

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR: A MATTER OF PERSONAL CONSCIENCE

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The issue of whether a Christian should participate in war and, if so, to what extent is very complex. The Christian must balance biblical revelation concerning the authority of the state with his individual responsibility to love his enemies and to do good to all men. A survey of three attempts to achieve this balance (the activist, the pacifist, and the selectivist) reveals inadequacies in each. A position that mediates between these positions appears to be a proper Christian response to the biblical norms. This position may be termed non-combatant participation.

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INTRODUCTION

THE issue of whether the individual Christian should participate in war has been discussed from the early days of the Church. Tertullian, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin are but a few of those who addressed the problem. The central issue has been and remains the ethical conflict between a Christian's responsibility to serve his government and the command of Christ to love his enemies. Godly men seeking to apply biblical principles have arrived at different answers to that conflict. George Weigel points out the lesson to be learned from the diverse answers to this chronic problem:

The very complexity of the Christian tradition's teaching reminds us that there are no easy or simple answers to the dilemma of security and peace. In a public climate where the glib slogan or the bumper-sticker phrase often defines the policy debate, the richly textured tradition of the Church quietly tells us that there is no simple solution to the moral problem of war, and that an indignant self-righteousness is a warning sign of errors. Moreover, the fact that the Christian Churches have sustained a pluralistic dialogue on the ethics of war and peace reminds

us to acknowledge the validity of another's moral concerns-especially the concerns of those with whom we disagree. We should search in others' perspectives for possible hints and traces of truth that might be brought into our own.¹

The Brethren response to this concern has not always been unanimous. However, the doctrine of non-resistance has long been held in Brethren circles and is now held by many in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. The purpose of this study is to survey the Issue and analyze non-resistance in the face of the potential of conflicting demands placed upon the believer.

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

The Authority of the State

The subject of civil government pervades both the OT and the NT. It is an aspect of God's providence, a fact of biblical history, and is integral to biblical prophecy. One basic theme of the Bible is that civil government is ordained by God.

While the government of Israel receives special attention, the OT also mentions other civil governments. Joseph and Daniel were Jews who served as leading officials in non-theocratic governments. Amos 2:1-3 points out that God held the government of Moab accountable for the use of its sword. Assyria was to learn the same lesson (Isa 10:5-19). Daniel records that God, after previous reminders on the subject (Dan 2:21, 37-38), called King Nebuchadnezzar to account for not recognizing "that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes" (Dan 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21).

Thus, the OT consistently indicates that God has ordained government wherever it is found. The nations with their variety of social organizations and magistrates operate as divinely established institutions. These governments are accountable to God. Since government is given by God, it follows that to disobey government is to disobey God.

This theme of the OT is continued in the NT. Government is presented as a human institution reflecting various forms but deserving the believer's submission for the Lord's sake (1 Pet 2:13). It is accountable to God for its ministry of punishing evildoers and supporting those who do good (1 Pet 2:14). Thus, it is the will of God for the

¹ George Weigel, *Peace & Freedom: Christian Faith, Democracy and the Problem of War* (n.p.: The Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1983) 5. For a helpful annotated bibliography of writings on this complex issue see David M. Scholer, "Early Christian Attitudes to War and Military Service: A Selective Bibliography," *TSF Bulletin* 8: I (1984) 23-24.

believer to have a clear testimony before the world by obeying civil authority (I Pet 2: 15). In their practice and teaching both Jesus and Paul consistently maintain this position.

Jesus lived in a conquered province in an empire whose imperialistic ruler stood for everything that was antagonistic to the revealed faith of the Jews. Jesus was not a revolutionary but instead conformed to the laws of civil government.² Nowhere did he denounce the legitimate power of the state. Jesus paid his taxes (Matt 17:24-27). He recognized the authority of Pontius Pilate, even when Pilate unjustly delivered him over to his enemies (John 19:11). Jesus reminded him, however, that his authority was not autonomous (John 19:10-11) but that it was delegated from the One who was above.³ Thus, in practice and precept Jesus recognized that the government under which he lived was ordained of God.

The most extensive teaching in the NT on the subject of the Christian and civil government is found in Paul's letter to the church located in the capital of the Roman Empire. Rom 13:1-7 establishes some basic principles which are at the very heart of the question concerning the believer's participation in war.

First, this passage clearly establishes that the Christian must obey the de facto government of the region in which he lives (13:1). The fact that a civil government is organized and in operation gives evidence that it has been ordained by God. Paul makes no distinction between good rulers and bad ones or between pleasant laws and unpleasant ones. The command is not unconditional in light of the fact that there are times that "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). However, the normal expectation of God is that Christians will obey authorities and their laws.⁴

Second, there are several reasons given for this requirement. These reasons give insight into the proper God-given function of government. The "powers that be," no matter how pagan and impious, are functioning under the authority of God (13:1). It follows then that to resist such authority is to resist that which God has established and

² Robert D. Culver, *Toward a Biblical View of Civil Government* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 183-84.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 797; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (2 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954) 2.418; and R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943) 1263-65.

⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979] 2. 662) demonstrates that the verb used here "can denote the recognition that the other person, as Christ's representative one (cf. Mt. 25.40, 45), has an infinitely greater claim upon one than one has upon oneself and the conduct which flows naturally from such a recognition." This passage is not teaching uncritical and blind obedience to authority's every command since the final arbiter in a particular situation is not civil authority but God.

to face his condemnation (13:2).⁵ Furthermore, on its part the government is expected to inflict punishment upon evildoers and approve those who do good (13:3-4).⁶

Third, the obedience expected of every person (13: 1) is specifically applied as a moral issue to the believer (13:5). The believer should not submit simply for utilitarian reasons. He must obey because he knows that it is right. This includes paying taxes to rulers, who are functioning as servants of God (13:6).

Fourth, it is especially significant .that this passage reiterates the power of government to take a human life (13:4). The sword represents the God -given authority of civil government to inflict God's temporal punishment upon evildoers, including the death penalty.⁷ While this passage deals specifically which matters of criminal justice and civil order, It has also been applied to the military power possessed by government. The power of the sword is extrapolated to deal with evil on an international level.⁸

Therefore, the practice and teaching of both the OT and NT establishes that God .has ordained the human institution of civil government. He expects his people to, submit to its authority m every way not inconsistent with his revelation.

The Christian's Relation to All Men

The Christian also has specific biblical direction regarding the personal use of violence. This is the other side of the issue. In both OT and NT there is taught a personal ethic of nonretaliation and nonviolence to neighbors.⁹ The positive and active responsibility of the samt has always been to demonstrate kindness.

An OT passage which seems, to capture the essence of what many feel is the NT teaching on this subject (Rom 12:20) is found in Prov 25:21-22. Jesus' teaching that the whole law hung upon two commandments, one of which was to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 23:39), was based upon Lev 19:18.

Thus, OT believers lived under an ethical system which proscribed any act of personal revenge. Self-defense was permitted, but with

⁵ There is a twofold aspect of this judgment: civil and divine. See Cranfield, *Romans*, 2. 664; and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 2. 149.

⁶ This praise of good works may be conscious or unconscious, willing or unwilling, as the idea of reward is not implicit in the terms used. Even unjust acts of persecution by civil government may ultimately bring praise and glory to God. See Cranfield, *Romans*, 2. 664-65; and Murray, *Romans*, 2. 151.

⁷ Culver, *Civil Government*, 254.

⁸ Cranfield, *Romans*, 2. 667.

⁹ Robert D. Culver, "Justice is Something Worth Fighting For," *Christianity Today* 24 (November 7, 1980) 16.

severe limitations.¹⁰ Thus, the believer is not faced with the alternative of a NT or an OT ethic. The OT lays the foundation for the NT ethic which renounces the use of violence against others.

The position of nonresistance derives its name from NT teaching in Matt 5:39, "Do not resist him who is evil." A simple reading of Matt 5:38-48 shows that there is at least some form of personal nonresistance expected of the believer. Even those who reject the application of this passage to participation in war agree that the passage is dealing with personal offenses and that "the believer must have the spirit of nonresistance so much a part of his life that he only retaliates as a last resort, and then only in a continued spirit of love."¹¹

The believer is commanded in the NT to act positively toward his fellow man. It is not a matter of merely having a spirit of nonresistance. He is commanded to love his enemies (Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27; Rom 13:8-10). This love for enemies is expressed in doing good for them (Rom 12:20) and in praying for them (Matt 5:44). Those who persecute the believer should receive back a blessing (Rom 12:14). Persecution must not be answered by taking revenge (Rom 12:19). As far as it is possible, the believer must be at peace with all men (Rom 12:18) as he pursues the things that make for peace (Rom 14:19). Paul summarized this lifestyle when he instructed the Galatians:

And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of "the faith [Gal 6:9-10, NASB].

In the teachings of both Jesus and Paul the active lifestyle of doing good to all men and responding positively to persecutors is clearly commanded. The personal ethic of the believer is based on an attitude of nonresistance and nonviolence towards others.

THE MAIN ALTERNATIVES

The Christian world falls into two broad camps in response to the question of the believer's participation in war. One side responds affirmatively but some limit the kind of war in which a Christian

¹⁰ Ibid., 16-17.

¹¹ Charles G. Stoner, "The Teaching of Jesus in Relation to the Doctrine of Nonresistance" (Master of Theology thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1970) 31.

¹² This passage cannot be restricted to love within the fellowship of believers (cf. Murray, *Romans*, 2. 160; Hendriksen, *Romans*, 2.439; and Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God's Grace* [Chicago: Moody, 1973] 224-25).

should participate. The other side responds negatively but is divided on the question of noncombatant participation. Each position attempts to practice biblical principles.

The Activist

In the post-Vietnam War era the position of the activist became less prominent. However, new movements closely associating the political New Right with some in the Fundamentalist camp could possibly lead to a grass roots acceptance of activism. The activist position is based on the principle that the believer is bound to submit himself to the divinely ordained government. Thus he must participate in any war his government enters.

Operating on the assumption that the government of the United States is based on Christian principles as well as self-evident truths which make it the enemy of tyranny and injustice, these advocates of patriotism are convinced that their loyalty to the state in time of war is essential both politically and spiritually.¹³

A modern advocate of this position, Harold O. J. Brown, attempts to justify both the preventative war and the crusade. A preventative war is begun in anticipation of an act of aggression rather than in response to it. "A preventative war intends to forestall an evil that has not yet occurred."¹⁴ The crusade, however, is "a war waged to remedy a past atrocity, especially one recognized as such for spiritual or religious reasons."¹⁵ Brown views Israel fighting for its [homeland as the prime example of a justified crusade. Wars of national liberation and revolutions motivated by a concern for ethical principle would also fit in the category of crusade.¹⁶

Brown argues that the individual is not in the position to make any decision regarding the relative merits of the opposing nations in a war.

It is impossible to require each citizen to know the facts that will enable him to judge the justness of a particular war. In the period when he might possibly influence the decision whether to go to war, he has too little information. Later, when the war has broken out, the information may not do him any good-"military necessity" will override all other considerations.¹⁷

¹³ William E. Nix, "The Evangelical and War," *JETS* 13 (1970) 138.

¹⁴ Harold O. J. Brown, "The Crusade or Preventative War" in *War: Four Christian Views*, Robert G. Clouse, ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981) 155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

Brown puts full responsibility upon the leaders of the nation. Because the individual is unable to make an informed decision he is not expected to attempt it. Since the leadership bears full responsibility, the individual is delivered from any moral responsibility.

An individual is morally obliged to refuse to participate in individual acts that he knows to be wrong, but he cannot be held responsible for knowing that the war itself is wrong. If he does know it and acts upon that knowledge by refusing to fight, he deserves praise. But if he obeys his orders and fights, it is very hard to condemn him. Individual responsibility means not making the decision to launch a wrong war, when the citizen has the right to participate in decision making, and not performing wrong acts in war. However, if a wrong decision has been made by the government, it is hard to hold the individual responsible to resist it.¹⁸

This is the essential argument of the activist position. However, this approach is disputable.

First, to argue that a believer must always submit to his government implies that his nation is a "chosen people." This is not the case, since only Israel, now set aside, had any claim to being a theocracy.¹⁹

Moreover, the Bible makes it clear that there are higher spiritual obligations which may require the believer to disobey the government in order to obey God. In the OT Daniel, his three fellow exiles, and the Hebrew midwives in Egypt stood against government edicts due to higher spiritual obligations. In the NT the apostles chose to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19-20 and 5:29).

It seems clear that the believer cannot escape his responsibility to make a decision regarding his participation in war. To argue otherwise could lead to moral bankruptcy. However, one question raised by Brown still remains. In this day of propaganda controlled by sinful men on all sides, how is the Christian to know that he is not killing others in the name of a cause that is ultimately unjust?

The Pacifist

The pacifist takes the position that the believer should avoid any participation in any war. There are many forms of pacifism founded upon philosophical, political, or social agendas. There is a new breed of "peace" scholarship which converts the gospel of Jesus as seen in traditional "peace" churches into a political program, including the abolition of national defense and the complete elimination of war in

¹⁸ Ibid., 165-66.

¹⁹ Nix, "The Evangelical and War," 140.

the world. It has as its goal the remodeling of society.²⁰ However, the present study is focusing on those who seek a biblical base for their position. Myron Augsburger, a Mennonite and a spokesman of the historic "peace church" movement, states, "I want this stance to be clearly interpreted as evangelical and biblically based and different from humanistic and moralistic pacifism."²¹

In contrast to the activist who has one basic argument for his with attached corollaries which form the foundation of the pacifist position.

First, many pacifists cite the pacifism of the pre-Constantine church. Christenson and Bainton make this one of their primary supports.²² Augsburger himself is not adverse to including historical data in his discussion,²³ though it does not have a primary role. It is indisputably clear that the pre-Constantine church did resist participation in war. Admitting that opposition to war was almost unanimous in the second and third century Church, Culver points out,

Evangelicals today reject many views of the second and third centuries: the developing legalism, dependence on rites called sacraments for salvation (sacerdotalism), transfer of all liturgical acts and church government to a priestly class (prelacy). So we are surely free to re-examine early views on war.²⁴

Accordingly, in this study the use of church history to support pacifism will be set aside. The focus will be biblical arguments.

Second, Augsburger points out that the Church as a voluntary association of believers is "a minority in society always separate from the state (any state, recognizing that God has ordained government for the good of the people). The church is not coterminous with the state."²⁵ Hoyt points to John 18:36 where Christ declared to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (NASH). Believers are thus part of a kingdom separate from

²⁰ Robert Culver, "Between War and Peace: Old Debate in a New Age," *Christianity Today* 24 (October 24, 1980) 51.

²¹ Myron S. Augsburger, "Beating Swords Into Plowshares," *Christianity Today* 20 (November 21, 1975) 8. "

²² Reo M. Christenson, "Christians and Nuclear Aggression," *The Christian Century* 100 (May 25, 1983) 522; and Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960) 66-84.

²³ Myron S. Augsburger, "Christian Pacifism" in *War: Four Christian Views*, 92.

²⁴ Culver, "Justice Is Something Worth Fighting For," 14.

²⁵ Augsburger, "Christian Pacifism," 83.

the state and have a responsibility to live as pilgrims and strangers upon the earth. Their conduct is to be conditioned by their heavenly citizenship.²⁶

William Nix in response argues that this view "assumes that believers must be a minority group within society and be without political responsibility for the actions of the state."²⁷ Actually, when Christianity became the dominant religion, its role in society caused many changes.

The pacifist position often leads to a "dropoutism" mentality, including the refusal to pay taxes or to serve in any political office. There is a disengagement from the whole body politic.²⁸ However, this mentality is not intrinsic to the pacifist position. Augsburg, for example, does not rule out all political participation by Christians. He believes that Christians may serve in political positions so long as they do not attempt to create a state church. However, "they should not consider holding positions where they could not both fulfill the obligations of the office and remain consistent with their membership in the kingdom of Christ."²⁹ Nevertheless, the pacifist movement has unfortunately all too often fallen into isolationism or has led to a refusal to pay taxes.

Separation of Church and State is an important truth that needs to be underscored. Obviously, the use of force or political power to further the ministry of the Church is forbidden.³⁰ Though the Church is separate from the state, the Christian functions in both realms. Since government is ordained by God, serving the government is not in itself immoral.

Neither Hoyt nor Augsburg would disagree with what has just been stated. What they are saying, however, is that "since the church and state belong to separate kingdoms or spheres of operation, the methods for defense and offense should also be different."³¹ There is a dual obligation recognized by most Christians. Christians recognize that some things which are expected from them by God are not properly matters for legislative action on the part of the civil government.

We operate under the myth that we are a Christian nation, and we seek to interpret for society an ethic we can bless as Christians. We need a

²⁶ Herman A. Hoyt, "Nonresistance" in *War: Four Christian Views*, 32.

²⁷ Nix, "The Evangelical and War," 136.

²⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971) 175.

²⁹ Augsburg, "Christian Pacifism," 89.

³⁰ Stoner, "The Teaching of Jesus Christ in Relation to the Doctrine of Non-resistance," 36-37.

³¹ Hoyt, "Nonresistance," 32.

new awareness of the pluralism of the New Testament. The crucial issue is the difference between the Church and the world; the Church operates "within the perfection of Christ," while the world operates outside the perfection or will of Christ. Only an understanding of this can save us from a cultural religion and from a civil religion.³²

Simply appealing to separation of Church and State does not prove the pacifists' case. However, it does open the possibility that there may be things which individual Christians should not do which nevertheless are not forbidden for the entire nation.

A third pacifist argument, related to what has just been discussed above, emphasizes the priority of the believer's obligation to his heavenly citizenship. "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."³³ All those who name the name" [of Christ are translated into his kingdom (John 3:3,5; Col:13) and are no longer of this world, even as Christ is not of this world (John 17: 16).³⁴ Augsburg describes the consequences of this affiliation in relation to nationalism and allegiance to any particular nation:

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. This is not a position which can be expected of the world nor asked of the government as such. ...The Christian can only encourage the government to be the government and to let the church be the church.³⁵

Augsburger believes that this outlook on the primary loyalty of the Christian is even more basic to the NT than the principle of love.³⁶ This difference between the Church and the State points to a distinction that must be recognized. What Israel did as a nation or what was commanded in the OT theocracy is not necessarily binding upon the NT believer.³⁷

Up to this point in the argument, there may not be much with which most Christians would disagree. The priority obligation to obey

³² Augsburg, "Beating Swords Into Plowshares," 8. ,

³³ John Drescher, "Why Christians Shouldn't Carry Swords," *Christianity Today* 24 (November 7, 1980) 21-22.

³⁴ Hoyt, "Nonresistance," 32.

³⁵ Augsburg, "Christian Pacifism," 87.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁷ Tom Fitts, "A Dispensational Approach to War" (Master of Theology thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1973) 52-55; and Hoyt, "Nonresistance," 39-42.

God rather than men is widely recognized. This alone does not establish a basis upon which the pacifist can refuse all participation in war. However, this priority does come into conflict with a believer's active participation in war. Augsburg takes the reasoning forward another step when he states, "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 a Christian brother or sister in another nation."³⁸ Those allowing participation in war to the point of taking human life have not provided an answer to this problem. Should obedience to the government include a Christian taking up arms and harming a fellow Christian simply because he is wearing the uniform of another nation? Fourth, pacifists point to the Church's commission (Matt 28:19-20) and argue that the work of evangelism has priority over military service.

Biblical pacifism's objective is to lead others to know Christ and follow him, thus experiencing reconciliation with God and others and becoming ministers of the gospel of reconciliation to everyone. To do this it is impossible to participate in any program of ill will, retaliation, or war that conflicts with Christ.³⁹

The argument is developed along two different lines. Augsburg and Drescher⁴⁰ ask whether a Christian, whose basic mission is evangelism, should participate in war to the point of taking the life of a person for whom Christ died. Hoyt reasons that if witnessing is the supreme business of believers, then military service would exhaust their time and effort. He adds that noncombatant service would provide believers with opportunity to obey.⁴¹

Arthur Holmes, in response to Hoyt and Augsburg, effectively counters these arguments. He points out that Christians in the military will have time and opportunity to reach people who otherwise might never hear the gospel. Moreover, there are many occupations which could become so engrossing as to interfere with the Christian's responsibility to witness.⁴² He adds,

As for the argument that killing prevents the victim's accepting God's mercy, the same plea could be leveled against giving the sword to governments, against the Old Testament uses of divinely commissioned

³⁸ Augsburg, "Christian Pacifism," 60.

³⁹ Drescher, "Why Christians Shouldn't Carry Swords," 16.

⁴⁰ Augsburg, "Christian Pacifism," 90; and Drescher, "Why Christians Shouldn't Carry Swords," 21.

⁴¹ Hoyt, "Nonresistance," 41.

⁴² Arthur F. Holmes, "The Just War" in *War: Four Christian Views*, 67.

force, and against God himself for allowing human mortality at all. Even more tragic is the fact that in any case not all will be saved.⁴³

The pacifist might reply that the Christian is separate from the government, and is in a dispensation different from the OT saints. He is not sovereign like God is. But the pacifist has to face the issue of taking a life in self-defense. To be consistent he would have to argue that killing a person in self-defense is also wrong since it would result in sending that person to judgment while the believer would go to heaven. To be consistent, the evangelism argument must apply on the level of self-defense as well as participation in war.⁴⁴

The final argument presented by the pacifists involves the basic principle of love for one's enemies taught by Jesus both in his sermons and by his example. Probably no other area of the discussion seems to evoke as much emotion on all sides as this does. Every position wants to view itself as consistent with the life and teaching of Jesus. Pacifists especially make this an important tenet in their position. The argument is developed in three steps.

First, pacifism is consistent with the lifestyle of Jesus. He came to save and not to destroy (Luke 9:54-56). He went about doing good and healing (Acts 10:38). When he was reviled and suffered persecution, he did not revile or threaten in return but instead offered himself on the cross (1 Pet 2:23-24) while forgiving those who crucified him. Believers are thus exhorted to follow in his footsteps (1 Pet 2:21) and to walk as he walked (1 John 2:6).⁴⁵

Second, Jesus made explicit that which was implicit in the OT. He gave OT revelation a qualitatively new dimension in the Sermon on the Mount.⁴⁶ According to that teaching, the believer should now respond to evil by imparting good, not evil. He is to love his enemies. The believer is also warned that "those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52).

Third, the teaching of the apostles continues this emphasis. Paul emphasizes doing good and loving enemies (Romans 12-13; Gal 6:10). Peter challenges his readers not to return evil for evil (1 Pet 3:9).

In response to such arguments one must examine what is really meant by the biblical statements. Jesus was using an extreme example in order to show that his disciples were to bend over backwards in matters of personal affronts. They were not to misuse the right of lawful retaliation. Jesus was merely stressing that in the matter of

⁴³ Arthur F. Holmes, "A Just War Response" in *War: Four Christian Views*, 108.

⁴⁴ Geisler, *Ethics*, 166.

⁴⁵ Hoyt, "Nonresistance," 40.

⁴⁶ Fitts, "A Dispensational Approach to War," 55-57.

He was not teaching unlimited nonresistance, but rather that the believer must have the spirit of nonresistance so that he retaliates only as a last resort, and then in the continued spirit of love.⁴⁷ The command does not mean that Christians may never defend themselves. The point is that they should refrain from revengeful retaliation.⁴⁸

Further, it appears that both Jesus and Paul did not take the command to turn the other cheek with wooden literalness. Jesus challenged those who struck him (John 18:23). Thus, the statements from the Sermon on the Mount must be taken as emphasizing the heart and the emotions and an intelligent, kind response to the true needs of people.⁴⁹

The Selectivist

Those who view both the activist and the pacifist positions as extreme and problematic must modify one or the other. Modifying the activist position, the selectivist⁵⁰ "maintains that the believer is obligated to submit himself to authority until and unless that authority compels him to place that authority before God."⁵¹ While accepting the individual's moral responsibility, this view also believes that there are times when morality demands a call to arms.

The selectivist position has developed, since the time of Augustine, a set of criteria which enable the believer to judge the justness of a war. If a war is seen to be just, the believer may fully participate. Any unjust war is to be resisted. The believer must accept the consequences of his decision.

James Childress provides an extended discussion of the criteria involved in determination of a just war.⁵² The basic criteria presented there can be summarized as:

1. The proper authority has determined that a war is just and justified.
2. The requirement of a just cause demands that the reasons for undertaking a destructive war must be weighty and significant. War should be the last resort after all possible measures having reasonable expectation of success have been undertaken.

⁴⁷ Stoner, "The Teaching of Jesus Christ in Relation to the Doctrine of Non-resistance," 31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁹ Culver, "Justice Is Something Worth Fighting For," 20; and George W. Knight III, "Can a Christian Go to War?" *Christianity Today* 20 (November 21, 1975) 6.

⁵⁰ This category is used by Geisler. Nix used the term "mediativist" while others refer to the "just war" position. These are synonymous.

⁵¹ Nix, "The Evangelical War," 141.

⁵² James F. Childress, "Just-War Theories: The Bases, Interrelations, Priorities, and Functions of Their Criteria," *TS* 39 (1978) 427-45.

3. A formal declaration of war announcing the intention of and the (reasons for waging war is necessary. The use of military force is), the prerogative of governments and not individuals.
4. A reasonable hope of success which is defined as being broader than simple victory is also necessary. Success thus defined would limit the objectives of any war and rule out total destruction Of another nation's economic and political institutions.
5. The principle of proportionality requires that the means employed ~, take into account the limited objectives with total, unlimited war rexcluded.
6. The principle of just intention stresses that the war is initiated with the goal to secure a genuine peace for all the parties involved.⁵³

In response, pacifists point out that the development of nuclear weapons rules out the possibility of a just war. "The arguments for a 'just war' in history appear to be quite irrelevant in an age of mechanized and nuclear warfare."⁵⁴ Even a selectivist such as Geisler admits that "tactical nuclear weapons are a conceivable part of a limited war but megaton nuclear power is so devastating as to make such a war automatically unjust."⁵⁵ However, Culver, in defending the selectivist position, points out,

It is equally difficult, however, to maintain that even modern atomic warfare introduces a difference in principle from the destruction of Jericho recorded in the Bible. Or for that matter, it is difficult to argue that the Christian ought no longer to be willing to fight for the right because human suffering will be greater than in the past.⁵⁶

Culver consistently maintains the basic presuppositions and interpretations of the selectivist position. However, the selectivist cannot easily escape the problem of nuclear war and justifiable Christian participation in it.

After establishing a criteria for determining the justness of any war, the selectivist develops several lines of reasoning. There are five basic arguments held by most selectivists.

First, in response to some pacifists who appeal to the sixth commandment as forbidding any killing, the selectivist agrees that murder is forbidden but argues that not all life-taking is murder.⁵¹ Hoyt even admits that this is the case. The sixth commandment concerns personal hatred with intent to murder and is hardly comparable with

⁵³ Ibid.,435-39.

⁵⁴ Augsburg, "Beating Swords Into Plowshares," 7.

⁵⁵ Geisler, *Ethics*, 176.

⁵⁶ Culver, "Between War and Peace," 51. ..

⁵⁷ Knight, "Can a Christian Go to War?" 4; and Geisler, *Ethics*, 170.

personal responsibility in warfare which does not involve personal hatred.⁵⁸ Clearly God delegated the authority to take human life when he instituted capital punishment (Gen 9:6) and later incorporated it into the Mosaic Law. Every government, not just the theocratic government of Israel, has divine authority to take life.⁵⁹

The discussion goes further, however, to point to the OT precedents for just warfare. The story of Abraham's battle against the kings in Genesis 14 is cited as an example of unjust aggressors being resisted by the sword.⁶⁰ The destruction of the Canaanites along with the commands regarding the conduct of war in Deut 20:10-17 are used to support the view that God not only sanctioned the extermination of the Canaanites but also other peoples who would not accept a just peace. While no nation can claim special revelation from God commanding war or a theocratic right to wage war, it is clear that war is not always contrary to God's will.⁶¹ Culver points out that the OT commands both a nonretaliatory personal ethic and participation in war. Thus, such would be consistent for the Christian as well.⁶² Hoyt agrees that force was entrusted to governments, not to individuals in the OT. However, he points out that,

There are some who insist that the issues in Israel described in the Old Testament differ profoundly from the principles of the church in the New Testament. And because this is true, some Christians will insist that there should be no involvement of the individual Christian in warfare, and where it is permitted, it must be severely limited.⁶³ Both Augsburg and Hoyt point back to the basic presuppositions that there is a separation of Church and State and that the obligation to the Church takes precedence. At this point an important fact becomes clear; interpretation of individual passages is not the crucial issue. Rather, the basic presuppositions and theological stance of the interpreter will determine the conclusions reached.

Second, Jesus gave his highest words of praise to a soldier, the centurion of great faith (Matt 8:10). John the Baptist did not demand that soldiers leave the army, but that they not misuse their power for sinful goals in exacting by force what was not rightfully theirs (Luke 3:14). Peter was sent to Cornelius, a soldier who was described as being a righteous and God-fearing man (Acts 10:22). In

⁵⁸ Hoyt, "A Nonresistant Response" in *War: Four Christian Views*, 137.

⁵⁹ Geisler, *Ethics*, 170-71.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 173; and Knight, "Can a Christian Go to War?" 4-5.

⁶² Culver, "Justice Is Something Worth Fighting For," 17.

⁶³ Hoyt, "A Nonresistant Response," 138.

none of these encounters are these soldiers told that being a soldier [was incompatible with their faith].⁶⁴

Augsburger responds that this is an argument from silence. By the same logic one could argue for slavery, a stance once taken by some American theologians, since the NT did not tell masters to free their slaves.⁶⁵ Further, no one knows how these soldiers responded to participation in pagan sacrifices and emperor worship as part of the Roman army. It is just as easy to argue that these soldiers would have had to leave military service in order to obey Christ.

Third, at one point Jesus commanded his disciples to buy a sword in contrast with previous instructions (Luke 22:35-36). The disciples already had two swords in their possession and the Lord declared them to be enough (22:38). In contrast, Jesus later rebuked Peter for using his sword on the high priest's servant (John 18: 11, Luke 22:51, Matt 26:52). He admonished Peter that those who took the sword would perish by the sword.

The selectivist points to these passages and concludes "that although there may be some symbolic meaning to the instruction of Christ to buy a sword, He is primarily preparing His disciples to assume the normal means of self-defense and provision in a world in which kingdom ideals are not yet realized."⁶⁶ While swords are not valid weapons to fight spiritual battles, they are legitimate tools for self-defense. Thus, Jesus is sanctioning the use of an instrument of death in defense against an unjust aggressor.⁶⁷

Some pacifists respond that the purpose of the disciples' swords could not have been for self-defense since this would contradict Jesus' teaching of submission to persecution. The limitation to only two swords is cited to show that the purpose of the swords was not self-defense. Luke 22:37, beginning with "for," gives the real purpose-to fulfill prophecy. By carrying swords and meeting in a large group they would be open to the charge of being transgressors.⁶⁸ However, this interpretation of the passage seems forced. The two swords were real swords. There is no evidence that Jesus considered the disciples to be the transgressors referred to in 22:37.

Hoyt admits that this is a difficult passage to interpret. However, he has a problem extrapolating the two swords into a just war conducted by civil government:

⁶⁴ Knight, "Can a Christian Go to War?" 5. ,

⁶⁵ Augsburger, "Christian Pacifism," 84.

⁶⁶ Stoner, "The Teaching of Jesus Christ in Relation to the Doctrine of Non-resistance," 43. "

⁶⁷ Geisler, *Ethics*, 171; cf. also Lloyd A. Doerbaum, "A Biblical Critique of War, Peace and Nonresistance" (Master of Theology thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1969) 39-41.

⁶⁸ Fitts, "A Dispensational Approach to War," 29-30. "

Whatever our Lord meant by his statement about buying a sword, it certainly cannot be construed to mean that he is sanctioning war in any sense. If he meant self-defense in some limited sense, then it is to be explained in the light of other Scriptures instructing Christians on the use of physical force.⁶⁹

This appears to be a more reasonable approach to the data. It is also the only place that Hoyt comes close to admitting that self-defense is a legitimate option for the believer. However, based on his presuppositions, he does not view self-defense as including the Christian bearing arms in a war initiated by the civil government.

Third, pacifism is labeled as "ethical non-involvement." The citizen who will not defend his country against an evil aggressor is morally remiss. The nation with adequate power which will not defend the rights of smaller weaker nations is also morally remiss. By failing to defend a good cause, the pacifist aids an evil one. "Thus, complete pacifism is at best morally naive and at worst morally delinquent."⁷⁰ This charge is offered as further evidence that the believer must participate in a just war.

However, the pacifist does not believe that "non-involvement" adequately describes his position. Augsburgers believe that it is important to see that the doctrine of nonresistance has a positive, active dimension. It is not a case of total non-involvement as much as it is a decision for selective involvement within parameters defined by Scripture. "This is a working philosophy of life. This is not an escape from responsible action, but is an alternative to the patterns of the world."⁷¹ The Christian carries an ethical responsibility to his nation. He is to give himself to others in doing good. This is not something which is suddenly activated during a war as if it is the way to avoid military service.⁷²

It is clear that the believer has a responsibility to be a good citizen. The question is not an unwillingness to defend oneself. The pacifist simply desires an active role of doing good for his fellow citizens. Yet he is unable to compromise his personal conviction not to kill an enemy soldier. The sincere biblical pacifist is not morally naive or morally delinquent. He is not abdicating his involvement in government policies or opting for a totally passive role.

The heart of the selectivist position is based on an extension of the sword of Rom 13:4 to international conflict.

⁶⁹ Hoyt, "Nonresistance," 54-55.

⁷⁰ Geisler, *Ethics*, 174.

⁷¹ Augsburgers, "A Christian Pacifist Response" in *War: Four Christian Views*, 59.

⁷² Augsburgers, "Christian Pacifism," 94; and Herman A. Hoyt, *Then Would My Servants Fight* (Winona Lake: Brethren Missionary Herald, 1956) 16-17.

If it is right for rulers to use coercive force, then most men of good will and good conscience will say that it is right for the Christian to be a part of the force. Reality, most will agree, provides no "division of labor" whereby one section of humanity, as a matter of necessity and duty, does something for my benefit in which it is too sinful for me to help out.⁷³

If the Christian should support and participate in the functions of government, then why should a Christian not participate in legitimate governmental use of force?

[This brings the whole question back to the central issue. Hoyt responds,

It is true that force was entrusted to governments, not to individuals.

But it is not true that believers were necessarily involved in the exercise of force, even as agents of the government, in the same way in the New Testament as in the Old.⁷⁴

Augsburger argues similarly that the State operates on a different level than does the Church. While Christians might well have the responsibility to call the State to participate only in a just war, the individual Christian is called by Christ to a higher ethical function. Augsburger goes on to deal with this ethical duality by explaining that "while there is one ethic for all people. . . by which we shall all be judged and to which we are held accountable, the patterns and levels of life commitment do not conform to this one ethic."⁷⁵

Both Hoyt and Augsburger are arguing from their presuppositions regarding the separation of Church and State and the priority commitment to the Body of Christ. Thus, the Christian has responsibility to the State (Rom 13:3, 6, 7) but that cannot include acts which contradict the Christian's higher responsibility to Christ.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION: NONCOMBATANT PARTICIPATION IN WAR

The noun "nonresistance" may be misleading. It sounds a note of non-involvement, an uncaring isolationism when the nation is in the throes of a desperate military struggle. It could be interpreted as a passive and lifeless response to a very emotional issue. Perhaps "non-combatant participation" is a term which reflects a proper Christian response to the biblical norms.

⁷³ Culver, "Justice Is Something Worth Fighting For," 21.

⁷⁴ Hoyt, "A Nonresistant Response," 138.

⁷⁵ Augsburger, "A Christian Pacifist Response," 143.

⁷⁶ Drescher, "Why Christians Shouldn't Carry Swords," 23.

Observations

Before drawing conclusions, two observations need to be made. At the outset, there was a reminder that this issue is complex. It has given rise to a dialogue among men who desire to conform their personal ethics to the norms of Scripture. There are two reasons why this diversity exists.

First, the Christian is faced with the fact that the NT is silent on the specific question, does Christian responsibility to obey the God-ordained government include taking the life of others, possibly even fellow believers, simply because those individuals are soldiers of another nation? There is no "proof text" which settles that question. There is a necessary step that everyone must make beyond direct NT statements.

Those who support participation in war lean quite heavily on the fact that God has given the sword to civil government (Rom 13:4). However, Holmes, a 'just war' advocate, admits,

The passage pertains directly to matters of criminal justice and the civil order and only by extrapolation to international conflict. But it does make clear that for some purposes, the precise scope of which is not defined, government has the right to use lethal force.⁷⁷

Another passage that deals with this subject of swords is found in Jesus' statements to his disciples in Luke 22:35-36. Jesus commanded his disciples to buy literal swords. He did not rebuke them for the two swords which they had brought with them. Geisler moves from viewing these swords as legitimate tools for self-defense to the conclusion that "herein seems to be the sanction of Jesus to the justifiable use of an instrument of death in defense against an unjust aggressor."⁷⁸ The step to international warfare may be a logical one, but it is only an inference.

Second, it is recognized by all sides that the determining factor is not the interpretation of particular passages of Scripture. Presuppositions, the theological premises built out of biblical study which are accepted at the beginning, determine the conclusions that are reached. In their discussions both Holmes and Augsburg⁷⁹ make that quite clear.

In light of the silence of the Scriptures and the recognition of theological presuppositions, the following conclusions are offered with

⁷⁷ Holmes, "A Just War Response," 122.

⁷⁸ Geisler, *Ethics*, 171.

⁷⁹ Holmes, "The Just War," 65; and Augsburg, "Christian Pacifism," 65.

the recognition that godly men of different persuasions have the liberty in Christ to disagree agreeably.

Conclusions

Does the requirement of obedience to the government relieve the believer of individual ethical responsibility? The activist view is most likely erroneous. The apostles recognized that they had to heed God first (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). There is no question that the believer is expected to obey the government. However, Romans 13 is also clear that the government's authority is derived from God (13:1, 2, 4, 6). Thus, the believer should pay taxes (13:6). However his subjection is not required when the government expects something that is not legitimately due (13:7). The higher authority is God,

This does not mean that the Christian prevents the state from engaging in war or from defensive preparations which might deter aggressors. The separation of Church and State allows the government that privilege. However, Christians are still bound personally by a higher priority established by a higher authority. God has made each Christian a member of the Body of Christ. The responsibility to fellow believers is abundantly clear in the NT. Numerous commands about love, forbearance, unity, and kindness fill the pages of the NT, How can the Christian violate such commands in the name of patriotism? In addition, even with qualifications added, the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and direct statements such as those found in Romans 12 and 13 regarding the treatment of enemies are binding upon Christians. Individual ethical responsibility must enter in if a believer is personally on one side of the gun aiming at another person who is there only because a war has been declared. Thus, In my view, this higher priority bars that kind of participation in war.

Commonly the issue of self-defense is raised against this position, "What would you do if a man was threatening to kill your family?" To move to this personal and emotional plane obscures the issue. "Nonresistance in war and nonresistance in this situation are not necessarily parallel cases."⁸⁰ There is a difference between defending one's family in this type of situation and planning to take lives in war.

It is wholly illogical to pose this problem as the test for the non-resistance position, In war the situation is known and the movements are all premeditated and planned with precision. Surely the Christian who feels that the Word of God warns him against the show of violence cannot deliberately plan to do the very thing he knows is un-Scriptural.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Hoyt, *Then Would My Servants Fight*, 85.

⁸¹ Ibid 86.

To permit self-defense when one is personally threatened with violence does not necessarily permit one to join in war and take the lives of "enemies" because they are from another nation. The separation of Church and State and commitment to fellow Christians forbid the latter practice but not the former.

Each Christian must ask, "What is my responsibility? What decision should I make in regard to participation in war?" I can summarize my own view of such responsibility in three statements. First, it is my responsibility to trust God as my ultimate defense. Some may feel that the noncombatant believer leaves to others the defense of the nation. While I would not deny the responsibility to participate in such defense as far as conscience allows, my ultimate trust differs from that of many of my fellow citizens. My faith is in the sovereign God as the ultimate Defender of me and my family. Even those believers who in clear conscience fully participate in war need to examine their priorities. Perhaps Christians should be as concerned to pray for the security of their nation as they are to guarantee its military defense.

Second, it is my responsibility to serve my government as far as conscience and my commitment to Scripture allows. The separation of Church and State and my citizenship in the heavenly kingdom does not mean that I am to be isolated from the society in which I live. Christians are not to go out of the world (1 Cor 5:9-10) though they are "not of the world" (John 17:15-18). Rather they have been sent into the world (as Jesus' prayer in John 17 indicates). Non-resistance then should not be passive but rather active as Christ's commandments are carried out.

Third, it is my responsibility to serve my fellow man. Serving my fellow citizens and my government may well involve going into life-threatening situations knowing that I will not be bearing arms. However, my service may involve binding wounds or serving as a chaplain. Thus, my refusal to take lives in the name of the government is a biblically limited participation not a refusal to participate. I prefer to call this "noncombatant participation" in war.

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