

TAKING JESUS SERIOUSLY PACIFIST APPRAISAL OF WARFARE

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Situating the Topic

War is a social conflict wherein one party, with the use of some sort of force tries to compel the surrender or submission of the other. It happens between all kinds of social groups such as tribes, races, nations, religious groups, social classes and even between families and individuals. Warfare is generally understood as armed conflict, which results in the direct killing of other human beings. It is enlightening to note that physical and armed forces are not the only types of force. Gandhi waged a war with the use of 'soul force' (satyagraha). Although his means was nonviolence (ahimsa), it was still a type of warfare because its primary purpose was to bring about the submission of the other through compulsion of the soul force.¹

The question 'can one justify modern warfare?' is very fundamental especially in the present context of *how* wars are waged. First of all, there is an inherent weakness in the very question. It assumes *apriori* that some wars could be justified. Most Christians seem to be comfortable at waging traditional wars and

¹ Guy Franklin Hershberger, *War, Peace & Nonresistance* (Herald Press: Scottdale, Pennsylvania, Waterloo, Ontario, 1981), p. 1.

have apprehensions only at the present type of wars, which use nuclear or bio-chemical weapons. Justification of war or participation in warfare has become a part of the majority Christian heritage. For most Christians it goes along with their practice of faith. Catholics and Protestants of all the major denominations hold to the theory of a just war, which justifies Christian participation in warfare. In holding on to this theory, pacifist Churches believe that the vast majority of Christians follow St. Augustine's idea that was further developed by Thomas Aquinas. Without ignoring the New Testament, this theory has some roots in the non-Christian or pagan philosophy of Plato and Cicero. The standards of the pagan world met those of the Church halfway, and the Kingdom of God was badly confused with the kingdom of the world.² They have developed an informal system of a *just war* for determining when it is *justified* and even *necessary* for Christians to kill other human beings. With this rationale, Christians have participated in wars of defense, wars of conquest and even of genocide, and wars of religious intolerance.

However, at the same time there are small numbers of Christians, who have always refused to kill other human persons. They had based this stand on the demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by pointing out that Jesus Himself has laid down his own life in loving sacrifice instead of punishing his persecutors. He meekly submitted to the crucifixion and overcame the evil of the world. That was the moment when he manifested his most thoroughgoing nonresistance. It was a revolution calling for a radical way of life of faithfulness. He created a community around Him and gave a new way to deal with offenders, and violence. This distinct community firmly believes that prayer and selfless obedience to God's way of peace and love have a greater influence on the final outcome of the events than do bullets and bombs, machineguns and missiles.³ This group is not only a novelty in the society but, it is also the most powerful tool of social change.

² Ibid., pp. 70-80.

³Dennis Byler, *Making War & Making Peace* (Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, Kitchener, Ontario, 1989), p. Back cover.

1. Different Christian Beliefs towards War

How many opinions or attitudes towards war can be Christian? Why do some Christians approve fight and some others do not? Did not Jesus Christ address this crucial issue and show the right path regarding violence and war? Did he not categorically approve the fifth commandment that "you shall not murder"? (Ex 20:13). Still, Christians down the centuries had managed to disagree over many matters and it should not come as a surprise that all Christians do not think in the same way regarding warfare. And yet, if Christ took a definite position concerning how to deal with our enemies, then that and only that should be considered as the truly Christian position. All others would simply be non-Christian positions, even if certain Christians or certain mainline Churches hold them. In fact, there is a Christian position on war⁴. Jesus spoke plainly about the love of enemy (Mt 5: 38-48) and he demonstrated it by not resisting his persecutors, who crucified him. All the four gospels vouch to this startling fact. Of course, some would argue saying that it is for individual Christians to be patient and forgiving. But did Jesus mean by that that we should love our wartime enemies too? Are States as institutions set up by God (Rom 13:1) obliged by this ethic? There are innumerable opinions about this question. Even among the pacifists, there are many varieties of pacifism⁵. The various patterns among the pacifists and the rest would fit into certain patterns. Before we study them, let us see the sources of most Christian thinking on war.

2. Sources of Most Christian Thinking on War

Christians might be surprised to learn that most Christian thinking follows non – Christian philosophy. The first source dates back to Plato, a philosopher who lived in Greece about three hundred years before Christ. He wrote that war should be fought

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁵ Confer John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless, The Varieties of Religious Pacifism* (Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, Waterloo, Ontario, 1992), 15-143; Also Brian Johnstone, *The theory and Practice of Peace-Making, Class Notes for Students' Use* (Accademia Alfonsiana, Istituto Superiore Di Teologia Morale, Roma: 1989-1990), pp. 1-52.

in such a way as to make reconciliation possible and further wars unnecessary. Another influence is Cicero, a Latin writer who lived and died a few years before Christ. He has this to say about war:

There are certain duties that we owe even to those who have wronged us. For there is a limit to retribution and to punishment or rather, I am inclined to think, it is sufficient that the aggressor should be brought to repent of his wrongdoing, in order that he may not repeat the offence and that others may be deterred from doing wrong. ... The only excuse, therefore, for going to war is that we may live in peace unharmed; and when the victory is won, we should spare those who have not been blood-thirsty and barbarous in their warfare.⁶

Many Christians may feel comfortable with the above principles. They sound so right, so sober, peace loving, balanced and even so Christian! But in fact, Christians of the first three centuries did not participate in war. They believed prayer for enemies was the real way and weapon to peace.

3. Constantinianism and Christendom

With the emperor Constantine at the beginning of the fourth century, things changed drastically with far more serious consequences. As per the story, Constantine was fighting against one of his rivals for the imperial throne. While fighting he had a vision. A cross appeared in the heavens with the inscription "By this sign, conquer". At the Milvian Bridge near Rome under a banner with the same words, his troops were indeed victorious. After this he was supposed to have been converted.

Romans regarded the emperor as a god. When he favored Christianity and made it the official religion of the state, did he continue claim himself as god? Eventually the emperors gave up their claim that they were gods. But the Church believed that their authority to rule came straight from God. From now on there were two ways of God's will to be known. One was through the Church and this applied to private morality. The other was through God's

⁶ As quoted in Byler, *Making War*, op.cit., p. 17.

appointed 'Christian' ruler and this applied to public morality. This can happen when everyone in a society is Christian or at least everyone that matters, certainly the rulers. This is called "Christendom", which permits Christianity to become state policy. As the Church takes responsibility for the society at large, suddenly the idea of Christians not taking part in wars seemed no longer practical. It would disarm the nation and leave it weak and defenseless before enemies who are pagan. They could easily take over the government and who is there to stop those pagans? Hence the need of a new doctrine concerning Christians and war was inevitable.

4. The Ends justify The Means: Augustine's Legacy?

According to the principle 'the ends justify the means', some actions which are not normally morally acceptable, are permissible if the expected outcome is positive enough. Is this way of determining right and wrong conduct is correct for Christians? Is it not based on utilitarianism and consequentialism? Is it not a sort of 'situation ethics'? This is the legacy of St. Augustine. Although for hundreds of years Rome was a fortress of civilization, one hundred years after the conversion of Constantine, the Roman empire was in deep trouble. The barbarians started invading and reached as far as the gates of Hippo, a city in Africa, whose bishop was Augustine. He found himself with a crisis on his hands. Boniface, the general in charge of defending the city was a Christian. The traditional teaching had been that Christians do not participate in war and if someone became a Christian while in army, he did not have to leave the army. However, you were not allowed to kill anyone. It is said that Boniface decided to leave the army to become a monk but Augustine convinced the general to stay on and fight the invaders. His arguments to persuade Boniface were neither grounded on Jesus words, nor on the traditional teaching of the Church but on pagan philosophy of Plato and Cicero:

Peace should be the object of your desire; War should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may by it deliver men from the necessity and preserve them in peace. For, peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged in order that peace may be obtained. Therefore, even in waging war, cherish the spirit of a peacemaker, that,

by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace.⁷

By the above argument Augustine was saying that Christians must be very careful to fight only wars that are just. It has been understood ever since that it is all right for Christians to fight, fight justly! Thus Augustine invents a square wheel! A wheel has to be round, it could not be square. A square wheel would not function as a wheel and therefore would not be a wheel. This kind of thinking did not begin with Augustine. Jesus had already found it among the Pharisees, who thought they had good reasons for not honoring their parents. Some of them thought they had good reasons for trying to keep Jesus from healing on the Sabbath and even for crucifying him. It is amazing that such reasoning found its way back into Christian thought. Augustine faced other problems too because of the split of the African Church into two rival denominations: the Catholics and the Donatists. Augustine was for unity. Having tried all the possible means, he came to believe that the only way to unite the Church was through force. But he thought that it would be wrong to use imperial police to force Donatists to become Catholic. When they did so anyway, he became convinced it had worked for good after all.⁸

In his book, *The City of God*, Augustine is deeply saddened by the evil world he sees around him. People who are guilty of crime tend to lie about their guilt. The only way to find out if they are guilty is to torture them. It never seems to cross his mind that torture itself might be wrong especially if they are innocent. In short, the essence of the Augustine's thought is: A Christian may fight the enemy. A Christian may torture, maim, and kill the enemy. A Christian may even persecute those who disagree with his religion on three conditions: First, it must be for a just cause. Second, one must truly love one's victim. And third, one must feel great sorrow about the need to behave this way. But *agape* is the Christian ethic and it destroys all divisions and barriers among men (Col 3:11) and it does not harm its neighbour (Rom 13:10).

⁷ Byler, *Making War*, op. cit., p. 23.

⁸ Herschberger, *War, Peace & Nonresistance*, op. cit., pp. 70-74.

Augustine is a great saint. His writings have influenced many areas of Christian thought. He was brilliant at expressing Christianity in ways people could easily understand. But in the area of violence and war, he did not realize how far he was from Jesus. He simply tried to be a responsible Christian under changed circumstances and thus laid foundations of the just war theory. Augustine's idea was further developed by Thomas Aquinas, in the context of Crusades, approving some wars as justified.

5. Certain Situations Justify Warfare

Most Churches since Augustine opine that certain circumstances justify their participation in warfare. It is a sad fact but a true ethic, they say. Because responsible Christians must fight as we live in a real and not in a utopian world.

5.1. God's Justice Demands Punishment of the Evildoer

Jesus was meek and humble and expressed his love. But he also expressed God's justice and judgment without restraining his words. He drove the money changers out of the temple. Most Christians believe that the love and justice of God go hand in hand. Because God is love, God does not stop being just. For many Christians love is an insufficient force in dealing with the evil in the real world. It may be proper to forgive certain kinds of personal offences. But some kinds of evil like that of Hitler, of the murder of Stains, Godra holocaust, etc. cannot be forgiven by individual Christians. God's justice and righteousness demand punishment for the unrepentant evildoer. And ever since the early Old Testament times God's punishment has occasionally taken the form of war. God has established the government to punish the evildoer (Rom13: 4) even with death penalty. God often used wars to punish evil nations. We do not believe that trust in the providence and deliverance of the Lord means passive inaction in the face of great evil. Bible does not advocate that we must sit idle while evil goes unpunished. Some Christians even say that the nuclear destruction of the world is to be preferred to the victory of the godless and unjust aggressors over passive Christian nations!

5.2. Lesser Evil

In our real world sometimes it is impossible to avoid evil. Many Christians admit that the punishment of the evildoers has evil consequences too. But that does not and should not make

people sit idle and do nothing about the evil spreading like wildfire. In this fallen world, many decisions we have to make have some evil consequences. At such times, we must consider which action will produce lesser evil. Sometimes fighting a war might be such lesser evil. But sitting idle wringing our hands might be at times much worse evil.

5.3. Lesser Good

Some of those Christians who believe that it is sometimes proper for Christians to fight think of it as a lesser evil. But some others prefer to think of it as a lesser good. It is an unpleasant action but still necessary and is a good action. There is nothing unethical in it to worry the Christian conscience.

5.4. Pacifism is Irrelevant

'Irrelevant' is a word we use for something which is not related to the situation at hand. Some Christians believe that to love as Jesus loved implies that they cannot bear arms against national enemies. Most Christians dismiss this as an irrelevant and useless position. Such ideas can be held only by people who live in a fantasy or dreamy world. As loyal citizens, we should shoulder the responsibility of the defense of the nation. This type of Christians believes that it is more important to bear arms than to slavishly and literally be faithful to the thought of Jesus.

5.5. Private Individual Vs. Public Official

What might be wrong for anyone to do, is proper if the right person does it. Since Augustine, this is a fundamental principle, which concerns the difference between the individual and the government. It states that God instituted national governments to carry out justice. If a government does not punish the evildoer, it is, in fact disobeying God. What God established cannot be wrong. For a duly constituted authority to defend the citizens cannot be a sin. The rulers only carry out God's intention. These Christians argue that if there is nothing wrong in it, then there is nothing to keep a Christian from it. But they believe that there are some things a Christian must never do on one's own authority. As a private person, one may never destroy one's enemy, deny forgiveness, and refuse to turn the other cheek. However, if one happens to be the authority instituted to avoid disorder, and to punish the evildoer,

morality is different for him or her. In doing that, one is carrying out God's will.

Martin Luther too believed that what a Christian individual should not do, the State can do. He went one step further and stated that the duty of a citizen is obedience to the state. Therefore, if a State asks a citizen to fight in a war, a Christian must not disobey. Accordingly even a mercenary does a proper function. Above all, as in the days of Augustine, Luther's reformation depended on the backing of the State. Luther was deeply grateful to them. When conscientious German peasantry rose against the very emperors who supported the reformation, he supported the authorities encouraging them to put down the rebellion with any means necessary! John Calvin too believed in the duty of the State and of its citizens to exercise force to guarantee an orderly society. In this area of violence and war, Catholic and Protestant thought agree. All of them were convinced that Augustine was right."

6. Fight against the War of the Oppressor

We have seen so far that the reason many Christians have given for going for war is: God is just and righteous. His love does not stop from punishing the wicked. Christians must not stand idle in the face of injustice and evil. They must stand up for righteousness. However the traditional Christian just war thought states that a war can be just only when fought by a properly constituted authority. Private individuals or groups must not take the law into their own hands. When the German peasantry revolted against the oppressing nobility, Luther was shocked because he felt the principle of the divine order was violated. Is this not a contradiction? Is revolutionary war never right? Against the wickedness of Hitler, Christians of the world mobilized their armies and resources. It took years of terrible war to stop Hitler. Yet they all felt justified for having destroyed the evil Nazi system. Should not Christians fight against new Hitlers or new wicked Nazi systems and structures?

Thomas Aquinas, a famous theologian of the later middle Ages had stated that as a rule, revolution or sedition, it is a mortal

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 75-80

sin. But now faced with the point 'whether it is sin to fight against an oppressive government', he states that a tyrannical government is not just, because it is directed, not to the common good, but to the private good of the ruler. Therefore, there is no sedition in disturbing a government of this kind. Indeed, it is the tyrant who is guilty of sedition, since he encourages discord and sedition among his subjects that he may lord over them more securely; for this is tyranny, being conducive to the private good of the ruler, and to the injury of the multitude.¹⁰

John Locke, a seventeenth century philosopher, Camilo Torres, a Catholic priest of the twentieth century stated that to revolt against oppressive and unjust governments or aggressors in defense is not wrong. According to Locke, it is the oppressive States who have started the war. Christians, who believe fighting is justified only when declared by a proper authority, say that wars of unprovoked aggression are always wrong. Defense against such aggression is always justified. Therefore, when people defend themselves by fighting against oppression, they are waging a just war. Class conflict too exists because the rich and the powerful began exploiting the poor and not because Karl Marx stated. Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of the liberation theology in Latin America, like Augustine wishes to ensure no loss of Christian love in the conflict.¹¹

In the right wing Christian thought, *might is right*. Those in authority are those whom God wants in power because God is in control of history. In the left wing Christian thought, *right is might*. Christians engage in armed struggle for a better system in the belief that since they are working for justice, God will eventually grant them victory. In New Testament thought *might is merely might*. The mighty, right or wrong will perish by the sword they take up. 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' (Mt 5:5).

¹⁰ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2-2, Q.42. Art 2.

¹¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *a theology of liberation*, trans. (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1971), pp. 265-279.

7. Fight When Christ Commands: The Crusades

The first Crusade to seize Palestine, the Holy land from the Turks was launched by Pope Urban II in 1095. His words were full of religious authority as he expressed a new theology of warfare for Christians. He called the Turks, the Persian people a vile race and called all Christians to exterminate them. He assured the fighters that the sins of those who participate in the Crusade would be forgiven in case they lose their lives in fight against the 'heathen'. Above all, he stated that *Christ commands it*. This is a long way from Augustine and those who seek to fight to end injustice and oppression. The pope called to wipe the Persian people out of the face of the earth on religious and racial grounds. How could Christians have come to such horrifying attitude?¹² Most Christians of that time believed that it was Christ's wish and therefore it became a simple matter of obedience. All other considerations were set aside.

8. Old Testament War as the Model

We observed earlier that most Christian thought on war came from non-Christian philosophy. However, we should study about the influence of the holy war of Old Testament upon some Christians. This goes in the opposite direction from non-Christian influence. Non-Christian philosophy had argued for moderation seeking peace and justice. But the model of the Holy war of Old Testament has fostered in some Christians a spirit of fanaticism and intolerance leading to killing of a whole race of people. Some puritan preachers in north America claiming to be the new Israel, called the native Americans 'Amalekites'. God led them to the promised land and expected them to deal with the native people much the same way he commanded Israel to deal with Amalekites in Canaan!

9. The Influence of Islam?

For over a millennium Christians did not believe that the warfare commanded in the Old Testament had any direct relation to their own wars. The teaching of Jesus had a soothing influence,

¹² Byler, *Making War*, op.cit., pp.49-50

even when Christians were able to justify fighting under certain circumstances. Then how did Christians come to believe that God was again commanding them to fight? Christian writers and analysts, see once again the influence of non-Christian thought especially the Islamic Jihad shaping the Christian thought of war. This is the reason for the crusading spirit in the Americas in exterminating the native population, fighting in World War I, destroying Hitler and godless Communism in World War II and in many wars till date. At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the crusading spirit is evident in some Christians in Latin America. They believe that God commands the Marxist inspired violent revolution there as Jesus used force and chased the money changers out of the temple. Jesus is turned into a Latin-American guerilla fighter by some and the authorities are directed to defend themselves against guerillas by some conservatives. Both sides believe that it is a sacred duty for a holy cause! The crusading spirit is heard from the pulpits in many catholic and protestant Churches. Interestingly, Christians of militant mind-set, whether rightist or leftist, do agree on one thing: It is God's express will that they kill each other!!

10. How may Christians Justly Fight?: Proportionate Means

Our study might make people think that all Christians are willing to resort quickly to force and violence as a solution to either civil or international conflicts. This is not true at all. That is the reason why the general rules of the just war theory have developed over the years. Their purpose is to try to set limits on Christian participation in war. One of the important rules is the use of proportionate means. This is our present concern. Punishment must be proportional to the action being punished. It must not cause more harm or injustice than that is prevented or punished. It must neither harm the innocent nor destroy the ecological balance beyond its capacity to heal itself. Its chief purpose should be to achieve an acceptable peace, a better peace than that existed before. Its purpose is not the destruction of the other, but the establishment of a peaceful relationship with the opponent. This is the reason why some Christians believe that nuclear warfare presents special moral problems. There are reservations regarding nuclear weapons and chemical and biological weapons. All these

fit into another older Christian tradition of being critical of certain wars or weapons without totally rejecting warfare.

11. Fight against Only Excessive Violence

Although Christianity had largely forsaken its original principles for opposing war and violence, certain signs of it remained. It did not seem right for clerics to fight. Those who shed blood were refused entry into monastic life. Those who shed blood even in justified wars were often required to do penance. Holy Communion was withheld from them for some time. In spite of what the public officials were doing, most people were spared from actual fighting. They were free to practice the original Christian teaching against violence. Even those who could not escape military service were encouraged limit the damage ensuring from their actions.

12. Nuclear and Bio-chemical Pacifism

Nuclear weapon is not just another weapon, like the switch from arrows and swords to gunpowder. They represent a totally new moral problem. The dreadfully disastrous nature of a nuclear holocaust spreads destruction and death across large segments of the globe. It exceeds any proportionality to just end. They destroy not only military capability but also medical capability, economy and political system in addition to the majority of a nation's population. All this far exceeds any moral ends for going to war and makes sheer mockery of any notion of justice or love. Therefore, nuclear disarmament is a must even if it must be unilateral and even if it means the possibility of defeat for a State. A growing number of Christians are expressing similar opinions not only about nuclear arms but also of chemical and biological weapons using bacteria in warfare. Something deep in the hearts of concerned Christians refuses to agree to the destruction their governments are planning. It is true that some older weapons of outdated technology are being destroyed. But in reality the arms race continues furiously. No country will stop researching and developing the technology for newer and better weapons. From Hiroshima and Nagasaki we can imagine the horror of nuclear war. But we cannot imagine what war with the next generation of weapons will be like!

13. Biblical Pacifism: Taking Jesus Seriously

A careful reading of the thought of most Christians on the matter of war and violence reveals that their attitudes in times of war are unreflective and emotional. The high ideals of Bible often make no difference in real life. The attitude even of the Christian preachers seldom give careful consideration to Jesus. All they know is that all major Christian denominations believe that some wars are justified and Christians have always participated in war. However, many new Christians often exhibit a special sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as response to their 'first love' (Rev. 2:4). Because of this, people in the armed forces often have questions about their profession once they become Christians. But Christian ministers, not probably intentionally, teach them not to have scruples about it. The most important concern of most Christians is the missionary commission for expansive, Spirit-filled and effective evangelism. With this in mind, Christians do not sufficiently examine the Bible on the subject of war. At times, they do not even bother about Augustine or Just war theory because they might put limits on their approval of wars! Worse still is that today Christians do not decide as to which war is just. When the media or government informs, they approve and decide to participate in war. Many times the media of the both parties in the war tell that the other side is unjust. The general attitude is: It is the duty of the government to run the State and it is their duty to obey!

14. Nonresistance is Biblical Pacifism

Nonresistance is a Biblical principle, and a way of life espoused by the Mennonites from the beginning of their history in the time of reformation. Both the terms, nonresistance and pacifism are biblical terms, taken from the Sermon on the Mount. The former is taken from the words of Jesus "Resist not the evildoer" (Mt 5:39). The latter comes from the words "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9). In some ways the term 'pacifism' is preferable to nonresistance because it is positive in its suggestion while nonresistance is more negative. In the original and present meaning the term nonresistance describes the faith and life of those who accept the Bible as the revealed will of God, and who can not

take part in warfare because they believe the Bible forbids it, and who renounce all coercion, even nonviolent force.¹³ Pacifism, on the other hand is a term which covers many types of opposition to war. Some pacifists are opposed to all wars and some are not. Mennonites are absolute pacifists opposing all wars.

The history of humanity in general and the history of Christianity in particular is spread over the debris of countless wars. Most people, who are psychologically addicted to violence, glorify themselves in the parades of military strength on national festivals. Despite this, God has preserved an *oasis of peace, a people of peace*. The learned Doctors will forever discuss Cicero, Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Camilo, etc. The mainstream Churches might convincingly sign up for justified violence and counter-violence. But somewhere, the Lord will have always at least a handful of Christians, 'the little flock', which turns to Bible for guidance. Even if the history does not remember, God never forgets them. They are Peter Waldo and the early Waldesians in twelfth century, Peter Chelcicky and Czech Unity of Brethren in fifteenth century, Menno Simons and the Anabaptists in the beginning of sixteenth century, George Fox and the Society of Friends called Quakers in the beginning of seventeenth, David Low Dodge of Peace Society in 1815, Adin Ballou of Peace Movement, Martin Luther King and many martyrs who have refused even 'justified violence' till date and offered their lives than to kill others.¹⁴

The history of war reflects that Just-war thinking sounds reasonable for both Christians and non-Christians. But biblical pacifism requires conversion to make sense. It is intensely spiritual and requires the mind of Jesus Biblical pacifism *begins and ends with Jesus*. It goes beyond the Sermon on the Mount. It is the incarnation of Jesus. It is the Christian belief that Jesus fully reflected the nature of God. That Jesus is what people will be like if they wish to do God's will. Biblical pacifists firmly believe that *Jesus is the complete, definitive revelation of God's will* for humanity. They really trust that

¹³Ibid., pp.172-173.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 73-74

he is the eternal *logos* of God, made flesh. He is the eternal message of God, the Word made flesh in the human history so that *God never again be misunderstood*. His life and example show how our relations with enemies should be. Jesus had national enemies, political enemies and religious enemies. Perhaps some of them became his personal enemies. Therefore, when he holds up his own enemy-love as an example for his followers, he is not in an unreal fantasy world, where enemies do not matter. He is in a very real world where his enemies torment him to death on a cross.

Even if Jesus had not taught us to turn the other cheek (Mt 5:39), or never told us to pray for and love those who hate us (Mt 5:44), or never told us to forgive unconditionally, those who take Him seriously would still avoid fighting because he taught us 'to love as he loved' (Jn 15:12). The way he loved us was to die for our sins rather than punish us. He suffered injustice against him self rather than treating us with the justice we deserved. The Apostles were aware that Jesus' death in favor of his enemies was meant as an example to be followed (1Pt 2:21-23). "If God had intended his people to bear the injustice and sin of the world, what could he have said or done beyond what he did in Jesus Christ? If we will not understand it this way, how would we understand it?"¹⁵

15. Need for a New Birth

Biblical pacifists arrive at absolute rejection of war through the Scriptures. Other Christian pacifists have arrived at similar conclusions through other paths. Some believe in human goodness and say that human society is constantly evolving in the direction of equality, fraternity and justice. They do not take sin into account. This is a shallow pacifism because it will not be able to stand up to the test when evil and wickedness cause war and violence and gets out of human control. For Quakers the path toward pacifism is an *intense inner experience of the Holy Spirit*. The Spirit of Christ reveals himself as inner light to those who are open to Him. God creates within humans a strong aversion at even the thought of taking human life. For Quakers this is enough. Even without the Bible they would still need to follow this inner light.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 76.

Menno Simons lived a century before Quakers appeared. His position is labeled as *Biblical pacifism*, though Mennonites traditionally called it *nonresistance*. Menno insisted on regeneration or new birth,¹⁶ similar to the call of Christ to Nicodemus (Jn 3: 4). Although Menno sounds as if another baptism is required, in fact he says that the rightly baptized followers of Christ, who are baptized inwardly with the Spirit and fire and externally with water, according to the Word of the Lord, have the weapons of patience, hope, silence and God's Word required for absolute pacifism.¹⁷

16. Shalom, Alternative to War

War for peace is the slogan of the day. But Biblical pacifists see Peace as God's alternative to war. Whether Christians should act for justice or not, is not the point of disagreement. Christians who justify war state that they are for justice as well as love and say that those who refuse to fight are interested only in love. Biblical pacifists agree that justice and love are inseparable and no one can have one without the other. The only argument is *how* one works for justice. Interestingly one of the first victims in war is always justice. So pacifists argue that if the aim is justice, war is simply the wrong means to use. One cannot paint a wall white with black paint. The Bible does not have much to say against war. Yet it has a well-developed message for peace. Peace is not the absence of war; it is *shalom*, which implies harmony, the total order that can come only when no one is suffering. This is the mark of God's Kingdom (Lk 4:18-19).

Pacifists are for a new social order and are sometimes at the forefront of liberation movements. 'Nonviolent direct action' is the path they choose. It confronts the society with the suffering imposed on people by the usual state of things. One of the objectives of this approach is the conversion, not the destruction of enemies. Nonviolence is the way of suffering and martyrdom. It has tremendous power to bring persons to their moral senses. But the source of this power comes from people taking suffering on

¹⁶ Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956), p. 93.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

themselves, rather than causing others to suffer. One cannot talk of nonviolence without mentioning the name of Gandhi. He is a great inspiration to those who follow the non-violent way. Gandhi openly acknowledged the influence of the life and teaching of Jesus upon his beliefs and behavior. Perhaps, he took Christ more seriously than many Christians.

Many biblical pacifists feel uncomfortable with any tactic, violent or nonviolent, which seeks to force change upon society. They believe in an alternative way to work toward shalom in society. It is to build among God's people a model of peaceful society in worship, love, joy and justice. This is possible when men and women are reborn and are spirit filled. This will mean a radical break with injustice and violence in any form.

To Conclude

Many Christians, with sixteen bloody centuries of history, still hold that just war thinking is basically sound. History proves that when war is justified, it results in a flood of wars. When a war is not just, Christians must say so clearly and refuse to fight. But, then they will meet with the same fate as the pacifists, who were labeled *irrelevant* or worse *irresponsible*. The world is happy to have a Christian opinion on wars as long as that justifies wars. Concerned Christians ever since Augustine have been trying to say that some wars are justified. And ever since people went on killing one another and then theologians followed behind to explain why they were necessary and how their position was just. It is like feeding the monster of just war; in doing so, one expects to control it but in fact always loses control of it. Pacifists therefore say that all war is sin. Modern warfare is still worse. Therefore, it goes without saying that Pacifists do not justify any warfare. Jesus lived a real world of social conflict with at least four possible strategies: Pragmatism of the Herodians and Sadducees, revolutionary violence of zealots, withdrawal of the Essences into the Desert and the *proper and separate religion* of the Pharisees. Jesus did not yield to those fundamental human temptations. His Sermon on the Mount is the ethic of perfect love, an ethic of unqualified love of the neighbor and even of the enemy to the point of readiness to suffer unjustly. It is the nature of God's love and His Kingdom. Jesus' path is faithfulness to God's will. We do not, ultimately, love our neighbor because Jesus told us but because God is like that. It is not because Jesus told us to that we love even beyond the limits

of reason and justice, even to the point of refusing to kill and willing to suffer because God is like that too (Mt 5: 43-48).¹⁸ Wickedness and evil in world would be restrained and overcome by the spiritual authority of prayers than by the might of the rulers as Origen and Paul stated (Eph 6:10-18).

Christians who justify war say that the wicked enemy should be stopped by force. But the real enemy is not Hitler or Bin Laden but the devil. More than fighting the enemy in flesh and blood, Christians should fight the dark spiritual forces. Though Hitler was killed in World War II, his ideas had been bred by the spirit of violent civilization. In the real world naive idealism is dangerous. The wicked have to be stopped. But as Christians, we believe that the real world includes demonic forces, which drive people to such extreme wickedness. Those who find fighting the devil by spiritual means to be too big a challenge, too frightening and faith demanding, go to kill the evildoer, which is much less complicated. Jesus and the early Christianity knew this and consistently resisted the devil (James 4:7). The devil, first, traps the evildoers and then draws others into the same trap to kill the same victims. This is the monstrous temptation of the devil to wage war. The biblical pacifists still go for shalom after the manner of Jesus because his defenseless death on behalf of us, who were his enemies, is still capable of inspiring them to walk in his steps. The resurrection is the convincing proof of the power of God to destroy the might of the wicked. Only faith is required to go beyond reason and justice carrying the death of Jesus in our bodies so that life of Jesus may reveal itself (2Cor 4:9-10).

¹⁸ John H. Yoder, *The Original Revolution, Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, Kitchener, Ontario, 1977), pp. 18-33, 46-51.