

Preface

The following article is taken for the most part from a lecture given in 1989 in the context of a debate on war and peace held by several Parisian evangelical churches. My basic position has not changed. Therefore, I am allowing this text to be reprinted even though I would no longer write it in the same way today.

In the ensuing years, I have become professor of Church History. The historical part of this article could be or even should be reinforced and qualified. For example, Alan Kreider continues to work on Early Church History in a stimulating manner, and I have not yet had the time to incorporate his work. Likewise, because of my experience in ecumenical dialogue since 1989, now I would write differently my appraisal of the medieval church. In my first work, I asked the evangelical churches - or "free churches" - to be more consistent in their "Protestant" criticism of medieval Catholicism. Even if, as a Mennonite, I remain a member of a church originating from the Reformation, I think that Protestantism has much to learn about peace from the Catholic tradition. This is not very obvious in the lines which follow, but I wanted to at least mention it in this introduction.

The bibliography refers to works by Stanley Hauerwas and John Yoder. I have continued to read these two authors since the text was first written. Paying closer attention to their more recent work would do much to improve the theological aspects of my article. Hauerwas continues to call "mainstream" American churches into question about their manner of being and their presence in the world. It is necessary to have a community which is solidly anchored in the Gospel tradition in order to live the peace of Christ. Nothing is closer to the ideas of the founders of Church & Peace. John Yoder continued to develop his thinking on peace, always in a spirit of dialogue, until his death. It is my hope that continuing such dialogue will still bear fruit within Church & Peace circles.

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Introduction

The subtitle "The pacifism of the Gospel" is not necessarily clear because of the many different meanings of the word "pacifism". Using pacifist/nonviolent theology as a base, this article will deal specifically with Christian attitudes and practice regarding the phenomenon of war and those called "enemies".

First of all, it can easily be shown that Jesus and the apostles taught nonresistance to evil or nonviolence. It is sufficient to read a few passages of Scripture:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to them the other also." Mt. 5: 38-39

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Mt. 5: 43-44

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil.... Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath... If your enemy is hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Ro. 17: 12

No one would question the existence of these texts. That is not the problem. The question is rather to know in which circumstances Christians must take these teachings seriously, for there are also the Old Testament wars as well as Romans 13 and its teaching on civil authority. For many, the New Testament passages simply do not apply to the question of war. Most Christians more or less share Martin Luther's position that the nonresistance or nonviolence taught by Jesus is to be applied to our personal and private relationships, or between Christians within the Church. On the other hand, other criteria come into play in the public domain when it is a question of defending one's country. After a period of several centuries in which Christians were reticent about military service and violence, a theology of the just war came into being, a tradition where under certain conditions and in certain circumstances the violence of war was accepted as a lesser evil.

In contrast, the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition has always affirmed that these words of Christ apply to a disciple's life whatever the situation. The following sections will examine various reasons why such an affirmation is still thought to be valid.

I. Nonviolence and the Cross: Biblical and Theological Foundations

First of all, unconditional love of the enemy is not simply an arbitrary ethical position. In the 16th century, the Reformers usually accused the Anabaptists (the ancestors of 20th century Mennonites) of trying to reintroduce salvation by works, primarily because the Anabaptists strongly emphasized a serious life of discipleship consistent with the teachings of Christ.

But the authentic foundation of a nonviolent theology is found first of all in grace. Evangelical nonviolence is an attitude and a behavior which flows directly out of the grace of God manifested on the cross. Nonviolence is a theology of the cross. In other words, the foundation for loving the enemy is rooted in the very being of God and God's action towards the world through Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote that "the sin of one brought condemnation for all". The fall led to the rupture between humanity and God. Humanity preferred to be master of its own life and destiny. God became the obstacle to self-fulfillment. God became the enemy of humanity and humanity became the enemy of God. Without exception this is the state in which each person finds him- or herself. However God's love did not reject humanity or treat people as enemies but instead preferred to come among us in the incarnation and to assume the consequences of human evil and rejection.

"... when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son." Ro. 5: 10

The cross can thus be understood as the realization of the love of enemy which Jesus talks about in the Sermon on the Mount. This kind of love is part of the very nature of God. This is how God acts towards us in Christ.

In such a perspective, Christ on the cross becomes the sign par excellence of love of enemy. But we can delve further into this theology of the cross. The death of Christ, that is, the cross, was not an isolated event. It must be understood within the context of Jesus' life and as the result of his obedience. The cross happened because of a lifestyle consciously chosen and lived out. Jesus died because he incarnated his own teaching. He died because his life disturbed others and what he was asking profoundly questioned the wisdom of the world in which he lived. The cross shows Jesus living out his teaching. He loved his enemies, turned the other cheek and refused to respond to evil with evil, paying the price with suffering and eventually his own life.

The meaning of the "cross" can be pushed further still. If the cross first represents the reconciliation offered by God in Jesus Christ "when we were enemies", it subsequently represents the realization and practical outcome of the teachings of Jesus. The cross was the incarnation of loving the enemy lived out for us in time and space. Thirdly, the cross is the way of life to which each disciple is also called.

"If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Mk 8.34

These words were said in the context of the announcement of Christ's passion. Jesus simply said, "I'm going to die. If you want to follow me, you must live like me, but be careful, the same thing could happen to you..." It is interesting to note that almost all of the New Testament writers present suffering and Jesus' attitude to suffering as the model that Christians are to follow. It was never specified that this attitude should be applied in certain situations and not in others.

Two more remarks about the cross. First of all, the cross was followed by the resurrection which demonstrates that the way of the cross is the only effective way of dealing with evil. It is God's approval of the Suffering Servant's way of life and, at the same time, the concrete sign of the defeat of evil. It assures the disciples that the life to which Jesus calls them has meaning, even ultimate meaning in the unfolding of history. This victory over evil and death assures Christians that "nothing can separate us from the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ our Lord." The question of nonviolence is a question of faith. Do we truly believe that the cross is followed by the Resurrection, that even if we suffer unjustly, God does not abandon us?

Finally, the cross is the source of peace between peoples. The epistle to the Ephesians affirms that Jesus is our peace. By the cross, he has put to death hostility and reconciled Jew and Greek into a new community. The cross renders possible a new social reality, i.e., the church. Peace is not only interior and individual, but also social. It destroys the wall of separation between peoples and allows those who previously could not live together before to now do so. Nonviolence is not an individual question; it is social and political, lived out first of all within the Christian community which through grace has been made into a community of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. At the same time, the cross is not necessarily a source of peace in the world. Jesus said the opposite. Nonviolent Christianity or evangelical pacifism doesn't resolve all of the political and social problems which confront us. It is a political pacifism which asserts that a warless world will be created by abolishing all weapons. The Church has a mission to fulfill in the context of a violent world. This mission consists of announcing and living the peace of Christ. It is not possible to announce peace by acting in ways that contradict the life and teachings of Jesus.

II. Remarks on the Historical and Theological Development of the Just War Tradition

Historically it is an established fact that during the first three centuries, Christians in the Roman Empire were markedly reticent about the army and military service. However, there is divergence as to the reasons which motivated this reticence. Some scholars (usually non-pacifists) believe that Christians were particularly suspicious of the Roman army because of its practices of idolatry and emperor worship. Others (usually pacifists) assert that it was because Christians could not accept fulfilling military functions, that is, to kill.

There is, of course, no reason to think that these two hypotheses are mutually exclusive. It is clear that Christians could not accept the deification of Caesar, and

that many martyrs perished for having refused this imperial ideology. Moreover, we see here an interesting basis for civil disobedience. For the early Christians, Paul's teaching in Romans 13 did not exclude a critical evaluation of the requirements of the civil authorities.

It is also clear that for many Christians, including the Church's theologians, the teachings of Christ categorically excluded the possibility of shedding blood, even in the case of war or legitimate defense. A few examples:

- Tertullian:

"...We may not do evil even when it might seem justifiable." (De Patientia, Hornus, p. 216)

"...in our doctrine we are given ampler liberty to be killed rather than to kill." (Hornus, p. 214)

- Origen:

"Concerning the Christians...we say that they have been taught not to defend themselves against their enemies, and because they have kept the laws which command gentleness and love to man [sic], on this account they have received from God that which they could not have succeeded in doing if they had been given the right to make war..." (Hornus p. 148)

Concrete efforts were also made to introduce such thinking into church discipline and into the systematic teaching of catechumens. An example of this is the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, a teaching of the Roman Church at the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries, and must be considered as "the source of primitive canonico-religious literature". (Hornus, p. 161). The following counsel can be found:

The soldier who is of inferior rank shall not kill anyone. If ordered to, he shall not carry out the order, nor shall he take the oath. If he does not accept this, let him be dismissed. Anyone who has the power of the sword or the magistrate of a city who wears the purple, let him give it up or be dismissed. The catechumen or believer who wish to become soldiers shall be dismissed, because they have despised God. (Hornus, p.163)

The "Testament of Our Savior" (dating from a later period) affirms:

If a soldier desires to be received and instructed and wishes to submit to our law, let him give up his looting and violence, let him give up his slander, disobedience and folly, let him be content with his pay. Then, if he has given up this trade, let him be received; if not, let him be dismissed. (Hornus, p. 164)

It is clear that in addition to the opposition to the practice of idolatry within the Roman army, there was also an ethical aversion to the necessity of killing.

As time went on, this mistrust of military service became blurred, primarily for two reasons: 1) the conversion of the emperor Constantine and the fact that Christianity became the official religion of the Empire, and 2) the menace of foreign invasion and the end of the "Pax Romana". In a lapse of about two hundred years, one went from a situation in which a Christian could be excommunicated for having participated in military service to one in which only Christians could be part of the army.

It was in this difficult situation that Ambrose and Augustine began to theologially justify Christian use of violence under certain conditions, for they found themselves faced with a real dilemma: "either a Christian will observe the precept that he must abstain from all violence but fail his obligation to come to the aid of the victim of an unjust attack, or he will make his strength available to the victim of injustice and fail to keep the Gospel precept of nonviolence." (Joblin, p. 81)

The just war theory attempts to respond to this dilemma. There are several versions of this theology, each having different criteria. Nevertheless, there are two types of criteria which can be found in all of the versions. There is the "jus ad bellum", that is the criteria which help to know whether a war is just or not. (Is it declared by a legitimate authority? Is the cause just? Have all means of reconciliation been used?) And then there is the "jus in bello", the criteria concerning the manner in which a just war is waged. (The means must be proportional to the ends, the war must be able to be won, and the lives of the innocent must be spared etc.)

From a pacifist point of view, it is interesting to note that there are several presuppositions behind this theory. War is never seen as good, and is never glorified. When one resorts to using violence, it must be justifiable. In other words, the normal position for Christians is Christ's teaching of nonviolence. It is not nonviolence which must be justified, but rather violence. Those who want to use violence must be able to justify it with precise criteria.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that even after the acceptance of the just war theory, killing during war was still considered a sin. "As a sort of reminder of the early teaching, the Church continued to impose penance on those who killed a man in war, even in a just war, even in legitimate self-defense." (Hornus p.175) At the end of the fourth century, Basil required that "the soldier with unclean hands abstain from communion for three years". (Hornus p.171) It was forbidden for a priest to shed blood, and one who had been a soldier could not easily become a priest.

The second presupposition is that the just war theory implies that there is a capacity for ethical discernment on the part of Christians. The criteria of "jus in bello" (the way a war is waged once it has been declared just) imply that "the conscience is not linked to what the authorities declare as being in accordance with the interests of the city.... On the contrary, for the believer, the State is in the service of fulfilling the common good... according to God's plan." (Joblin p.96) In Luther's "Can soldiers be in a state of grace?" (1526) we find the following instruction:

Question: How should I act if my lord is wrong about going to war?

Response: If you are absolutely sure that he is wrong, you should fear and obey God rather than men [sic]....and you should not go to war nor serve, for in this case, you cannot have a good conscience before God." (Martin Luther, Oeuvres Tome IV, p.257)

The just war theory implies the right to selective conscientious objection. The interests of the prince or the nation do not automatically justify resorting to violence.

III. The Beginnings of a Dialogue with the Just War Tradition

Several questions from a pacifist Christian perspective can be raised and asked of Christians from a just war tradition in the hope of establishing a dialogue which could be very important for today's Church.

First of all, there is the question concerning the theological interpretation of history. The evolution during the first three centuries of the Christian position on the use of violence has already been noted. Christian thought and practice moved from a position of rejecting military service and violence, which was more or less widespread, to accepting the possibility that Christians may kill in certain circumstances.

There are, however, several ways of interpreting this evolution. There is the "prophetic" reading of church history which sees a major shift (and major mistakes) with Constantine. Jacques Ellul goes so far as to call this shift the "subversion of

Christianity". This means that the church had become unfaithful and in need of renewal.

A more "developmental" reading of church history would see such an evolution as the work of the Holy Spirit, a gradual process of the understanding of truth which was previously not apparent. As time went on and Christians made up the majority of the population, the Church needed to be politically responsible. What was possible (or perhaps necessary) for a small persecuted minority was no longer appropriate for a Church which had reached "adulthood".

Such a position assumes that "those who deliberately renounce all power and adopt a position of weakness in a society greatly risk not influencing its evolution and not being able to contain the violent impulses it undergoes". (Joblin, p.27) It is a question of choice between an "ethics of conviction" and an "ethics of responsibility".

Such questions are closely tied to the meaning of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. In some respects, Protestantism comes close to the "prophetic" reading of history. The reform had as its starting point the idea that it is possible for the Church to make mistakes, and that all that happens and is taught (called "tradition" in the Roman Catholic Church) is not necessarily in accordance with God's will. The principle of "sola scriptura" (Scripture alone) implied that there are criteria for measuring the evolution of doctrine and practice. The Church is not a self-justifying institution; it needs constant reformation.

The Church of the first centuries and the Middle Ages evolved in several other ways besides its position on the question of violence and nonviolence. During the period of time when Christianity became an official religion and took on the shape of a state or established church, church structures and theology also became more hierarchical and sacramental. The Reformation principles of "faith alone" and "Scripture alone" were directed against such an evolution. The reformers, for example, rejected the "mediator" function of priests and sacraments, affirming that these ideas and practices were not in accordance with scriptural revelation. Nevertheless, in relation to the question of violence, the Reformation did not consider it advisable to question the Constantinian synthesis. It founded national churches which were closely linked to the established civil authorities.

But, in the midst of the Reformation, there were those who wanted to go much further, those who claimed that infant baptism was not justified, and that the Church was too closely linked to the civil authorities. In fact, these radicals (called "Anabaptists") wanted, in the name of "sola scriptura", to challenge the Constantinian synthesis. Therefore, it is not surprising that they came to the same conclusion as the early Church, i.e., that Christians could not kill (even in the name of the civil authorities.)

Members of "free churches" or the "dissenting tradition" (Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals and many others) do not usually hesitate to question certain aspects of the "official" Reformation such as infant baptism and close church-state relationships. Why stop then with the question of violence? Without wanting to reject all the values of Western Christendom, is it not possible to consider that there is a connection between the development of the politically established church, infant baptism, hierarchy, and the militarization of the Church?

Along with Constantine, Theodosius and the establishment of Christianity came a new ethics. What formerly could have been asked of a believing and committed Christian could no longer be asked of the masses. Categories such as "responsibility" and "effectiveness" began to function as ethical criteria, claiming that Christians

could not be indifferent to what was happening in the world. The Church had to influence the course of history in a positive manner even if it meant acting contrary to the Gospel teachings.

We are thus faced with a crucial question. What does it mean to want to influence the course of history? Since Constantine, Christians have adopted the criteria of political realism and effectiveness when evaluating the use of violence. It is claimed that nonviolence simply "does not work". The Christian must act realistically and responsibly. If Christians do not react - with violence if necessary -, there will no longer be justice or freedom.

One could, however, ask the question in another way. Is it the Church's task to act in such a manner that history goes in the right direction? A pacifist ethic would instead assert that in Jesus Christ we already know in which direction history is going. Evil has already been defeated. The world does not need our political realism and our calculated effectiveness. We tend to think that the political decisions of the nations of the world make history. Biblically speaking, this is not true. The significance of history is found in the lives of a people who were first called in Abraham, a people of peace and reconciliation who, in Christ, are to be a blessing to the nations. In this perspective, the task of the people is to first live and witness to the reality towards which history is moving, and not to play the tower of Babel game, i.e. to be a part of a divided and warring world. To witness means that our lives and the means used to reach a given end must correspond to the Kingdom which is already here but also still to come. Our concern for effectiveness must be measured in the light of Jesus Christ, knowing that in order to defeat evil, he had to suffer and die.

The question could be asked if political realism and effectiveness, in whose name so many wars have been justified, are truly realistic and effective. Is an ethics of responsibility really responsible? Can we truly know what effect our acts will have on subsequent events? If we want to speak of Christian social responsibility, there is already the example of Western Christendom, a period in which the kings and princes were Christian, a period in which the Church was responsible for the functioning of society, a period in which everyone said or thought they were "Christian". This was an era when the Church exercised responsibility and functioned according to the criteria of political realism. But what heritage did this experience leave? Certainly many positive things, this cannot be denied. But there were also the Crusades, the Inquisition, the wars of religion, opposition to tolerance and democracy, the twentieth century spectacle of the use of chemical and atomic weapons by "Christian" nations', and the almost total rejection of the Church by European masses who used to call themselves Christian.

After taking into account the question of the theological meaning of history, let us now look more directly at the just war theory. The first problem is the following. This tradition was able to function at times within Western Christendom during the Middle Ages. It is true that the Church often played a positive role in situations of war and violence through its efforts of negotiation, with threats of excommunication and with such institutions as "the Peace of God" and "the Truce of God". Nevertheless, throughout the centuries and particularly in modern times, Christians have tended to justify most wars most of the time, even when there were Christians on both sides. History has shown too often that those who speak of "just war" are trying to justify wars of national interest or ideology. Even the great theologian Karl Barth, whose theology allowed him to say no to Hitler was able, after a brilliant exposé on the theology of just war, to state:

"... an attack against the independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity of the Swiss Confederation would fulfill, in my opinion, the conditions. This would be a case

in which defense would be necessary and in order. I would speak and act in such a manner if the case arose." (Barth, *La guerre et la paix, Les cahiers du renouveau*, V, Labor et Fides, 1951, p.32)

If the theory of a just war is viable, it must mean that there are wars that should not be waged or wars that it would be better to lose. If the only way to win a war is to commit war crimes, it would be better to lose. Where, in history, are the wars when Christians said "no" in the name of a "just war" theory? Who is really "sectarian" - those who, in the name of Christ, refuse to kill, or those who, in the name of their respective nations, kill each other or prepare to do so with no qualms whatsoever?

Where in our churches and theological seminaries is the ethical discernment being taught which is necessary for Christians to tackle this question? Why do conscientious objectors have to justify themselves so often in Christian circles, but not those who accept without question going to war? In my youth, I heard it said that it was my Christian duty to go to Vietnam to fight communist atheism. This is no longer a "just war" theory but rather a "crusades" ideology.

No matter what is said, modern warfare seriously calls "just war" theology into question. How can one speak of war as being the last option in a world where the next war could be over before we even knew it began? The criteria of "jus in bello", the manner in which a war must be waged, often no longer apply. How do we seriously speak about the proportionality of means or the protection of the innocent, be it in Kosovo or Rwanda?

Christians are not usually in agreement with the kind of position that has been espoused in this article. But I can ask those who disagree to think seriously and honestly about their own just war tradition and take it to heart. Has the "just war" theory functioned in the past? If so, where, when and how? Can it work today? Even if all Christians don't accept "evangelical pacifism", what would it mean to take the just war theory seriously in today's world?

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