

Some Theological Reflections on War and Peace

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1. There is no detailed, exact view of war and peace in Scripture. But there are biblical and theological moorings. As a theologian, I'd like to use most of my opening comments briefly thinking about these moorings.
2. I'd aver that it is best that two 'poles' not be neglected: First, we ought to emphasize both the condescension and exaltation of Jesus Christ. We should affirm Christ's birth, suffering, death and burial, along with resurrection, ascension, reign at right hand of Father, and second coming in judgment (NT and Apostles Creed). These include both the foolishness of the cross, self-sacrifice, suffering, and gratuitous mercy, but also new life, judgment against evil and injustice, and ultimate victory. Judgment without the cross leads to triumphalism, love without resistance to evil invites tyranny.
3. Second, there is both continuity and discontinuity of OT and NT. Too much focus on one or the other creates problems for our faith. On the one hand, we do not want to be Marcionites; we must preserve the Jewishness of Jesus, 12 tribes = 12 apostles, one high priest, Davidic shepherd king, and the inspiration and authority of OT (3/4 of Bible). On the other hand, there is a sense that the church is a non-nationalist distinctively NT entity, Jesus said "I will build my church" (Mt 16:18). Jesus is not merely a hiccup in redemptive history, but is its epicenter.
4. It seems to me that along the typical spectrum of Christian views on war and peace, advocates of pacifism and 'holy war' fail to maintain these biblical and theological poles, while some form of just war theory makes best sense of specific biblical passages as well as these more general biblical and theological moorings. Pacifism over-emphasizes the condescension of Christ and discontinuities with the OT, while 'holy war' proponents over-emphasize the exaltation of Christ and continuities with the OT. Frankly, I'm more worried about the latter.
5. David Dark, in *The Gospel According to America*, argues that our besetting sin as a country is the tendency to over-identify the U.S. with Jesus, and patriotism with Christianity. For some this seems to foster a belief in America's messianic role in our world and legitimates the use of military force to spread the gospel of democracy and freedom. Yet since Christ the people of God are no longer defined by national boundaries, and I cannot help but wonder if this violent gospel of 'freedom' produces peoples more enslaved than ever to their anger and thirst for vengeance. Besides, practically speaking, military force has proved very bad at spreading political ideologies and cultivating benevolent societies.
6. It is true that we are to turn the other cheek and love our enemy (Mt 5), but we are also told to pluck out an eye if it causes us to stumble. And we are also told that we must hate our father and mother (Lk 14:26). The hyperbole in these passages seem obvious to me, so if it is said that we must literally turn the other cheek under *all*

circumstances, this has troubling implications in other areas (e.g. we'd have a church of blind dysfunctional Christians). The cross itself is both an inspiration towards self-sacrificial love, but on classical atonement theories is also a just punishment for human corruption. In addition I think that the implications for Christian life of the Christ's resurrection, present reign, and future judgment, as a military victor (Rev 19!), are often neglected by pacifists.

7. Specific biblical passages give credence to the possibility of just use of force against evil. Abraham rescued Lot by means of military force (Gen 14), and the battles of Joshua, many judges, and David all seem to have God's approval. The Book of Hebrews commends David and numerous judges for their military exploits (Heb 11:33-34). John the Baptist, Jesus (Lk 7:9), and Peter (to Cornelius) all preach and minister to soldiers without telling them to stop soldiering. Jesus even drives out moneychangers with a whip of cords (Jn 2:15). But most perspicuous of all, Rom 13 expressly gives civil government (established by God) the power of the 'sword' (Grk. *machaira*, compare to Gen 34:26; Jdg 3:16 in LXX) to execute God's justice on the evildoer. So while all war involves sin, the total moral proscription of all war and use of force appears to overstep the biblical witness.
8. Nonetheless I am a *reluctant* just war theorist. I believe that ultimately grace is what will bring redemption to our world, and all efforts to avoid war should be taken, along with more serious self-criticism than is typically the case, especially since sin and pride are deeply entrenched in attacker and attacked alike. We must attempt to reconcile the conviction that taking human life is seriously wrong, that states have a duty to defend their citizens, and defend justice, and that protecting innocent human life and defending important moral values sometimes requires willingness to use force and violence.
9. I accept most typical just war criteria for determination of the justice of resorting to war in the first place (*jus ad bellum*), such as just cause, proper authority, right intention, probability of success, and proportionality. I find it hard to justify a preemptive war based on these criteria. I also accept most typical criteria for determination of the justice of conduct within war after it has begun (*jus in bello*), such as obedience to all international laws on weapons prohibition, discrimination and non-combatant immunity, proportionality, benevolent quarantine for prisoners of war (POWs), soldiers may not use weapons or methods which are "evil in themselves" (*mala in se*), and no reprisals. Based on the principles of proportionality and *mala in se* I suppose I am a virtual nuclear pacifist. But I'm sure my colleagues will take up these criteria in more detail.