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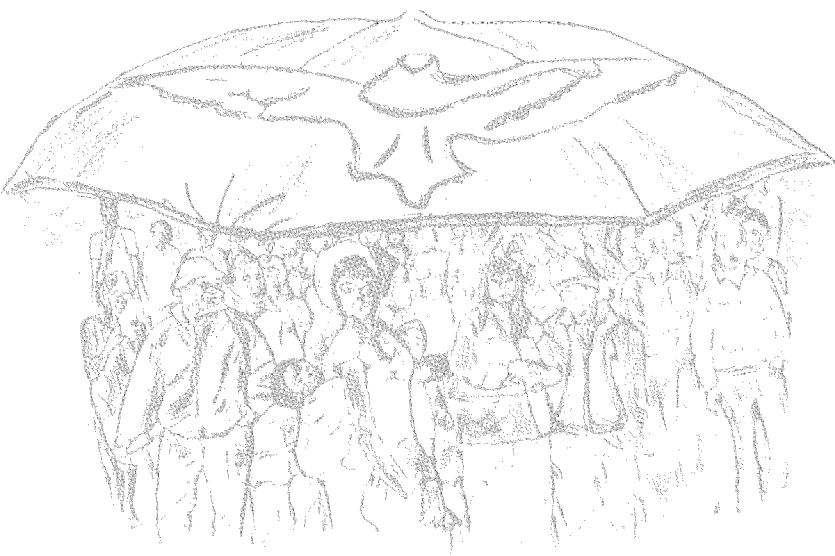
The Responsibility to Protect

Ethical and
Theological Reflections

Forming the Ecumenical Mind and Addressing Ethical Dilemmas
on Prevention and Protection of People in Peril

Geneva, 21-23 April 2005

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III. CHRISTIANITY AND WAR: DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Christianity and War: The Pacifist View

Arnold Neufeldt-Fast

In recent years, the awareness of past abuses of just war theory and practice, the greatly increased destructiveness of war, and the desire to be faithful to the witness of the gospel accounts of Jesus Christ have helped make Christian pacifism an attractive option for many Christians of non-pacifist traditions.

At the same time, however, there are significant factors that have made pacifism difficult for non-pacifist Christians: 'the concern to liberate, defend or preserve the neighbour from oppression, evil and death – using the sword if necessary – out of love for the neighbour, renders pacifism difficult for non-pacifist Christians'¹. It is precisely the affliction of the other in situations of overwhelming evil that also makes the non-pacifist approach attractive and tempting to Christian pacifists concerned with justice. Those of both traditions wish to follow Jesus faithfully, but the pacifist position raises suspicion if the desire for faithfulness is understood more as purity than as responsibility.

In this regard the joint response from the perspective of the Historic Peace Churches to the WCC document 'The protection of endangered populations in situations of armed violence: toward an ecumenical approach' begins with a confession of complicity:

We have often failed to live up to our commitment to the Spirit of Jesus Christ. We have often been silent and failed to act on behalf of those who are suffering the scourge of injustice and violence. We do not always know exactly what constitutes justice – or peace – in any given situation; we lack wisdom in addressing the complex issues of our time.²

The responsibility to protect also provides a specific challenge to Christians who espouse a pacifist approach to violent conflict. Does a consistent Christian pacifist approach – which places faithfulness above efficacy – take seriously the Christian responsibility for the protection of endangered populations in situations where armed violence is a reality? What experience or wisdom do the Historic Peace Churches bring to this question?

It has become abundantly clear that in our present deliberations we are dealing with very difficult and perplexing questions. These questions demand that we as churches respond with our own best theological and ethical wisdom; that is, as churches, so as not to simply repeat what other NGOs or governmental agencies could say just as well or better. This is the kind of service which the community of churches owes the world.

Though it has been persuasively argued that the church was largely a peace church in the first three centuries of the Christian movement³, the term 'Historic Peace Churches' (HPC) is of recent origin. It is a label that refers collectively to the Mennonites, the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Church of the Brethren. These three groups originated separately in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, respectively, and had only occasional contact with each other before the twentieth century. However, on account of the challenges growing out of the two world wars – including support for conscientious objectors and alternatives to military service, war-sufferers' relief, peace witness and the like⁴ – more common endeavours were undertaken together. In the

last forty years further joint thought and cooperation was stimulated through peace studies programmes in the Peace Church colleges and seminaries.

The World Council of Churches has occasionally called on the HPC to share with the community of churches their witness, resources and experience in peacemaking and disarmament.⁵ Not infrequently, ecumenical interest in the HPC has been limited to their unique social-ethical position; that is, insofar as 'they bring out an aspect of the Christian faith which no other denomination represents, the complete absence of which would result in a serious impoverishment of Protestantism'⁶. Yet the import and validity of the peace ethic represented by the HPC can only be properly understood and evaluated as part of a coherent web of specific theological convictions, especially regarding the nature and significance of Christ and that of the church.⁷ Indeed, the HPC invite and encourage the notion that orthodoxy consists not only in believing rightly but also in obeying rightly. Yet the HPC want not only to be interesting on one point (as a sort of sectarian oddity or a prophetic exception), but also to be taken seriously as a theological approach to dilemmas of our age. The appeal is to classical catholic Christian convictions properly understood.

I have been asked to present the pacifist view to Christianity and war. I must note at the outset that there is not one but a variety of religious pacifisms: John Howard Yoder counts 28 types!⁸ A pluralism exists even within the HPC,⁹ due largely to variations in theological assumptions, ethical principles and procedures, but also to differences in historical location and experience. Nonetheless a set of components can be identified which the various HPC models have in common. For the purpose of brevity this common position reflected in the joint response has been variously called 'evangelical pacifism' (Duane Friesen)¹⁰ or 'principled pacifism' (J. Denny Weaver).¹¹ Correspondingly, Jesus did not simply preach prohibitions, but rather active, transforming initiatives to make peace. This pacifism is Christian or evangelical not because it makes sense or has 'practical' application; it is a moral and theological commitment to non-violence which rests on the conviction that the rejection of violence was intrinsic to who Jesus was, and that overcoming violence and working for a sustainable reconciliation is at the heart of Christian belief and mission. (It is important to note that 'pacifism' has different etymological origins to 'passivism'. The term 'pacifist' comes from the Latin phrase *pax facere*, to make peace.) With John H. Yoder and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pacifism is a 'discipleship-pacifism' – a commitment to peacemaking and non-violence as a way of life in all relationships based on loyalty to Jesus Christ and desire to witness to the coming of God's kingdom. This is a different pacifism to the 'rule-and-exception' ethics pacifism.

Following the line of discipleship-pacifism, I want to present a particular type of pacifism grounded in fundamental notions about Christ (christology) and the nature of the church (ecclesiology), and framed by the specific Christian hope in the Lordship of Christ (eschatology).

Christian Pacifism and Christology

First, a coherent Christian pacifism builds on the assumption that Jesus Christ is a norm not only for reflecting on the nature of God and God's activity in history, but also as providing the model and norm for what it means to be fully human.

Many Christians define Christ in ways that make him irrelevant to politics. Mainline Christian social ethics has often sought guidance from common sense or the nature of things – that is, we measure what is 'fitting', 'adequate', 'relevant' or 'effective' – with the intention to be 'realistic' and 'responsible'. Epistemologically, these slogans point to a 'theology of the natural', assuming that 'it is by studying the realities around us, not by hearing a proclamation from God, that we discern the right'.¹² Implicitly or explicitly, it is argued that Jesus is irrelevant for social ethics. The stakes in the argument are high: if the sources or content of Christian ethics are discernible via natural wisdom, then we must ask if there is such a thing as a Christian at all.

John H. Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* – a classic reference for Christian pacifism – presents three basic theses: (1) that the New Testament consistently testifies that Jesus renounced violence and coercive power; (2) that the example of Jesus is directly relevant and normatively binding for the Christian community; and (3) that faithfulness to the example of Jesus is a political choice and not a withdrawal from the realm of politics. Christologically defined faithfulness is repeatedly characterized in the New Testament as self-emptying, where coercive power is relinquished, dominion is replaced by servanthood, and hostility is absorbed through forgiveness. It is in this respect alone that the New Testament exhorts us to be like Jesus. Understanding the example of Jesus as norm entails the rejection of all forms of violence and seeks to create peace and bring about reconciliation between human beings.

The example of Jesus offers a third way between the alternatives of the use of violent force and passive resignation to evil. Duane Friesen writes: 'A follower of Jesus is committed to a pilgrimage of seeking concrete initiatives within the culture where we live that can creatively transform conditions of injustice and violence into occasions of justice and peace.'¹⁴ Friesen goes on to say that we need a christology that can provide a vivid picture of a Christ who is not disembodied from culture, but who is concrete enough to provide leverage for assessing how we should engage with the particularities of culture. In short, Christians need a christology that integrally links Christ to politics.

This type of christocentric pacifism is informed by a particular strategy of reading the Bible. It suggests the Bible wants to be read directionally; that is, we follow its narrative logic and see where the story points, rather than attempt some form of synthesis of various contrasting moments. Following this strategy, the cross is revealed as the decisive revelation of the way that God is in the world, and this result supersedes any sanctions for war which one might draw from the Old Testament read in isolation. That is, the cross becomes the hermeneutical key, the canon within the canon, the lens through which the whole canonical story is to be read.¹⁵ Read in this way, peace or shalom (wholeness or salvation in all spheres of life) serves as the integrative concept to describe God's redemptive activity in history and to describe the witness and mission of the church as well.

The HPC are also beginning to listen to the challenge of the wider ecumenical church to explore how a trinitarian framework might better inform its traditionally christocentric approach – linking faithful and patient discipleship, for example, with the impatient resilience of the Spirit of God groaning within us and fighting for redemption wherever death and sin continue their reign.¹⁶

Christian Pacifism and Ecclesiology

Second, a coherent Christian pacifism is based on an understanding of the church as a calling to live among the nations in a way that reflects this politics of Jesus. The HPC document emphasizes a view of the church as the new alternative society which seeks to express in its life the reality of God's shalom as revealed in Jesus: it is a community where the dividing walls of hostility are broken down and there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, man nor woman. The church should be the space in which God's project of shalom or peace takes shape. Being the church – that is, maintaining the integrity of the churches' own life and witness – is not a retreat from social issues to private piety. Rather, it is a responsibility to be a light to all the peoples of the world, not to meet violence with violence and thereby challenge the illusionary power of the world's death-systems; it is to be a transnational community whose loyalties are defined not primarily by nation, race or ethnicity but rather by Jesus Christ and his mission.¹⁷

Especially since the Second World War, the HPC have gradually evolved from traditions emphasizing non-resistance and non-participation in war towards active non-violent peacemaking, which also involves active participation in the relief of suffering, building the institutions of peace and working to remove the causes of war.¹⁸

Christian Pacifism and Christian Hope (Eschatology)

Third, a coherent Christian pacifism employs an eschatology of trust in Christ ‘the slain Lamb’ as the Lord of history. Faith is the attitude of trust in the victory over evil by the God revealed in the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus; it is the ‘willingness to accept the apparently ineffective path of obedience, trusting in God for the results’.¹⁹ Non-resistance and active peacemaking are right in the deepest sense, insofar as they anticipate the coming peaceful kingdom, the triumph of the Lamb that was slain. The responsibility for bringing about victory is not ours, but God’s alone. Yet if Jesus is Lord, then the *way* of Jesus reveals the ‘grain of the universe’ (Yoder); then the universe does ‘bend toward justice’ (as Martin Luther King was fond of saying); then faithful, non-violent action must also be more effective in the long run than injustice and war. In the end, a coherent Christian pacifism does not need to choose between being faithful and being responsible. The shape of the world presented by scripture enables us to break through traditional no-win dichotomies rendered by conventional wisdom (for example, utility versus duty). Again, Yoder argues that if Jesus Christ is Lord, then obedience to his rule cannot be dysfunctional, cannot be imprudent generally, though it may appear to be so in the short range:

When it *seems* to me that my unjust deed is indispensable to prevent some much greater evil deed being done by another, I have narrowed my scope of time, or of space, or of global variety, or of history. I have ruled some people out of my Golden Rule, or have skewed the coefficients in my utility calculus.²⁰

Yoder’s writings have consistently shown that we should be clear that the commitment to secure justice through violent force is also an eschatology, a competing vision of how best to ‘secure’ the future. The Bienenberg Statement recognizes that both those who claim to secure the future through armed force and those who trust ultimately in God’s victory over evil through the way of the cross must guard against exaggerated claims. Neither the pacifist nor non-pacifist positions can guarantee success:

Ultimately, a Christian vision of life is based on the conviction that in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have a vision of the kingdom of God. In Christ we have a revelation of the way God’s sovereign power works in history, a vision of the non-violent cross as the way in which God’s victory over evil is accomplished. This is the foundation for our work as Christians.

Ultimately, our work as peacemakers is not based on our ability to be successful, but is invested in means of action grounded in our trust in the way of Jesus, our calling to be the Body of Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. May we truly ‘embody’ that vision, and repent of all arrogant trust in our own schemes to make history come out right.

Conclusion

It is important not to overlook the fact that the larger debate between Christian pacifism and just war theory – focusing typically on the question if it is ever right to fight a war – has not only diverted attention, but also served to neglect the positive task and obligation of committing the energies of both (especially the HPC side) toward the prevention of war and the development of war-preventing practices. I would suggest that a just war theory should not be based on an argument that during times of war or because of the fallenness of the world the way of Jesus is no longer relevant; it too must be based on the presumption of minimizing non-violence and injustice:

‘either it serves the purpose of reducing violence and seeking justice under Christ’s lordship, or it serves some idolatrous loyalty such as rationalizing a war that we have an urge to make’.²¹ Both Christian pacifists and just war theorists should urge their governments to adopt policies that are as non-violent as possible and as active in taking peacemaking initiatives as possible. Clearly, non-Christians cannot be expected to take this route because of Christian faith. But if we believe that the gospel reveals God’s will, ‘we must seek to persuade them to do peacemaking based on the ethics they do acknowledge’.²²

NOTES

1. ‘Summary Statement’ of the Douglaston Consultation on the Apostolic Faith and the Church’s Peace Witness’, sponsored by the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, October 1991. See Marlin E. Miller and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds, *The Church’s Peace Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 208–15. For a recent critique in this direction, see Michael Haspel, *Friedensethik* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 2003).
2. ‘Just peacemaking: toward an ecumenical ethical approach from the perspective of the historic peace churches’, in Fernando Enns, Scott Holland and Ann K. Riggs, eds, *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Publishing, 2004), pp. 232–43.
3. For a brief review of recent scholarship, see David G. Hunter, ‘The Christian Church and the Roman Army in the First Three Centuries’, in Marlin Miller and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds, *The Church’s Peace Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 161–81.
4. See D. F. Durnbaugh, ed., *On Earth Peace: Discussions on War/Peace Issues between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Churches, 1935–1975* (Elgin, IL: Brethren, 1978). See also the entry for Historic Peace Churches at: www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/who/dictionary-article8.html.
5. See Fernando Enns, *Friedenskirche in der Ökumene: Mennonitische Wurzeln einer Ethik der Gewaltfreiheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).
6. Otto Piper, *Protestantism in an Ecumenical Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), p. 170.
7. See Enns, *Friedenskirche in der Ökumene*.
8. John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992).
9. See J. Richard Burkholder and Barbara Nelson Gingerich, eds, *Mennonite Peace Theology: A Panorama of Types* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, 1991).
10. Duane Friesen, ‘Peacemaking as an Ethical Category: The Convergence of Pacifism and Just War’, in T. Whitmore, ed., *Ethics in the Nuclear Age: Strategy, Religious Studies, and the Churches* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989).
11. J. Denny Weaver, ‘Response’, in Ivan Kauffman, ed., *Just Policing: Mennonite–Catholic Theological Colloquium* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004).
12. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 8ff.; see also Yoder’s essay ‘Peace Without Eschatology?’ in M. G. Cartwright, ed., *Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 162: ‘The error here is not in affirming that there is a real Christian responsibility to and for the social order; it is rather in the (generally unexamined and unavowed) presuppositions that result in that responsibility’s being defined from within the given order alone rather than from the gospel as it infringes upon the situation. Thus the sinful situation itself becomes the norm, and there can be no such thing as Christian ethics derived in the light of revelation.’
13. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, p. 131.
14. Duane K. Friesen, ‘The DOV: A Historic Peace Church Perspective’, *Ecumenical Review* (July 2003).
15. See the comments on Yoder by Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), p. 250.
16. In another direction, John D. Rempel argues that the mainstream of the HPC has accepted two major correctives: first, their need for a theology of creation in order to live responsibly in society; second, the

realization that their model of the church is not a pure deduction from the apostolic age, but (like that of others) shaped by the conditions under which it arose. See 'The Unity of the Church and the Christian Peace Witness': www.peacetheology.org/papers/rempe.html.

17. For a more thorough account of the relationship between Christian pacifism and ecclesiology, see Enns, *Friedenskirche in der +kumene*, and Yoder in Cartwright, *Royal Priesthood*.
18. See the various contributions in C. Sampson and J.-P. Lederach, eds, *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacemaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
19. Yoder in Cartwright, *Royal Priesthood*, p. 152.
20. John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 38.
21. Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Finding Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), p. 165.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 169.