Autonomous Weapons, AI and Moral Conscience

By Jeremy Peckham

In a much-publicised video, a small drone is seen chasing a Ukrainian street vendor in Kherson trying to avoid its pursuit and show the drone operator that he is just selling vegetables. The drone eventually blows up in close proximity and the man, though he survived, was left with concussion and shrapnel wounds. Sometimes called 'human safaris' after the term was coined by a Ukrainian journalist, this incident has highlighted the way in which First Person View[1] remotely operated drones have been used by Russia to target and terrorise civilians since 2024. A UN human rights commission reports that at least 200 civilians have been killed and over 2,000 wounded by the use of such drones.[2] Whilst contested by Russia, such acts constitute a war crime or crimes against humanity under international conventions.

These drones are based on the same technology that allows me to track and video my grandchildren racing down a slope on a go-kart or playing with the dog. Equipped with hand grenades or simple explosive devices, they can be lethal. At the present time, FPV drones are semi-autonomous, requiring a radio link or a large spool of fibre optic cable of up to 40 km range to avoid signal jamming. Human drone guidance is necessary to avoid destroying 'friendly' personnel and infrastructure – a problem that is compounded if large numbers or swarms of drones were to be used.

Current drone technology can autonomously track people, navigate indoors and deliver a lethal payload, either with a small explosive device or a spring-loaded injection of poison. The technology for building swarms of low-cost fully autonomous micro drones that can track and kill humans exists, but most states do not have the motivation to develop and deploy such weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Even energy limitations could be partially reduced by lighter but still lethal payloads and by using a mothership to deploy nearer the target, allowing drones to perch and idle whilst they seek and lock onto a target. In an article about such WMDs, Felix Choussat (Visiting Policy Researcher at the Center for AI Safety) describes a frightening scene of how these kinds of indiscriminate weapons could be deployed by rogue states regardless of any international treaties, challenging us to prepare for the future now.[3] One wonders how long it will be before such drones are utilised by terrorists or rogue states to terrorise civilians at scale, just as semi-autonomous drones are currently being used against Ukrainian citizens today.

Even if we cannot control the use of such technologies by bad actors, these realities are a poignant reminder of the importance of having an ethical stance, particularly in the context of Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS) and Automated Decision Support Systems (ADSS). In the Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan conflicts, AI has become a crucial part of the battle field, whether it be in the use of armed drones and autonomous vehicles, or as part of battle and logistics support.

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1 A First Person View (FPV) drone refers to drones that are remotely operated by a pilot who sees images relayed from an onboard camera through a headset that allows the pilot to feel as if they were flying the drone.

2 Andrew E. Kramer, 'Russia Aims Drone Attacks at Civilians, a War Crime, U.N. Inquiry Says', World, *The New York Times*, 27 October 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/27/world/europe/russia-drones-target-civilians.html.

3 Felix Choussat, 'Drone WMDs Don't Need Any New Technology', AI Frontiers, 20 July 2026, https://ai-frontiers.org/articles/drone-wmds-dont-need-any-new-technology.

In February 2026 the *New Scientist* published a sensational headline that stated "AIs can't stop recommending nuclear strikes in war game simulations".[4] The article reports on a study carried out by Kenneth Payne at Kings College London that looked at the results of wargaming using artificial intelligence.[5] The study reported that there was there was a preference 95% of the time to engage nuclear weapons. We are, hopefully, a long way from using AI autonomously to make such decisions, but the article further illustrates why our ethical stance on AI use and development is so important at this time.

In this article, I will firstly outline how a Christian Anthropology informs our thinking on the ethical questions surrounding AI. Secondly, I will provide my perspective on what AI is and how that contrasts with the nature of humans seen through the lens of this Christian Anthropology. Thirdly I will consider what the Bible teaches about engaging in war and then discuss how that perspective – together with Natural Law (deriving from the nature of God), and the International Conventions on The Laws of Armed Conflict – forms a basis for resolving some of the ethical dilemmas surrounding the development and the use of AWS and ADSS.

A Christian Anthropology

The starting point for developing a Christian Anthropology is the Book of Genesis where we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the heaven, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."[6] (Gen. 1:26)

The Bible doesn't define what it means to be made in God's image (often referred to as the *Imago Dei*) or to be made in God's likeness. Theologians have wrestled over the centuries with what these concepts mean and three main views have put forward.

The first is the ontological view, that is, that the *Imago Dei* is about what we are made like. This view posits that we mirror some of the attributes of God – the communicable attributes, such as God being moral, truthful, wise, thinking, reasoning, rational, and so on.

The second is the functional view, reflecting what we were made to do or what we were we made for. This derives from God stating, "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Gen. 1:26) This functional view holds that we are vicegerents – God's representatives here on earth, tasked with carrying out the ruling and dominion over God's creation. The functional view also upholds the dignity of work with its respect for God putting Adam to work in the garden of Eden.

The final view is what I call the relational view, which is about what are we made to be. This is the idea that God created us to be in relationship, first of all, with him, and then in relationship with each other (as shown by God creating a companion for Adam). I think it is fairly obvious that the relationship that he is called us into with each other is an embodied relationship – it is not a virtual relationship.

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4 Chris Stokel-Walker, 'AIs Can't Stop Recommending Nuclear Strikes in War Game Simulations', *New Scientist*, 25 February 2026, https://www.newscientist.com/article/2516885-ais-cant-stop-recommending-nuclear-strikes-in-war-game-simulations/.

5 Kenneth Payne, 'AI Arms and Influence:Frontier Models Exhibit Sophisticated Reasoning in Simulated Nuclear Crises', accessed 4 September 2026, https://arxiv.org/html/2602.14740v1.

6 Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

I believe that it is a mistake to separate or hold in tension these three aspects of what the *Imago Dei* means – because we see in Jesus the true *Homo Deus* and the last Adam.[7] He is exactly what it means to be human, made in God's image. Jesus is fully God, but also fully human at the same time. We see in Christ "the exact imprint of His nature" (Heb. 1:3), so Christ displays God's attributes and character. We learn that he is God's representative (John 14:9), but also that he is relational both in his perfect relationship with his Father but also in his selfless love for others (John 13:1).

Drawing together these insights into a Christian Anthropology, we can highlight six key aspects of the *Imago Dei* and what it means to be human (see Fig. 1). These provide a helpful guide when thinking about how AI, or indeed any technology, shapes humanity and what might potentially be lost in the *Imago Dei* by an uncritical embrace of technology.

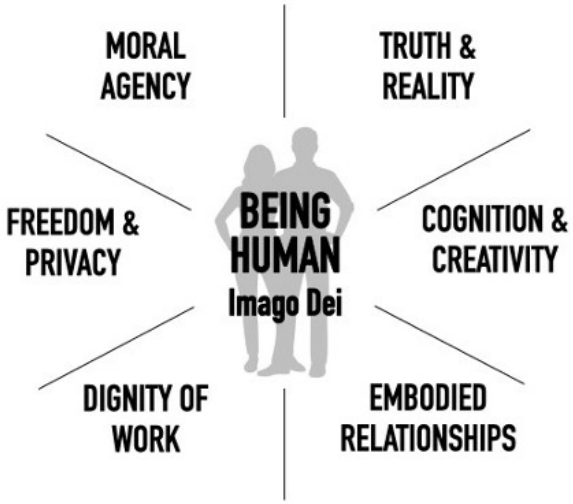

Figure 1: Six key aspects or attributes of what it means to be made in God's image and after his likeness, developed from Jeremy Peckham, *Masters or Slaves: AI and the Future of Humanity*, IVP, 2021.)

How then does this anthropology work out in daily practice and ethics? Two principles provide a guide.

The first is that we are to image God (Eph. 5:1) in whose likeness we are made, albeit marred and spoiled by our rebellion against God that occurred at the Fall (Gen. 3). We are also are being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), confirming that Jesus, the *Homo Deus* and last Adam, is our template for what our character, behaviour and moral conscience should be. The second principle is that our motivation in life should be to bring God glory (1 Cor. 10:31) and delight in Him. As we do that, God delights in us (Zeph. 3:17, Is. 62:3-5).

In developing our ethics on any topic and on the use of technology like AI, we must ask whether it glorifies God: is it something in which he will delight? This must also be coupled with a consideration of whether it is consistent with imaging God's character and with how Jesus would act. Does it detract from, dumb down or mar the image that we should display in the world. Through God's self-disclosure in the Bible, we can discover God's character. We also have the eyewitness accounts of how Jesus thought, spoke and acted. Both of these, as we shall see, give us the principles on which we can base a Christian view on the use of AWS and ADSS, particularly the use of AI in these fields.

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7 Y. N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2016). Harari surveys the progress of humankind and suggests that in the 21st Century, humans will seek to gain ever more God-like powers – hence the title *Homo Deus* (Latin: man-god).

Space precludes citing all the references in the Bible to God's character but it is evident that we should speak the truth, exercise love through embodied relationships and use our moral agency – that is, our freedom to choose what is right – from which derives our general human freedom as well as our privacy. Engaging our minds to think critically helps us to exercise sound judgement and develop wisdom, qualities that the Bible speaks much about.

In 2 Peter 1:5, we are exhorted to "make every effort to supplement our faith with virtue" (Gk. 'excellence of character') and it could be argued that living virtuously is no more than a plea to display God's nature in which we are made.

Being faithful in displaying God's nature and glorifying him (as best we can with the Holy Spirit's help) will of necessity ensure that the attributes of being human, shown in Figure 1, are being displayed by us and neither dumbed down nor diminished by outsourcing to an artefact.

Before considering precisely how this Christian Anthropology impacts our understanding of AWS and ADSS, we need to first address what exactly AI is. This is important because there is considerable confusion over the ontology of AI. And this results in false claims being made for its capabilities, which then in turn creates an ethical quagmire. Understanding its ontology also helps us to frame in what areas it can be usefully used in the light of the Christian Anthropology I have outlined.

What exactly is AI?

For the purposes of this article, I will define two broad types of AI that are relevant in the discussion about its use in autonomous weapons and decision support systems, the topic of this article.

Discriminative AI is based on a pattern-matching algorithm that is trained on specific data, such as faces or MRI scans, in order to be able to identify a particular person or a malign tumour in the future. Such systems might be deployed in a drone weapon system to identify, track and even target a particular enemy combatant or terrorist. A fully autonomous weapon system could be programmed to destroy the target automatically, once identified at a pre-programmed level of probability, without any human intervention or supervision. Discriminative AI systems are also used in decision support systems where the training data might be anything from criminal offenders' recidivism to a population's individual credit rating. In war scenarios, this might be battlefield data or logistical information, used to model likely outcomes from a new set of data and parameters that would be input by military personnel. Machine Learning, the mathematical basis of the software used in AI systems, is widely used in cybersecurity for discovering potential breaches. The flip side is that bad actors can also use these techniques for finding vulnerabilities in organisations' software infrastructure and then hacking them. Cyber ransom is a product of the use of such tools.

The more widely understood and experienced form of AI (at least since the launch of ChatGPT in 2022) is Generative AI based on Large Language Models (LLMs) that have been trained on vast quantities of data scraped from the internet. This includes natural language text as well as images. In this case, the models predict new text or images as output that best satisfy the input prompt. Such systems can also be used in decision support systems. The most advanced of these models are described as Frontier Models (leading edge) and these are now being combined with other programmes and AI systems to act autonomously – so-called agentic AI.

With both types of AI system, actions can be taken automatically on the basis of the match threshold in discriminative AI or the information output for Generative AI systems.

Generative AI systems have caused the most controversy and ethical debate because they output fluent natural language that can be indistinguishable from human output. This has caused many to

describe these systems as thinking, reasoning and having human cognitive capabilities, even having the potential to surpass human thinking. These impressive capabilities and claimed futured potential are what lie, in part, behind the interest of governments and their military.

Unfortunately, there is much confusion over what AI really is and what it is capable of, both now and in the future. Our worldview influences how we think about AI. In the Christian Anthropology that I outlined above, we are made in God's likeness to image him and to image Christ. That is our status, and we do what we do because of that status. But a naturalistic view tends to begin with what we do (and who we are springs out of that), which is a functional definition of what it means to be human. This plays out in how people interpret the capabilities of Generative AI. It goes something like this:

1. If a computer behaves intelligently,
2. then it is intelligent.
3. If the computer is intelligent,
4. then it must have a mind.

It is not surprising then that, at the extreme end, people will think of the brain as simply 'wetware'– a biological computer that is decaying but that can be replaced with a computer. We can then upload our brains, and even create a super intelligence and achieve transcendence. From a Christian worldview perspective, this is essentially building a Tower of Babel – nothing more than an attempt to be God. But it is important to understand that, if you have that worldview, it will seem perfectly reasonable to those people to assume that it is possible to create artificial general intelligence and super intelligence. In an article in *Nature*, the authors claimed that we have already reached artificial general intelligence, "By reasonable standards, including Turing's own, we have artificial systems that are generally intelligent. The longstanding problem of creating AGI has been solved."[8]

Passing the Turing test proves just one thing – that a machine can generate fluent text indistinguishable from human language output. That is it. So where is the intelligence? It is actually an illusion of intelligence, simply because we often will define whether somebody is bright or smart by what they say or how they say it. But that is all it is. Mimicry or simulation does not equal intelligence. We do not call a parrot intelligent or ascribe it human intelligence because it can repeat the words of its master. In allusion to this, natural language researcher Emily Bender has coined the term “stochastic parrot” to describe Generative AI systems.[9]

Part of the problem in thinking about AI is that we use anthropomorphisms such as thinking, reasoning and intelligence to describe it. In fact, the term 'AI' was coined by John McCarthy in 1955 in response to the convening of a Dartmouth conference to explore whether machines could be made to reason like humans. McCarthy later went on to define Artificial Intelligence as: “the science of making machines do things that would require intelligence if done by people.”[10] It’s interesting that Herbert Simon and Alan Newell, who attended the Dartmouth Conference, preferred the term 'Complex Information Processing' to AI as they felt it better describe what the field was about. This would have been a much more appropriate term, albeit not as exciting as AI – and it certainly would not have attracted the funding that AI has!

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8 Eddy Keming Chen et al., ‘Does AI Already Have Human-Level Intelligence? The Evidence Is Clear.’, *Nature* 650, no. 8100 (2026): 36–40, MEDLINE, https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-026-00285-6.

9 Stochastic refers to the statistical and probabilistic nature of the processes that underly many AI approaches. Emily M. Bender et al., ‘On the Dangers of Stochastic Parrots: Can Language Models Be Too Big? 🦜’, Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency (New York, NY, USA), FAccT ’21, 1 March 2021, 610–23, https://doi.org/10.1145/3442188.3445922.

10 John McCarthy, 'What Is Artificial Intelligence?' (Stanford University, 2007), 2, http://jmc.stanford.edu/articles/whatisai/whatisai.pdf.

So-called Frontier AI systems are, for the main part, based on statistical predictors – apart from a few using neuro-symbolic processing (which is an approach combining statistical pattern matching with rule-based processes). Combining statistical and rule-based systems is not a new approach and was the basis for the Speech Understanding and Dialogue (SUNDIAL) project in the 1990s.[11]

After a LLM has been developed through an extensive training process, human feedback is provided in a reinforcement learning process where people select a preferred output to sets of questions or inputs, based on the goals and values of the organisation. This might mean that sycophantic responses are preferred because they keep people using the system.[12] Guardrails are then added to prevent certain outputs or behaviours, such as preventing the output of instructions about how to make a bomb or chemical weapon. They are effectively temporary sticking plasters – and they can often be circumvented (which is known as 'jailbreaking').

Compared to the human mind, AI has a number of limitations (see Figure 2). It is inefficient; it is often incorrect;[13] it does not generalise; it does not engage in critical thinking;[14] and it has neither wisdom nor the capacity to make empirical observations.

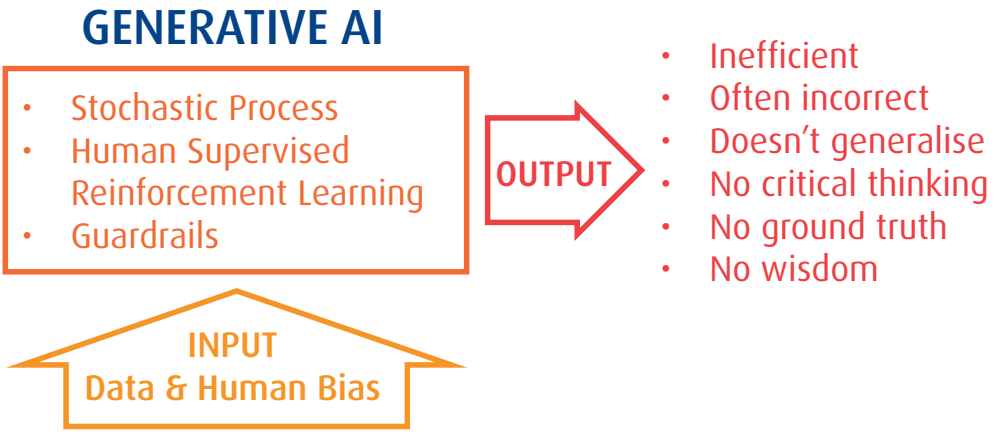

Figure 2: Generative AI and its relation to human generated text.

Equating AI with human intelligence is an ontological confusion, and when we do that, it leads to an ethical quagmire – particularly when we are thinking about using systems in warfare. A Christian Anthropology and its practical outworking provide clarity on how to think about the ethics surrounding the development and use of autonomous weapon systems and automated decision support systems.

The first question that we have to ask is this: is the development and use of these systems consistent with virtue? In other words, does it allow us as humans to exercise virtues such as self-control, wisdom and perseverance? More than that, might these systems actually diminish the development of these virtues as cognitive processing is offloaded to a computer? This is surely a particular concern where it concerns the control of an autonomous weapon or a decision support system. Ultimately, a Christian

11 Jeremy Peckham, 'A New Generation of Spoken Dialogue Systems: Results and Lessons from the SUNDIAL Project', 22 September 1993, 33–40, https://doi.org/10.21437/Eurospeech.1993-4.

12 Myra Cheng et al., 'Sycophantic AI Decreases Prosocial Intentions and Promotes Dependence', *Science* 391, no. 6792 (2026): eaec8352, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aec8352.

13 Wenting Zhao et al., 'Wild Hallucinations: Evaluating Long-Form Factuality in LLMs with Real-World Entity Queries', preprint, 24 July 2024, https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2407.17468.

14 Parshin Shojaee et al., 'The Illusion of Thinking: Understanding the Strengths and Limitations of Reasoning Models via the Lens of Problem Complexity', preprint, n.d., accessed 4 September 2026, https://arxiv.org/html/2506.06941v3.

Anthropology informs us that humans alone have moral agency. This leads us to the question, is war ever justified? And if it is, what are the moral imperatives for engaging in it?

A Biblical View of War

Space precludes an extensive treatise on the Christian views of war, which range from just war theory to pacifism. Just war theory tends to be the default thinking for many Christians and others, even when the topic has not been thought about very deeply. Perhaps this is because of 'Natural Law', the idea that everyone, regardless of faith or culture, has a sense of what is right and wrong or what justice is.[15] This is in line with our Christian Anthropology discussed earlier – that we believe that we are created in God's image and likeness and that he is a moral, just and righteous God. That is not to say, of course, that human beings understand perfectly what is right, wrong or just. As we know all too well, sadly there are many occasions when people, governments and whole societies get this wrong.

A biblical perspective on war derives from both Old and New Testament writings.

The Old Testament Israelites were told that the shedding of blood by murder would "pollute the land in which [they] live" (Num. 35:33) and "You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the LORD dwell in the midst of the people of Israel." (Num. 35:34) This attitude to murder mirrors what we have learnt from Christian Anthropology. Because we are made in God's image, life is precious to God – and to take a life by murder mars that image in a significant way and offends the God who made us.

These prohibitions provide much of the context for the Old Testament accounts of war brought about by divine providence – including those initiated by God to enable the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land. Although abhorrent to many,[16] those wars also require understanding of the context of contemporary Canaanite practices, which involved the sacrifice of children. God warns the Israelites, "You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD." (Lev. 18:21) Another Canaanite practice was the worship of the deity Anath, patroness of sex and war, whose bloodlust and massacre knew no bounds. The late archaeologist William Albright describes Anath with support from a fragment of the Baal Epic text:

> The blood was so deep that she waded in it up to her knees – nay, up to her neck. Under her feet were human heads, above her human hands flew like locusts. In her sensuous delight she decorated herself with suspended heads while she attached hands to her girdle. Her joy at the butchery is described in even more sadistic language: 'Her liver swelled with laughter, her heart was full of joy, the liver of Aneth (was full of) exultation (?).' Afterwards Aneth 'was satisfied' and washed her hands in human gore before proceeding to other occupations.[17]

The reason for God's judgement is clear: these were practices that marred the image of God in which the Canaanites had been created.

The Bible is clear that we should not be aggressors. We must not pick a fight for gain or from revenge (Rom. 12:19); rather, we should be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9). But the Bible also gives an individual (and,

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15 For an extensive treatment of Natural Law see J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving the Natural Law: A Return to Moral First Things* (Eerdmans, 2008).

16 Many struggle with divine sanction of war because of the difficulty reconciling it with the command, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13, KJV). For more on this, see Tim Dieppe's article on p. 5 of this edition of *Social Issues*.

17 Quoted in Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Baker Books, 2011), 159.

by inference, a state or group of people) the right to defend themselves. The Mosaic law concerning self-defence during a nighttime break-in allows lethal force whereas a daytime break-in does not (Exod. 22:2-3), presumably in recognition of the fact that darkness adds to the danger in which the intended victim finds themselves. In a similar vein, Nehemiah armed builders to protect their work, and Esther secured the right for Jews to defend their lives against annihilation (Est. 8:11; Neh. 4:14–18).

In the New Testament, we are instructed to "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right." (1 Pet. 2:13) This suggests that we should submit to governments' and authorities' rule if they seek to defend the nation against attack – perhaps even to defend others in another country against unjustified invasion.

Furthermore, the Roman officer who asked Jesus to heal his servant was a soldier of the occupying force – yet Jesus commends his faith and, as far as we know from the biblical account, says nothing about either the officer's authority or vocation (Matt. 8:5-13). In a more explicit encounter, soldiers ask John the Baptist about how they should repent. He tells them not to extort money by threats or false accusation and to be content with their wages. This is an implicit acceptance of their vocation and roles as law keepers and soldiers.

This brief perspective on the biblical justification for war (often referred to as 'just war' or 'just war theory') is enshrined in a variety of international treaties and conventions on the laws of armed conflict, including the Hague and Geneva Conventions.

The Law of Armed Conflict

There are four principles underlying the law on armed conflict:

- *Military necessity*, which requires the actors to use only the degree and kind of force necessary to achieve a legitimate purpose, such as complete or partial submission with minimal expenditure of life and resources. This assumes that any such force is not prohibited by the conventions (for example the use of biological weapons).
- *Humanity*, which seeks to preserve human dignity and minimise suffering by prohibiting human suffering or injury that is not justified by military necessity.
- *Distinction*, which is the doctrine requiring commanders to separate combatants from non-combatants as well as military from non-military targets.
- *Proportionality*, which requires that any losses must not be excessive in relation to the military advantage gained.

The clear intention behind these conventions is to minimise suffering caused by armed conflict rather than to impede military efficiency. They seek to ensure that prisoners and non-combatants are treated fairly and humanely and that suffering is not caused by a desire for revenge or aggression. The use of drones to kill civilians in Ukraine (described earlier) falls far outside of these parameters.

The moral weight of these four principles is clear – yet in the theatre of war, it is often a difficult task to fulfil them. Tensions often exist between minimising civilian casualties and achieving military objectives. Resolving these tensions relies on sound intelligence from the field, careful analysis and evaluation, as well as experience, judgement and wisdom on the part of those making decisions.

Resolving these tensions therefore requires characteristically human attributes. And yet frontier systems and their LLMs are already being used to assist in decision support and intelligence analysis. It is disturbing that anthropomorphisms (such as reasoning, theory of mind and deception) abound in the analysis and description of the performance of such systems. For example, Payne's paper, cited earlier, states that, "We also find systematic failures and striking context-dependence—one model exhibits apparent passivity in open-ended scenarios, yet transforms into a calculated hawk willing to employ strategic nuclear weapons when facing deadline-driven defeat. Another demonstrates calculated ruthlessness that would alarm any student of nuclear strategy, including willingness to launch first strikes when perceiving vulnerability."[18]

As I have pointed out, the danger behind such anthropomorphisms is that users might begin to attribute completely unwarranted capabilities to the systems they are using – notwithstanding the impressiveness and even helpfulness of their outputs in certain situations. The worry is that, because the outputs of these LLMs are (by and large) stochastic, it is to be expected that its outputs will be unreliable. In his response to the Trump Administration over Anthropic's refusal to allow the military unrestricted access to their algorithms, Dario Amodi stated, "frontier AI systems are simply not reliable enough to power fully autonomous weapons".[19] The same argument is also true for decision support systems where confident and even aggressively worded outputs, purely derived from the predictive process, ought not to be considered – let alone relied on. Yet in the heat of conflict, it might be tempting to act on the instant decisions output by an LLM rather than take time to reflect and evaluate. As Payne summarises his own argument *I, Warbot*: "AI systems lack the embodied, emotional substrate that shapes human strategic judgment—for better and for worse."[20]

Particularly in view of Christian Anthropology, the clear difference between AI systems and human beings leads me to argue that AI should never be used in a fully autonomous way for consequential actions for weapons systems. It should also not be relied upon for decision support.

I would also argue that cognitive outsourcing in the decisions and actions involved in both weapons systems and decision support will, over time, diminish skills, critical thinking, the development of good judgement and wisdom. Ultimately, humans are unique in having agency. We should not offload that agency, effectively giving proxy agency to a statistically based, non-deterministic artefact. A consequence of this position is to argue that AI-equipped weapons systems must always keep a human being appraised of the situation – and that consequential decisions must rest with people. But even with this caveat, AI systems require their users to exhibit considerable discipline (or even put safeguards in place) in order to avoid the temptation to rely on its output.

The counter argument to the above is that AI-equipped weapons systems will result in fewer deaths because they will reduce human error that can result in loss of civilian life, disproportionate killing of combatants or property damage. However, I am not aware of any empirical basis for this claim – and the LLM simulations run by Payne instead suggest that the opposite might prove true were such systems given free rein. Moreover, although the objective of reducing casualties lies in favour of the objectives of the law of armed conflict, the underlying ethical basis is utilitarian and consequentialist (that is, that the ends justify the means). And in a Christian worldview, the use of a lethal, fully autonomous weapon does not diminish moral culpability for the consequences of its action, especially where it is found to have infringed the principle of proportionality or discrimination. A commander

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18 Payne, 'AI Arms and Influence'.

19 Dario Amodei is the CEO and founder of Anthropic. Dario Amodei, 'Statement from Dario Amodei on Our Discussions with the Department of War', accessed 4 September 2026, https://www.anthropic.com/news/statement-department-of-war.

20 Payne, 'AI Arms and Influence'.

is responsible for an AI-equipped weapons system being deployed; others are responsible for its servicing, arming and fuelling. Each individual involved has a share of moral responsibility.

How we use AI in autonomous weapons, decision support and in applications across society will have a long-term impact on humanity. This is because technology is not neutral. As Professor Melvin Kranzberg put it in his Kransbergs' Laws, technology is neither good nor bad, nor is it neutral.[21] Neil Postman put the same idea another way in his book, *Technopoly*: "Every technology is both a burden and a blessing; not either-or, but this-and-that."[22]

Any piece of technology provides what philosophers of technology have called 'affordances', that is, different possibilities for use. An example might be that smartphone apps could be designed to allow users to sign up for the service in a way that engages them to think of it as a conventional bargain between two parties. This would require the user to read the contract. But in the case of social media this might run into hundreds of contracts between the service providers' third parties. Of course, most people do not want to do that – and so the software is designed to require just a box tick to accept the contract and its terms and conditions. This design approach has shaped the whole software and service industry, normalising the use of a check box to onboard customers. In practice, most people do not know (and may not care) precisely what they have agreed to – especially when the service is free.

It is well known that social media algorithms have been designed to keep people engaged on the platform to maximise advertising revenue. Keystrokes (every key that you press on the keyboard) are collected and analysed to allow targeted feeds which are filtered to post the content, including adverts, which is most likely to appeal to a specific user. This has shaped whole societies and resulted in many cases in addiction and the attendant harms that can result from it, such as loneliness and depression, now appearing in studies of habitual AI Chatbot use.[23]

The design of any piece of technology is shaped by the values and incentives of the designers and their companies. This technology in turn shapes its users and eventually whole societies. As the use of a particular technology becomes normalised in society, designers of technology are themselves are shaped and influenced in what they create next (see Figure 3). In a military context, the same shaping is true. Reliance on AI systems will become the norm, potentially de-skilling a whole new generation of analysts, commanders and combatants.

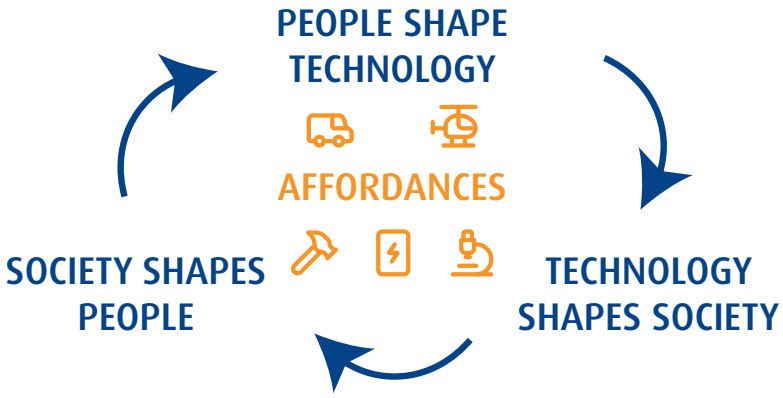

Figure 3: The cycle of how technology shapes us through the affordances it offers.

21 Melvin Kranzberg, 'Technology and History: "Kranzberg's Laws"', *Technology and Culture* 27, no. 3 (1986): 544–60, https://doi.org/10.2307/3105385.

22 Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Vintage Books edition (Vintage Books, 1992), 4–5, WorldCat.

23 Cathy Mengying Fang et al., 'How AI and Human Behaviors Shape Psychosocial Effects of Extended Chatbot Use: A Longitudinal Controlled Study', preprint, 2025, https://www.media.mit.edu/publications/how-ai-and-human-behaviors-shape-psychosocial-effects-of-chatbot-use-a-longitudinal-controlled-study/.

AI and Generative AI in particular is perhaps the first technology to simulate human natural language output in ways that can appear indistinguishable from human-generated thoughts. This has convinced many to outsource cognitive processes like writing and searching for information to AI personal assistants and chatbots. The impact of this habituation, rather like social media and internet addiction, is beginning to be realised. Studies are showing how such outsourcing is diminishing critical thinking abilities and writing skills. In the context of military operations, how might the skills, experience, judgements and wisdom of commanders, combatants and support staff be shaped over time through reliance on AI in decision support systems and autonomous weapons? The consequences of such reliance are yet to emerge, although some have speculated that the destruction of the girl's school in Iran at the start of the US invasion might have been partly a consequence of using AI tools.[24]

Conclusion

From the perspective of Christian Anthropology, we need to navigate our use of technology in any sphere by balancing what is gained and what it does *for* us with what is lost in our humanness and what it does *to* us. These value judgements must be made in the context of our mirroring the image of God and of our imitating Christ. A further question might be to ask is this: why use AI and not a human expert, even though all of us are flawed? AI works on probabilities and approximate information retrieval and, though humans are also flawed, moral agency rests with us alone.

These are serious issues for society. But it is crucial that we navigate them in this increasingly unstable world where military technology is becoming ever more sophisticated and AI is seen as a key part of the arms race. As long ago as 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin made this pronouncement to students: "Artificial intelligence is the future, not only for Russia, but for all humankind. It comes with colossal opportunities, but also threats that are difficult to predict. Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world."[25]

I have argued that AI is, by its nature, ontologically different from the embodied human mind in its fullest orb. I have also argued that AI is fundamentally unreliable and limited in its capabilities and that this should be a warning to use it with utmost caution (even with a human involved), especially where decisions and actions are consequential, whether to life or property.

In practice, this means that, where autonomous weapons are being used, there should always be a human involved who makes decisions and especially final judgements, taking into account military justification, humanity, discrimination and proportionality as defined in the Law of Conflict. I see these laws as in harmony with a Just War Theory derived from my understanding of the biblical texts outlined in this article. These same principles apply to the use of AI in support functions, especially in critical scenarios and war gaming where outputs might be acted upon. AI developments need careful evaluation of their utility and should only be used in an assistive way that does not bypass human cognitive processes. AI can be extremely useful when used in the right context, such as pattern matching – as long as there is a recognition that it is imperfect. Cybersecurity is just one example where rapid analysis and flagging of potential threats does not replace people but rather allows human experts to evaluate the outputs, saving significant time in what would otherwise be an overwhelming task.

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24 Kevin T. Baker, 'AI Got the Blame for the Iran School Bombing. The Truth Is Far More Worrying', News, *The Guardian*, 26 March 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/news/2026/mar/26/ai-got-the-blame-for-the-iran-school-bombing-the-truth-is-far-more-worrying.

25 Joseph Trevithick, 'Putin Says Whoever Has the Best Artificial Intelligence Will Rule the World', *TWZ*, 6 September 2017, https://www.twz.com/14141/putin-says-whoever-has-the-best-artificial-intelligence-will-rule-the-world.

Given the human propensity to desire speed and efficiency and our temptation to sloth,[26] the use of AI systems must be a well-informed strategic decision with adequate provisions for human input, analysis, reflection and the application of wisdom that can only be acquired over time. This is necessary to avoid overreliance on AI systems' outputs, whether those are analysing intelligence, wargaming recommended actions or identifying targets.

The questions surrounding the use and impact of AI on people and whole societies are questions about which Christians and the church have an informed perspective and a significant contribution to make. We are called to speak wisdom into the world. Pope Leo's *Encyclical on AI* is a case in point. The voice of other Christian traditions must be added to this, alongside informing and teaching our own congregations.

Whilst our influence may be limited, resolving the ethical and moral issues surrounding the use of AI in the military, our focus in this article, is crucial. In an age where individual values have replaced virtues and many are questionings what it means to be human, we need to bring back the supernatural into the debate in the public square. We need to reaffirm what it means to be human – what it is to be made in God's image. Because, as Alexis de Tocqueville rightly observes, "When religion has lost its empire over the souls of men, the most prominent boundary which divides good from evil is overthrown."[27]

Jeremy Peckham is a technology entrepreneur and author of the book Masters or Slaves? AI and the Future of Humanity *(IVP, 2021). He spent much of his career in the field of artificial intelligence and he was project director of a €20m pan-European research project on Speech Understanding and Dialogue (SUNDIAL) that broke new ground in AI.*

26 Sloth (Latin 'acedia') is much more than simply laziness. In its full meaning, it can be a lack of care or attention to doing what is right and it can quench the Holy Spirit and work against imitating Christ.

27 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (Oxford University Press, 1965), 256.

Update from the Christian Institute

By Sam Webster

Pastor Clive Johnston

The Christian Institute is supporting retired pastor and former president of the Association of Baptist Churches in Ireland, Clive Johnston, to appeal his conviction for preaching the Gospel in an abortion buffer zone.

In July 2024, Clive led a Sunday open-air service within an abortion 'Safe Access Zone' (SAZ) near Causeway Hospital in Coleraine but some distance from the hospital itself. Clive preached a gospel message and he and a small group sang gospel choruses. About ten minutes in, police officers attended and directed the group to leave. Clive refused and was cautioned by the police.

In February 2025, Clive was charged under the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act (Northern Ireland) 2023 for conducting an act "with the intent of, or reckless as to whether it has the effect of, influencing a protected person" in connection with the protected person attending protected premises (i.e. an abortion clinic). Under the legislation, protected persons are those accessing abortion services, those accompanying such persons or those working at the premises.

The trial took place at Coleraine Magistrates Court on 17 December 2025. Clive was represented by the former Attorney General for Northern Ireland, John Larkin KC. After further hearings and written legal submissions earlier this year, the Magistrate handed down his judgment on 7 May.

Judgment

The Magistrate's findings of fact included the following:

Clive was present in the SAZ on 7 July 2024 at the material time "along with a number of others as part of a 'Return to the Cross' event".

- There were no anti-abortion placards displayed at the event, the sole visible indication of the event being a large wooden cross.
- Clive delivered a Christian sermon at the event refraining from any mention of abortion.
- Clive's "decision to preach within the SAZ was motivated by two reasons – to test the legislation and to influence anyone who heard him towards the Bible and the Christian message generally".

Although he accepted that no mention was made of abortion, the Magistrate found Clive guilty of both the charge of influencing and of failing immediately to leave the area after a police direction to do so. Clive was fined £450. Summing up, the Magistrate concluded:

- Clive "was doing an act, in this case preaching the Gospel, intending that any person hearing it would be influenced whether directly or indirectly".
- Clive "was reckless as to whether a protected person in connection with them attending at the Causeway Hospital for a section 3 purpose hearing it would be influenced whether directly or indirectly".

The Magistrate relied on a 2022 Supreme Court ruling in a reference made by the Attorney General for Northern Ireland regarding the human rights compatibility of the Northern Ireland SAZ legislation. That ruling had suggested that if the test for the offence under the legislation is met, a conviction will not breach a defendant's rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion and that a court does not need to further assess the human rights impact. This was disappointing. Clive's legal team had stressed the need for the court to contextualise the Supreme Court judgment, particularly given the clear gap between gospel preaching and the activities which were intended to be caught by the legislation.

Appeal

Clive is now pursuing an appeal to the Court of Appeal in Belfast. It is expected to look at the compatibility of how the legislation was used with Articles 9 (Freedom of thought, conscience and religion), 10 (Freedom of expression) and 11 (Freedom of assembly and association) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Judicial review of Civil Service involvement in 'Pride'

The Christian Institute is pursuing a claim for judicial review in the High Court to challenge the active participation of civil servants in 'Pride' marches identifying themselves as civil servants. It argues that this breaches the Civil Service duty of impartiality and is therefore unlawful.

A particular focus for the legal challenge is the Birmingham Pride Parade on 23 May 2026.

Pride is a movement that advocates political, cultural and ideological goals. Pride organisations are engaged in political activities, including lobbying for changes to legislation and policies in favour of those who affirm gender ideology. The involvement of civil servants in Pride marches who are identifying themselves as civil servants (through wearing t-shirts or holding banners), raises an issue of public importance concerning the scope of the Civil Service's responsibility to act impartially under the Civil Service Code. It associates the Civil Service with support for the contested political aims of Pride, particularly in relation to gender ideology. It communicates that the Civil Service is opposed to those who hold contrary points of view and has moved from a neutral position on ideologically contested issues.

Civil servants are the gatekeepers for ministers and the Ministerial Code requires ministers to give "fair consideration" to impartial advice from civil servants. Civil Service failure to adopt a neutral stance on the aims of the Pride movement is therefore liable to affect the output of legislation and public policy.

The aim of the judicial review is to secure greater neutrality in the Civil Service for Christian groups such as The Christian Institute to engage positively with civil servants about the impact of LGBT policies on religious freedom, marriage and the family, and education. A successful outcome in the judicial review would also help Christian civil servants who feel under pressure to affirm gender ideology and Pride contrary to their conscientiously held beliefs.

The Institute's claim is similar to the successful challenge brought by Linzi Smith to the participation of Northumbria Police in the 2024 Newcastle Pride march. In that case, the High Court ruled that Northumbria Police had acted contrary to the police duty of impartiality by allowing officers to participate in the march, displaying Pride colours or insignia.

A decision is awaited from the High Court as to whether permission will be granted for the judicial review to go forward. The defendant is the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Current Bioethics Issues (September 2026)

By Dr Calum MacKellar

Scotland rejects assisted suicide

After five years of debate, the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill, brought forward by Mr Liam McArthur MSP, was defeated on 17 March 2026 by 69 votes to 57 in the Scottish Parliament. The Bill was also opposed by the leader of the SNP, Scottish First Minister John Swinney; Scottish Labour leader Anas Sarwar; and the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Russell Findlay. They were joined by Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes and by former First Ministers Nicola Sturgeon and Humza Yousaf. In addition, dozens of major medical bodies and organisations representing the most vulnerable in Scottish society came out in opposition to the Bill.

During the Scottish Parliament's final debate on assisted suicide, a large number of MSPs from across the political spectrum came to the conclusion that assisted suicide was an extremely unsafe and dangerous procedure, deciding that it would undermine the equal and inherent value and worth of all human life which is necessary for a civilised society to survive. It would also have put the most vulnerable and weak persons in society at an unacceptable risk.

England and Wales reject assisted suicide

On 11 September 2026, the Westminster Parliament rejected assisted suicide by 286 votes to 270. This followed the decision on 14 June 2026, by Ms Lauren Edwards MP, to bring back legislation mirroring the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill approved by the House of Commons in 2025 to legalise assisted suicide in England Wales. This is because the previous Bill (introduced by Kim Leadbeater MP) did not complete its passage through the House of Lords in April 2026. This was because an exceptional number of amendments prolonged scrutiny to the extent that time ran out. As a result, Ms Edwards MP indicated that she wanted to 'finish the job'.

By reintroducing the same legislation without changes, Ms Edwards MP had hoped to pave the way for the use of the Parliament Act to overcome resistance in the House of Lords if peers rejected the measure again. Normally, a Bill can only become law once both Houses of Parliament have agreed on its final text. However, the Parliament Act – used only seven times in the past 100 years – allows legislation that has been passed in identical form by the Commons in two successive parliamentary sessions to become law without the agreement of the Lords.

In the end, because the House of Commons rejected the Bill for similar reasons as those presented in the Scottish Parliament, no more procedures are expected for the duration of this Parliament.

France legalises assisted suicide and euthanasia

On 15 July 2026, members of the French Parliament voted by 291 to 241 in favour of a Bill supporting assisted suicide and euthanasia, despite it having been rejected on three occasions by the Senate, the upper chamber of the French legislature. The new legislation means that France joins a small number of countries (including the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, and Canada) that have legalised assisted suicide and/or euthanasia.

The new legislation provides that adults can end their lives in France if they are affected by a serious, incurable, and life-threatening condition that has reached an advanced or terminal stage. To qualify,

the individual must be experiencing persistent physical or psychological suffering that is either intolerable or cannot be adequately relieved by treatment.

A patient would be required to express their wish voluntarily and clearly to a physician, who would then assess the request and reach a decision within 15 days following consultations with relevant healthcare professionals. Subsequently, after a mandatory two-day reflection period, the individual would be expected to self-administer the prescribed lethal substance (assisted suicide). However, if they were physically incapable of doing so, the medication could be administered by a doctor or nurse (euthanasia).[1]

On the 18th of August 2026, France's Constitutional Council approved the legislation in its entirety, while indicating that several aspects required further clarification. Among these was the 'conscience clause', which would grant healthcare professionals the right to opt-out of participation in the procedure on grounds of conscience.[2]

Genetically modified pig kidney successful in patient for 271 days

In July 2026, it was announced that a kidney from a genetically modified pig has reportedly functioned successfully in a US patient for 271 days, setting a new record. It served as a temporary solution until a human donor kidney became available and spared the patient from undergoing months of hospital-based blood-filtering dialysis treatment.

In this regard, biomedical researchers are continuing to develop xenotransplantation, which is the transplantation of organs from one species to another, as a potential solution to the persistent shortage of donor organs. In the USA, approximately 100,000 patients are awaiting a kidney transplant, yet only about 25,000 kidney transplants are performed annually. In the UK, more than 7,000 people remain on the waiting list for a donor kidney.

Pigs are widely regarded as the most suitable animals for xenotransplantation because their organs are similar in size to those of humans, and they have been extensively studied through decades of pig farming.

The pigs used for these transplants have undergone genetic modification to make their organs more compatible with the human body. This process involves (1) removing certain pig cell characteristics that trigger immune rejection, (2) introducing human genes that help disguise the transplanted tissue from the recipient's immune system, and (3) disabling viruses embedded within pig DNA to reduce the risk of infection.

The pig organ eventually failed for reasons yet to be determined. As a result, the patient had to resume dialysis treatment until a suitable human donor kidney became available.[3]

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1 Paul Kirby, 'French MPs Approve Assisted-Dying Law with Strict Rules after Years of Argument', *BBC News*, 15 July 2026, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvg7g2z4pv3o.

2 Jon Henley, 'France's "Aid in Dying" Law Comes into Effect after Constitutional Approval', World News, *The Guardian*, 19 August 2026, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/aug/19/france-assisted-dying-law-comes-into-effect.

3 James Gallagher, 'Pig Kidney Works in Human Body for 271 Days – Is This the Future of Organ Transplants?', *BBC News*, 3 September 2026, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c305qn2jeggo.

Legalisation of self-abortions up to birth in England and Wales

Unfortunately, on 18 March 2026, Baroness Monckton's amendment to overturn the possibility for pregnant women to self-administer abortion up to birth was rejected by the House of Lords by 185 to 148 as part of the Crime and Policing Bill for England and Wales.

Moreover, Baroness Stroud's amendment to reinstate in-person consultations with a medical professional prior to a self-administered abortion taking place at home was also rejected by 191 to 119.

This brings forward one of the most significant changes to UK abortion legislation since 1967, when abortion was first made possible. As part of the Crime and Policing Bill, the possibility for women to self-administer an abortion in England and Wales will make it more likely that they will have their own abortions at home in very inadequate circumstances. It also means that it would no longer be illegal for women to self-administer their own abortions for any reason, including sex-selective purposes, and at any point up to, and during, birth.

Proposal to suspend UK legislation relating to embryology

In the 2026 King's Speech, new powers to suspend prohibitions relating to embryonic research were included in the creation of sandboxing powers as part of the Regulating for Growth Bill. These proposed sandboxes would 'theoretically' limit any physical, biotechnological, ethical (or any other kind of) outburst while hopefully limiting the damage outside the box. The accompanying briefing notes to the King's Speech indicates: "These sandboxing powers will be legal powers to allow existing rules to be temporarily relaxed, under strict controls, to test new products and technologies in real-world settings. This will support the UK to unlock growth from emerging technologies where current regulatory frameworks create barriers, with a focus on the Industrial Strategy's growth-driving sectors, but also enable citizens to benefit (for example from accelerated access to medical treatments)."[4]

This means that current legislation under the UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 and 2008 could be 'suspended' so that any kind of research which may 'accelerated access to medical treatments' would become possible. But this would also mean that:

- 'Sandbox' legislation would be developed without the general public understanding what it really represents, which is completely undemocratic.
- The development of embryonic models would be possible without the safeguard of legislation. Similarly, the creation of artificial sperm and eggs and the generation of certain human-nonhuman living combinations with, for example, entirely human organs (chimeras) for transplantation, would become possible without appropriate democratic control.

4 Prime Minister's Office, The King's Speech 2026: Background Briefing Notes (Prime Minister's Office, 2026), 31, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6a18713db95db968c8f3bbfd/The_King_s_Speech_2026_-_background_briefing_notes.pdf.

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The Christian Institute exists for "the furtherance and promotion of the Christian religion in the United Kingdom and elsewhere" and "the advancement of education". They are a nondenominational Christian charity with more than 60,000 supporters throughout the UK, including more than 5,000 churches. They are committed to upholding the truths of the Bible which they believe is inerrant and the supreme authority for all of life. They are committed to upholding the sanctity of life from conception.

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