

WHY ARE WE WRITING ABOUT IT?

The widely popular video game franchise *Fallout* begins each installation of its series with the now-iconic phrase, “War never changes.”¹ While the mechanisms and tools of war change, armed conflict indeed seems ever-present in our world and news cycles. What also seems consistent is the dubious use of religion to justify conflict. Whether considering the Crusades from a thousand years ago, territorial wars between Christianity and Islam from centuries ago, holy war imagery from world wars decades ago, or modern conflicts, the relationship between religion and broad violent conflict demands that religious people examine our beliefs on the topic.

In February 2026, the United States and Israel attacked Iran. While rationale, purpose, and exit-strategy are still (as of March 2026) being analyzed, the conflict has (as of this writing) in under a month claimed over 3,000 lives. Among them have been Iranian leadership, active military from multiple countries, and civilians, including a school for girls. The full cost and impact are unknown, and ongoing.²

One of the particularly striking aspects of this conflict to many Christians – including your Brewed Theology authors – was the prevalence of Christian nationalist and apocalyptic language from leadership in the United States government to justify military action, especially from Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth. As a recent *New York Times* article observed, “Often [Hegseth] has imbued these actions with a Christian moral underpinning that suggests they are divinely sanctioned.”³ Such suggestions or justifications of war on behalf of Christianity are worthy of discussion and debate.

WAR.

“Just” & “Christian”

a Brewed Theology
Conversation Primer*

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

What was the first war (whether officially declared, or not) that you remember in your lifetime? What sort of sentiment, support, and rejection did it receive, and why? Was religious language used? Was there any talk of reconciliation or forgiveness? What is the relationship between religion and violence? What language about war and peace can you think of from the Bible? What does the Bible say about justice? What does Jesus teach?

BIBLE BASICS

- **Isaiah 2:3-5** – The Prophet Isaiah shares a vision of peace. Sword become plowshares. (Read the whole chapter.)
- **Joel 3:9-12** – The Prophet Joel shares a vision of justice (and vengeance?). Plowshares become swords.
- **Romans 13:1-10** – Obey authorities...and love your neighbor. Read and consider how these relate or conflict.
- **Matthew 5:1-12** – Sermon on the Mount 1: The Beatitudes. Who is blessed?
- **Matthew 5:38-48** – Sermon on the Mount 2: Turning cheeks and loving enemies.
- **Matthew 26:46-52** – In the presence of enemies, Jesus say, those who live by the sword die by the sword.

¹The recent Prime Video adaptation of *Fallout* saw sales of the game *Fallout 4* grow to 25 million copies. War also sells.

²“Why did US and Israel attack Iran and how long could the war last?” March 22, 2026. [Link to article.](#)

³“Hegseth Invokes Divine Purpose to Justify Military Might.” *New York Times*, March 20, 2026. [Gift Article.](#)

ESSENTIAL READINGS and LISTENINGS

“A PASTORAL LETTER IN A TIME OF WAR”

Allison Burns-LaGreca is an Episcopal priest at St. Mary’s Episcopal in Stone Harbor, NJ. She’s also a military mother. Read this letter she posted in February 2026, at the onset of the Iran conflict.

THE FIRST “CHRISTIAN” ARMY? In the year 312 CE, the Roman Emperor Constantine had a vision before a conflict with a rival claimant to the throne. He saw a bright cross in the sky, and put it on his soldiers’ shields, officially merging Christianity with Empire – and military power – for the first time.

MODERN WARS: RELIGIOUS CRUSADES?

Read this interview with religious history scholar Philip Jenkins about the use of Christian imagery in World War 1, from religionnews.com. Consider the role of religion in modern conflicts.

JUSTIFYING WAR AS GOD’S PLAN ...IN 2026

It’s not just ancient Rome or early 20th century conflict. Christian religious language was used to justify US & Israeli attacks on Iran in 2026. Christian nationalist “theology” leaning (shakily) on the Book of Revelation and suggesteting the return of Jesus found its way into military rhetoric. From The Guardian.

“JUST WAR THEORY” One manner of weighing the legitimacy of armed conflict is through criteria called “Just War Theory.” With roots in Augustine of Hippo (358-430) and developed by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the theory proposes standards for declaring war, and conduct during war. Skim this 2013 article on thinkingfaith.org (or dig in, it’s a little academic). Consider how “just” the theory is.

FOUR CHRISTIAN VIEWS ON WAR

This book review of a 1991 book *War: Four Christian Views* edited by Robert G. Clouse lays out views from four Christians on war. Posted on thegospelcoalition.org.

MARTIN LUTHER (AND MARTY) ON WAR

In this 2003 article from *The Christian Century*, Lutheran scholar Martin E. Marty describes his – and Martin Luther’s – response to armed conflict, and what Christians should do in such times.

A LETTER FROM THE ELCA’S PRESIDING BISHOP

Read this brief statement on the Iran War from ELCA Presiding Bishiop Yehiel Curry, in which he laments the cost of lives and peace. Curry references [an ELCA social message, “Living in a Time of Terrorism.”](#)

BONUS

In 1914, during World War 1, a series of ceasefires spontaneously arose between opposing sides at Christmastime. Soldiers met in “no man’s land” between enemy trench lines, and took photographs, exchanged gifts, and played football (soccer). [You can read about it in this Wikipedia article.](#)

In 2005, the movie *Joyeaux Noel (Merry Christmas)* depicted the events of the 1914 Christmas truce. While taking creative liberties, the movie is a powerful telling based on historical events. Pertinent to this Brewed Theology conversation is the story arc of a Scottish priest-chaplain, who presides over Christmas worship mass during the truce. Afterwards, his superior arrives and relieves him for his actions. Their interaction is thought provking, regarding the role of faith in war.

Rent the movie and watch. At the time of this writing, the [whole thing is available on YouTube](#). If you have only a little time, watch just [the clip of priest and his superior, and a following homily, here](#).