

# OPEN FORUM

Joseph Allen's defense (Jan/Feb 2001) of our current war on terrorism in Afghanistan (and soon to be moving on to other places in the world) may be a very popular point of view since September 11. However, I maintain his justification is neither Christian nor an effective way to stop terrorism.

The history of humankind has proven again and again the truth of our Lord's words, "Those who take the sword will perish by the sword." Our many wars and acts of violence have always been followed by more wars and more acts of violence and the results continue to be more deaths and more destruction to too many people and their way of life.

I'm also convinced that our nation's overwhelming military power does more to cause terrorism than it does to destroy it. The only way our less powerful enemies believe they can compete with our military superiority is to do acts of terrorism against us.

Our country doesn't need more 'cheerleaders' (especially not Christians) for once more trying to settle problems with guns and ammunition. Our country needs prophets who call us to stop the cycle of violence and vengeance and to use our resources for building a better world for all its peoples before any more of it is destroyed.

**Merlin J. Ackerson**  
Keokuk, IA

**The *Circuit Rider* 2001 Index**  
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Congratulations for an excellent January-February edition! Your three articles treating terrorism and the church, ministry to military personnel, and Just-War are most helpful. Although the normative United Methodist and classic Christian position on violence has always been based on St. Augustine's Just War theory, for several decades many liberals have wanted us to believe it was pacifism. Tragically, our church has often considered chaplains and those in military service as second class citizens. Moreover, our bishops have often made feckless pronouncements about American military policy and our strategic defense. In doing so they have offended legions of veterans who have sacrificed for their country. Our church is still living off the anti-military hyperbole engendered by the Vietnam tragedy.

I especially liked Professor Joseph L. Allen's treatment of St. Augustine. It is a good corrective to the *Christian Century's* James Wall who would have us believe that our response to the terrorists of September 11 is immoral.

When life "falls in" and the demonic strikes, as it did on September 11, it is best to refer to classical rather than marginal theologies. St. Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Kierkegaard, and Reinhold Niebuhr are better guides than faddish feminist and liberationist twentieth century theologians. Sadly, the latter have given up normative for unrealistic theories of human nature.

"One cannot rule the world with a crucifix," opined Martin Luther. "Only the dead," Plato knew, "have seen the last of war." Even our American secular saints—Theodore Roosevelt and Benjamin Franklin—knew the danger of fanatic ideologies and predatory collectives. The former said, "Speak softly but carry

a very big stick!," while the latter observed, "If you make yourselves sheep, the wolves will eat you!"

Again, kudos to you for a fine issue!

**Walter W. Benjamin**  
St. Paul, MN

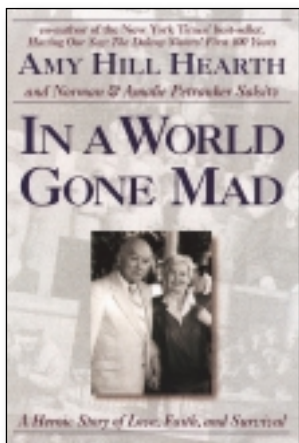
Since September 11, I've written letters to several publications, so am not inclined to write another, but I must respond to *Circuit Rider's* January/February issue. This first issue to directly address recent events features articles heavily weighted in support of America's war effort, especially those by Joseph I. Allen and Army Chaplain, Col. Greg W. Hill. Dr. Allen's article in particular directly advocated the so-called "just war" position.

The presence of these articles itself would not bother me, but no others balance them. Why none from a Christian pacifist perspective? Perhaps you thought that, in some measure, those by Stephen A. Rhodes and Wayne Jack Plumstead reflect this tradition. But neither is explicitly pacifist, nor do they represent classical evangelical pacifism.

Bizarrely, only Dr. Allen speaks directly about pacifism. Experience has taught me that those who explain beliefs they oppose always get it wrong. Thus, Dr. Allen misrepresents pacifism when he contrasts it with the "just war" position in words which the editors highlight: "For just war Christians love is best interpreted as not refraining from violence, but doing what helps our neighbors' lives." It is dishonest to contrast this with pacifism. We believe precisely that war does not help our neighbors, but always ultimately harms them.

At best, war may temporarily suppress a particular expression of evil, but in the long run it increases the level of violence in the world. Thus, war makes the world more dangerous for our neighbors—particularly those of the future, including our own children. Now, however, we already see Israel and India using America's example to justify their own military efforts.

In addition, in many ways Jesus tells us that our enemy is also our neighbor. The parable of the Good Samaritan makes precisely this point. Whether we like it or not, members of al Qaeda and the Taliban are neighbors whom the Lord calls us to love. And in case we doubt that, He says explicitly, "Love your ene-



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—Ernest S. Lyght, Bishop, The New York Area

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—Alfred Johnson, Bishop, Greater New Jersey Annual Conference

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mies.” Any claim that we may kill those we love is impossibly dishonest. As the apostle Paul says, “Love does no harm to a neighbor,” (Romans 13:10a).

The United Methodist Church includes some of the most important pacifist thinkers working today. Please have the decency to let such persons tell us what pacifists really believe, rather than simply printing the misrepresentations of those who reject our convictions.

**Dennis D. Hensley**

Fairmount, IN

You devote the first four articles (Jan/Feb) to various aspects of terrorism. I find it both astonishing and disturbing that you would include an article on the just war theory but only a footnote reference to pacifism, and no mention in the entire issue to positions taken by Methodist bodies and church leaders. Consider the following:

“As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe that we must choose the nonviolent way of the cross in these dangerous times. If we or our loved ones are attacked, injured or killed by acts of terror, we forbid our governments to retaliate in our names... We intend to continue resisting any foreign policy that results in the death or exploitation of human beings, whatever their nationality.” (Christian Peacemaker Teams, of which I am a member).

“We claim the teachings of the Prince of Peace who instructs us to love and pray for our enemies and refrain from responding to violence with violence. As we join people around the world in our resolve to bring terrorists to justice, we understand that war is not an appropriate means of responding to criminal acts against humanity.” (United Methodist General Board of Church and Society)

“Now, who can reconcile war, I will not say to religion, but to any degree of reason or common sense?...What must mankind (sic) be, before such a thing as war could ever be known or thought of upon earth?” (John Wesley, “Doctrine of Original Sin”)

“Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also...Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” (Jesus Christ)

Can the war against Afghanistan really be considered “just” when we bomb a

clearly marked Red Cross Center, not once but four times, and when, as of December 6 (the latest figures I have), 3,767 civilians had been killed by U.S. bombs—in just 8-1/2 weeks? This is more than were killed in the attack on the World Trade Center. It is also worth noting that, in large part as a result of policies of corporate globalization (some of which were made in the World Trade Center), which have impoverished much of the two-thirds world, approximately 35,600 children died of starvation on September 11, 2001 (FAO figures).

**Douglas E. Wingeier**

Evanston, IL

I was delighted to read Joseph Allen’s article because a number of clergy in our area are taking a pacifist stance. However, I totally agree with Joseph Allen’s view.

I speak as an African American male who has experienced injustice. I speak as a United Methodist who joined the church in 1955. I speak as a pastor, called by God to preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I speak as a District Superintendent who understands the diversity of all Christians who agree that Jesus is Lord; and I speak as a human being who has had to offer comfort to people devastated by the acts of terrorism that took the lives of [so many] INNOCENT people. I agree with the Social Principles expressed in the Discipline, but I also understand that there are circumstances that require an examination of those principles because the face of evil does not always adhere to the same guidelines and rules of society as Christians.

I realize that one of the most difficult decisions we make in living out our Christian witness is the ethics of getting involved in war of any kind. I agree with Augustine, Aquinas, Grotius, and others who are proponents of the Just War Theory. I take this stand because the Taliban committed ‘crimes against peace. I personally believe that self-defense from external attack and the protection of innocent people from an unprovoked attack requires response for unjustified violence. I believe that America’s response is morally appropriate.

**Harvey James Palmer, III**

Rome, GA



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I am very disappointed with Joseph L. Allen's article on terrorism in the January/February issue of the *Circuit Rider*. It is highly unusual for a seminary teacher to make such a strong case for war.

Allen first proposes the false alternatives of pacifism and the “just war theory.” Interestingly he quotes Jesus in a defense of pacifism. The rest of the article promotes the “just war theory.” Is it not possible to be a selective objector to a war or a certain set of activities of war? Most people now accept the idea of selective objection.

Allen then defends and blesses our nation's activities in Afghanistan. He assures us that we are defending ourselves and our neighbors, that our response is proportionate, and that we are operating with the best of intentions. Are we or are we going well beyond the boundaries of a just war? It is not unusual, as Walter Wink observes, for a nation to wink at the criteria for a truly just war.

Third, Allen sees violence as the only way to destroy terrorism. Does violence curb terrorism or increase terrorism? Where has violence not increased rage and despair and inspired more violence? Most often violence increases the cycle of violence making peace and security more illusive than ever.

Allen also does not see any alternatives to violence. Are there other ways to deal with terrorism? My guess is that the FBI has done more to increase domestic security than the military has. Investigations, prisons, and the coming judicial proceedings have made us more secure. No one has yet offered to mediate or begin dialog among warring parties. It is possible that security and peace can be increased with these alternative methods.

Last but not least, Allen has failed to hear the voice of the Church. The Book of Resolutions writes that “war is incompatible with the teachings and the example of Christ.” The bishops and the General Board of Church and Society agree. You would think that an academic would at least consider this position. Sadly Allen's great light comes not from the Gospel or the Church but from his own ethical theories.

**Richard M. Royalty**  
Medway, OH

I find the January/February [issue] to be extremely valuable in providing spiritual and biblical balance on the issues of terrorism facing our nation and the world. Specifically, Joseph L. Allen's article: “Terrorism and Just War Thinking” was excellent. Dr. Allen's handling of the difficult decisions Christians must face between war (that all oppose) and the intolerable reality of terrorism (which all must oppose) is rational in thinking and commitment.

At a time when it seems that the United Methodist Church voice on terrorism is both divided and confused, I find the *Circuit Rider* refreshingly clear and sound in its perspective. I encourage you and your staff to continue to provide United Methodist clergy with valuable perspectives on critical biblical and religious issues.

**Carl H. Doerr, Jr.**  
Philadelphia, PA

I recently received your January/February 2002 edition of *Circuit Rider* and read the commentary by Robert E. McAuley concerning *The Prayer of Jabez*. I was hoping to see shared testimonies from the many United Methodist churches like mine who have been involved in the “Prayer of Jabez” Bible study and richly blessed by it. Instead it was just another hatchet job attacking one of the most amazing and wonderful books and studies that I have ever come across.

Rev. McAuley makes the suggestion that the book encourages Christians to be selfish instead of looking to bless others. “The Christian message does not justify selfishness or asking God to bless us as opposed to others. Primarily we are taught to pray for others.” I agree with his statement but certainly not as he applies it to this book.

I have found myself praying more for others and asking for God's blessing on them. In fact, during the study the Holy Spirit revealed to me just how selfish I had been in my prayer life up to that point. I realized that I had been praying for my church to be blessed because if we prospered it would make it easier on me. It wasn't out of love and concern for other. The results of the book and its Bible study did for me just the opposite of what the author suggests. I have since repented of that selfish attitude and the love of God has been poured out on me as a great blessing from God simply because I sought to love and bless others. Perhaps if Rev. McAuley would read the book again with an open mind and allow the Holy

Spirit to speak to him about the anointing from God which is upon it, he would have similar results.

**Kent L. Svendsen**  
Ashton, IL

Rev. Robert E. McAuley's article on the *Prayer of Jabez* echoes everything I previously thought and preached about the subject. His problem is the same as mine was. It is easy to write negatively about this prayer as long as you haven't tried it! After I had pooh-poohed this prayer approach, a colleague challenged me to try using the prayer daily for six weeks and see if anything happened. Reluctantly I did it, retaining my skeptical attitude to the end.

God has blessed me through this prayer, but not in ways that have made me rich or famous. I was asked to be patient, a failing of mine, and I was blessed with patience. I was confronted with a situation needing compassion, another shortcoming, and I was compassionate. A disease in my body was changed to something I can deal with. My congregation dealt with 9-11 in a mature way, not a fearful way. Some people who were very irregular in attendance are now coming regularly.

These are not blessings of an economic nature. They are blessings of the heart. I challenge everyone who has read the negative reviews of Wilkinson's book, to read the book itself and try the prayer as a discipline for about 40 days. Draw your own conclusions, not those of someone who hasn't tried it out.

**George Lawton**  
Lakeside, MI

Donald E. Pardun's letter in the Jan/Feb 2002 issue raised my number one "red flag," namely the use of the term "biblical" to indicate an "evangelical" (that is to say, "the correct") position on theology. As a liberal, I believe just as strongly as Mr. Pardun, and with just as much faith in Christ's redeeming love, that "progressive" theology is also "biblical." We often hear the term, "a Bible-believing Church," as though there was any other kind. This is insulting in the extreme. I beg my sisters and brothers in the more "conservative/evangelical" camps to exercise care when using the term "Biblical" or "Bible-believing."

**Ralph R. Barlow**  
Los Angeles, CA

# CIRCUIT RIDER

## Reviews

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### Books reviewed in this issue:

*Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* by William H. Willimon

*The Cherry Log Sermons* by Fred Craddock

*Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* by Harry L. Poe

*Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*  
edited by Kenneth Collins and John Tyson

*Faith in the Living God: A Dialogue*  
by John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker

*The Gospel According to the Simpsons* by Mark I. Pinsky

*Journey to the Center of the Faith: An Explorer's Guide to Christian Living*  
by James A. Harnish

*Searching for Truth: Confessing Christ in an Uncertain World*  
by Thomas W. Currie



### Book Review Editor

**Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.** is pastor of Mount Tabor United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He is the author of *The Gifted Pastor* (Abingdon Press, 2001).

### YOUR COMMENTS?

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