Towards the Cessation of Church Suicide: A Theology of Peace from an Anabaptist Point of View

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A simple confession underlies this presentation of a theology of peace: I read the New Testament following an invitation to see what the Bible says about the use of nuclear weapons. I found a Jesus in the documents markedly different from the Jesus with whom the Anglican church had nurtured me. It was a Jesus who challenged his would-be followers with a radical demand for obedience: "Why do you address me as 'lord' and refuse to do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). He obviously expected the Sermon on the Mount to be taken with utmost seriousness. Something of this "naive" response to clear orders underlies Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insistence that:

> Jesus knows only one possibility: simple surrender and obedience, not interpreting the Sermon on the Mount or applying it, but doing it and obeying it. That is the only way to hear his word. But again he does not mean that it is to be discussed as an ideal, he really means us to get on with it.[1]

How delightfully free this is from the nightmare of theological complexity which often accompanies discussion of Christ and war.

From the vantage point that blowing your enemies to pieces is forbidden by Jesus, all arguments to the contrary look like dangerous compromises designed to interfere with the essential obedience needed

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[1] *The Cost of Discipleship*, New York: Macmillan, 1959, 218-219.

for entrance into the Kingdom of God: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mat. 7:21). Jesus goes on to utter the most terrible of all his sayings. Many will protest at the judgment that they have been serving him faithfully even to the point of preaching in his name and demonstrating their power in charismatic exploits. Yet they will fail to be recognized as other than false prophets (Mat. 7:23). The issue is plainly one of obedience through faith; and obedience must include submission to the "hard sayings" about "loving enemies" and "not resisting evil persons." Once the absolutist standard is adopted the various "faiths" offered by the denominations begin to look suspiciously like counterfeits — pale reflections of the original, not too well camouflaged imitations of the real thing, but sufficiently endowed with Christian language to seem plausible. Was not an apostle needed to warn the Corinthians that the Devil would be busy promoting his spurious versions of "Jesus," "spirit" and "gospel" (2 Cor. 11:1-4)? Is the Jesus who has countenanced the violence of churches for some seventeen centuries the Jesus Messiah of revelation? Are Christian communities which sanction the use of terrible destructive force against their enemies and fellow believers, in the name of "just war," sailing under false colors?

Building upon naive beginnings, one is able to add substance to conviction by way of readings in theology and church history. I will construct my theology of peace with the help of those many voices which have for me the clear ring of Truth, as distinct from the tragic language of compromise and apostasy. Throughout I will take note of the persistent but, as it seems to me, misguided reasonings of the camp which seems bent upon obscuring and rendering complex an issue about which Jesus never equivocated. To one seeking the truth of Scripture, the complaint of Habakkuk appeared to speak eloquently to the Church of England's post-war official justification of Christian participation in "just conflict":

> Why do You show me iniquity and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are many who raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked and judgement never goes forth: the wicked compasses about the righteous; therefore wrong judgement proceeds (Hab. 1:3, 4).

The reaction of my devoted parents to my "idealism" was to have me examined by a psychiatrist, under whose supervision, and timed by a stopwatch, I arranged blocks according to prescribed pattern.

Recently the discovery of a British pacifist in similar surroundings has helped me to understand the revolution which the Sermon on the Mount caused in one for whom war was part of the respectable status quo:

> Let it not be forgotten that from my birth upwards all my associations and impressions were in favour not only of the lawfulness but of the glory of war . . . . War seemed the most normal condition of man, and peace a rare and vapid exception.[2]

A powerful argument for Christian non-participation in war may be built on early church history: believers did not apparently join the military until around 177 AD, and thereafter it was not unusual for baptism and the Lord's Supper to be refused to those who had shed blood. The presumption is that the early second-century church maintained a closer link with original apostolic truth. However, since it is to the Scriptures that we must appeal as the final arbiter in matters of Christian doctrine, our strongest line of defense against the post-Constantinian "just war" theory can be based on the biblical view of Christian brotherhood. (A vestige of this point of view is seen in the insistence of post-Constantinian churches that the clergy abstain from killing.)

I. "LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

The seeds of the New Testament ethic of a separated community demonstrating adherence to a priority above the state are found in the Old Testament. Hebrew Scripture establishes the principle that bloodshed in war between brethren is unthinkable (2 Chron. 11:4: "You shall not fight against your brethren"). The word of Elijah to Jehoram of Jerusalem is clear in its condemnation of fratricide: "But you have walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and have made . . . Israel play the harlot . . . and have killed your brethren of your father's house who were better than you" (2 Chron. 21:13). David's career in the military is seen as a disqualification for building the Temple (1 Chron. 22:8). Abraham was to break ties with his country of origin as well as his natural family in order to become the father of a new community of faith (Gen. 12:1-4). Jesus himself follows this pattern when he recognizes his real family not in Mary and Joseph but in those who do the Father's will (Mat. 12:46-50).

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[2] Sir L. Charles L. Brenton, son of a naval officer, who left the Church of England for the Plymouth Brethren; cited by Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe*, Princeton University Press, 1972, 402.

The church of the New Testament evidently includes believers of all nations, for in Christ there is neither "Jew nor Gentile, Barbarian or Scythian, but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11). The great commission, based on the covenant with Abraham, mandates an international propagation of the Good News of the Kingdom (Mat. 24:14; 28:29, 30) and thus envisages the formation of a community of kings and priests "from every nation, people, tongue and race" (Rev. 5:10), who are to "have peace among themselves" (Mark 9:50), be salt in a putrefying world (Mat. 5:13) and "lights in the midst of a crooked society" (Phil. 2:15). The church thus constitutes the New Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) designed evidently to be a microcosm of the coming Kingdom of peace on earth. Premillennialism, based on the vision of the prophets which Jesus endorsed (Rom. 15:8) and to which Old and New Testament strain in verse after verse, holds out the hope of world peace when the nations will cease forever to learn the art of war (Isa. 2:2-5). The efficacy of Christianity is to be demonstrated now by the community of the "sons of the Kingdom" (Mat. 13:38) (i.e. those destined for a place in the Kingdom) who, through the visible love which they have for each other, proclaim to the world the promise of the New Age. The hope of the prophets must be realized in the believing community, at least in some measure, in "the present evil age," though the regeneration of the world at large is expected beyond the Day of the Lord (Mat. 19:28; Acts 3:21). The international church is to be like an arrow pointing to the world peace of the Messianic future.

This pervasive biblical theme is dealt a lethal blow when it is proposed that believers can join in the slaughter of their brethren in other nations. Such fratricide suggests only that Christianity does not work — that the spirit is too weak to overcome the natural hostilities of the flesh. The New Testament is thus rendered pointless. Mankind, in his dealings with different peoples, is not benefited by Christ at all. Hatred is not replaced by love. Little wonder that we find James protesting that friendship with the world means inevitable hostility to God (James 4:4). Nowhere is this more clearly shown than when "believers" join in the killing of other members of the Body of Christ. Satan must count this his greatest triumph; for Christ is then divided against Christ, the church commits suicide, the body self-destructs, and the evidence of God's spirit at work internationally amongst the peoples of the earth is destroyed.

This kind of argumentation supporting the case for an international Christian church does not depend for its success upon a few biblical texts. It is axiomatic throughout the New Testament that Christians are bound

to a higher priority than loyalty to the individual nation-state. God has made each Christian a member of the universal body of Christ. The priority of responsibility to fellow believers, irrespective of national origin, is abundantly clear in our Christian documents. Repeated commands about gentleness, forbearance, unity in the spirit and the power of the visible witness of Christian love fill the pages of the New Testament. How can anyone imagine that bombing other Christians can be anything other than an absolute denial of the faith? I cannot see how Archdeacon Percy Harthill's pointed protest could fall on deaf ears, and not effect a radical repentance throughout churches:

> The Church is further proclaimed by the creed to be catholic . . . universal and world-wide . . . not simply international but supranational . . . . The community of the Church is something that man did not make and which man must not be allowed to break . . . . Obviously, therefore, any political or social allegiance of the Christian must take second place . . . . All men are to know that we are Christ's disciples if we love one another *as He loved us* (John 13:34, 35) . . . . Within the Christian fellowship each is to be linked to each by a love like that of Christ for each. That is the new commandment; and obedience to it is to be the evidence to the world of true discipleship . . . . Such is the quality which Christ designed for the unity of the Church. But can anything conflict more completely with such an ideal than that Christians should go to war against Christians? . . . Can anyone outside a madhouse suggest that when, for example, British and American Christians accepted the responsibility for dropping the atomic bomb which killed and maimed in body and soul their fellow-Christians in Nagasaki such an act could be "evidence" that within the Christian fellowship they were linked by a love like that of Christ for each? If anyone still doubts this, let him read *We of Nagasaki*, written by Christian survivors of the bombing.[3]

One who did see the force of this plea for Christian non-violence was the former Roman Catholic military chaplain, George Zabelka:

> In l945 Tinian Island was the largest airfield in the world. Three planes a minute could take off from it around the clock. Many of these planes went to Japan with the express purpose of killing not one child or one civilian but of slaughtering hundreds and

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[3] *War, Communism and the Christian Faith*, James Clarke & Co., n.d., 47-49.

thousands and tens of thousands of children and civilians — and I said nothing. As a chaplain I often had to enter the world of the boys who were losing their minds because of something they did in war . . . . One man told me that he had been on a low-level bombing mission, flying right down one of the main streets of the city, when straight ahead of him appeared a little boy, in the middle of the street, looking up at the plane in child-like wonder. The man knew that in a few seconds the child would be burned to death by napalm which had already been released . . . yet I never preached a single sermon against killing civilians to the men who were doing it . . . . Silence in such matters, especially from a public body like the American Bishops, is a stamp of approval . . . . The facts are that seventy-five thousand people were burned to death in one evening of fire bombing over Tokyo. Hundreds of thousands were destroyed in Dresden, Hamburg and Coventry by aerial bombing. The fact that forty-five thousand human beings were killed by one bomb over Nagasaki was new only to the extent that it was one bomb that did it . . . . It seems a sign to me that seventeen hundred years of Christian terror and slaughter should arrive at August 6th, 1945, when Catholics dropped the A-bomb on top of the largest and first Catholic city in Japan. One would have thought that I, as a Catholic priest, would have spoken out against the atomic bombing of nuns. (Three orders of Catholic sisters were destroyed in Nagasaki that day.) One would have thought that I would have suggested that as a minimal standard of Catholic morality, Catholics shouldn't bomb Catholic children. I didn't. I, like the Catholic pilot of the Nagasaki plane, "The Great Artiste," was heir to a Christianity which had for seventeen hundred years engaged in revenge, murder, torture, and pursuit of power, and prerogative violence, all in the name of our Lord . . . . I pray God forgives us for how we have distorted Christ's teaching and destroyed his world by the distortion of that teaching.[4]

These impassioned cries for the abandonment of a tradition which denies the Gospel gather strength from numerous voices in the Anabaptist tradition, demonstrating the advance of the Radical Reformation over mainstream denominations in terms of catching the spirit of authentic Christianity. In a perceptive article entitled "The Christian and War: a Matter of Personal Conscience,"[5] David R. Plaster describes the pacifist argument which he himself finds compelling. This "relates to the priority of the believer's obligation to his heavenly citizenship."[6] He goes on to

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[4] *Peacemakers*, 16-18.
[5] *Grace Theological Journal*, 6:2, 1985, 435-455.
[6] *Ibid*., 444.

cite John Drescher: "The church is an interracial, supranational, transcultural body composed of all who put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and follow him as Lord."[7] Plaster then refers to Myron Augsburger's development of the consequences of participation in the body of Christ:

> To affirm that one is a member of the Kingdom of Christ now means that loyalty to Christ and his Kingdom transcends every other loyalty. This stance goes beyond nationalism and calls us to identify first of all with our fellow disciples of whatever nation, as we serve Christ together.[8]

Augsburger then presses the argument home as follows: The priority to obey God rather than man "comes into conflict with a believer's active participation in war."[9] He advances the reasoning another step:

> Since our highest loyalty is to the kingdom of Christ, and since that kingdom is global, a Christian in one nation cannot honorably participate in war, which would mean taking the life of another brother or sister in another nation.[10]

Plaster observes that "those allowing participation in war to the point of taking human life have not provided an answer to this point.[11] Dale Brown adds his voice to this argument when he reports that M.R. Zigler "often rose to his feet and proposed that Lutherans pledge to refuse to kill each other, Anglicans other Anglicans, etc."[12] The Mennonites now distribute postcards on which is printed the slogan: "A modest proposal for peace: that Christians refuse to kill each other." Meanwhile Eileen Egan, an editor of *The Catholic Worker*, reminds us that Constantine and Augustine borrowed the just war theory from the pagans in order to allow lay Christians to become soldiers.[13]

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[7] "Why Christians Shouldn't Carry Swords," *Christianity Today*, Nov. 7, l980, 21-22.
[8] Cited from "Christian Pacifism" in *War: Four Views*, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship of the U.S.A., 1986, 87.
[9] Plaster, 445.
[10] *Ibid*. cited from "Christian Pacifism," 90.
[11] Plaster, 445.
[12] *Biblical Pacifism*, Brethren Press, 1986, 8.
[13] Cited by Dale Brown, *ibid*., 7.

II. Injustice of the "Just War"

One of the most astonishing features of the debate about Christians and war is the unflinching way in which proponents of the "just war" admit that its origin is in pagan Greece and Rome. It appears as a concept developed on the basis of natural law by Cicero and "Christianized" by Augustine. Appeal is sometimes made also to the Old Testament. Jesus, however, specifically rejected the "lex talionis" as a proper basis for the New Testament community of the spirit, both in his teaching and example (Mat. 5:38, 39). The Old Testament itself deplores internecine war in Israel. Fratricide inevitably occurs when the New Testament "Israel" takes sides against itself in war. Moreover, pagan Greek and Roman philosophy is seen by the New Testament as a dangerous threat to the faith (Col. 2:8). The faith is essentially Hebrew in its main ingredients and should guard itself against invasion by philosophy. The point is made tellingly by Floyd Filson:

> The primary kinship of the New Testament is not with this Gentile environment but rather with its Jewish heritage and environment. We are often led by our traditional creeds and theology to think in terms dictated by Gentile and especially Greek concepts. We know that not later than the second century there began the systematic effort of the Apologists to show that the Christian faith perfected the best in Greek philosophy . . . . The New Testament speaks always with disapproval and usually with blunt denunciation of Gentile cults and philosophies. It agrees essentially with the Jewish indictment of the pagan world.[14]

Later he says: "The modern church often misunderstands its relation to the Old Testament and Israel and often inclines to prefer the Greek attitude to the New Testament view."[15]

In the same vein Canon H.L. Goudge wrote: "When the Roman and Greek mind came to dominate the church there occurred a disaster in doctrine and practice from which we have never recovered."[16]

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[14] *The New Testament Against Its Environment*, London: SCM Press, 1950, 26.
[15] *Ibid*., 43.
[16] "The Calling of the Jews," in the collected essays on *Judaism and Christianity*, cited by H.J. Schonfield in *The Politics of God*, Hutchinson, 1970, 98.

Eberhard Griesebach in an academic lecture on "Christianity and Humanism" remarked: "In its encounter with Greek philosophy, Christianity became theology. That was the fall of Christianity."[17]

The paganism which lies hidden in post-Constantinian Christianity (though its infiltration began in the early second century) is revealed also by Professor G.J. Heering in his book, *The Fall of Christianity*. Luther, he maintains, derived his theology of the State from Stoic natural law. His successors in modern times have given absolute status to the relative authority of the State, which demands blind obedience. "The time has come for Christianity to disentangle itself from imperialism and war."[18] Referring next to the Roman Catholic church, he points to a systemic weakness which allows believers to be seduced into disobedience to the command of love:

> Although an international church, Roman Catholicism shows little disapproval of the nationalistic State and its ways. The remarkable friendship of the Pope with the pagan Roman dictator of Italy whose God is the State and whose worship is law and might and war, and the obviously complete impotence of the Vicar of Christ over his national congregations whose members, nay whose "shepherds" even bayoneted each other in war — these things tell us more than enough.[19]

An incisive theology of peace must relentlessly expose the falsehood of the foundation on which both Protestant and Catholic traditions about war are built. Luther's tortured argument justifying Christian participation in war needs to be rehearsed and dismissed.

> When a Christian goes to war or when he sits on a judge's bench, punishing his neighbor, or when he registers an official complaint, he is not doing this as a Christian but as a soldier or a judge or lawyer. At the same time he keeps a Christian heart. He does not intend anyone any harm, and it grieves him that his neighbor must suffer grief. So he lives simultaneously as a Christian towards everyone, personally suffering all sorts of things in the world, and as a secular person, maintaining, using, and performing all the

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[17] Cited by Robert Friedmann in *The Theology of Anabaptism*, Herald Press, 1973, 50.
[18] Fellowship Publications, 1930, vii.
[19] *Ibid.,* 70.

functions required by the law of his territory or city, by civil law, and by domestic law.[20]

But on what New Testament basis may a Christian do some things as a Christian and others not as a Christian?

Judged in the light of the single standard demanded by Jesus most popular forms of Christianity stand condemned. For example, the theology of the Moral Majority conspicuously lacks the ethic of loving enemies in its "gospel." It practically equates American foreign policy with the will of God. In the words of William Klassen, *Love of Enemies*, this form of the faith:

> has to be pronounced false and those who proclaim it designated as false prophets. The ease with which they identify America with Christianity and the fact that they do not follow Jesus in teaching release from hate, supports that judgement. In the Bible the true prophets soon found themselves expelled from the presence of the king, for they refused to ally themselves with the king or tell him what he wanted to hear.[21]

Equally unsatisfactory are the desperate attempts of some to justify the continuation of Christian participation in warfare on the grounds that the Christian ethic is inappropriate for deciding what Christians do in their "political" life. Some spokesmen for the "just war" appear to find the gospel ethic unacceptable:

> The Gospel is one of the standards of our life, but not the only standard. Not our entire morality is rooted in the gospel, but only a part of it. Besides the Gospel there are demands of power and right without which human society cannot exist . . . . The state rests upon entirely different impulses and instincts from those which are cultivated by Jesus . . . . All constructions which attempt to explain the state from brotherly love to our neighbor are, considered historically, so much empty talk . . . . Not every doing of one's duty is Christian . . . . Hence we do not consult Jesus, when we are concerned with things which belong to the domain of the construction of the state and of Political Economy.[22]

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[20] *Luther's Works,* ed. Pelikan, Concordia, Vol. 21, 113.
[21] Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, 7.
[22] Frederick Naumann, Lutheran minister writing in 1917, cited by Ray H. Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms*, Herald Press, 1969, 73.

For an attempt to whitewash the horror of war the statement of E.I. Bosworth, Dean of Oberlin College, can scarcely be outdone. He spoke of the love and friendship with which a Christian soldier kills his enemy:

> The Christian soldier in friendship wounds the enemy. In friendship he kills the enemy. In friendship he receives the wound of the enemy. He keeps his friendly heart while the enemy is killing him. His heart never consigns the enemy to hell. He never hates. After he has wounded the enemy, he hurries to his side at the earliest possible moment with all the friendly ministration possible . . . . [23]

Apparently he had not taken to heart the realistic view of war expressed by Lord John Fisher:

> The humanizing of war! You might as well talk of the humanizing of hell! When a silly ass [the term is comparatively inoffensive as used in England] at the Hague got up and talked about the amenities of civilized warfare and putting your prisoners' feet in hot water and giving them gruel, my reply, I regret to say, was considered totally unfit for publication. As if war could be civilized! If I'm in command when war breaks out I shall issue my order: — "The essence of war is violence. Moderation in war is imbecility. Hit first, hit hard, and hit everyone."[24]

During the Second World War, the Bishop of London, in the name of Christ, adopted the same hard-hitting line:

> Kill Germans — kill them not for the sake of killing, but for the sake of saving the world. Kill good as well as bad; kill young people as well as old; kill those who have shown kindness to our wounded as well as those fiends who crucified the Canadian Sergeant . . . . As I have said a thousand times, I look upon it as a war for purity, I look upon everyone who dies in it as a martyr.[25]

The extraordinary confusion of voices in this matter of Christians and war forces one to ask: What is the nature of the religion we in the West have grown up to call Christianity? Does it truthfully reflect the teaching

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[23] *Ibid.,* 67.

[24] Cited by Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes to War and Peace*, Abingdon Press, 1960, 247.

[25] *Ibid.,* 207.

of the Bible? What has happened to the vital New Testament faith as distinct from this amalgam of various kinds of Greek philosophy, Platonism and Stoicism with a few selected Bible references? How may this worldly Christendom be matched with the community envisaged by Jesus as uncompromisingly non-violent ("By this [love] all men will recognize you as my disciples") and often the prey of organized religion ("The time will come when those who think they are doing God a service will be killing you")? After all, is the label "just war" anything other than a cover-up for disregarding the "hard sayings" of Jesus? Do not those who ask, "How shall *we* as a nation deal with our enemies?" betray their solidarity with the systems of this world? Do not the New Testament Christians speak rather of "them," the world, and "us," the Christians, a separated colony of ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20) dwelling as "resident aliens" (1 Peter 2:11) in a hostile world?

The underlying difference between the advocates of "just war" and the pacifists is simply this: the former believe it to be their duty to help "manage" the state *now* while the biblical pacifists believe that the state cannot be made peaceful this side of the second coming. The latter position maintains with Paul that Satan is still "god of this age." It therefore holds that the church has "nothing to do with judging [i.e. managing] those outside [the church]" (1 Cor. 5:12). At the same time it has a clear eschatology, recognizing that Christians are destined, *at the future establishment of the Kingdom*, to "manage the world" (1 Cor. 6:2, Moffat). At that time the church will indeed be in charge of world affairs. Scripture is filled with promises that the believers are candidates for royal office with the Messiah (Mat. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; 1 Cor. 4:8; 6:2, 2; Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 20:4). Until that moment comes, the church must maintain a status of "resident alien," suffering, if necessary, in a world hostile to the spirit of the Messiah.

III. Concluding Recommendations

The only antidote to the centuries-long Constantinian concubinage into which churches have fallen is a strongly confessional theology of peace. The church must constantly bring to mind the horror of what is even now still contemplated as a reasonable way of effecting a permanent peace. It must insist that plans to destroy the earth invite the wrath of God, not salvation ("God will destroy those who destroy the earth" — Rev. 11:18). It must urge believers to remember that Jesus said that Christians

are not to be "of this world" and since the whole world is in the "power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), not to join hands with it. The State is evil, under the control of the "principalities and powers and the 'cosmocrats' (*kosmokratores*) of this present darkness" (Eph. 6:12). If post-Constantinian Christianity were on the side of Jesus it could never have contemplated the manufacture and stockpiling of weapons so powerful that they may now destroy every major city five times over. We must never let the church forget that even in l985:

> the nuclear weapons stockpiled by the US, USSR, UK, France and China are equivalent to 1,000,000 Hiroshima bombs . . . The 50,000 warheads and bombs in nuclear arsenals today include 17,400 weapons in the strategic forces of the superpowers. Their range is intercontinental. Each weapon is powerful enough to destroy a large city — if there were that many cities in the world . . . . MX, officially called Peace-maker, carries ten independently targeted warheads and has a destructive power over 300 times as powerful as Little Boy, which killed or maimed 200,000 civilians at Hiroshima.[26]

We end as we began, with the confident assertion that only the "Anabaptist" refusal to take life does justice to the mandate of Jesus to his church. Even though the theory of the "lesser of two evils" has made its appeal to the vast majority of those who have claimed to be Christians, "sober reflection will indicate at once that such an ethic moves on an entirely different level from that proclaimed by Christ."[27] The same document says so eloquently that:

> for Christians to allow themselves to be drawn into taking sides in war is a denial of the unity of the Body of Christ. The Christian Church is not provincial or national, it is universal. Therefore every war in which churches on each side condone or support the national effort becomes a civil war within the Church. Is not this state of affairs where Christian kills Christian an even greater breach of ecumenical fellowship than the deplorable confessional differ- ences that have rent our unity? Indeed, can we as Christians expect the Lord to restore our unity in worship as long as we put one

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[26] Ruth L. Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures,* World Priorities, 1983, 13ff.

[27] *Peace Is the Will of God*, A Testimony to the World Council of Churches, by the Historic Peace Churches and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, l953, 13.

another to death on the field of battle? Therefore we humbly submit: The refusal to participate in and to support war in any form is the only course compatible with the high calling of the Church of Christ.[28]

Amen! But will they hear? Bonhoeffer was not heard by the ecumenical church when he issued a prophetic call for repentance and obedience. We end with his words which reflect an urgently needed theology of peace-making:

> Our task as theologians consists only in accepting the commandment of peace, not as a question open to discussion. Peace on earth is not a problem but a commandment given at Christ's coming. There are two ways of reacting to this command from God: the unconditional, blind obedience of action or the hypocritical question of the Serpent: "Yea, hath God said . . . ?" This question is the mortal enemy of all real peace . . . .
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> Brothers in Christ obey His word; they do not doubt or question, but keep his commandments of peace. They are not ashamed, in defiance of the world, even to speak of eternal peace. They cannot take up arms against Christ himself — yet this is what they do if they take up arms against one another![29]

A practical plan for the recovery of pre-Constantinian faith would be:

1) A concerted effort by the peace churches to call *their own membership* back to a united, vigorous peace position.

2) A campaign to make this position known within all denominations, thus calling together a nucleus of non-violent believers.

3) The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom everywhere according to its original Messianic meaning, with peace as an essential requirement of discipleship — peace now between all believers, as necessary preparation for entrance into the Kingdom of God, through survival until the Parousia or by resurrection at that time (1 Cor. 15:23).

4) The reinstatement of eschatology (without retreat from biblical apocalypticism) as the first locus of dogmatic theology, with ethics and ecclesiology as a close second, followed by an examination of other damage done to biblical Christianity by the overlay of Greek philosophy.

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[28] *Ibid.*, 17.
[29] Bonhoeffer, *Briefe, Aufsätze, Dokumente*, 1928-1942, 447, 448.