A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

George L. Carey

Biblical-Theological Perspectives on War and Peace

My concern in this paper is to take a further look at the biblical material which has already been discussed by my colleagues in their papers on the Old and New Testaments, to consider the material theologically, and to discuss the hermeneutical approaches and interpretations of some recent theologians.

The framework of my paper is as follows:-

1. Under the heading of 'Yahweh — a warrior God' we shall glance at the theme of war in the Old Testament.

2. We shall then go on to consider the impact of Jesus' teaching under the title of 'Jesus and the New Age'.

3. Moving into the Early Church we shall consider the position of the Christian as a citizen of two communities.

4. We shall then jump forward to modern times to reflect on the contributions of some modern theologians.

5. Finally, I shall offer some thoughts on what I consider to be 'constituent elements of a Christian doctrine of peace'.

I. Yahweh — a Warrior God

The Old Testament presents us with a picture of God who not only fights for his people but who also demands that they fight for his law and his cause. The Israelites are seen at first as a poor, oppressed and weak minority dominated by a tyrannous ruling majority who exact from them a bondage so harsh that flight is the only solution. Yahweh fights for them single-handedly and delivers them from the hand of their enemy. Through this major event of deliverance they are made a people for Yahweh's possession and a covenant is established which binds them to him in a close personal relationship of love.

> 'If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exodus 19:5, 6)

Their journey towards the Promised Land and their eventual possession of it inevitably brought them into conflict with other peoples.

> 'Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perrizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites'   (Exod. 33:2)

We must not allow the familiar words to dull our sensitivities to the destruction, pillaging and brutality which always accompany war and the overthrow of another nation. Israel is seen as a nation advancing to its goal which entails from time to time the complete annihilation of the enemy including women, children and animals.

> 'Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and asses with the edge of the sword. So the Lord was with Joshua . . .'   (Judges 6:17)

The nature of Israel's relationship to Yahweh seen in terms of total commitment led her to embrace the concept of the 'herem' as far as war is concerned. Destruction of entire peoples and their pagan worship was the only way to ensure the purity of Yahwistic faith and the nation's walk with God.

But it is important, I think, to observe three hermeneutical elements in this picture of a conquering people.

First, the 'herem-war' or any war is viewed not as Man's victory but as God's. His hand gives the victory even when it seemed that the Israelites had won the battle themselves. Thus Moses raises his hands in prayer at the battle of Rephidim and victory comes to the people of God. Gideon leads his picked men into battle but not until God had whittled the band down to a derisory 300 men to take on an army described as 'locusts for number' (Judges 7). The point of this apparent folly, from a human perspective, is to ram home the point that Israel is not fighting for God but that God is fighting for Israel. The essential point of such narratives lies in the intended testimony to the might of Yahweh. And, on the contrary, when Israel attempts to go to war in her own strength, she fails. So in Numbers 14:41ff, Moses warns the people against fighting the Amalekites because 'the Lord is not among you'. Disobedience to this warning results in a resounding defeat.

The second observation builds on the point just made — Yahweh is pictured as a warrior who goes into battle and fights for his people. Reference is even made in the Old Testament to a source 'The book of the wars of Yahweh' (Numbers 21:14). The concept of deliverance with the motif of Yahweh the warrior and the Yahweh wars dominate much of the Old Testament. We find it in Samuel's farewell speech (1 Samuel 12:6) and other historical resumes (Ezekiel 20:6-10). The Psalms likewise celebrate and record God's intervention ((Psalm 78: especially v.55; 136). Here,

I suggest, we are contemplating something quite significant in God's character. A. E. Martens in *Plot and Purpose in the Old Testament* agrees and argues that the motif of Yahweh as a warrior is important not only for Israel but for all who trust in him:

> 'The struggle with evil, then as now, is no myth. There is someone, Yahweh the warrior, who is set as a force against evil. The shape of evil may change but the combat between God and the powers of evil continues.'
>
> (p.62)[1]

According to Martens, therefore, the concept of Yahweh as warrior is more than analogy — it is a description of God's nature and mission.

My third observation is that 'holy-wars' or 'herem-wars' are not ends in themselves but to bring about the fulfilment of God's promise — the land. Breuggemann is correct to note the centrality of the 'land' in Israel's dreams and theology. 'Land', he states, 'is a central if not the central theme of biblical faith.' (*The Land,* p.3)[2] He means by this that biblical faith is the pursuit of historical 'belonging' that includes a sense of destiny derived from such a possession. He traces the themes of 'land', 'landlessness', 'home and homelessness' in an evocative study of land as promise and problem and the way it is spiritualized in the New Testament. It is difficult not to agree with Breuggemann that the possession of the land makes a nation of the people of God. Her 'herem-wars' were designed to pave the way for the fulfilment of her destiny. Her expansion, unlike, say, Hitler's, was not dominated by greed or by the desire to exploit for the sake of a superior race, but by the conviction that the land was hers by right. She was not taking land that belonged to another but merely entering into her inheritance.

The land also clarifies Israel's self-consciousness as a theocratic nation. 'Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord'. Acquisition of the promise meant that the pilgrim people settled down in a possessed land which led to momentous changes in patterns of life. Even faith itself is now focussed upon established icons which are seen as signs of God's blessing upon his people and conveying the sense of reality with them — a city, a temple and a cultus. This, of course, leads to a significant change in attitude to war. It is now no longer necessary to attack in order to possess

---

[1] A. E. Martens, *Plot and Purpose in the Old Testament* (IVP 1981).

[2] W. Brueggemann, *The Land* (SPCK 1978).

but rather that *she must now defend* in order to keep what is hers as a gift.

Before we turn to consider the New Testament we should observe the strand noticeable in the prophets that to trust in Man's might is a precarious defence for a people who claim that the Lord is their God. The Lord is the only true defender of Israel. Chariots, horsemen and the power of Man attract more sarcasm from the prophets than practically anything else (2 Kings 6; Isaiah 30:31).

II. Jesus and the New Age

A biblical theologian approaching the New Testament after considering the Old Testament approach to war is struck by the apparent discontinuity between the Testaments. The Old Covenant with its tight identity expressed in land, law and nation is succeeded by a New Covenant delineated by Kingdom, grace and people. It is not simply that the three-fold Old Testament emphasis is spiritualized but, rather, that it is transposed into a higher order of being through the momentous impact of Jesus of Nazareth. In him a new age has dawned, and God's salvation broadens out from Israel to take in the whole world. Now this, I argue, is a most important hermeneutical shift. A gospel which takes in the whole of humanity will have staggering implications for relationships between individuals and society.

Let me pick out a number of elements which bear on our theme from this transposition of land to Kingdom; law to grace; and nation to people.

First, *land to Kingdom* moves God's salvation in Christ to all mankind. It is no longer localised in a particular place but is ever-present to all who confess Christ. This Kingdom is both present and future and located in the hearts of men and in the company of the faithful. This concept of the Kingdom enabled the Jesus-people of the New Testament to rise above the narrow nationalism of their day to embrace a unity which is eager to draw all mankind into the love of God. This made the early Christians a disconcerting bunch. Their exclusive faith centring in the finality of salvation in Christ had an inclusive focus — no-one was excluded. A radical Gospel, then, with radical consequences. So Paul outlines the nature of his universal Gospel: 'There is no Jew nor Gentile, bond or free, male or female — for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

Second, *law to grace* moves God's salvation away from a man-centred obedience to a Gospel which is cross-shaped and grace-

centred. Not only does God's love dominate the Christian life but love for others is the heart of Christian lifestyle. Indeed Jesus challenges the accepted teaching of his day:

> 'You have heard that it was said: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'   (Mt. 5:38, 44)

Not only is love commanded but non-violence is required from the Christian who walks Christ's way. 'Do not resist . . . turn the other cheek . . . give your cloak as well as your coat . . . walk two miles when you are compelled to walk one . . .'. (Mt. 5:39-41)

Of course, this is *much* more than meek resignation. Jesus is talking about turning non-violence into an actual challenge to evil. Going that extra mile and responding beyond what is asked will have the effect of challenging evil and drawing attention to the power of good. But whatever its intended effect the message coming across is that the way of non-violence is the goal of any follower of Jesus. But Jesus did not merely teach it — he lived it and took that way of life right to the cross. A genuine 'theologia crucis' will not be simply limited to atonement theories but will affect a Christian's social behaviour as 1 Peter 2 makes plain.

Third, when we study the links between the *nation* of Israel to the people known as the *Body of Christ* so we find ourselves considering the transposition of a nation finding its identity in the law to a people finding it in Christ. 'Jesus is Lord'. Three simple words, but with what momentous and radical consequences for anyone who said and says them! They called people to a simple yet absolute loyalty which was to have fearful implications for them, especially when the demands of following Jesus clashed with those of the State.

So far we have observed little which directly relates to war although a great deal relates to peace and its quality. Yet in this teaching we may see those elements which clearly bear on our subject and which may be regarded as constituent elements of a doctrine of war and peace. We shall be considering this in a little more detail later but in the meantime we note: the Christian belongs to a Kingdom which transcends all earthly kingdoms; he belongs to a people whose allegiance is to Jesus, Lord of all; and he is bound by an ethic of love which compels him to call any human being his friend and brother.

III. Citizens of Two Communities

The scene is now set for an explosive confrontation. If a

Christian's commitment to Jesus Christ binds him body and soul
to his Lord, the demands of a totalitarian regime may place upon
the believer an intolerable choice — Christ or Caesar. We see the
issues appearing in three texts in the New Testament: Romans
13:1-7; the First Epistle of Peter; and the Apocalypse. We shall
look closely at the first passage and only very briefly at the other
two.

Romans 13:1-7 says nothing at all directly about war but it does
have some important things to say about the attitude of the
Christian to the State. It is most unlikely that the passage is
simply expressing Paul's passing and casual thought on a topic
which happened to be in his mind at the time. He is considering a
question which was of the greatest practical importance for the
Early Church — what ought to be the attitude of Christians to the
ruling powers? Jewish Christians would have felt this issue most
keenly. Jewish nationalism was running very strongly at the
time of writing and the unrest must have rippled through the
Christian fellowships.

We note that Paul's discussion of the relationship between the
State and the Christian citizen is rooted in his teaching about
social relationships generally set forth in chapter 12. In a passage
reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount, Paul appeals that the
way of love should govern all we say and do. 'Let love be
genuine' (v.9) . . . 'hate what is evil . . . love one another with a
brotherly affection . . . bless those who persecute you . . . repay
no-one for evil . . . don't avenge yourself but leave it to the wrath
of God, for it is written: "Vengeance is mine — I will repay" says
the Lord . . . do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with
good.' Here, then, coming back to us strongly is the love ethic of
Jesus — we should not overcome evil with its equal but with
meekness, peace and goodness.

Romans 13:1-7 does not contradict this teaching but rather
establishes it in the social and political realm. But we must
observe that Paul is able to make these apparently meek state-
ments about obedience to the State because the Christian has a
primary allegiance to a greater power. 'There is no authority
(ἐξουσία) except from God and those that exist have been
instituted by God (v.1). Political authorities have a real and
positive value in the eyes of God because they have an accepted
place in the providential order which he has established for the
good of mankind. We must at this point part company with Paul
Ziesler's interpretation of the passage. He interprets Paul's
injunctions solely in the light of the Parousia. 'There can be no
thought of refashioning social structures which are in process of

passing away' he declares.[3] So the Christian lives within the present society as a quiet and law-abiding citizen as part of his Christian obedience.

It is perfectly true that Paul reminds his readers of the fulness of salvation to come (v.11) but I suggest that Romans 13:1-7 is not setting forth a temporary expedient but is rooted in the Old Testament conviction that God is the ruler of all nations and of all history. Strangers they may be to Christian revelation but no good earthly power is outside the control of God's providential will. Paul indeed strongly emphasises this in vs.1f, by the repetition of the verb 'to establish'. No government, he is saying, is outside God's ordering or beyond his power to be used as the agent of the divine will.

So then, for this earthly life we are subject to civil powers because of the need for order and organization. Verse 2 is the corollary of the opening verse. If the higher powers are God-appointed, to resist them is to defy God and incur his wrath. Here we find the possibility of the 'demonisation' of the State — when it arrogates to itself the divine name and will. But the following verses correct the balance and establish the positive and negative aspects of the State's authority.

Positively, the purpose and value of civil government is to support causes of right, to promote the good and to enforce a just retribution on wrong-doing. Verse 5 reinforces this point: the Christian submits to a system of justice which is an aspect of God's will for his world. What we cannot read clearly from the passage is whether Paul considers it right for that punishment upon evil to include the taking-up of arms against a defiant and rebellious tribe or people. To infer that the passage is merely talking about the individual in community is, I suggest, not the most natural reading of it.

Negatively, verse 4 leaves open the door for criticism of the State when it forsakes its role as a servant (διάκονος) for good. Paul's whole attention is, of course, upon the State as fulfilling God's plan for it in building up the life of its citizens. But the implication may be fairly drawn, I think, that the State which forsakes its proper role and becomes a tyrant, forfeits its role to be obeyed. There is certainly no call here for unconditional obedience. Paul would have been horrified by such an inference. His concentration is upon the *lawful* role of those who rule. We are not given help here or anywhere else in Scripture concerning the question: If the Christian is forced to disobey the civil

---

[3] J. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity* (OUP 1983), p.119.

authorities, to what extent should resistance be carried? Is violence always wrong?

The other two texts we shall glance at in passing. 1 Peter 2:13 reveals a different atmosphere from that of Romans 13. Gone are the cordial relationships of civil life prior to the persecutions of AD 64, whereas in 1 Peter we meet a church experiencing the pain of being the church of the Crucified. Astonishingly, from a worldly point of view the readers are expected to honour and obey the emperor who represents the forces which are threatening to crush the first Christian communities. The Christian attitude, says Peter, is to see the cross of Jesus as an example of suffering obedience and steadfast exposure to evil. That is the way to live, he exhorts.

The Apocalypse moves the relationship between Church and Roman Empire into a deeper level of hostility and conflict. All pretence at live and let live is now gone. The Empire is evil and its doom is foretold. In this book the note is struck again of God as a warrior who enters the fray on behalf of his people or, rather, who sends Michael and the forces of good to beat down evil under his feet.

The dilemma which faced the early Christians, and which faces all Christians who attempt to wrestle with the obligations of being a Christian and a citizen, is how far do we go in following the injunctions of the State? We have, indeed, no abiding city. We are citizens of a greater Kingdom and we share a brotherhood with people of all races and tribes. Nevertheless, we are still men and women of particular nations as far as this life is concerned and feel the pull of this affiliation. Insofar as the theme of war is concerned, what attitude does Scripture tell us to adopt? Let us consider two quite different approaches to the question.

First of all we have a Lutheran two-Kingdom theology which separates the Christian responsibility to the kingdoms of this world from that of Christ. Anders Nygren's commentary on Romans confirms this approach although I am not charging him with representing a classical viewpoint here.[4] However, I believe that his exegesis leads logically to the two kingdoms concept. Why should Paul speak so appreciatively of the State and its functions? asks Nygren. Could it be that he would have altered his view after persecution began? No, contends Nygren. Paul's attitude to the State is part of Paul's total theology. The apostle is setting forth the basic Christian view about worldly government. So far we are in agreement. But then Nygren goes on to separate

---

4   A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (SCM 1952).

the demands of the two aeons. In this provisional world the Christian has to live his life and within it he is subject to the earthly ruler, who is the servant of God in this aeon of wrath. This submission is not merely external, but *internal.* The Kingdom of this world is ordained of God and must be obeyed because this is God's will. Although Nygren does not deduce from this an ethical dualism the implication is there as Leenhardt in his commentary makes clear. Leenhardt criticizes Nygren for overlooking that the role of all government is for — τὸ ἀγαθόν — the good of communal life.[5] By ignoring this qualifying distinction Nygren assumes that the Christian submits to authority in all events. Yet even if Nygren has not worked out a fully-fledged ethical dualism, others have followed Luther's two Kingdom teaching — that the love ethic of Jesus applies to the individual lives of Christians only, whereas as a member of this aeon of wrath he may be required to do things in public life which he could not possibly contemplate as an individual. There does not seem to be much justification for this exegesis. There is nothing in Romans 12-13 to suggest that when Paul moves from the private and personal areas of Christian living in chapter 12, into the political arena of life in chapter 13 that his command to love, honour and to be at peace are rescinded. Surely not: there is a unity in Paul's teaching. Although he has a clear conception of two aeons making their demands on the Christian, the ethics of Christ's Kingdom dominate and affect the way we live now in this life.

But how do we respond to another interpretation — this time the complete opposite of the sharp dualism of the two-Kingdom theology? We take as an example of this the pacifist interpretation of R. Sider and R. K. Taylor in *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope.*[6] Sider and Taylor reject the dualism of the classical Lutheran position as I do but put in its place an argument for a rejection for all forms of violence. 'Christians', they argue, 'ought to forsake the diverse dualistic ethical systems developed since the Fourth Century and return to Jesus' teaching in non-retaliatory, suffering love.' There is much in this approach that I find attractive. The way of the Christ we follow is indeed the pathway of suffering love. He commanded Peter to put up his sword; he went willingly to his cross: he did teach his disciples not to retaliate.

---

[5] Leenhardt, *Commentary on Romans*
[6] R. Sider and R. K. Taylor, *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* (Hodder 1982), p.135.

But attractive though this approach may be there are some searching hermeneutical questions which reveal, I believe, that Sider and Taylor are not as biblical as they think they are.

First, can we be sure that Jesus' teaching about non-violence can be absolutized in this way? We have to ask what was the original setting of the sayings in Matthew 5-7 and on what basis may we apply a saying to the life of the Church in society. Jesus is clearly forbidding his disciples to indulge in personal retaliation, which is something of universal and timeless application. But does it mean that we should never use force or violence if a child is attacked, a woman raped, a helpless person cruelly treated? There is, of course, always the danger of asking of the New Testament questions about which it was not concerned, and I, together with Sider and Taylor, may be falling into this trap. But I think my point is made: I don't think Jesus' teaching rules out forceful intervention to protect the innocent and defend right.[7]

Second, even if Sider and Taylor reject the ethical dualism of Luther, are they not replacing it with another dualism — a social dualism in which church and society are separated by alien ideologies? I mean by this that Sider and Taylor appear to be suggesting that the Christian has a total theological perspective which always rules out certain actions. This implies that political and social questions have little to say to the theological perspectives and, indeed, are not at all theological.

Thirdly, Sider and Taylor show some ambiguity in their interpretation of the notion of punishment. In their interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 they indeed allow a proper role for *disciplinary* punishment but not for retributive punishment. Leaving aside the question whether Paul's notion of punishment in Romans 13 is not primarily retributive anyway, we must ask: what is the nature of 'disciplinary' punishment on an international scale? What does one do when an aggressive people runs through a Kingdom and threatens to destroy a way of life? What is the role of disciplinary love then?

IV. Pacifism and Just War Theories

The Bible then appears to leave us with a number of unresolved questions concerning war and peace. The Early Church, as far as we can deduce from the evidence, rejected the use of force, although it is unclear whether it did so because it believed it was following the clear, unequivocal commands of Jesus to walk the

---

7 See discussion in N. Anderson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Hodder 1983), ch.6.

way of love, or whether this ethic flowed from a rejection of a pagan world and its values. What we do find, however, is that in the post-Constantine period, the Church's attitude underwent a transformation. Perhaps it was the politics of power which led it to assume the inevitability of violence to settle certain differences between communities. Sider and Taylor view this as a sad decline from non-violence to violence and from suffering, costly love to retribution. But are they correct in putting it in such terms? Are the issues that clear and certain?

In order to answer this I would like to compare the contributions of two other writers, Jean Lassere and John Macquarrie.

Jean Lassere in *War and the Gospel* has written one of the most powerful Christian pacifist books of modern times.[8] Written in 1962 at the very point when it was beginning to dawn on us all what were the consequences of living in the nuclear age, it is a forthright and powerful denunciation of the use of force.

In chapter 3 Lassere calls upon the Church to reject the traditional doctrine which he expresses in the following way: God has charged the Church with the duty of preaching the Gospel and the State with ensuring the stability of the political order. The Christian is a member of both Church and nation; as to the former he obeys God by conforming to the Gospel ethic, as to the latter he conforms to the political order. As with the two-Kingdom ethic, the distinction between private and public morality opens up. In his personal life the Christian respects the Gospel teaching and in his public life he respects the law of the land. Obedience to 'call-up', to support the defences of the nation and assume the right of the militia, all flow from this is Lassere's conclusion. Jean Lassere's logic leads him to reject this traditional morality which grew up in the post-Constantine period and he urges the Christian churches to abandon a theology which he believes to be profoundly un-Christian and un-biblical. Inevitably the argument leads him to embrace whole-heartedly the pacifist position fully recognizing where it might lead the Christian, perhaps even to the concentration camp. Quoting Horace: 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori', he asks, 'but why should it be more glorious to be dismemberd by a bomb than to die in a concentration camp where up to the last minute you can keep the inward attitude of a man and render Christian witness? Which is more glorious from the point of view of the Gospel? Christ and the apostles died as brave victims of totalitarianism, but not with weapons in their hands.' 'It may', continues Lassere,

---

[8] Jean Lassere, *War and the Gospel* (J. Clarke 1962).

'lead to your country being overrun and dominated by a hated regime. A systematic non-violent resistance, including civil disobedience, in short, non-collaboration with the invader seems a means more moral, more 'manly' (in its truest sense), more compatible with the Christian faith.'[9]

Two points spring to mind. First, in Lassere's theology at this point social ethics and the gospel are one. Ethics flow from the gospel. If 'Christ died for all', then I cannot possibly take up arms to fight against my brother or sister. For Lassere also our ethics have evangelical consequences — they may either draw attention to our values or contradict them.

One must acknowledge that a great deal can be said for this viewpoint. It contradicts the 'rather dead than red' retort. Lord Chalfont, for example, stated in 1980: 'There can be nothing — nothing — worse than a life in which by the exercise of relentless tyranny, the precious gifts of liberty and dignity are denied.' Lassere would have replied to this, and I am sure quite correctly, that denial of dignity and liberty are not the most fundamental or ultimate of things. There is something far worse than being deprived of freedom: it is living without faith, hope and peace in your heart. We can look at the Eastern Bloc countries, particularly Poland, and see that Communism has not been successfully imposed on people everywhere. 'But the pacifist thesis may lead the Church to the Cross?' asks Lassere. 'It certainly will', he replies, 'it might also lead the Church to glory, whereas today, its Gospel falsified, the Church is without the Cross and without glory.'[10]

John Macquarrie, however, finds difficulty with the pacifist position. In his book *The Concept of Peace*[11] he deals with the moral ambiguity we face as Christians. He points out that there is no clear universally-accepted teaching on the subject. On the one hand there is a long tradition of pacifism and non-violence and yet, on the other hand, another tradition which, while not encouraging violence, deems it permissible in certain circumstances. Macquarrie admits that he finds himself on the opposite side to pacifism and argues that Christianity means living in a tension with the world: 'And it is impossible to do this without in some way participating in the corporate sins of the world, including its violence'.[12] Are there guidelines to help us answer

---

[9] *Op. cit.*, p.211.

[10] *Op. cit.*, p.218.

[11] J. Macquarrie, *The Concept of Peace* (SCM 1973).

[12] *Op. cit.*, p.59.

the agonizing question as to when and under what circumstances it might ever be right to fight?

Macquarrie falls back on the traditional Just War doctrine as formulated by Thomas Aquinas. Reference has already been made to it but briefly it is:

1. Just cause
2. War must be a last resort
3. A lawful authority
4. A feasible goal
5. Means must be appropriate to the end
6. Reconciliation to be eventual outcome.

I don't want to discuss the Just War theory but I want to point out that it, or something very much like it, is the only reasonable alternative to pacifism as a response to the war/peace dilemma at least as far as conventional warfare is concerned. Deny this framework and all we have left is a number of 'ad hoc' comments from different Christian theologians or different parts of the Christian tradition.

Perhaps now we should return to our earlier question: was the non-pacifist position which developed in the Church as Christianity strengthened its hold on society a proper and reasonable interpretation of the Gospel or a regressive slump into a worldly morality concerned with the survival of the 'status quo'?

I do not share Sider's view that it is the latter, neither am I asserting that the Church's traditional doctrine has always been a proper interpretation of the Gospel. What I do find, however, is the complexity of applying the teaching of the Christian faith to the situations in which we find ourselves. It is worth noting that the Just War theory completely abandons the attempt to apply biblical principles to its logic. Indeed, it was not even in the first instance a theological construction — it was derived from the classical world of Greece and Rome and was dressed up in Christian language by the medieval theologians. This does not make it a wrong or necessarily a bad construct — the point I am stressing is that it is primarily a *political* theory.

Nowhere better is the dilemma seen than in the life and teachings of D. Bonhoeffer. Macquarrie sets him forth as an answer to the question: 'Can revolutionary views ever be justified from a Christian point of view?'[13] From our point of view Bonhoeffer is of great interest because, as we shall see in a moment, he is of major importance to both writers — Lassere and Macquarrie.

---

[13] *Op. cit.*, p.60.

The tragic irony of Bonhoeffer is that this man of peace was forced by his theology as well as by his love for people to join in an attempt on Hitler's life. An act he paid for with his life. Yet Bonhoeffer's theology rested in the radical nature of discipleship of which the Sermon on the Mount was its compelling peak. Of formative importance to Bonhoeffer's development was the year 1930 which he spent in the Union Theological Seminary, New York, as an exchange student. An enduring friendship began with a French Reformed student named Jean Lassere. Lassere was already an ardent pacifist whereas Bonhoeffer was not. Through Lassere Bonhoeffer was prompted to take the Sermon on the Mount as a concrete command to the Christian. According to his biographer, Eberlard Bethge, 'Not that Bonhoeffer immediately became a convinced pacifist — in fact he never did so — but, after meeting Lassere, the question of the concrete answer to the biblical injunction of peace and that of the concrete steps to be taken against warlike impulses never left him again.'[14] Through Lassere's challenge to him and through his own study of discipleship, Bonhoeffer struggled with the theme of peace throughout his life and ministry. It is, as I said earlier, the tragic irony that Bonhoeffer who was so strongly led into the ways of peace should end his life violently because he took up weapons of violence. In becoming a partner to the conspiracy he turned his back on the way of peace.

John Macquarrie sees Bonhoeffer's action as a legitimate expression of the Just War idea.[15] Maybe. Yet it seems to me that Bonhoeffer's example is more that of showing the dilemma of the Christian who is caught up in the more difficult task of balancing his response as a Christian and as a citizen. Where pacifism fails — and I believe Bonhoeffer serves to illustrate that it does so fail — is in its ultimate action in withdrawing from the situation. In a sinful, fallen world the Christian Church does not stand outside the sinful structures of society as a holy and inviolable people but is also caught up in the struggles of a world searching for law and order and peace. In many, many cases violence is wrong — but I don't think we can say categorically that it is always wrong.

V. The Way of Peace

There is, I suggest, a certain irony in the fact that we are studying the theme of war when the Bible gives us practically no teaching

---

[14] E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Collins 1970), p.112.
[15] J. Macquarrie, *The Concept of Peace* (SCM 1973), p.59.

on it whatever! Instead it concentrates upon peace. Yet even with this difference of emphasis we may observe something very fundamental about human nature. War is something which springs from what we are. At this moment there are over twenty local wars going on in different parts of the globe. Rather than war being exceptional, it is peace which is unusual and exceptional. The 'ubiquity of war in the Old Testament', which I believe was Derek Kidner's phrase, is also true of our contemporary situation. Another factor of which I believe we need to be reminded is the awfulness and horror of war. It is all too easy for us to talk about it in the harmony and peace of a conference, but now we need to remind ourselves of its terrifying consequences, especially when we think of the effects of nuclear warfare. Whether we are pacifists or not we Christians must be a voice and a conscience in society and should unite against this terror.

Even though I must reject those noble attempts to convince me that pacifism is the only natural deduction to draw from the New Testament, that is, if we are talking about conventional warfare, I share with this approach a strong desire that the church should rediscover its role as a peace maker in society. There are a number of elements of great importance which the church must live out and speak out.

First, we must rediscover what it is to be people of the Cross. The Cross is for us the primary fact of reconciliation. 'Christ is our Peace who has made us one and broken down the dividing way of hostility' (Eph. 2:14). I would not go as far as Sider and Taylor in making the Cross a foundational theological principle for non-violence (p.142) because that was clearly not its primary purpose, but is is difficult not to agree that the Cross is more than a theological idea — it is something we have to take up and embrace. The 'Imitatio Christi' doctrine is, as Moltmann points out, an important theological motif in discipleship down the ages and, surely, we need to rediscover it in our own day. What is it to take up one's cross as an oppressed Christian in El Salvador or South Africa? How is evil to be resisted and overcome when it threatens the lives of many through oppression, violence and pain? At what point does the conflict take one over the line from passive disobedience to active disobedience? And most terrible of all, at what point does the conflict lead us to take up arms to overthrow a regime? Academic questions to us maybe, but not such to many Christians in our world.

Second, the Christian Church conveys that important element of hope. The Church is the Church of the Resurrection which proclaims God's victory — a victory which will one day become a

EQ LVll 2-F

reality to the whole of creation when Christ returns in glory. This relates to our world in one important way. A people without external hope will be all the more afraid when it is threatened with extinction. It has to defend itself at all costs because it has nothing beyond its own traditions and values. As Keith Clements point out in his recent *A Patriotism for Today*[16] fear drives a nation to make its boundaries as secure as possible. 'The desire to negotiate from strength means that in order to have something to bargain with, one must go to the conference table outwardly desiring peace but all the time trying to ensure that one is more powerfully armed than one's opponent'.[17] The escalation of arms is, therefore, inevitable. Fear and lack of trust are bed-fellows.

The Christian Church must sound clearly the note of hope, that God has acted in Christ and that Man cannot and shall not have the last word in God's world.

The last element I would place in a Christian doctrine of peace is one I mentioned much earlier which we spotted in the Old Testament and also in the Revelation of St. John: Yahweh the warrior God who fights for his people and his world. So Psalm 44 strikes the right chord for the Christian who knows that the battle is the Lord's:

'Thou art my King and my God,
who ordainest victories for Jacob.
Thro' thee we push down our foes;
thro' thy name we tread down our assailants.
For not in my bow I trust,
nor can my sword save me.
But thou has saved us from our foes
and has put to confusion those who hate us.
In God we have boasted continually
and we will give thanks to thy name for ever.'

---

16   Keith Clements, *A Patriotism for Today* (Bristol Baptist College 1984).
17   *Op. cit.*, p.121.