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In Defense of Dharma: Just-War Ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka

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Introduction[1]

Stanley Hauerwas has called attention to the role that cultural and religious narratives (or stories) play — whether of the Nuer or of the Christian — in shaping the moral decisions that individuals make. Like Steven Kemper, who has argued that, in the Sri Lankan context, stories do not work on people without their knowledge,[2] Hauerwas maintains that actors in ethical predicaments test stories for their efficacy.

Hauerwas's project is constructive; his aim is to "call attention to the manner in which [Jesus'] story teaches us to know and do what is right under definite conditions,"[3] a calling unrelated to this study. Nevertheless we can heed his request to pay attention to narratives as we ponder ethical systems. This study takes advantage of Hauerwas's point of view, inasmuch as it establishes the significance of narrative for ethical reflection and is concerned with the narratives that constitute a particular ethical dilemma in a particular culture — namely, defense of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Such study will reveal that, while there is a narrative thread in Sri Lankan Buddhist history and in contemporary rhetoric that endorses pacifism, there are Buddhist stories that argue that, for the defense of Buddhism — that is, of the Dharma — violence and war are permissible, even necessary, under certain conditions. In other words, this study will probe a type of Buddhist

"just–war thinking" that calls into question scholarly obedience to the canon's narratives of pacifism. Moreover, inasmuch as the data suggest that Sri Lankan Buddhists have taken (and take) full advantage of the range of resources available to them to legitimate their ethical stance on war — namely, canonical and post–canonical stories, this study aims to demonstrate that inquiry into the full heritage of Sinhala–Buddhist ethics should not be limited to a survey of the Pali canon.[4]

Many interpreters of Sri Lankan (Sinhala) Buddhism have paid sole attention to the canonical narrative of pacifism, thus prompting us to take the imagined ultra–pacific Buddhism as the real one. This is as true of the European scholar as it is of the Sri Lankan. For instance, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk–scholar, the Venerable Palane Siri Vajiranana, writing in 1940 during World War II, urged pacifism as he cited H. Fielding Hall's *The Soul of a People*:

> There can never be a war of Buddhism. No ravished country has ever borne witness to the prowess of the followers of the Buddha; no murdered men have poured out their blood on their hearth–stones, killed in his name ...He and His Faith are clean of the stain of blood. He was the preacher of the Great Peace, of love, of charity, of compassion, and so clear in His teaching that it can never be misunderstood.[5]

In this example of comparative missiology, a formulaic remnant of Buddhist–Christian relations dating to the mid–eighteenth century, Buddhism is superior to Christianity because it is non–violent. For the venerable monk, as well as for Hall, Buddhism never has allowed — nor ever will allow — for the possibility of war: the example of the Buddha's life, as well as the his teachings, prove as much. There are no two ways about it.

In a more recent evaluation of Buddhism and war, Gananath Obeyesekere argues that "in the Buddhist doctrinal tradition...there is little evidence of intolerance, no justification for violence, no conception even of 'just wars' or 'holy wars'." In fact, Obeyesekere reinforces his claim by maintaining that "one can make an assertion that Buddhist doctrine is *impossible* to reconcile logically with an ideology of violence and intolerance."[6] Notwithstanding Obeyesekere's point of view, quite a few Sri Lankan Buddhists — monks and laity alike — have argued for a less clear cut picture regarding doctrinal prescriptions for war and for peace. Some of the Sri Lankan Buddhists I interviewed[7] cited the very doctrinal tradition — with its rich mosaic of stories about the Buddha — that Obeyesekere argues is devoid of just–war ideology, to legitimate their point of view. Indeed, though the majority referred to post–canonical narratives, many

nevertheless argued that the canon itself contains the seeds for a just–war ideology.

As is well–known, study of European (Christian) just–war tradition has isolated a set of concerns dubbed just–war criteria. While these criteria are a product of scholarship on Christianity, as John Kelsay has made clear they are not uniquely Christian.[8] Indeed, these criteria provide a useful set of concepts for analyzing religious traditions that must balance claims of non–violence with the realities of war. For Kelsay, all religious traditions that take seriously the presumption that inflicting harm against others is morally problematic will contain just–war thinking of some sort.[9] In short, religious thinking, be it Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu,[10] or Buddhist, that takes seriously the relationship of ethics, morality, and power, contains just–war thought.[11] And while here I use the tools of comparative religion, particularly Christian ethics, to illuminate Sinhala Buddhism, an overriding concern of this study, of which this essay is a small part, is to isolate the particularly Buddhist nature of the ethical world view of Sinhala Sri Lanka.

Though, as I hope to demonstrate, just–war thinking is no stranger to Sri Lankan Buddhism, it is also obvious and indisputable that stories of pacifism abound in Sinhala Sri Lanka. The story recounted most frequently by the Buddhists I interviewed during fieldwork in the summers of 1997 and 1998 that lays a foundation for pacifism is that of the Buddha's alleged second trip to Sri Lanka, recounted in the post–canonical *Mahavaṃsa*. In that story, as some of my informants argued, the Buddha's actions "embody," using Hauerwas's language,[12] the ideology of pacifism: the Buddha interrupts a war between rival factions by inspiring the would–be combatants with a sermon. In short, for some of my informants, that story, as well as canonical injunctions regarding non–violence, promote pacific behavior. At the same time, as other Buddhists maintained, there are narratives, both canonical and post–canonical, which by their very nature run counter to the foundation of Buddhist pacifism and thus allow for war.

Before we refer to the stories that provide justifications for war, it is important to note that many of the (approximately fifty) monks and laity that I interviewed for this study are well known in Sri Lanka as proponents of "finishing the war," that is, of eradicating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who, since 1983, have been unabashed in their claims for a "homeland" in the north of the island. In other words, the high profile of the Buddhist defenders of the government's resort to war — in and of itself — supports the premise of this essay — namely, that Buddhists have and do justify war. And while the war that has ensued as a result of territorial claims has no readily identifiable religious component, Buddhist monks

and laity alike justify — with Buddhist rhetoric — the predominately Sinhala and predominately Buddhist government's use of deadly force to quash the LTTE. As we shall see, proponents of the war — who couch their justifications in Buddhist rhetoric — argue that preservation of the integrity of Sri Lanka is tantamount to "just cause" for war. It must also be stressed, however, that those who make arguments for war — based on their interpretation of Buddhism — also maintain that Buddhism demands compassion and non–violence. How to balance the demands of non–violence with the protection of the entire island of Sri Lanka as a Buddhist territory has remained a constant feature of political and religious rhetoric in Sri Lanka since at least the 1890s, when archival resources allow for a comprehensive view.

In the 1990s, of course, with an actual war raging in the north of Sri Lanka, the discussion about war has moved from the realm of the theoretical to the reality of the deaths, since 1983, of thousands upon thousands of Tamils and Sinhalas.[13] Which has, to say the least, issued forth many responses, some of which condemn the war, others of which support it. No matter the position, it is generally supported by Buddhist stories. Indeed, in one of my interviews conducted in 1998, the Venerable Athuraliya Rathana, who is the coordinating secretary of the National Sangha Council, alleged that there are many stories in the canon that depict the Buddha as an advocate of force and violence if there is just cause.[14] Some of these stories are about the Buddha; others are told by him. The Venerable Rathana cited, among others, the *Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta*, which depicts a king, committed to the Dharma, who is flanked by a four–fold army nonetheless. For the monk, these images suggest that even the Buddha, who taught that the paradigmatic Buddhist king is a pacifist, realized that war is a reality of life and that, for defensive measures, war can be justified.[15] For the monk, the *Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta* provides the contemporary Sri Lankan government (which is predominately Sinhala and Buddhist) with the Buddhist justification it needs to proceed with the war against the LTTE. A Buddhist layman, the outspoken and controversial Nalin de Silva, suggested that the reason that the king could be righteous and teach pacifism in the first place had to do with his having an army: "only after non–Buddhists saw his army could he pacify them and bring them to Buddhism." Thus, for de Silva, the army in the *sutta* is a vehicle for forcing people — through subtle manipulation — to convert to the Dharma. Moreover, in de Silva's line of thinking, the presence of the army indicates that even a righteous Buddhist king might have to fight a defensive war to protect Buddhism.[16]

In addition to canonical stories, post–canonical narratives have been used by Sri Lankan Buddhists to justify violence, even war. For example, a

monk, writing in 1957 to the newspaper, the *Bauddha Peramuna* — a forum for Buddhist monks to air their grievances — employed a post–canonical Buddhist story of war to legitimate the appropriate use of violence. In fact, the monk was provoked by what he considered to be misuse of a Sri Lankan Buddhist story: he took exception to an allusion of Buddhism and war in a local paper that aligned the then prime minister, SWRD Bandaranaike, with Dutugemunu, the Buddhist hero of the fifth–century, post–canonical *Mahavaṃsa*. In his editorial, the monk asks Bandaranaike "to read the Mahavaṃsa," the text that chronicles the history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, and to heed its lessons:

> Dutugemunu conquered by the sword and united the land [Sri Lanka] without dividing it among our enemies [i.e., the Tamils] and established Sinhala and Buddhism as the state language and religion.[17]

In his allusion to the great Buddhist king Dutugemunu — who, according to the *Mahavaṃsa*, interrupted "*damila*" suzerainty over Anuradhapura, an ancient northern kingdom of the island — the monk correspondent of the *Bauddha Peramuna* justified violence against the Tamil minority who, for him, constituted the island's "enemies," just as they did (from the monk's point of view) in Dutugemunu's day. (It is important to note that, whatever the *Mahavamsa*'s meaning of the Pali word *damila*, the Sinhala word for Tamil is *demala*, while twentieth–century Sinhala interpreters of Dutugemunu's war against *damilas* translate *damila* as Tamil, *demala*.)[18]

It is significant that the Sinhala–Buddhist monk reflected on Dutugemunu's story in the context of Bandaranaike's 1957 attempts to appease the Tamil minority's demands for protection of their language and territory against a vocal Sinhala (and predominately Buddhist) opposition. While Bandaranaike had the support of the *saṇgha*, the Buddhist monks, as he campaigned in 1956 on a "Sinhala–only" policy that, for all intents and purposes, alienated the minorities, his 1957 "about face" regarding the minorities, particularly the Tamils, enraged many monks and laity alike. Indeed, in 1959, the Venerable Mapitagama Buddharakkhita, a Buddhist monk whose name appeared in the media in conjunction with an ongoing discussion in the late 1950s on the propriety of monastic involvement in secular affairs,[19] organized Bandaranaike's assassination, while the Venerable Talduwe Somarama pulled the trigger — killing Bandaranaike — ostensibly for acquiescing to the Tamils. Though it is nearly impossible to know exactly what the monks were thinking as they plotted Bandaranaike's assassination, it is reasonable to assume that they were guided in part by

readings of the *Mahavaṃsa*, particularly given the Buddhist rhetoric of his day that linked the island to the Sinhala–Buddhist people. For instance, it was not uncommon in the late 1950s to pick up the newspaper and read an article about a politician or other Buddhist notable referring to Sri Lanka as the island (*dwipa*) of the Dharma — *dharmadwipa* (in English transliterations, variations of *dharmadwipa* include combinations of Sinhala, Pali, and Sanskrit: *dhammadeepa*; *dharmadeepa; dhammadweepa; dhammadwipa*), a slogan whose ideology is enshrined in the *Mahavaṃsa*. To illustrate, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the wife of the prime minister, in a series of speeches regarding education and its relationship to Buddhism, referred to Sri Lanka as *dharmadwipa* on various occasions,[20] while the Inspector General of Police (IGP) lamented that, given the 1958 riots in Sri Lanka, it is only by "a true understanding of the religion [Buddhism] both by precept and practice...that Lanka will become Dhammadwipa."[21] For both Mrs. Bandaranaike and the IGP, Sri Lanka's status as *dharmadwipa* was a status worth preserving; for others the ideology of *dharmadwipa* laid the foundation for claims that the island belonged solely to the Sinhala–Buddhist people, thus providing the justification for defensive violence.

Voices similar to our *Bauddha Peramuna* monk, whose ideas about war are shaped by the Dutugemunu story, and the involvement of monks in Bandaranaike's assassination, awaken us to something that many have refused to believe — namely, that some Buddhists, not unlike Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, have justified violence, even war, if certain criteria are met. And what are those criteria that lay the foundation for a just war in Sinhala Buddhism?

Sinhala–Buddhist Just War: Texts and Contexts

In order to answer this, we must turn to the Buddhist narratives, to the stories, that provide models for resolving ethical quandaries. These stories are found in the Pali canon, as well as in the post–canonical *Mahavaṃsa*, cited by the *Bauddha Peramuna* monk. Regarding the *Mahavaṃsa*, since the 1980s scholarship on Sri Lanka has focused upon the *Mahavaṃsa* as the text that lays the foundation for the Sinhala people's claim to be *the* preservers of Buddhism. In a nutshell, that scholarship has revealed that, according to contemporary readings of the *Mahavaṃsa*, some Sinhalas maintain that they are the Buddha's chosen people, and that the island of Sri Lanka is the Buddhist promised land.[22] An illustration of this point of view appeared in the summer of 1998, during the ongoing controversy in the island regarding the devolution of power, which would grant Tamils in the north a certain amount of autonomy. According to a "letter to the editor" penned by a Sinhala, one S. Perera,

> Rome is sacred to the Catholics, so is Jerusalem to the Jews and so is Mecca to the Muslims. The tiny island in the Indian Ocean...where the Sinhalese lived for over 25 centuries..is the hallowed land of Sinhala Buddhists.[23]

Though the letter does not directly refer to the Mahavaṃsa, it reiterates a claim made by many who explicitly cite the text — namely, that "every sq. mm of this island is sacred to the Sinhalese."[24] For the letter writer, Sri Lanka is a sacred island because the Buddha, by word and by deed, declared it to be so: according to the *Mahavaṃsa*, the Buddha made three magical trips to Sri Lanka, each time colonizing another area of the island, in preparation for the formal introduction of Buddhism two centuries after his death. Thus, Perera's view — based on readings of the *Mahavaṃsa* — that the entire island is the sacred home of the Sinhalas *and* of Buddhism and, therefore, is not to be divided. Philosophy of Perera's ilk has been elucidated by H.L. Seneviratne, who has argued persuasively that the *Mahavamsa*'s story of the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, in which the "island of Sri Lanka and its inhabitants, as the guardians of Buddhism, are placed under divine protection,"[25] continues to resonate in the present.

In his analysis of the *Mahavaṃsa* story regarding the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, R.A.L.H. Gunawardana has argued that there is dissonance between the Buddha of *Mahavaṃsa* and the Buddha of the Pali canon, the latter of which provides the textual foundation of Sri Lankan Buddhism (and *Theravāda* Buddhism, generally).[26] In that study, Gunawardana maintains that the *Mahavaṃsa* story about the Buddha's alleged first visit to the island, in which he rids Sri Lanka of forces inimical to Buddhism, provides the warrant for the use of violence for the sake of Buddhism.

According to Gunawardan's reading of the *Mahavaṃsa*, the Buddha's expulsion of the *yakkhas* — the non–human inhabitants of the island — contrasts with descriptions in the Pali canon of the Buddha taming similar creatures. In reinforcing the distinction, Gunawardana argues that while in the canon the Buddha uses compassion to convince non–believers of his Dharma, in the *Mahavaṃsa*, the Buddha uses force; in his "taming" of the *yakkhas*, the Buddha who, in the story, is referred to as the "Conqueror" (*Jina*), imposes "devious afflictions" upon the non–believers, driving them from their homeland.

Building on Gunawardana's study of the *Mahavaṃsa*, I would like to add that the *Mahavamsa*'s story of the Buddha's first visit to the island,

"For Lanka was known to the Conqueror where his doctrine should shine in glory" (I.20), introduces, for the first time, King Dutugemunu, who is the subject of ten of the thirty seven chapters of the *Mahavaṃsa*,[27] and to whom we have already referred. We meet Dutugemunu early in the *Mahavamsa*'s chapter one, immediately after the Buddha, who has eventually placated the *yakkhas*, bequeaths to Sri Lanka a bodily relic for worship. Having acceded to the requests of a deity for a relic, the Buddha gives the deity a handful of his own hair, which he allows to be encased in a reliquary to be worshiped. In recounting this episode, the author of the *Mahavaṃsa* then adds that, eventually, after the death of the Buddha, a collarbone of the Conqueror is brought to Sri Lanka; it is placed in the same reliquary as the Buddha's gifted hair, and the reliquary itself is fortified. The third and final fortification of the reliquary is Dutugemunu's, "while he made war upon the damilas" (I.41) who, (we learn in later chapters of the *Mahavaṃsa*), are illegitimate rulers of Anuradhapura. Inasmuch as relics (and their encasement) have the symbolic function of establishing Buddhism,[28] it is significant that the story of the acquisition of the island's first bodily relics of the Buddha are linked to the military campaigns of Dutugemunu. Dutugemunu's conquest of the damilas is homologized to the Buddha's conquest of the *yakkhas*, while the Buddha's bestowal upon the island of his bodily relics are completed by the warrior–king Dutugemunu who, in fortifying the reliquary, symbolically provides for the further ensconcing of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Put differently, the *Mahavamsa*'s first–chapter comparison of the two conquerors — namely, the Buddha and King Dutugemunu — symbolized by the reliquary but obvious in their campaigns — enmeshes the two defenders of the Dharma in one lesson about the limits of, and justification for, violence and war.

To return to the scene of the *Mahavaṃsa* that our *Bauddha Peramuna* monk recalled in his critique of Bandaranaike, we see Dutugemunu, after his war with the damilas, looking "back upon his glorious victory, great though it was, [he] knew no joy, remembering that thereby was wrought the destruction of millions (of beings)" (xxv.101–104). Burdened by the death of millions of warriors, his troubled conscience prohibits him from celebrating his victory over the damila king, Elara. In the scene that follows, each of the criteria for "just cause," or what scholars refer to as the most important elements of just–war thought, are expounded by none other than fully–enlightened beings, *arahants*, living symbols of the dhamma, symbols thus of the duty of non–violence. Indeed, we learn that just cause for war in the *Mahavaṃsa* includes, in the words of just–war scholars, establishing a "just order,"[29] in this case, Buddhism. Dutugemunu does not go to war for glory, but rather to protect the Dharma.[30]

Scholars who presume that Buddhism places an absolute duty of non–violence on Buddhists have argued that the *Mahavaṃsa* scene of the arahants' justification of Dutugemunu's protection of the Dharma itself warrants justification.[31] Many of my informants' reading of the episode, however, is that the scene contains its own justification. According to some of the Buddhists I interviewed in the summers of 1997 and 1998, Dutugemunu's saga provides contemporary Buddhists with the criteria to argue for just war (*dharma yuddhāya*); the saga reminds them of the prospect that they can be faced with conflicting obligations — namely, the obligation of non–violence and the duty to protect the Dharma, which might call for violence. Put differently, according to my informants' reading, the *Mahavamsa*'s rendering of ethical duties is based on *prima facie* responsibilities rather than on absolute duties. In other words, the duty of non–violence can be overridden — though the justification to do so is extremely weighty — if certain criteria are met. In the *Mahavaṃsa*, just–war thinking provides a scenario in which Dutugemunu's violent actions are justified and in which non–violence — rendered palpable by Dutugemunu's guilt — remains the guiding force.

The reading that Dutugemunu's duty of non–violence has been overridden by his duty to establish Buddhism further throughout the island is plausible in light of the exchange between the *arahants* and the troubled king. With their power to read the king's mind, they discern his profound discomfort for having taken life (that is, the lives of King Elara with sixty thousand men), and eight of them travel to his side to console him. He asks them how he will ever find comfort, considering what he had done, that he had killed such a lot of people. The *arahants* respond with their own just–war thinking:

> Only one and a half human beings have been slain here by thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto the (three) refuges, the other had taken unto himself the five precepts. Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from the heart, O ruler of men (xxv.108–112).

In other words, the enlightened beings counsel Dutugemunu with their criteria for assessing his war with the damila king, which includes Dutugemunu's sacrifice of his obligation as a Buddhist not to take life. For the *arahants*, spreading the religion constitutes just cause for war; it constitutes sacrificing one moral obligation for another.

In the narrative of Dutugemunu's angst and the *arahants*' logic, the

monk–author of the text lays the foundation for an internal dialogue regarding ethical responsibilities. Indeed, some of my monk and lay informants volunteered that the story demonstrates that Dutugemunu would have preferred not to have used violence, but nonetheless had a responsibility to engage in a war in order to defend the Dharma. Cast in the language of ethics, the rhetoric hinges on the notion that some ethical obligations, no matter how weighty, must be compromised if there is just cause. In other words, in the Dutugemunu narrative the ethical obligation to practice Buddhist non–violence is compromised for a very good reason, namely the spread or protection of the Dharma, which allows for the *arahants*' logic that only one and one–half persons were actually killed, or the idea of proportionality in just–war discourse. And proportionality, or the criterion that in the end more good than evil has been performed,[32] had been met from the point of view of the enlightened beings.

In a 1998 example of the idea of proportionality and of just cause, a Buddhist, who refers to himself or herself in the press as "a student," argues that the war in Sri Lanka against Tamil terrorism can be justified from a Buddhist point of view:

> Many people opposing the war...say...that it is very unBuddhistic and say...that the Buddhists [who advocate the war] are going against the teachings of Lord Buddha and support killing.[33]

The editorial's Buddhist argument for just war then proceeds like this: if your house is attacked by wasps, and you try to protect your house and, if in the protection, wasps are killed, "It's not actual killing that takes place."[34] In this line of thinking, the Buddhist obligation of non–violence should be compromised in order to protect, recalling the logic of the *arahants* in the *Mahavaṃsa*. Moreover, the deaths that ensue — in this case, they are rationalized away — are proportional to the need for violence, even war.

The just–war thinking reflected in the editorial is not limited to apolitical discourse. Indeed, in the summer of 1998, General Ratwatte, the architect of the present government's war against the LTTE, was homologized to Dutugemunu on various occasions.[35] The comparison was first made by the Buddhist monk, the Venerable Sobitha Thera, a proponent of "finishing the war," on Ratwatte's birthday.[36] Now labeled by some as the modern–day Dutugemunu, Ratwatte — who like Dutugemunu has waged a war against the "Tamils" — has become the embodiment of contemporary Buddhist just–war ideology in Sri Lanka. Moreover, as the Venerable Sobitha's remarks indicate, the rhetoric regarding General Ratwatte is an instance of the power of stories, in this case of the *Mahavaṃsa*, to

shape the ethical life, thus reminding us of Hauerwas's theory of narrative and ethics.

Conclusion

In the present, as my study indicates, Sri Lankan Buddhists avail themselves of a variety of Buddhist stories — canonical and post–canonical — to support their point of view regarding war. And because there are no pronouncements in the stories attributed to the Buddha or in those stories told about him that declare unequivocally and directly that war is wrong, the military metaphors of the stories allow for a variety of interpretations. Some Buddhists, as we have seen, argue that the stories directly or indirectly permit war under certain circumstances, while others argue that war is never acceptable. Whether they justify war or not, these Buddhists engage the stories — sometimes the very same ones — to argue their points of view. Put differently, and using Charles Hallisey's presentation of Buddhist ethics, one might say, then, that Buddhist stories are "discursive sites where Buddhists [have] debated the scope and validity of the different ethical theories."[37] Like Hauerwas, Hallisey sees in Buddhist moral stories a reflection of the ethical quandaries that religious people debate and their resolution, as well as models of and for behavior.

Moreover, Hallisey argues that *Theravādin* stories reveal that when Buddhists make moral decisions, they sometimes assume a kind of "ethical particularism," which may make them appear more inconsistent in their moral choices than the pluralism of the tradition might otherwise suggest. In short, Hallisey maintains that some *Theravāda* Buddhist ethics insist on a sensitivity to context. For Hallisey, ethical particularism is tantamount to *prima facie* duties, a subject taken up (without reference to Buddhism) by W.D. Ross.[38] Hallisey suggests that "Ross's account of *prima facie* duties does not suggest that some moral principles are more important than others; it also eschews any attempt to discover any consistency in the things which we take to matter morally."[39] (I find useful Ross's language of *prima facie* responsibilities, and Hallisey's expression of them, even though Ross fails to capture the texture of moral theory that Hauerwas's nuanced discussion of narratives offers.) Inasmuch as the just–war thinking reviewed here suggests that, when Sri Lankan Buddhists discuss the war in their country, they are sensitive to the context, it can reasonably be concluded that their thinking, like the Buddhist stories they embody, reflect a type of ethical particularism rather than an ethical system of absolutes.

The subject of just–war thinking in (Sinhala) Buddhism demands a larger inquiry than space allows here. Though this essay is part of a larger project that explores the relationship between canonical and post–canoni-

cal Buddhist narratives and their use in Sri Lankan political and religious rhetoric since the late nineteenth century, my hope is that, by presenting some of my ideas at this early stage, I will help to nurture a scholarly conversation that takes seriously a dimension of Buddhism that we very often fail to notice.

End Notes

[1] A version of this paper was read at the 27th Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, October 16, 1998. I would like to thank Charles Hallisey, Aline Kalbian, John Kelsay, and Jonathan Walters for their contribution to this study.

[2] Steven Kemper, *The Presence of the Past: Chronicles, Politics, and Culture in Sinhala Life* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 19.

[3] Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, *Why Narrative?: Readings in Narrative Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 159.

[4] For a similar argument, see Charles Hallisey "Ethical Particularism in Theravada Buddhism," *The Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 3 (1995), p. 6.

[5] Cited in Venerable Palane Siri Vajiranana Maha Nayaka,"Light to All the World," *The Buddhist*, vol. xi, no. ii (June 1940): 25.

[6] Gananath Obeyesekere, "Buddhism, Nationhood, and Cultural Identity," in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 233. Italics are in the original.

[7] In the summer of 1997, my research was funded by a generous grant from the American Institute of Sri Lankan Studies, while in 1998, the study was funded by a Florida State University Committee on Faculty Research Support grant.

[8] John Kelsay has argued that "just war criteria, while historically connected with Christian moral thinking, are nevertheless not strictly 'Christian'." See "The Just War Tradition and the Ethics of Nuclear Deterrence," *International Journal on the Unity of the Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Summer

1989): 229–252.

[9] In a further exposition of just–war criteria and non–Christian tradition, Kelsay explores the moral perspective of Muslims as they prepared for, and justified, the Iran–Iraq conflict and the Gulf War. See John Kelsay, *Islam and War: The Gulf War and Beyond* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1993).

[10] See Obeyesekere's study of the *Bhagavad Gita* in "Duttagamini and the Buddhist Conscience," in *Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia*, Douglas Allen, ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 141–142.

[11] Here, I have expanded upon Kelsay's ideas in "The Just War Tradition," p. 231.

[12] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), p. 120.

[13] From the Sri Lanka Net: COLOMBO, Dec. 9 (Reuters) – Battle casualties in Sri Lanka's ethnic war have risen sharply since the ruling People's Alliance coalition came to power in 1994 on a platform of peace, according to official statistics published on Wednesday.

The Daily News, quoting defence ministry figures, said 19,457 people, including 1,338 civilians, had been killed in major battles since November 1994, shortly after the government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga came to power.

The state–owned newspaper said 8,208 troops and 9,911 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam rebels had died.

The statistics mark a sharp rise in battle casualties.

In the 11 years before November 1994, a total of 15,655 soldiers, rebels and civilians were killed in major battles while 8,635 troops were wounded and 1,087 soldiers and 218 civilians were listed as missing, the newspaper said.

It said 17,492 soldiers were wounded in major battles in the last four years alone, while 1,321 troops and 187 civilians had been classified as missing in that time.

The government two years ago estimated the total number of people killed in the war at 50,000.

The People's Alliance came to power after elections in August 1994 pledging to talk to the rebels to bring peace to Sri Lanka.

But talks broke down and in 1996 the government launched Opera-

tion Jayasikuru (Sure of Victory) to wrest control of a bitterly contested strategic highway to the north of the country.

The government said last Friday that Jayasikuru had ended, but that it had launched a fresh offensive against the rebels.

[14] Space does not permit a fully–detailed account of these passages. Among them, the Venerable Rathana cited the *Kutadanta Sutta*, the *Alavika Sutta*, and the *Baka Jataka*.

[15] Interview with the Venerable Athuraliya Rathana, August 22, 1998, Colombo. My assistant, Yashodara Sarachchandra, conducted the interview.

[16] Interview with Nalin de Silva in Maharagama on July 30, 1998.

[17] *Bauddha Peramuna*, (untitled editorial) 21 September 1957, 2.

[18] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "Tamil" is the "native name (known in the 8th century) of the people and language; in Pali and Prakrit Damila, Davila, Dravida, Sinhalese Demala, Sanskrit Dramila, Dramida, Dravida."

[19] See, for instance, the letter to the editor, "Wither LSSP," *Daily News*, 14 October 1958.

[20] For instance, "'Religious Education is Lacking' — PM's Wife," *Daily News*, 18 October 1958; and "PM's wife on the role of Dhamma Schools," *Daily News*, 15 November 1958.

[21] "'Follow Example of Gunananda Thero,' says IGP," *Daily News*, 23 September 1958.

[22] For a summary of this scholarship, see Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, "Buddhist Fundamentalism and Identity in Sri Lanka," in *Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka*, Tessa J. Bartholomeusz and Chandra R. de Silva, ed (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 1–35.

[23] S. Perera, "Sinhala grievance — the Metadata...," *The Daily News*, 25 August 1998.

[24] Ibid.

[25] H.L. Seneviratne, "Identity and the Conflation of Past and Present", in *Identity, Consciousness and the Past*, H.L. Seneviratne, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997 [first published in 1989 in *Social Analysis*, no. 5 (September, 1989)]), p.8

[26] R.A.L.H. Gunawardana, "The Kinsmen of the Buddha: Myth as Political Charter in the Ancient and Early Medieval Kingdoms of Sri Lanka," (Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, n.d. [reproduced from *Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1976]), pp. 53–62.

[27] H.L. Seneviratne, "Identity and the Conflation of Past and Present," p. 8.

[28] For more on the role of relics in Sri Lankan Buddhism, see Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism: Rematerializing in the Sri Lankan Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[29] James Childress, *Moral Responsibility in Conflicts* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) p. 75.

[30] In his meditation of Dutugemunu's conscience, Obeyesekere notes that "Duttagamini claims that his war was not for the joy of sovereignty but to establish the doctrine of the Buddha." See Gananath Obeyesekere, "Duttagamini and the Buddhist Conscience," in *Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia*, Douglas Allen, ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 142.

[31] Among them, see Alice Greenwald, "The Relic on the Spear: Historiography and the Saga of Duttagamini," in *Religion and Legitimization of Power in Sri Lanka*, Bardwell Smith, ed. (Chambersburg, Pa.: Anima Publishers, 1978), pp. 13–35.

[32] James Childress, *Moral Responsibility*, p. 77.

[33] "That's not killing!," *The Island*, 13 May 1998.

[34] Ibid.

[35] For example, "Princely warrior not for polls," *The Sunday Leader*, 2 August 1998.

[36] "Splits in the Alliance and protest campaigns over polls," *The Sunday Leader*, 19 July 1998.

[37] Charles Hallisey, "Ethical particularism in Theravada Buddhism," p. 3.

[38] It is important to acknowledge that Ross is at odds with Hauerwas, particularly regarding the manner in which we come to know what the rules of ethical behavior are.

[39] Charles Hallisey, "Ethical particularism in Theravada Buddhism," p. 4.