



# How the Peace of Christ Confronts the Wars of the World

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**T**HE rise of terrorist violence, drone killings in violation of international law, proliferating weapons of mass destruction, and unending wars raise new questions about how Christians should respond to armed conflict. These questions bear even more urgency because a new President of the United States and majorities in both houses of the United States Congress, inspired by self-centered nationalism and faith in military power, fervently hope to make the United States “great” by spending more for military preparedness, even though U.S. (United States) military expenditures already exceed the military spending of all other major military powers combined. New U.S. priorities also include sharp cuts in allocations to abolish poverty, uphold human rights, sustain a healthy environment, and help the United Nations and other multilateral institutions, even though these initiatives would do far more to reduce terrorism and war-fighting, peace research shows, than additional military expenditures.

In addressing the question of how Christians should respond to armed conflict, it is useful, first of all, to reassess the long-standing pacifist (Anabaptist-Pietist) position of the historic peace churches on war and the main criticism of this position by Christian realists. Second, recent changes in international relations raise new questions about what is most useful in maintaining peace.

Third, these changes suggest that both pacifists and people in the just-war tradition can, and should, join together with other ethically-sensitive people from all religious traditions to move the world toward a more sustainable just peace.

**S**INCE their origins centuries ago, people in the historic peace churches (the Church of the Brethren, Society of Friends, and Mennonites) have emphasized that they simply want to follow Jesus. Jesus never killed anyone. He recommended that his followers love rather than kill. He said that peacemakers are blessed and “will be called children of God.”<sup>1</sup> On the night he was arrested, he said “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not...be afraid.”<sup>2</sup> Later that evening, he instructed Peter to put away his sword.<sup>3</sup>

The first thing Jesus said after the resurrection was “peace be with you.”<sup>4</sup> Following this lead for 400 years, Christians remained as nonviolent as Jesus, until Christianity became mainstream when the political leadership of the time adopted it. Then Rome used Christianity to cement its political power. From then on, the majority of Christians accepted war. But Anabaptists have considered Christian endorsement of military power to be unfaithful. The peace churches have repeatedly declared: “all war

is sin." It is "wrong for Christians to support or to engage in it."<sup>5</sup> People's first calling is to be faithful, which means, at the least, not killing anyone. At best, it means active loving of everyone.

The main criticism of Christian pacifism has been that if people choose never to kill

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in war, they are not responsible when they face a military aggressor. Reinhold Niebuhr, perhaps the best-known Christian realist, emphasized the need to use military power to confront German militarism in the 1930s and Soviet policies after World War II. Niebuhr acknowledged that pacifists were more closely imitating Jesus than were others, but he said that refusing to kill could not be responsible because, if everybody became pacifist, good countries would be overrun by militarily ruthless countries. In his view, and in the view of most Christians (who are not pacifists), killing the ruthless in order to protect the innocent is more responsible at times than to be loving toward all people and to kill no one.

In brief, pacifists say: Follow Jesus; do not kill; actively love; be faithful. Christian realists say: Follow our government to survive; kill if necessary to protect people in just wars; be responsible.

**A** GAINST this backdrop, major changes in international relations now require a reassessment of Christian positions. The first change is that the utility of military power has become extremely low for producing desirable outcomes. To be sure, military power has high utility for destroying, but it has low utility for achieving sustainable peace and democracy. Often military com-

bat not only fails to produce what one wants. Even if one wins a war, military victory often produces more of what one does not want: hatred, revenge, terrorism, and more war. Peace research shows that violence begets more violence, and terrorists usually are motivated by a sense of grievance over violence inflicted on them or on people with whom they identify.

Christian realists never dealt with the possibility that a country like the United States might acquire such high military preparedness that it would be tempted to become a military aggressor. Nor did they deal with the possibility that such a country might win a war, but the victory would produce something worse and more violent than existed before the war. Yet the U.S. attack on Iraq in 2003 illustrates both.

Superpower military strength led to quick victory, but also to a defeat for peace. Iraqis have not had one week of peace since the U.S. victory 14 years ago. And the disempowerment of Sunni Muslims led directly to the growth of Al Qaeda in Iraq and the creation of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Similarly, U.S. military victory in Afghanistan has not led to peace or stability. For nine years in the 1980s, the Soviet Union fought a bloody war in Afghanistan, with nothing good to show for it. Years of French and then U.S. fighting in Vietnam did not produce good outcomes. In short, military power has low utility for achieving desired outcomes.

A second change is the growing recognition of the utility of nonviolent direct action for achieving peace and democracy. Research examining all 323 resistance campaigns in the world since 1900, whether violent or nonviolent and whether to oust dictators or to resist external domination, shows that nonviolent campaigns succeed more often than violent efforts. Neither violence nor nonviolence works 100 percent of the time, of course, but nonviolent campaigns are more likely to result in peace and ensure that peace is sustained at least five

years after the campaigns have ended. Non-violent campaigns are also more likely than are violent campaigns to result in democracy being established one or two decades later—even if a violent campaign succeeds in its immediate goal of taking power, and even if a nonviolent campaign fails to take power.<sup>6</sup>

A third change in international relations is that more security threats are now arising from non-state actors than ever before. Terrorist groups operate easily across national borders. They are not controlled by a single state. Yet, because our existing international system assumes that separate states will manage security problems, this system cannot effectively address threats from non-state, transnational actors, as we see confirmed in the news almost every day. Only transnational law enforcement can provide effective protection against such threats. And only transnational initiatives to overcome global poverty, to reduce youth unemployment, and to end the unfair exclusion of oppressed peoples from decision-making can reduce the extremism that gives rise to terrorism.

Fourth, more security threats now arise from non-military sources. Global poverty, for example, is a security threat because it encourages political polarization, resentments, exploitation, oppression, and failing states. Thomas Pogge has demonstrated persuasively that the perpetuation of the existing international economic system, largely by the wealthy countries, regardless of whether it is done with or without malice, is the most massive denial of human rights in history.<sup>7</sup>

Non-military threats also arise from environmental destruction, water shortages, trans-border epidemics, immigration and refugee pressures, and the spread of chemical, biological, and nuclear agents for social disruption. These cannot be well managed within the existing international system. All can be more effectively managed if they are thought of as problems to

be addressed by better worldwide *governance*, rather than as problems to be solved by *deploying military power*. Military confrontations cannot bridge political divides as well as provide respectful give and take in fair global processes for finding common ground for law enforcement.

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The failures of the existing international system are evident in the rise of Al Qaeda, the brutality of ISIS, the killings and kidnappings by Boko Haram, innocent deaths in the thousands in South Sudan, 800,000 civilians killed in Rwanda, and over 12 million people displaced or killed in Syria. The existing international system, a militarized balance-of-power, actually encourages mass murders and extremism internationally and domestically.

A fifth change, usually called globalization, creates both new problems and new opportunities. One opportunity is that sufficient global governance now exists to show that it is possible to initiate a more effective rule of law in the world—if enough people insisted on it. With the help of satellites, we are now able to see what is happening all over the world as it happens; \$1 trillion of currency transactions reliably cross borders

every single day; 24 permanent international courts have arisen and produced more than 37,000 binding rulings since the end of the Cold War; these promote new trans-sovereignty working coalitions among governmental and private actors;<sup>8</sup> and small-scale vertical redistributions of national sovereignty are occurring during the development of international institutions like the International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Criminal Court and other courts, and, despite its real problems, the European Community.

A sixth change is more a matter of attitudes than the first five, but the new attitudes generate extreme danger when expressed through the existing international structures that already have been failing to provide peace or justice. These attitudes, enjoying a new-found popularity in the United States, parts of Europe, and elsewhere, combine a narrow, me-first nationalism for “us” with dismissiveness for “them,” wildly unrealistic faith in the ability of “our” military power to do good and make us great while denying similar access to “greatness” for others, bigoted stereotyping used to blame others as solely responsible for conflicts, and blind refusal to pay attention to inconvenient truths.

What do these changes in international relations mean? First, they mean that the current inter-state system *impedes* sustainable peace and security. It can be best understood as analogous to the security system of feudalism in Medieval Europe. That system was based on well-fortified castles—until the invention of the cannon. Then castles quickly went out of the security business. The security unit expanded from the feudal kingdom to the nation-state. Today, the security unit must expand beyond the nation-state to provide enough global governance to enforce rules able to make peace dependable throughout the world, as it is now within stable national societies. The

extent of the security unit eventually needs to become commensurate with the reach of modern weaponry, which is global. The international system also must be changed because it perpetuates poverty for and disenfranchises half of the human race, causing 18 million unnecessary deaths each year.<sup>9</sup> It also is not securing the environment.

As a result of changes in international relations and military technology, to be “responsible” leads to different conclusions today than were endorsed by Christian realists in the past. A realistic grasp of security problems and opportunities today means replacing the role of military power with the role of international law, just as law eventually replaced the role of feudal monarchs’ armies in settling disputes among feudal kingdoms as these were integrated into larger political units.

Transforming the militarized balance of power system requires addressing not only the influences of the military-industrial complex in the domestic economy and political processes, which President Eisenhower warned against in his farewell address, but also changing the structure of the international balance of military power. Yet without increased pressure from a worldwide coalition of civil society and religious groups who explicitly withdraw their support from killing in war and perpetuating global poverty, more desirable changes in the international system are unlikely to occur because powerful vested interests resist them.

Inspired by Jesus’ vision of the sacredness of all human beings, some Christians were aware of what was needed following World War II to establish a dependable peace with more justice. With hope that the United Nations or its successor might become an effective instrument of global governance, the Church of the Brethren’s Annual Meeting declared: “We urge our nation...to be the first to offer the surrender of our national sovereignty to a world government of, by,

and for the peoples of the world....”<sup>10</sup> Those who passed this resolution were not assuming that worldwide institutions would somehow produce salvation that only God could provide, but they did recognize that some governmental structures are likely to work better than others, and some are less likely to kill than others. They sought to demilitarize the international system and strengthen international law because the existing, militarized balance-of-power system was less consistent with Jesus’ teachings and would thwart people’s faithfulness. Once aware of the war-tendencies and poverty-proneness of this balance-of-power system, one can no longer describe it as an instrument for being *responsible*, because the system has not produced peace or justice.

For people to be responsible, their support for the domestic and international political orders must be strictly limited in ways that will bring systemic change. Jesus understood this 2000 years ago when he exposed the false dilemma between being faithful and being responsible. Political realists of his day did not understand why he did not support violence against Rome. Yet he never supported the Zealots’ rebellion aimed at gaining rights for Jews who were victimized by Rome. He also never endorsed joining the Roman legion to help Rome maintain the peace of the Empire, even though at that historical moment, Rome was the policeman of the world.

Similarly, religious realists of Jesus’ day did not understand why he was eating with tax collectors, expressing friendship toward Samaritans, and working on the Sabbath to help people. They asked, in effect: “Why don’t you and your disciples follow the law? Why aren’t you more responsible?”

Jesus responded: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”<sup>11</sup> In effect, he says that he is being responsible by fulfilling the law, even if his critics do not understand how he is. Jesus

shows himself here not to be a revolutionary who destroys the law in order to start over. He is a pilgrim or pioneer in extending the law and applying the law more perfectly. He fulfilled the law by saying, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I

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say to you, Love your enemies.”<sup>12</sup> He did not say that the law, in fact, said: “hate your enemy.” He said “you have *heard*” that the law said that. Apparently, he meant that when you heard that, you heard the law being misinterpreted. It could have been misinterpreted by realists—then and now. Jesus emphasized upholding the law; when correctly understood, it meant: “love your enemies.”

Of course, Jesus also was not a legalist. The spirit of the law is more important than the letter. Yet “not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law....”<sup>13</sup> When being asked further about what is most important in the law, Jesus spoke clearly: The first commandment is to “love God with all your heart,...soul, and... mind,” and the second is to “love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>14</sup> He then again emphasized the importance of this law: “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this religious law, there was the quite different law of the Roman Empire. It was not Jewish and not God’s law. It expressed imperial power. It was the



international system of his day and the direct forerunner of contemporary international law. Its role provided another opportunity for realists to try to entrap Jesus. They asked to whom and to what legal system Jesus was claiming to be responsible: "Is it lawful [for Jews] to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"<sup>16</sup> He responded: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."<sup>17</sup> This statement suggests that it was acceptable for pagan Rome to raise public revenue from Jews, as long as Jews rendered to God what is God's.

What is God's? It is God's to have authority over how we relate to God and to others, especially on matters of life and death. Jesus summed up God's law this way: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."<sup>18</sup>

We are not entitled to kill others because of reasons that we come up with, no matter how good the reasons are, because killing is not loving, and we do not want others to kill us because of any reasons that they may give to justify their killing. No one was entitled to kill Jesus because of any reason he or she gave. Yet to make the point that killing was wrong, Jesus himself could not engage in killing. He paid with his life to show that killing was not justified, even when to fight against those who might kill innocent persons (like Jesus) would be fully justified in realists' eyes.

In all his answers to those testing whether he was responsible, he refused to endorse violence, whether to maintain the Jewish system, to defend Jews against the Roman system, to support the Roman international system, or to overthrow that system. His main emphasis was: We should not abandon God's law in order to render to the state what belongs to God. We should follow God's law in shaping our relationships with people and institutions, thereby implementing the peace of Christ.

To sum up, Jesus calls people to uphold

God's law, which means not to kill and actively to love. It means supporting the state and the international system only up to a point, as Jesus did Rome, because one's uppermost call is to serve God, and secondarily the political order. When the political system renders to the state, which is our Caesar, that which belongs to God, that is where people should draw the line and no longer support the elements of the state or the international system that cause the continued use of military power and perpetuate poverty. Christ's peace means protecting the innocent from violence by upholding the law and by making sacrifices to provide humanitarian assistance and accompaniment, but not by abolishing the law in order to deploy military power.

**P**EOPLE need not let their hearts be troubled with worry that too many people might call for a non-killing foreign policy, thereby risking some irresponsible outcome. At any point in a gradually changing public opinion, the more people who oppose killing, the more quickly a better system of governance is likely to evolve, as a willingness to rely on violence would gradually subside. Never will there be too many calling for this peaceful change because the spread of a non-killing, active-loving ethic does not simply bow down to the ruthless. It upholds law to protect the innocent, abolish poverty, eliminate conditions that give rise to terrorism, and respect the environment.

It is becoming clear that to be faithful and to be responsible mean doing the same things. Many churches that historically have never been pacifist declared in a recent World Council of Churches action: "We feel obliged as Christians to...challenge any...justifications of the use of military power and to consider reliance on the concept of a 'just war' and its customary use to be obsolete."<sup>19</sup> Together, these worldwide



churches are transforming the old law of just war, which was based on “you-have-heard” mutually exclusive national identities, into an all-inclusive identity that includes all people in a new understanding of the law found in what is being called “just peace.”

In 2016, Pope Francis hosted a historic convocation on Nonviolence and Just Peace. It focused on what he called “the active witness of nonviolence as a ‘weapon’ to achieve peace.” The gathering voiced “an appeal to the Catholic Church to recommit to the centrality of gospel nonviolence.”<sup>20</sup> Carrying the idea of just peace further, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue declared that the misuse of religious traditions in political conflicts, the “you-have-heard” dimension, “requires a call to nonviolence, a rejection of violence in all its forms.”<sup>21</sup> Earlier the Pope emphasized that “Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. He walked that path to the very end...” Therefore, “to be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.”<sup>22</sup> In addition, “the choice of nonviolence as a style of life is increasingly demanded in the exercise of responsibility at every level...”<sup>23</sup> All those holding public office are especially called to “cultivate a nonviolent style.”<sup>24</sup>

A “just peace,” the meaning of which may be improved by joining them together in one inseparable word, “justpeace,” can be summed up as international and interpersonal relations focused on advancing peace, human security, justice, and human rights by doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. It can speak to those with spiritual sensitivities as well as to those without such concerns. Roots for just-peace might be found in Muslim traditions as well as Christian, or in Jewish traditions as well as Buddhist and Hindu, or in Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative<sup>25</sup> as well as other philosophical traditions. It is a process of continually establishing and ex-

pressing shalom relationships, rather than a static end state. It emphasizes that peace is the work of justice and that killing is to be avoided, rather than that wars can sometimes be justified, especially “our” wars, as just-war advocates usually have concluded. Justpeace also includes a call for withdraw-

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ing support from the killing aspects of any system, domestic or international, in ways that invite replacing the violent enforcement of preferences through the militarized balance-of-power system with a worldwide rule of law, buttressed by international community policing, that seeks to avoid killing even when employing the coercion that is sometimes necessary to enforce a rule of law.

Christ’s peace arises from the law calling people to love God, all neighbors, and themselves, and to treat others as one wants to be treated. This understanding of Christ’s peace enables harmony not only with all Christian communions but also with all major religious traditions, which in fact share the ethic of treating others as one wants to be treated. Living Christ’s peace is the most that one can do to avert nuclear war and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Living Christ’s peace is the most one can do to reduce terrorism, to end poverty, to bring justice, and to usher in a transformed global system. Living Christ’s peace is being faithful. And it is being responsible.

If we understand the things that make for

peace, we can act, with humility and conscience grounded in being faithful and responsible, together with people of other faith traditions, to build justpeace. ♦

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1. Matthew, 5:9, New Revised Standard Version, unless indicated otherwise.
2. John 14:27.
3. Matthew 26:52.
4. Luke 24:36.
5. Rufus D. Bowman, *The Church of the Brethren and War* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1944), 350.
6. See Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).
7. Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2008), 264.
8. Karen J. Alter, *The New Terrain of International Law: Courts, Politics, Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4.
9. Thomas Pogge, *Politics as Usual* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010), 11, 31.
10. "Resolution on Peace," *Minutes of the 161st Recorded Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren*, held at Orlando, FL, 10–15 June 1947, 92.
11. Matthew 5:17.
12. Matthew 5:43–44.
13. Matthew 5:18.
14. Matthew 22:37–39.
15. Matthew 22:40.
16. Matthew 22:17 RSV.
17. Matthew 22:21 RSV.
18. Matthew 7:12.
19. Matthews George Chunakara, *Building Peace on Earth: Report of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 2013), 182.
20. See Terrence J. Rynne, "Toward a New Theology of Peace," *Sojourners* 45:7 (July 2016): 9–10. See also, "An appeal to the Catholic Church to recommit to the centrality of gospel nonviolence," accessed July 28, 2016. <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/appeal-catholic-church-recommit-centrality-gospel-nonviolence/5855#sthash.omd9Fpal.dpuf>.
21. "Vatican's Message for Buddhist Feast of Vesakh," April 22, 2017, accessed April 28, 2017. <http://zenith.org/articles/vaticans-message-for-buddhist-feast-of-vesakh-2/>.
22. The Pope is quoted in "Vatican's Message for Buddhist Feast of Vesakh," from his 2017 Message for the World Day of Peace, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," no. 3, accessed April 28, 2017. <http://zenith.org/articles/vaticans-message-for-buddhist-feast-of-vesakh-2/>.
23. "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Letters of Credence," 15 December 2016. Quoted in "Vatican's Message for Buddhist Feast of Vesakh," and in *CNS* below.
24. Carol Glatz, "Pope: World Needs Nonviolent Responses to Social, Political Problems," *Catholic News Service*, 15 December 2016, accessed April 28, 2017. <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-world-needs-nonviolent-responses-social-political-problems>.
25. Kant's translated formulation is: "Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James W. Ellington (Cambridge: Hackett, 1993 [1785]), 30.

