Evangelical Approaches to Christian Participation in War: An Inquiry and a Proposal [*]

Part Two

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At this point it is necessary to draw together the strands of what has been considered and focus sharply on its relevance to the present subject. The socio-structural coherence that characterizes corporate human existence is not the arbitrary creation of fallen human beings, but is, as Col. 1:16 makes clear, the creational intention of God through Christ for humanity. Earthly rulers, the "authorities," or from a contemporary standpoint "the state," hold and exercise power which has been entrusted to them by God to order and stabilize human existence and preserve it from chaos. Thus the "state" is not *of itself* inherently evil. And neither is "politics" in the positive sense of the term—the creation of the policy by which a society is organized and governed—*necessarily evil* or an enterprise from which Christians must in principle abstain. Quite the contrary; the social organization of humanity would be impossible without mechanisms for determining and administering the collective will of society at all levels of its corporate existence. It must always be remembered, however, that the function of the authorities is instrumental to the achievement of such goals; their authority—derivative, provisional, and relative. They are God's servants, ministers for good (Rom. 13:4). This is the insight of Romans 13 seen in relation to Christology, and it accounts for the positive role the "authorities" enjoy in Paul's writings.

Yet this insight must be correlated with the fact that although the Powers originally were part of the order of God's good creation in Christ,

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the foremost fact of their present existence *is their fallenness*. The particular manifestation of the Powers' fallenness consists in their tendency to absolutize themselves idolatrously and arrogate to themselves the status and prerogatives of ultimate reality. The Powers, intended merely to be instruments in the service of humanity, to mediate structure and order to human existence, seek instead to dominate and tyrannize those whom they were intended to serve, and to separate them from God (Rom. 8:38; Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:20). This drama of struggle takes place on both the material and spiritual planes of history: fallen spiritual forces tirelessly seek to imbue human structures and institutions with their own fallen identity (Rev. 13; cf. Eph. 2:2; 6:11-17). And what is true of the Powers in general is true also of the state, the "authorities." Still, while they are heir to all the contradictions inherent in sinful existence, the authorities continue by God's sustaining providence to bear within themselves the seed of God's intention for them, and so Christians must submit to their rightfully exercised authority. That submission, however, must never become uncritical obedience or abject subservience. This is the insight of Revelation 13, and it is the necessary corrective to a biblically reductionist view that enjoins almost unqualified submission to the authorities.

It is with this paradox in view that Christians must develop their relationship to the political sphere. The tension is obviously great and should not be minimized. Christians can neither completely embrace nor totally repudiate existing social and political structures. In short, it is the Christian's task to exercise spiritual discernment in order to counterpoise wary, critical submission to the authorities with vigorous, prophetic-critical engagement of existing social and political structures. For while the cohesiveness of the human social existence is God's good creational intent, the institutions and structures mediative of that order are products of human activity. N. Wolterstorff has rightly observed that these structures:

> . . . are the result of human decision, and being made by us they can be altered by us. Indeed, they *must* be altered, for they are fallen, corrupt. The structures *themselves* are in need of reform, not only the persons who exist within these structures.[1]

[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, 9. Italics in original.

Just as individual humans are God's good creation, have fallen, and stand in need of redemption, so too, the structures and institutions of human existence are part of the order of God's good creation, have fallen, and stand in need of redemption, reformation and even transformation. It is the Church's task to "de-ideologize" the Powers, so that rather than becoming "ideological centers," the Powers might fulfill their divinely ordained vocation as "helps, instruments, giving shape and direction to the genuine life" of the human community.[2] The intransigence of fallen institutions provides no more reason to abandon the effort for their transformation than the intransigence of human sin provides reason to abandon the proclamation of the gospel. Again and again, Yahweh appeals to the chosen people to seek justice for the poor, the widows, the orphaned, the oppressed (Isa. 58:6-11; cf. 1:15-17; 3:14; Jer. 22:15, 16; Ps. 82:1-4). The command to seek justice for the oppressed requires political and social engagement. For injustice cannot be separated from the social and political realities that produced it, and Christians cannot avoid engagement with these realities if they are to address the causes of injustice at their roots. The oppressed of the earth are Yahweh's concern, and they must be the chosen people's concern also. Yahweh is the Helper of anyone who has no helper, and while God loves all creation, the loving kindness and merciful care of God extend especially toward the poor and the helpless—society's least desirable ones (Ps. 10:14, 17, 18; 72:1-2, 4, 12-14).[3] Jesus stands clearly within and perhaps even enlarges this tradition (cf. Luke 6:20, 21; Matt. 19:16-26). It is the Church's unfortunate tendency to read NT passages concerning the Kingdom of God abstracted from their OT background that has led to the arbitrary spiritualization of the radical political and social implications of the New Testament's message of redemption (cf. Luke 1:46-48, 52-55, 68, 69; 4:18, 19). The Kingdom of God is not exclusively an eschatological Kingdom—it has temporal and socio-historical dimensions which even now impact human life at every level (Luke 11:20/Matt. 12:28; Luke 17:20, 21, cf. Mark 1:14, 15; 9:1; Matt. 11:12a/Luke 16:16, cf. Matt. 11:3-5). The Kingdom is the realm that enters enemy territory—present

[2] Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. J.H. Yoder, Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962, 44, 50-52.

[3] Such emphases permeate the OT. The following represent only a minute fraction of the biblical material: Exod. 22:21, 22; 23:6, 11; Lev. 19:10; 23:22; Deut. 10:17, 18; 15:11; 24:12-21; 27:19; Ps. 9:11, 13, 18; 12:5; 68:5; Prov. 14:26, 31; 21:13; 22:9, 23; 29:7; 31:9; Isa. 10:1-4; 11:4; 29:21, cf. 32:7; 61:1-3; Jer. 22:15, 16; Ezek. 16:49; 18:5-9; 22:6, 7, 29; Amos 2:6-8; 4:1; 5:11-15, 21-24; 8:4-10; Zech. 7:8-14; Mal. 3:5.

reality—as a gracious spiritual movement of God that touches human lives in surprising, non-discriminatory ways, transfiguring human existence at all levels, and opening up the possibility of new life.[4] As agents of the Kingdom in society, the Church will engage the Powers with the message of the gospel, a message that aims wholly at the good of human beings—not only eschatologically in view of their ultimate salvation, but also temporally, in advancing justice and shalom in human relationships.

Does justice require violence? The question leads full circle back to the question of Christian participation in war. And it is precisely here—at the critical juncture between justice and violence—that Christian nonviolence is most seriously and consistently called into question. Critics complain that pacifists fail properly to balance their commitment to nonviolence with other, equally important ethical commitments, such as love of neighbor and the command to work for justice in society. In this view, the pacifist's one-sided deontological bias against the use of harmful or lethal force cannot do justice to the complexity of ethical decisions in the social and political realms. Christians exist during the "time between the times" when sin and evil continue to permeate all spheres of life. They cannot stand by idly in the face of tyranny or aggression and remain morally unimplicated in its consequences. Thus the supposed moral superiority of nonviolence is a dangerous illusion. The violence of war is a tragic but necessary cost which must be weighed against other commitments and especially against the human suffering caused by injustice, oppression or unjust aggression. Violence is already present in such situations. Therefore, if the advance of evil cannot be halted by peaceful means, violent force will be necessary to check aggression and to establish or restore peace and justice. Under such circumstances the moral legitimacy of violence is an important but secondary question, and pacifists who seek to make it the primary question are morally hypocritical and politically naïve.[5] Violence, however tragic, is a moral imperative if it serves the cause of justice.

[4] Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Kingdom Also Rises*, Elmhurst: United Church of Christ, 1991, 40-46.

[5] It is important at this point to observe the similarities and differences between two highly influential approaches that justify the use of violence in the cause of justice: "just war" and liberation theology. Of course, the question of violence (understood as lethal force) is not the primary concern of liberation theology. Liberation theology is rather a theological and socio-political hermeneutic that cannot within the total context of its thought avoid the question of violence, whereas just war is a moral tradition concerned with the justification and limitation of war. The point of this note is

Assumptions of this sort are widely held and deserve to be challenged. Behind them all stands the supposition that violence as a means is able to produce justice as an end. Yet it is well to heed the sage advice of Hannah Arendt:

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therefore limited to the observation that both approaches view violence as the unfortunate but necessary means to achieve justice, and that both seek to make the question of its moral legitimacy ethically secondary to other commitments. Yet, while both just war and liberation theology agree upon the necessity of violence, they stand in tension on the question of who may employ violence. It is instructive at this point to sketch briefly their contrasting answers to this question.

In "just war" thought individuals *qua* individuals do not possess the right to use lethal force against injustice—only individuals *as agents of government* do. This approach assumes that it is exclusively the prerogative of "the state" (a legitimate "authority") to wage war, and that as submissive citizens, Christians may employ lethal force only when called upon by the state to do so. Liberation theology, by contrast, holds that in a "revolutionary situation" (a situation in which the structures of society perpetuate injustice and oppression and resist peaceful change), individuals or groups of individuals from within society are justified in using violence as a last resort ("liberating praxis": revolutionary violence) in order to overthrow oppression, resist repression and establish justice. It is immediately clear where these approaches overlap:

	CONTEXT	MEANS	ENDS
JUST WAR:	aggression=*injustice*	—>just war *violence*	———>peace/*justice*
LIBERATION:	oppression=*injustice*	—>revolutionary *violence*	—>*justice*

In both models the reasoning advanced to justify violence is similar. Violence is a mechanism or instrument used against various forms of injustice in the service of positive social and political change. Furthermore, both models claim that the use of violence by Christians is not only a morally legitimate option, but rather that under specific circumstances it is a moral imperative. However, while just-war tradition allows only established, "legitimate" authorities to enjoin the use of violence for a just cause, the theology of liberation seeks to justify the violent, revolutionary overthrow of an irremediably oppressive established authority *by individual subjects* of that authority. Thus it becomes clear that while each model employs the same sort of ethical reasoning, politically and theologically each operates with very different assumptions—assumptions that call the other model radically into question. It is also immediately apparent why a person can be a proponent of one option and an opponent of the other. It is my contention, however, that at the ethical level, consistency requires the person who accepts either option in principle to accept them both. I do not see how proponents of just war who have rejected the legitimacy of revolutionary violence can escape the charge that they are instruments of oppression. In fact, it might be asserted that just war legitimizes the use of violence for the empowered while liberation theology legitimizes the use of violence for the disempowered. The difference, then, is between the violent use of power by the powerful and the violent quest for empowerment by the powerless. Yet both are alike in that they seek to legitimize violence in the cause of justice. And both launch much the same criticisms of pacifism.

> Since the end of human action, as distinct from the end products of fabrication, can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goal.[6]

If violence is then the means to achieve the political goal of justice, the moral legitimacy of violence remains for Christians a *primary* question. The question is not only, "Does justice require violence?" but equally and perhaps most importantly, "Can violence produce justice?" Means and ends are not independent; ends subsist in means; means entangle ends. The unbreakable link between means and ends is in fact an inescapable principle of social existence and the fundamental law of violence. At the social level, the means-ends relationship is illuminated in P. Berger and T. Luckmann's outline of the threefold process of human cultural creativity: externalization, objectivation and internalization.[7] According to Berger and Luckmann, human society expresses its collective will and self-understanding in creative mental and physical activities that objectify its goals and values (externalization). Once created, the products of externalization—implements, ideologies, institutions—are hypostatized or take on "life" independent of those who created them. They stand over against their creators as realities apart from them (objectivation). Finally, these realities create and condition culture as the values they embody are appropriated, expressed and passed on by society in language, custom, ideology and institutions (internalization).

Berger and Luckmann's model helps to clarify the unbreakable link that exists between means and ends as it applies to the social and political spheres. In this view, the institutions humans create to pursue political ends are not neutral instruments; they are themselves *creators of culture*. If violence is objectivated institutionally as an expression of a society's collective political will to justice, institutions of violence will necessarily become formative of society. The more profoundly a society comes to rely on institutionalized violence as an instrument of its political purpose, the more tightly will institutionalized violence entangle society and the more formative of societal identity violence will become. This relationship is evident historically among numerous nation-states that have

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[6] *On Violence*, San Diego, New York & London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1969, 1970, 4.

[7] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, New York: Doubleday, 1966, 52-61, 129ff., and Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, New York: Doubleday, 1967, 4-18.

allocated vast amounts of cultural, economic and political resources toward the maintenance of military institutions—the so-called military-industrial complex—while urgent social needs at both the domestic and international level remain unmet. Furthermore, countless violent revolutions have not resulted in justice for the oppressed, but only in the replacement of one form of oppression with yet another, at times even more ruthless, form. This situation persists because violent revolution tends to concentrate power in the hands of a small group of persons who are most effectively able to wield it, and such persons invariably make less than desirable political leaders. "Violent revolution fails because it is not revolutionary enough. It changes the rulers but not the rules, the ends but not the means."[8] In both cases, where political will takes on violent institutional form, or makes use of violent mechanisms in the quest for change—violence turns back on the system and calls a new situation into being, one that is alien to the political objectives it was intended to secure. In short, violence does not produce justice; it can produce only further violence.[9] Thus the so-called "political realism" that dominates the international system is an example of logical "begging the question" in its most insidious and seductive form. Institutions called forth by violence and maintained by violence insist that the exigencies of international relations have installed violent force as an indispensable instrument of political intercourse—justice requires violence; violence is of the order of necessity. Yet in this way they ensure only that the spiral of violence will continue its relentless advance.

Christians cannot allow themselves to suffer from this same lack of moral imagination. The Church is the witness of the Kingdom, the community of the Spirit in the time between the times, called to anticipate and incarnate in its life the future that has already dawned. The full realization of the new age remains yet to come, but it is not exclusively "beyond" history. The Kingdom is the new historical stream already emergent in history, conjoined with the old aeon, and driving inexorably toward its consummation at the eschaton. It is the *true history*, since it is the inescapable destiny toward which all creation is driving. Christians neither initiate that movement, nor do they by their creative activity hasten the coming of the Kingdom. God is the one who has inaugurated the Kingdom and God is the one who will consummate it so that it fills

[8] Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992, 136.

[9] This point is forcefully made by Jacques Ellul, *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective*, New York: The Seabury Press, 93-104.

"the whole earth" (Dan. 2:35, 44). The Spirit is the token of the future. It is the gift that empowers Christians even now to live the life of the Kingdom, the life of Jesus Christ, in the world (cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). Thus Christians cannot acquiesce to the "order of necessity" established by violence. They are realists of the new order. They recognize that means must be consonant with the ends they envision. They are bearers of a new history, a new consciousness, a new way of living and acting in the world. They must draw upon the rich resources of that history in order to create more productive patterns of engagement of the political order. The means and ends of Christian political engagement must be carried out "in the Spirit" for they are an anticipation of the future that has already dawned. That future is one of righteousness, justice and peace (conceived in its fullest sense as shalom). It is these ideals that Christians seek to approximate in the present social order.

Christian nonviolent activism does not harbor idealistic illusions about its ability to redeem the social order. It recognizes that nonviolent engagement of the Powers on behalf of the oppressed will lead to the cross. For just as Jesus' engagement of the Powers led inevitably to his cross, so too the Christian struggle for a more just and humane order will lead to the disciple's cross (John 15:20; Matt. 10:23-25; 16:26-28).[10] "The

[10] The suffering of the cross is therefore the transcendent expression of God's solidarity with the helpless. This insight must not be construed to minimize the atoning value of the death of Christ. It rather emphatically asserts that the cross which achieved eternal redemption and deliverance for humanity *arises historically out of a radical social stance*. Jesus' cross was not merely the miscarriage of Roman justice required for the Son of God to carry out his salvific work; on the contrary, *it is the social and political life that Jesus lived and the message he proclaimed that led to Golgotha*. From a social standpoint, many of Jesus' contemporaries undoubtedly viewed him as a maddeningly provocative radical. Jesus' radicalism is especially apparent in his relationships with social and religious outcasts—women, the poor, tax collectors, notorious sinners. Jesus welcomed such persons as his followers and sat in intimate table-fellowship with them, an action which in his culture was highly charged with connotations of religious and social status. He thereby defied the well-established hierarchy of religious values and social boundaries that characterized his society; he rejected the "righteous" marginalization of sinners; he challenged norms and customs that deprived whole classes of persons of worth and dignity. Moreover, he even dared to forgive sins, and boldly declared his authority even in relation to the Law (Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:34, 36-50; Matt. 5:21-48; Mark 2:27ff.). Such actions and teachings were culturally "subversive"; they undermined and destabilized both the dominant, external order of Jesus' society and the symbolic world upon which it was built—the whole constellation of norms and values which undergirded it. In short, Jesus' life was exceedingly dangerous to the stability of the dominant social order. And it is this social radicalism—Jesus' life of Kingdom praxis on behalf of the helpless and the oppressed—*that is linked to the central event of salvation history in the redemption of*

cross arises out of conflict with the powers in the midst of the goal to seek the welfare of the polis."[11] In full recognition of this, unhampered by the constraints of either postmillenial optimism or apocalyptic pessimism, *Christians act*. For if nonviolence takes the form of apolitical quietism, *such inaction may itself be violence*, because violence takes place not only in acts of overt physical assault against persons or communities, but also *where it is constitutive of situations or of the structures of society as a whole*. As Emmanuel Mounier has commented:

> People think too much about *acts* of violence, which prevents them from seeing that more often there are *states* of violence—as when there are millions of people out of work and dying and being dehumanized, without visible barricades and within the established order today . . . [R]eal violence, in the hateful sense of the word, is perpetuated in such a system.[12]

It is therefore incorrect to limit uncritically the meaning of the term "violence" solely to acts of overt physical assault.[13] It follows, then, that nonviolence cannot be narrowly construed simply as the refusal physically to harm or to intend to harm other persons. Indeed, violence is present wherever the "structures of society in which we participate produce an inordinate and intolerable amount of suffering, destruction and violation of human personality."[14] The notion that violence is a

the cross. Thus *soteriology is bound inextricably to social ethics*. The implications of this must not be ignored by Jesus' followers today. Rather, it compels his disciples to reflect anew on the social significance of Jesus' call to "take up their cross." (For a brief, readable discussion of the political and social ramifications of Jesus' life, see Marcus Borg, *Jesus. A New Vision*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987; see also Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, rev. ed., trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991, 45-55.)

[11] Duane K. Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking & International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective*, Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986, 93.

[12] Emmanuel Mounier, *L'engagement de la Foi* [The Engagement of Faith], Vol. 1, Paris: Sevil, 1933, 388. Italics in original. Quoted in Robert McAfee Brown, *Religion and Violence*, second ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987, 34.

[13] According to Friesen, "violence" as an act has in view both the *source* of violence (the acting agent, the one who "does" violence) and also the *recipient* of violence. As an ethical term, violence has in view the recipient of violence. "Recipient" violence refers to the violation of a person, with the corollary connotations of "injury" and "destruction." See Friesen, 143-46, and Brown, 29-38. To Friesen's "source" and "recipient" model I would add an intermediate term, the *instrument* (mechanism) of violence. This would distinguish the actual perpetrators of violence from the instruments (which could be institutional) they use to perpetuate or practice violence.

[14] Brown, 36. For contemporary examples and a discussion of structural violence see Friesen, 129-46.

property of particular situations and as such a "condition" that is manifest in structures has profound consequences for Christians who are committed to nonviolence. It requires Christians to be wary of and resist other, more subtle forms of violence as these are perpetuated in unjust social and political structures. A credible and consistent Christian witness to nonviolence must be actualized in a broad array of commitments—the refusal to employ lethal force in war is but one of many.[15]

The Christian relation to the old aeon with its normative principle of violence is therefore not one of passive acquiescence and assimilation but of incarnation and confrontation. The Christian community confronts the world with an entirely new set of values derived from a new history and a new sphere of existence: the life "in the Spirit" of the inbreaking Kingdom. In baptism the Christian "puts on" Christ's life and is "decisively turned down God's new path in the company of community" (Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12).[16] It is true that Christians live in the "meanwhile" between the "already" and "not yet" of God's eschatological reign. But they are Christ's Church—a sign and incarnation of the explosive intruding force of the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). For the Church, the "meanwhile" *is* the "already." The question of how a Christian resolves the tensions of his dual citizenship regarding the question of war must therefore be answered according to the nature and demands of discipleship.

3. *Yahweh War testifies to God's participation in the history of Israel. In Jesus Christ a new history ordered along wholly different lines has burst into human history; this history establishes a new normative framework for human relationships.*

Among the most important theological affirmations regarding the God of the Bible is that God reveals Himself in the continuum of history. Furthermore, the medium of God's self-revelation and action in history is a particular people—the chosen nation (Exod. 19:5, 6; 1 Pet. 2:9, 10).[17]

[15] I do not intend to imply that political withdrawal is not a Christian option. But rather, that when chosen, this stance itself must be a prophetic and critical reaction to particular situations.

[16] James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics*, Vol. 1, Nashville: Abingdon, 1986, 256.

[17] History is not the sole vehicle of God's self-revelation; nonetheless, the authenticity of inner/subjective revelation is always in some manner dependent upon and correlated with God's objective action in history. See George Ernest Wright, "God

Second, God acts within a *fallen* human history and among *sinful* people to effect the divine will. Third, God is the determiner of the ultimate meaning of history. In the biblical conception, history is the sphere of the creative action of God for the purpose of the salvation of the creation. From beginning to end, Scripture is energized by this notion of the redemptive character of history (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:21; Eph. 1:9, 10; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1; 22:2).[18]

God's self-revelation in the history of Israel for the purpose of redemption took the form of God as Warrior. This was a consequence of the reality that the nation of Israel was taken up into fallen human history's normative order of violence in relation to the nations surrounding it. It is therefore from the vantage point of God's salvific activity in the sphere of fallen human history that we gain an essential clue to the meaning of Yahweh War. The theological significance of God the Warrior is that God acts within the normal network of relations of sinful human history for the purpose of redemption. Again and again, OT war narratives are informed by this theme. The human agency in war is unimportant. It is Yahweh who acts in the Exodus-Conquest narratives to deliver Israel from Egypt and expel the nations inhabiting the promised land (Deut. 9:4-7; Amos 2:9; Josh. 24:12, 13; Ps. 78:53-55; 80:8-11, cf. Acts 7:45; 13:16-19). The human response in Yahweh War is to trust in God's deliverance and victory (Exod. 14:14; 2 Chron. 20, cf. Isa. 7:9; 30:1-5, 15-18).[19] Thus the bare fact of war in the OT does not of itself legitimize the institution

the Warrior," *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology*, Ben C. Ollenburger *et. al.* eds., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992, 100-20.

[18] Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964, 51-60. See also Peter Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 40ff.

[19] Everett Ferguson, ed., "War," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, New York & London: Garland Publishing Co., 1990, 813-15. See also Wright, 111-14. The specifically religious character of Yahweh war can be seen in the obligations and rites prescribed in the OT as preparation for war: (1) Ritual purity was required of all Israelite warriors in the armed camp due to the presence of Yahweh as symbolized by the ark of the covenant (Deut. 23:10-14, cf. 2 Sam. 11:9-11. See also 1 Sam. 14:18; Num. 10:33-36; Josh. 3:3, 11, 14, 17; 6:6-21). (2) Cultic rites were prescribed to sanctify the undertaking and ensure Yahweh's blessing (1 Sam. 7:7-11). (3) When Yahweh granted victory, Israel responded with songs of thanksgiving and praise (Exod. 15:1-21; Judges 5; Num. 21:27-30; Deut. 32:1-43; 1 Sam. 18:7). See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., "War," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988. Gerhard von Rad has gone as far as to posit that ancient Israel's wars were a cultic institution with specific ritual and ideological patterns. *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. Marva J. Dawn, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, esp. 41-51. The fact of the religious character of Yahweh war undercuts any attempt to seek a moral correlation between Israelite participation in Yahweh war and Christian participation in the wars of modern nation-states.

of war or participation in war—it points beyond itself to the reality and hope of the God who is immanent in history for the salvation of His people.

In Jesus Christ a new historical reality ordered along wholly different lines—the Kingdom of God—has exploded onto the horizon of human history. A new history evokes a new normative order in human relationships. The life and death of Jesus Christ both culminate an era of salvation history and inaugurate another. As G.E. Wright observed:

> God in Jesus Christ has completed the history of Israel; he has reversed the work of Adam, fulfilled the promise of Abraham, repeated the deliverance from bondage, not indeed from Pharaoh but from sin and Satan, and inaugurated the new age and the new covenant. . . . Hence [Jesus Christ] is the climactic event in a unique series of events, to be comprehended only by what has happened before him, but at the same time *the new event which marks a fresh beginning in salvation history*.[20]

This "fresh beginning in salvation history" is everywhere apparent in the eschatological impulse of the NT. The fundamental continuity and the apparent discontinuity between OT and NT lie in the tension of promise and fulfillment and are constitutive of the nature of Christianity. Thus the earliest Christians understood themselves to be the eschatological people of God in whom the promises of the prophets were being fulfilled (Acts 2:14-21, cf. Isa. 2:2; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:1, 2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18). Thus the early Church took over OT terminology and applied it to the Christian community, in the process radically re-defining and re-interpreting concepts crucial to Jewish self-understanding. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate this. The "people of God," for example, long understood to be the temporal, fleshly nation of Israel, in the Christian economy come to be defined as all persons, Jew as well as Gentile, who are united by faith in Jesus Christ and who have received the Spirit (Exod. 19:5, 6; Deut. 14:2, cf. 1 Pet. 2:9, 10; Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:6, 25, 26; Gal. 6:16). Again, in the light of the early Church's experience and interpretation of the Christ event, whole portions of the OT are either left behind as having been fulfilled or fundamentally transformed by their appropriation in a Christian context—including circumcision (Gen. 17:11-13; Rom. 2:28, 29; 5:2; 6:15;

[20] "God the Warrior," 106. Italics mine.

Phil. 3:3), Sabbath observance (Exod. 20:8-10; 31:14-17, cf. Col. 2:16, 17) and dietary laws (Lev. 11 and 17, cf. Rom. 14). Even the forms and rites of worship and the office of priesthood belong to an order that has been replaced by the inbreaking era of eschatological fulfillment (John 4:20-24; Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6).[21] It is possible to multiply such examples; however, the preceding is sufficient to demonstrate that a Christian reading and appropriation of OT materials is radically revisionist.

An examination of military imagery in the NT reveals that it undergoes the same fundamental transformation. Thus Paul can write to Timothy, "Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." The emphasis here is upon the Christian soldier's receipt of violence and suffering rather than upon his use of it (2 Tim. 2:3 NASB, cf. 1 Pet. 2:21-23). Jesus employs an illustration of military preparedness in order to underscore the far-reaching cost of discipleship (Luke 14:31-33, cf. Matt. 16:24). Furthermore, Paul insists that the Church's war is not against human adversaries, but against the "rulers and authorities" both cosmic and earthly that seek aggressively to dominate human existence and separate people from God (Eph. 6:11-17, cf. 2 Cor. 10:3, 4).[22] It is striking indeed that the NT Church, nurtured as it was on OT Scripture, chose to take up and appropriate "holy war" themes and imagery in what may be described as an essentially pacifistic manner.[23]

The fundamental tension set up by the dialectical relation of promise and fulfillment, old covenant and new covenant, old aeon and new aeon, is therefore suggestive for any Christian attempt to evaluate theologically how OT conflicts are constitutive of Christian ethics. It is this dynamic, essential to the inner logic of life in the Spirit, that furnishes the hermeneutical key for the ethical appropriation of OT war narratives. Negatively, OT war narratives cannot be appropriated inductively as unmediated propositional data for Christian ethics. Positively, a Christian theological evaluation of OT warfare and warrior images of God must proceed eschatologically—from the hermeneutical vantage point of the

[21] James D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of Ways*, Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991, 230-59, 267-71.

[22] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, 142-50. Jim Wallis, *Agenda for Biblical People*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984, 38-45.

[23] The spiritualization of the language of warfare is universal in the NT (see e.g. 1 Thess. 5:8; 2 Cor. 6:4-7; 1 Tim. 1:18, cf. 1 Cor. 9:6, 7; Rom. 6:13; 16:7; Phil. 2:25; Col. 4:10; Phm. 1-2, 23).

present reality of the Kingdom of God. Finally, for all their disparate emphases, the Testaments are united in their testimony to the God who speaks and acts in history for the salvation of creation, and to the human response of trust and obedience called forth by that action.

III. Conclusion

A biblical ethic of Christian participation in war must derive from a holistic reading of Scripture. The bare fact of warfare and warrior images of God in the OT does not legitimize war or Christian participation in war, but points beyond itself to the God active in human history. The hermeneutical key for unlocking the meaning of these motifs is Jesus Christ and the new community. Jesus is the culminator of the old aeon and the inaugurator of the era of fulfillment. The new community is the eschatological community of the Kingdom already emergent in history. In Jesus Christ, God introduces onto the horizon of human existence a New Order with a new way of living and acting in history. It is the Way authorized by Jesus of Nazareth, the way of the future exploding into the present.

In Jesus Christ, then, new possibilities, new potentialities emerge for human existence. The person who attaches himself or herself to Jesus Christ adopts a new history and a new disposition, a fundamentally changed attitude, and a wholly different scale of values. To be "in Christ" is to be "in the Spirit" and to live "by the Spirit" that is the very antithesis of war's violence, hatred, and strife (Gal. 5:16, 17; Rom. 8:12, 13, cf. Matt. 26:52). God's loving act in Jesus Christ is thus the final, definitive word on the Christian's relation to war. It repudiates worldly pragmatism, defies political realism, and appeals to us to bind ourselves in faith, whatever the cost, to God's pattern of dealing with enemies, to God's way in the world—the way of the inbreaking new epoch of the Spirit.