

# Discussion Paper - Weapons

*Plough Shares Not Sword or Gun Shares: Can we ethically invest in weapons?*

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## Summary Position

In the light of our framework of Commands, Character and Consequences and in line with our policy on disproportionately socially damaging industries such as alcohol production we should avoid investment in weapons production, and seek to invest in ways that promote peace.

The Church of England Ethical Investment advisory group has a useful summary statement as a guide:

*The Church accepts the rights of nations to defend themselves and engage in peace-keeping activities. However the Church does not invest in companies that supply weapons, weapon systems or weapon platforms such as aircraft, helicopters, naval vessels or tanks. Investment is allowed in companies that provide non-offensive systems such as instrumentation or avionics or radar so long as this is not a major part of the company's business. The supply of non-defence related products such as catering or clothing is allowed.*

Domini Social Investments has a useful more specific benchmark we suggest we adapt to our usual 5% tolerance level.

### Military Weapons

Christian Super will avoid in its investments companies that derive more than 5% of revenues from the manufacture of military weapons. This screen primarily excludes major military contractors.

“We reject Atomic, Biological and Chemical weapons as inappropriate in every sense.”

The screen also excludes military subcontractors that manufacture military aircraft controls, spacecraft and missile controls, and industrial electronics and electric drives that also have military uses, and companies whose military work includes shipboard electronics, airborne training systems, range instrument systems, and mechanical systems, where those companies derive more than 5% of their revenue from such activities.

### Firearms

Christian Super will avoid in its investment companies deriving more than 5% of revenues from the manufacture of firearms or small arms ammunition. This screen excludes producers of pistols, handguns, rifles, shotguns, and handheld automatic or semi-automatic weapons. It also excludes producers of ammunition for such weapons.

### Atomic, Biological and Chemical Weapons

Christian Super will apply an absolute exclusion to any company involved in the production or distribution of atomic, biological or chemical weapons. We reject these weapons as inappropriate in every sense. No tolerance level is applied to these forms of weapons.

## 1. Introduction

*Lord of War*, starring Nicholas Cage as amoral Ukrainian American gun-runner Uri Orlock, captures well the interconnections between the weapons trade, war and our global, technological world. The movie opens by scanning millions of bullets and Cage facing a smoking hulk of a building. He turns to camera and says earnestly:

*There are over 500 million firearms in the world. That's one for every 12 people. The only question is "how to arm the other 11?" The camera then follows a bullet through every stage of a factory, from formation to inspection to packing to transportation to checking by a Russian looking guard, to an African wharf where they're loaded onto a truck guarded by heavily armed men wearing bullets not shirts. The truck stops, the sound of gunfire is heard, a*

*bullet is loaded into a gun, we look down the barrel at a village torn apart by violence, the trigger is pulled and we follow the flight of the bullet into the head of a young black boy.*

As Orlock washes his hands of his trade in blood he says ‘it’s in our nature, the earliest human skeletons had spearheads in their rib-cages’. The end of the film notes that the five members of the UN Security Council are the world’s five biggest arms traders.

Decisions to invest in weapons have world-wide repercussions. They are part of the unravelling, miscommunicating and scattering of humanity caused by our quest for god-likeness and the misuse of technology, as seen at Babel. Technologies like weapons are not neutral, they are part of a pattern of human spiritual defiance and consequent disintegration beginning with Cain’s murder of Abel and Lamech’s quest for unlimited vengeance – 77 times – even on a teenager<sup>1</sup>. This is beyond any moderate, rational weighing up of consequences from a neutral position. Violence, the episode of Cain and Abel and the development of iron and weapons shows<sup>2</sup>, emerges out of wrong worship. Having declared what we believe is a biblical bias against violence (though not necessarily limited force), we can proceed to apply our threefold ethical framework of commands, character and consequences in relation to weapons investment.

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## 2. Commands/Principles

In earlier discussions<sup>3</sup> we argued, without resolving whether Christians should be teetotallers, that most Christians hold that we can as mature/rational individuals drink alcohol because Scripture permits it, but as a Christian institution we should still not invest in the alcohol industry.

Similarly we may argue, without resolving the debate in relation to pacifism and just war arguments, that it is permissible for individuals in appropriate roles representing the state (e.g. hunters, police,

“We may argue, without resolving the debate in relation to pacifism and just war arguments, that it is permissible for individuals representing the state ... to use weapons in moderation.”

soldiers) to use weapons in moderation.<sup>4</sup> Mankind has been given dominion over the animal world (hunting) and the state is given responsibility for enforcing laws and maintaining a peaceful society.

The ancient philosophical and Church Just War tradition separates ‘war-decision law’ and ‘war-conduct law.’<sup>5</sup>

Firstly, just war proponents generally propose 7 conditions that must be met before resorting to war:

- (a) Just cause
- (b) Proper authority
- (c) Right intention (loving, protection of the weak)
- (d) Reasonable hope of success
- (e) Proportionality i.e. total expected good outweighing total evil

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 4:23-24

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 4

<sup>3</sup> See Paper on Alcohol

<sup>4</sup> Romans 13

<sup>5</sup> WM. V. O’Brien

- (f) Last resort
- (g) For the end or purpose of peace.

Secondly, two War Conduct Principles are specified:

- (a) Discrimination between combatants and non-combatants –avoiding direct, intentional harm to non-soldiers.
- (b) Proportionality of means avoiding needless destruction to achieve justified ends

*The two sets of principles above don't directly answer which instruments of war are allowable ... [because] instruments are apparently adaptable. The surgeon's scalpel can be used to commit murder, the pirate's cutlass to perform surgery... 'If instruments are neutral what could possibly be said ... about the morality of different types of weapon, which might be used for moral or immoral purposes depending on those who used them? But .... if a scalpel can be used to commit a murder and a cutlass to perform an amputation, that does not mean there is no moral significance in the difference between the two implements. A surgeon's scalpel on the steward's requisition list for a merchant vessel would cause nobody any alarm; two dozen cutlasses might... instruments are designed in relation to purposes, and bear within their design the purposes they were conceived for. The form which weapons take tell us what kind of fighting is envisaged. The peculiar weapons of our age give voice to certain hypothetical war plans and are open to criticism inasmuch as the plans themselves (78-9).<sup>6</sup>*

“Indiscriminate weapons, such as atomic, biological and chemical weapons are indefensible because they attack the community’s basic means of life.”

Three objections are raised against particular types of weapon:

1. Their design implies unjust or indiscriminate war conduct;
2. They are inhumane or cruel
3. Proportionality (e.g. using a sledgehammer to crush a nut)

To expand on these three:

## **2.1 Indiscriminate Design**

Indiscriminate weapons, such as atomic, biological and chemical weapons are indefensible because they ‘attack ... the community’s basic means of life.’<sup>7</sup>

Another major area of indiscriminate use of weapons is through landmines. We should note the effects on limbless humans but also on the environment and remember biblical commands against scorched earth, ecologically destructive policies.<sup>8</sup> Vietnam, Cambodia, the Balkans and now Lebanon are still being slowly cleared of landmines

US folk singer Tom Lehrer sings of a German missile scientist who transferred to the US ‘once the bombs go up, who cares where they come down, that’s not my department, says Werner von Braun’. But it is his department as inventor and it is ours as investors.

Commercial responsibility must be encouraged, O’ Donovan argues:

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<sup>6</sup> O’Donovan, *The Just War Revisited – Immoral Weapons*, Cambridge University Press, 2003

<sup>7</sup> O’Donovan p80

<sup>8</sup> See for example Deuteronomy 20:19-20 on destroying trees & food.

“Those who make and sell arms must be allowed the opportunity to make and sell acceptable arms.”<sup>9</sup>

What are the features of a responsible market?

1. *Publicity, so that it can be determined* who is buying what from whom.
2. *Refusal to deal with illegitimate purchasers*, so that non-governmental buyers cannot purchase heavy arms.
3. *Tight credit control*, so that the purchase of weapons doesn't encourage excessive spending or debt.

Both supply-side control using the above criteria and bans against certain well-specified technical features of a weapon are necessary. But weapons technology is fluid and a ban represents an incentive to overcome the new hurdle it faces. Ethical investment in weapons requires very careful specification, in our view too precise and demanding for us as a fund to afford.

## 2.2 **Proportionality**

We also argue that, as alcohol is acceptable as a product however harmful when used out of proportion to what is wise, proportionality should be considered in relation to weapons in our

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world. In a world where billions live in hunger the \$1,118 billion (more than \$2 million per minute) spent on arms instead of alms in 2006 can only be described as obscene and idolatrously disproportionate. And it's increasing: 'Over the 11 year period from 1995-2005, world military spending increased 34%. Diversion of just

10% of arms spending would alleviate world hunger and go a long way towards tackling epidemics like HIV and malaria' Surely alms not arms is what we should invest in.

In relation to our responsibility to the immature or weak, in the US and many other places weapons are available indiscriminately to young men or boys, for instance in the Lord's Army of Uganda, and weapons can destroy the users as much as the targets.

## 2.3 **Inhuman or Cruel Weapons**

'All weapons can cause terrible and prolonged suffering'. But there is scope for criticism where weapons cause avoidable suffering. The principle of proportionality means 'that we should minimise suffering produced by weapons by any means compatible with their effectiveness in battle.'<sup>10</sup>

Mark Twain saw that the intense pursuit of military technology breeds 'a race of inventors [and investors] who do not have to contemplate at close quarters the harm that their inventions do' (O.O., 90). This visual and moral distancing is inherently dangerous.

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<sup>9</sup> O'Donovan, p92-93

<sup>10</sup> O'Donovan, p86-87

## 2.4 Prevention

A further, broader biblical principle is *prevention*. Israelite case law interpreted and applied commands through the positive, preventative law of love. We are not only not to kill, but we are also to prevent accidental deaths.<sup>11</sup> We see this in modern times through legislation mandating swimming pool gates, or to limit passive smoking.

How does this preventative principle apply to weapons? In Australia we see a preventative principle of limiting firearms ownership, a direct result of the Port Arthur massacre in 1996, and a measure which has reduced the risk of dying from gunshot dramatically.<sup>12</sup> We should certainly avoid indiscriminate investment in weapons.

## 2.5 Positive Influence

In line with our general emphasis on positive principles and investments, *how do we invest positively in ploughshares not weapons* – in constructive uses of industrial and information technology?

O'Donovan gives examples of indiscriminate weapons that can be made to fit just war criteria and some companies now produce ecologically friendly but still deadly weapons. But even more we need examples of destructive weapons being turned to productive purposes.

# 3. Character/Persons

In examining the character of this issue, we examine what role weapons may have within the state, as used appropriately by a hunter, policeman or soldier.

Presumably the biblical permission given<sup>13</sup> for the State to use the sword applies also to the gun, in so far as the state acts proportionately as a servant or minister of God.

We must also consider the promotion of violent character through the use of weapons in our world. The music and movies we (especially young people) listen to and the video games we play are saturated with violence. Former military psychologist Lt Colonel Dave Grossman's states:

“Our obsession with violence hampers our efforts to produce young people capable of the rational discrimination necessary to understand ... the appropriate use of weapons.”

*In the American media system of 'violence as entertainment', in movies, TV and video games in particular, the culture is exposing and subjecting its children, from an early age upward, to essentially the same kinds of conditioning techniques being used in the military to break down new recruits' inhibitions to point a gun at another human being and pull the trigger. Combine that fact with the availability of weapons and we have a clear recipe for disaster among our teens and young people (p.49).<sup>14</sup>*

Our obsession with violence hampers our efforts to produce young people capable of the rational discrimination necessary to understand Just War or the appropriate use of weapons.

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<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 22:8, See also the principle of Exodus 21:28-30

<sup>12</sup> Sydney Morning Herald, 14 December 2006.

<sup>13</sup> See Romans 13:4

<sup>14</sup> Lt Colonel Dave Grossman, *On Killing*, p49.

## 4. Consequences/Purposes

From a consequentialist perspective the statistics are shocking. Marianne Williamson states:

‘In the United States, 12 children each day die from gun violence. Homicide was the second leading cause of death for people ages 10 to 24 in 2001, with rates 10 times that of other leading industrialized nations. War itself has killed more than half a million Americans since World War II’.

A 2004 World Health Report estimated the cost of interpersonal violence in the United States (excluding war-related costs) at \$300 billion per year. We currently allocate more than \$400 billion per year to the Department of Defense, not including the cost of the war in Iraq. The financial cost alone is enough to motivate many to wage peace but the human carnage is simply a cost that should never be permitted in a civilized society.’<sup>15</sup>

If we add in the war in Iraq which has already cost over \$400bn we see even more of the catastrophic cost of western society’s love affair with weapons. The Iraq war has rightly been overwhelmingly opposed by the churches on Just War grounds.

We see the opportunity cost of our world’s idolatrous obsession with weapons in that the money spent on the war with Iraq could have reconstructed half of Africa and eradicated diseases that wipe out 30,000 children each year, as Tim Costello noted on Lateline.

“We should seek to invest in ways that promote peace.”

Further, 50%-66% of all engineers are engaged in military related research. What an enormous waste of human brain power and ingenuity.

The biblical vision of ‘turning swords into ploughshares’ should imaginatively inspire our investment. We need to have shares in ploughshares, to positively invest in ploughs and human development, not swords or guns as instruments of disproportionate human destruction.

## 5. Difficulty of Discrimination & Level of Exclusion

Having argued against investment in weapons manufacture, how much of the market does that eliminate and can we discriminate between companies like Boeing or McDonnell Douglas’ civilian products and their weapons manufacturing? Where do we draw the line between parent companies and weapons-producing subsidiaries? Generally, we should apply the principle that parent companies are accountable for the actions of their subsidiaries. If in the Early Church certain occupations, including involvement in the military were banned, certainly where it was associated with idolatrous practices and vows, we should consider banning work and in parallel investment in nuclear weapons manufacture. Texan RC bishop Hunthausen rightly banned Catholics from working in that industry, and sought to provide alternate employment.

## 6. Conclusions

In the light of our 3C framework and in line with our policy on disproportionately socially damaging industries such as alcohol production we should not invest in weapons production and seek to invest in ways that promote peace.

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<sup>15</sup> Marianne Williamson, *Waging Peace*, Boston Globe 17 November 2006.

### ***Document History***

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