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# Opinion

## Pacifism

I read Geoffrey Turner's article on Pacifism (Vol 92:2) with great interest. I feel that those of us who are Chaplains to the Forces are very close to this whole wide area of issues. Although many of us are of the post-Second-World-War generation, by virtue of the call of God that we have followed we feel closer to the matter than many of our contemporaries called to the parochial ministry.

I would first of all say that we are in the forefront of those who abhor the horrors of war. As an army chaplain I never carry a weapon. But I do work closely with soldiers, which involves going on Exercise and therefore being with them on all their training. I thus appreciate only too well what a modern war would mean in terms of carnage, brutality and suffering. Nobody I know in the army actually wants a war.

This leads me to my second point. A modern major war is total war. Geoffrey Turner himself recognizes that deciding what would be war-work and what would not is 'problematical'. In fact, to be a pacifist in practice you would have to emigrate to a neutral country. Armies don't go to war—populations go to war. I feel that every civilian occupation in time of war is part of the war effort in some way, as the whole nation is mobilized.

Thirdly, I feel that the distinction drawn between 'war' as Geoffrey Turner defines it, and other things such as what he seems to want to call 'low-intensity operations' (countering terrorism, peace-keeping duties, etc.) is a false one. To try and isolate 'war' from these other things may help his argument, but to me is an utterly artificial exercise. For a start, such activities as peace-keeping increasingly have to be entered into as military operations, whether it be in Northern Ireland or rescuing Europeans from Zaire. Again and again, the scale of the terrorist activities is too much for police forces to handle, and the army has to be sent in. Earlier this year, there was a distinct and abrupt cut-off point in time when the battalion I am currently with ceased to be trained for the (we hope remote) possibility of 'war' in North-West Europe so as to train for our present tour of duty in Northern Ireland as peace-keepers. Later this year the reverse will happen. I feel that Geoffrey Turner has simplified the issues in this area just as we all often do in an attempt to clarify the issues, but in this case it is in a way that leads to an unhelpfully unrealistic situation.

Fourthly and most importantly, though, I want to make the point that we are part of a fallen creation. The Old and New Testaments

make this point, most emphatically in the description of the Fall in Genesis, and in Romans 8:18ff. We are Christians, and so are seeking to serve the risen Lord in the world. But, even so, we are not perfect this side of heaven; and so with all humanity we share the guilt for all the strife that occurs, whether we personally or our nation are directly involved in a particular war or not. In some measure, all mankind is responsible for every conflict that occurs. We must all be repentant for Zaire, Angola, Vietnam etc., just as much as for Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Belize, and Southern Africa. Rather than a 'two kingdoms' view, this to me underlines our creation solidarity with the whole human race. I have read Geoffrey Turner's article and Oliver O'Donovan's excellently thought-provoking Grove booklet with interest, but neither seem to go into this particular theological area.

Lastly, there is the point that, in recent years, Britain has been involved in several wars and security operations—of varying intensities—because of Commonwealth responsibilities. There has been the Malayan emergency, Indonesian confrontation, Cyprus troubles, and threats of invasion to Belize where we have had a long-standing responsibility to be involved. If we had said on each occasion that we had pacifist leanings and would not be prepared to help (and where necessary defend) them, we would have been guilty of abandoning them to their undoubted and unpleasant fate. A Christian being individually a pacifist would have been just as guilty of such preparedness for abandonment whatever the nation as a whole decided.

I am sorry to have written at such length. I will now close, leave my desk, and go out and see how the soldiers I serve are faring on the streets of Londonderry, outside the relative safety of the corrugated iron walls of our makeshift camp.

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