

The 2012 Beal Memorial Lecture

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Peacemaking in a Violent World:

A Christian Perspective

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I. Introduction: Violence in Our Time

Read recent NY Times headlines on violence

From even a cursory reading of these recent newspaper headlines one gets a visceral sense that violence is ubiquitous, intractable, and demoralizing. Ubiquitous. Violence seems to be everywhere—in every part of the paper, in every aspect of society, in every place in the world, like a mold run rampant throughout your house. Intractable. Violence seems to stubbornly resist any peaceful solution or resolution, like a virulent disease that repels medical treatment. Demoralizing. Violence seems to suck the hope right out of any person, community, or country, like the air rushing out from a deflated balloon.

Some of these newspaper stories are our own. Most (if not all) of us in this room, sadly, have our own tales to tell. We have been profoundly affected by violence. A high school coach killed in a drunken-driver car crash. A cousin wounded in Vietnam or Afghanistan or Iraq. A spouse shot by a stray bullet. In my case, all three of these examples apply.

In short, this topic—peacemaking in a violent world—is not esoteric or abstract or unconnected to the lives we daily lead. So how to think about it? And what to do about it? And to the point of this talk—“Peacemaking in a Violent World: A Christian Perspective”—what can and what should we who claim to follow Jesus do about violence?

II. Voices from the Past: Three Saints

“It is not lawful for me to fight.”^[1] So spoke Martin of Tours, a 4th century Christian who died in 397. What he meant was, it is not morally permissible for me to use violence. It is not morally allowable or ethically acceptable for me to engage in violence. Why? Because, he said, “I am a soldier of Christ.” Born in 316, Martin was baptized at age 18, while a soldier in the Roman army. Two years later he had determined that his faith was in conflict with his occupation. Like many in the early Church, Martin became a pacifist because he was a Christian.

Ironically, this early pacifist was later in the Middle Ages made a patron saint of soldiers. His cloak, by then a venerated relic, was taken into battle by the Frankish kings of early France, and much later he became a military saint in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. An early church prophet of peace was transformed into a medieval and modern baptizer of violence. The story of how that happened lies beyond the scope of this address, but it is important to note that we American Christians are not usually comfortable with messages such as that of Martin of Tours. “It is not lawful for me to fight.” This runs against the grain of our patriotism and nationalism. But these words represent the dominant voice of the Church—a pacifist Church—for the first 300 years of its existence.^[2]

“I was fully convinced that the proceedings in wars are inconsistent with the purity of the Christian religion.”^[3] So wrote John Woolman in his famous journal on April 4, 1758. Having been asked to provide housing for some American army officers, Woolman found he could not so do. A lawyer, he acknowledged the legal authority for such

a request; however, Woolman found that supporting the military in this way would be a violation of his conscience as a member of the Society of Friends. This Revolutionary War era Quaker found violence of any sort to be incompatible with his faith. Indeed, Woolman was an early leader in the movement to abolish the slave trade. Though he acknowledged that “deep-rooted customs, though wrong, are not easily altered,” he argued that “I could not write any instrument [legal document such as a will] by which my fellow creatures were made slaves, without bringing trouble on my own mind.”^[4] The Quakers continue to this day as one of the so-called Christian peace churches, steadfast in their resistance to injustice, but without advocating the use of violence.

A third voice. “I have a dream today.” One sentence is all it takes. You know who speaks: Martin Luther King, Jr. In his most famous speech, in Washington DC in August of 1963, King declared:

But there is something I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads to the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred....We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.^[5]

King, the eloquent Baptist preacher and civil rights leader with a Ph.D. in theology at age 24 and Nobel Peace Prize at age 35, was absolutely clear: the only road to freedom and justice and peace is via nonviolence. In an essay written to defend the position of nonviolence taken by the Southern Christian Leadership Convention, King states: “Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward the community where men and women can live together without fear.”^[6]

Martin of Tours, John Woolman, Martin Luther King. Three voices reminding us of the Christian quest for peace and inviting us to look again at what the Christian faith—sacred scripture and living tradition—has to say about violence.

III. Knowing Our Past: The Four Traditions

In the history of the Church there are four main views on violence, and war in particular.^[7] Noted church historian John Howard Yoder calls them: Blank Check, Holy War, Justifiable War, and Pacifism. The Blank Check position states that war is morally permissible if the sovereign says it is. As Yoder puts it, “the decision about the legitimacy of war is made by the ruler, who is not accountable to anyone.”^[8] The ruler has a blank check—can do whatever he or she wants with no justification needed. In short, war is justified simply by virtue of a ruler’s decree. Machiavelli famously describes such a ruler in his classic handbook on politics, *The Prince*. The religious form of this view is known as “the divine right of kings.”

The Holy War position states that war is not only morally permissible but morally obligatory because “a god or a prophet or a pope may command a war.”^[9] In other words, war is legitimated or sanctioned by religious authority because it is deemed necessary to defeat the powers of evil. In this case, one is duty-bound to go to war. In short, war is justified to advance what is perceived to be the will of God. One version of this, of course, is the crusade.

The Justifiable War (or Just War) position states that while war is always regrettable, in some circumstances it is morally permissible. For example, it is permissible to use violence in order to defend the innocent or to restore justice. As Yoder puts it, in this view “war remains a regrettable though unavoidable lesser evil.”^[10] The “just” in Just War refers to the fact that that the war is justified morally according to a set of criteria. In short, war is justified as

the only way to achieve peace. Perhaps the most famous recent example of this is Reinhold Niebuhr's argument justifying American involvement in WW II in order to stop fascism.[11]

The Pacifist position states that war (and violence in general) is never morally permissible. In the words of Yoder, "there can never be a warrant to destroy human life." [12] Not even noble ends justify violent means. Violence only breeds more violence. In short, war is never justified. Examples of this position in recent history include the Civil Rights Movement in the US headed by MLK, the so-called Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, shortly after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and (some would say) the recent regime change in Egypt.

For our purposes I will focus in more detail on the two positions that are foremost in the minds of most people today, namely, the Just War tradition and the Pacifist tradition. Few people any longer regard the Blank Check position as a legitimate option and though the language of the Holy War tradition seems prevalent today, most people do not endorse it.

A. The Just War Tradition

The Just War position, in essence, says that some uses of violence are morally permissible. With respect to war, this position argues that war is justified, but only under certain circumstances, namely, when undertaken for just reasons and when justly fought. So there are two sets of criteria, known by their Latin names: *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. The former refers to laws having to do with going to war and the latter refers to laws in the fighting of war. In other words, in order for a war to be justified, certain criteria need to be satisfied before going to war and certain rules must be followed during the war itself.

These criteria can be traced back in pre-Christian literature to Plato and Cicero. For example, Plato argued that war is legitimate only if all other means of achieving peace have failed and only if the restoration of peace is the goal. This is the origin of two modern criteria: last resort and just cause. Cicero argued that a war is just only if conducted by the state and only if a formal declaration of war is made. This is now known as the criterion of legitimate authority.

Within the history of the Church, the just war tradition reaches back to Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. For example, Ambrose argued that "the conduct of war should be just and that monks and priests should abstain." [13] Augustine went farther to develop various just war criteria, namely, that the only proper motive for war is peace, that the goal of war is justice, that war must be waged under the authority of a ruler, that the conduct of war must be just. [14] As historian Roland Bainton concludes: "The position Augustine delineated is of extreme importance because it continues to this day in all essentials to be the ethic of the Roman Catholic Church and of the major Protestant bodies." [15]

The Christian Just War tradition was further developed through a long history that includes such luminaries as Thomas Aquinas, Erasmus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Francisco Suarez, Hugo Grotius, and Reinhold Niebuhr. For example, Luther argues that war is justified only as a last resort and only when there is just intent and limited means. Calvin argues that war is justified only if waged by a legitimate authority and for the purpose of achieving justice. It should be noted that both Luther and Calvin assume a Constantinian position regarding church and state. That is to say, they believed in state control over the church. Thus both Luther and Calvin criticize the Christian pacifists of their day, e.g, the Mennonites, not only for their pacifism but also for their insistence on the separation of church and state. The famous Christian humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam perhaps captured the heart of the Just War tradition in the sixteenth century—a century noted for its bloodshed—when he eloquently stated:

Although a prince ought nowhere to be precipitate in his plans, there is no place for him to be more deliberate and circumspect than in the matter of going to war. Some evils come from one source and others from another, but from war comes the shipwreck of all that is good and from it the sea of all calamities pours out. Then, too, no other misfortune clings so steadfastly. War is sown from war. From the smallest comes the greatest; from one comes two; from a jesting one comes a fierce and bloody one, and the plague arising in one place spreads to the nearest people and is even carried into the most distant places.

A good prince should never go to war at all unless, after trying every other means, he cannot possibly avoid it. If we were of this mind, there would hardly be a war. Finally, if so ruinous an occurrence cannot be avoided, then the prince's main care should be to wage the war with as little calamity to his own people and as little shedding of Christian blood as may be, and to conclude the struggle as soon as possible....Lastly, when the prince has put away all personal feelings, let him take a rational estimate long enough to reckon what the war will cost and whether the final end to be gained is worth that much—even if victory is certain, victory which does not happen to favor the best causes.[16]

The upshot of this long history of development of the Just War tradition is a set of criteria that must be met if a war is to be just.[17] The criteria to be considered prior to going to war (*jus ad bellum*) include:

1. **Legitimate authority:** War must be carried out by legitimate rulers or governments, not private parties or tyrants.
2. **Just Cause:** The purpose of war must be to protect innocent life, to ensure people can live decently, to secure justice and restore peace.
3. **Right Intention:** The motivation must not be enmity, vengefulness, or the desire for power or material gain, but rather care for the victims of aggression.
4. **Comparative Justice:** While it is not necessary that one side be wholly in the right, war must never be waged unless the injustices to be fought on the one side are sufficiently greater than the injustices on the other.
5. **Proportionality:** The good ends to be gained from war must be greater than the destructive means used to achieve those ends.
6. **Probability of Success:** There must be reasonable likelihood that the war will achieve success or be winnable.
7. **Last Resort:** All peaceful alternatives must have been exhausted.

Seven standards that must be met before a war can be said to be justified. The criteria for waging war once it has begun (*jus in bello*) are:

1. **Right Intentions:** Since the aim must be to achieve a just peace, battle tactics must avoid any acts or demands that would hinder reconciliation.
2. **Proportionality:** Tactics must not be employed unless the goods to be reasonably expected are greater than the damage inflicted.
3. **Discrimination:** The immunity of the innocent must be respected, so one must not directly attack noncombatants or use them as shields.

It should be noted that for a war to be just, all ten of these criteria must be met. Failure to meet any one of them constitutes failure to meet the standard for a just war. In other words, the criteria are jointly necessary and sufficient.

A number of things strike people when they learn about these criteria. First, they comment that they have never heard of most of these criteria before. Christians, in particular, are amazed that despite (in many cases) years of preaching and teaching in the Church, they have never been taught about this. The exceptions are those who belong to one of the Peace Churches. It seems, ironically, that only the pacifists know what the just war criteria are. Second, people are shocked to learn that all ten of these standards are required for a war to be deemed just. Most assume that only a mere majority is required or that only certain criteria, e.g., last resort, are obligatory. Third, people wonder whether any war has ever successfully met all of these criteria, and many are skeptical as to whether any government rulers or church leaders actually consider these criteria before going to war. Fourth, many people

express doubt as to whether any modern war could possibly meet all these criteria. Given the nature of modern warfare, e.g., the indiscriminate effects of certain kinds of weapons, many believe no war today could possibly measure up. In short, for a war to be just it must be justified according to these (or similar) criteria.

B. The Pacifist Tradition

Since there is often much misunderstanding on this issue, it is important first to clarify what pacifism is and what it is not. So, some important distinctions. First, force is not the same as violence. Force simply means power or strength or the capacity to act. Violence is a particular kind of power, namely, the power to injure or abuse. Violence is destructive or violating or lethal force. So to advocate the use of force is not necessarily to endorse the use of violence. For example, Gandhi made famous the term *satyagraha*, or soul-force. It is a positive force, a force that builds up and binds together—similar to the powerful Hebrew term *shalom*. Thus the key question is: what kind of force? Pacifism advocates using certain kinds of force, but not violence.

Second, resistance is not the same as violence. Resistance can be violent or it can be non-violent. One can resist another person by using a gun or resist a corrupt regime by taking up arms or resist another country by deploying an army. Or one can resist another person by creative persuasion or resist an unjust regime by using demonstrations and boycotts or resist another country by using economic and/or political sanctions. Pacifism supports resisting injustice, but without the use of violence. Pacifism advocates non-violent resistance.

Thus, third, pacifism does not equal passivism. Being a pacifist does not mean being passive, doing nothing, being a doormat. This is perhaps the most prevalent misunderstanding of all—that being a pacifist means being passive. But clearly this is not the case. Jesus was a pacifist, but he was anything but passive. He actively resisted evil whenever he came across it, but without the use of violence. Gandhi was a pacifist, but he was anything but passive. He actively resisted the injustices of British colonialism in India, but did so without violence. King was a pacifist, but he was anything but passive. He actively resisted racism wherever he sniffed it out, but did so without violence.

So pacifism is the position that violence in general and war in particular is never morally permissible. There are many reasons given for this claim and thus there are many varieties of pacifism, e.g., the pacifism of absolute principle, the pacifism of nonviolent social change, the pacifism of moral conscience. Indeed, in one of his books Yoder lists 29 different kinds.^[18] The common claim, however, is that violence is not morally permissible and thus war can never be just or justified.

IV. Who Would Jesus Kill?: Looking Again at Scripture

Who would Jesus kill? So asks Mark Allman, a Roman Catholic ethicist, in the provocative title of his recent book.^[19] Who would Jesus kill? In order to answer such a question, let's take a look at the Bible.

Of the many treatments of this topic the best, in my view, is that of Richard Hayes, Duke Divinity School NT professor. In his book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Hayes clearly lays out the issues in a chapter entitled "Violence in Defense of Justice" and, in so doing, presents a complex and compelling argument. Let me attempt to summarize his case.

The specific question that Hays explores is this: Is it appropriate for those who profess to be followers of Jesus to take up lethal weapons against enemies? More broadly, his question is this: Is it ever God's will for Christians to employ violence in defense of justice? Hays perceptively notes that "history bears haunting witness that this impulse

[to impose our will through violence] is all too easily baptized and confirmed so that divine sanction is claimed for killing.”^[20] We need only recall the ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia between Bosnian Muslims and nominally Christian Bosnian Serbs, each of whom claimed divine approval for their blood-letting, to find confirmation of Hays’ claim. Hays reminds us that “the just war tradition...was developed in Christian theology precisely as a check against the indiscriminate use of violence.” Can that tradition, Hays asks, be justified on the basis of the Bible?

A. The Sermon on the Mount

Hays begins his exploration with what he considers to be the key biblical text, namely, Matthew 5:38-48. Let me read this text to refresh your memory. There are six influential interpretations of this pivotal text. First, these words offer a vision of life in the future (or in heaven) when the kingdom of God is fully realized, and thus are not literally to be put into practice in our lives today. This is the “impossible ideal” interpretation of Reinhold Niebuhr. Second, these words prescribe an “interim ethic” for Jesus’ disciples on the assumption that the final judgment was near, and thus one need not worry about the long-term results of this perfectionistic ethic. Thus this text is not intended for us today, many years later. Third, these words forbid self-defense, but do not preclude fighting in defense of an innocent third party. This was Augustine’s reading. Fourth, this text is a counsel of perfection that applies only to a special class of Christians, e.g., monks or ministers, and not to everyone else. Fifth, these words show how impossible it is to live up to God’s standard of righteousness and thus they convict us of our sin and show us that we are sinners in need of grace. Sixth and last, this text is located within a very specific social setting and thus the scope of these injunctions is limited, e.g., the enemy refers only to personal enemies within the village and not to political enemies. So to summarize each interpretation, the ethic here is: impossible ideal, interim ethic, personal self-defense, counsel of perfection for the holy, conviction of our sin, delimited to personal enemies.

Hays examines each of these interpretations and concludes that “none of these proposals renders a satisfactory account of Matthew’s theological vision.”^[21] Summarizing Hays, first, “the teaching of nonviolent enemy-love is not merely an eschatological vision or an ideal. Jesus practiced it to his own death and the Gospel of Matthew presents this teaching as a commandment that is to be obeyed by Jesus’ disciples.”^[22] This is no impossible ideal.

Second, “Matthew, writing at least fifty years after the death of Jesus, is well aware that history is continuing and that the church must reckon with an extended period of time ‘until the end of the age.’ During that time he envisions the church’s mission as one demanding all nations to obey Jesus’ commandments, including the commandment of nonviolent enemy-love.”^[23] This is no interim ethic.

Third, “there is no basis in Matthew’s Gospel for restricting the prohibition of violence merely to a prohibition of self-defense. The example given in Matthew 5:39 (Turn the other cheek) certainly refers to self-defense...But the larger paradigm of Jesus’ own conduct in Matthew’s Gospel indicates a deliberate renunciation of violence as an instrument of God’s will. That is part of the temptation that Jesus rejects in the wilderness and again at Gethsemane. He does not seek to defend the interests of the poor and oppressed in Palestine by organizing armed resistance against the Romans or against the privileged Jewish collaborators....Perhaps most tellingly, he [Jesus] does not commend the disciple who takes up the sword to defend him against unjust arrest; rather, uttering a prophetic word of judgment against all who ‘take up the sword,’ he commands that the sword be put away.” As Hays emphasizes, “Armed defense is not the way of Jesus. There is no foundation whatever in the Gospel of Matthew for the notion that violence in defense of a third party is justifiable.”^[24] Matthew 5 cannot be reduced to an ethic of personal self-defense.

Fourth, “the suggestion that the teaching of the Sermon is intended only for a special class of supersanctified Christians is discredited by the Great Commission at the conclusion of the Gospel. *All* baptized believers are to be taught to observe *all* that Jesus commanded.” This is no counsel of perfection for the holy.

Fifth, “the idea that the perfectionistic teachings are intended merely to compel us to recognize our need of grace is decisively refuted by the conclusion of the Sermon itself (Matt. 7:21-27). These words (“Everyone who hears these words and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock...And everyone who hears these

words of mine and does not act on them is like a foolish man who builds his house on sand...”) are meant to be put into practice.”^[25] This is no call to conviction of sin.

The sixth interpretation (that the normative power of the text must be restricted because of the limited social context) is also problematic. Understood in context, the admonition “Do not resist an evildoer” (Matt. 5:38-42) does not mean only, as some interpreters claim, “Do not oppose an evil person in court.” It means, rather, to live in a way that eschews retaliation of whatever sort. And the exhortation to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:43-48) includes all enemies. This ethic cannot be limited to personal enemies.

The final admonition of Matthew 5:38-48 (“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”) sums up the entire series of antitheses (“You have heard that it is said, but I say to you”) by emphasizing that those who follow Jesus are “summoned to the task of showing forth the character of God in the world. That character is nowhere more manifest than in the practice of loving enemies, a practice incompatible with killing them.” Thus, concludes Hays, “the church’s embodiment of nonviolence is—according to the Sermon on the Mount—its indispensable witness to the gospel.”^[26]

B. The Rest of the New Testament

But, you might say, this may be what Matthew 5-7 teaches, but what about the rest of the New Testament? And what about the Old Testament? Let us turn to this question of violence in the context of the entire canon of Scripture: how does the norm of nonviolent love of enemies found in Matthew fit into the larger witness of the Bible? Do other texts in the canon reinforce the Sermon on the Mount’s teaching on nonviolence, or do they provide other options that might allow or require Christians to take up the sword?

Hays argues that the testimony of the New Testament is univocal on this point, namely, that nonviolence is the norm. In the Gospels at every turn Jesus “renounces violence as a strategy for promoting God’s Kingdom.” In the Pauline Epistles “there is not a syllable that can be cited in support of Christians employing violence.” In Hebrews and the catholic Epistles (e.g. 1 Peter, James) there is “a consistent portrayal of the community of Christ called to suffer without anger or retaliation.” In the book of Revelation, contrary to many interpretations, the saints conquer “not through recourse to violence” but through “the blood of the Lamb who was slaughtered.”^[27] In summary, Hays concludes: “Thus, from Matthew to Revelation we find a consistent witness against violence and a calling to the community to follow the example of Jesus in *accepting* suffering rather than *inflicting* it.”^[28] In short, the New Testament as a whole teaches pacifism. It is hard to escape this conclusion.

C. Texts in Tension

You may be thinking of certain biblical passages that seem to be in conflict with this claim. Let’s look at some of these texts. First, Matthew 10:34. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” This saying occurs within the context of Jesus’ instructions to his disciples about how to conduct the ministry that he is sending them to do. Jesus gives many warnings about the opposition the disciples will face, especially the divisions they may expect, even within their own families. The word “sword” here is a metaphor for the division that will occur between those who proclaim the gospel and those who refuse to receive it. The Lukan version of the same saying makes this very clear: “Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you but rather division.” (Luke 12:51) The disciples are to go forth with neither staff nor sword, but with the expectation that they will face divisions and opposition. This text does not provide warrant for violence.

Second, Luke 22:36b. “The one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.” The reference to sword here is again figurative. On the night of his arrest Jesus reminds his followers that they can no longer rely upon the hospitality of those to whom they preach, but rather must be prepared for rejection and persecution. The sword refers to the intensity of the opposition that Jesus’ followers will experience. Jesus’ disciples don’t get it; they take the

reference to the sword literally (“Lord, here are two swords.”). Jesus’ response (“Enough already!”) clearly indicates his disapproval of violence. As NT scholar Joseph Fitzmeyer puts it: “Jesus will have nothing to do with swords, even for defense.”[29]

Third, Matthew 21:12-13/Mark 11:15-19/Luke 19:45-48/John 2:13-17. The story of Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers and sellers in the Jewish Temple, with (in John’s version) Jesus using a whip of cords to drive out the sheep and cattle. In one sense the actions here are violent, but Jesus’ behavior must be understood in light of the two OT texts Jesus uses, namely, Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. The first text (“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations”) evokes the eschatological vision of Isaiah 55-66 in which God will restore Jerusalem and bring all nations to worship there. An integral part of this vision is the abolition of violence, as symbolized by the peaceful coexistence of the wolf and the lamb. The other text (“You have made it a den of robbers”) is an allusion to Jeremiah’s Temple sermon—a call for repentance that condemns Israel for various acts of violence. In other words, Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple is a call for repentance and a sign that the promised future restoration is at hand. No one is hurt or killed in this demonstration. It is an act analogous to antinuclear protestors breaking into an Air Force base and pouring blood on missile silos. As Hays puts it: “The incident is a forceful demonstration against a prevailing system in which violence and injustice prevail, a sign that Jesus intends to bring about a new order in accordance with Isaiah’s vision of eschatological peace. It is difficult to see how such a story can serve as a warrant for Christians to wage war and kill.”[30]

Fourth, soldiers in the NT. There are a number of passages in the NT in which soldiers appear: a Roman centurion in Matt. 8:5-13, a centurion at the foot of the cross in Mark 15:39, a group of soldiers in Luke 3:14-15, the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18. These texts seem to indicate that the NT writers did not see participation in the army as sinful in itself. On the other hand, the soldiers serve to dramatize the power of God to reach even the unlikeliest people. For example, in Luke 3 the soldiers are included with tax collectors as illustrations of how the preaching of John the Baptist has reached even the most unsavory characters. In Mark 15 the point is that while the dunderheaded disciples do not understand who Jesus really is, the consummate outsider—a Gentile army officer—confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. When Jesus states that tax-collectors and prostitutes will enter the Kingdom of God ahead of you (Matt. 21:31), we do not understand him to commend tax extortion or prostitution; so also, argues Hays, “these stories about centurians cannot be read as endorsements of military careers for Christians.”[31] Hays acknowledges, however, that of the texts “that might seem to stand in tension with the New Testament’s central message of peacemaking, these narratives about soldiers provide one possible legitimate basis for arguing that Christian discipleship does not necessarily preclude the exercise of violence in defense of social order or justice.”[32]

Fifth and last, texts in the Old Testament. This is no doubt the greatest canonical challenge to the witness of the Sermon on the Mount and the New Testament more generally. What about texts that explicitly command the people of Israel to kill their enemies? Here are a few such texts. Deut. 20:10-15 commands Israel’s army to put all men to the sword and take women, children, and livestock as booty. Deut. 20:16-18 commands the Israelites to kill everything that breathes in towns captured within the land claimed by Israel—a command uttered by the prophet Samuel and put into practice by King Saul (1 Samuel 15).

These texts have been dealt with in different ways. For some they provide literal warrant or justification for violent crusades. Others read them allegorically as admonitions to expunge sin from our lives. Yet others try to hold these violence-justifying texts in tension with the biblical texts that commend nonviolence. Hays honestly faces the issue head-on and argues for a particular position:

If irreconcilable tensions exist between the moral vision of the New Testament and particular Old Testament texts, the New Testament vision trumps the Old Testament. Just as the New Testament texts render judgments superseding the Old Testament requirements of circumcision and dietary laws...so also Jesus’ explicit teaching and example of nonviolence reshapes our understanding of God and of the covenant community in such a way that killing enemies is no longer a justifiable option. The sixth antithesis of the Sermon on the Mount marks the

hermeneutical watershed [Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you]....Once that word has been spoken to us and perfectly embodied in the story of Jesus' life and death, we cannot appeal back to Samuel as a counterexample to Jesus.[33]

It is hard to find fault with Hays' conclusion. We don't follow many of the laws of the Old Testament, and we justify that behavior by reference to the New Testament. Why would it be any different when it comes to violence? Let's be honest: when texts from the two testaments collide, the New trumps the Old.

D. Scripture and Tradition

In the preceding we have focused on the interpretation of the Bible. But in the practice of Christian theology, there are four sources, the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral, from which to draw: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Typically all are used, but weight is usually given to one or the other. These sources, furthermore, also function as norms. That is, they are authorities that provide guidance on what to believe and how to live. For some Christians Scripture is the only or central authority. For others tradition reigns supreme. For yet others reason or experience is the norming norm. In other words, one could accept the argument that the Bible supports pacifism and still argue that pacifism is not obligatory by appealing to tradition or reason as more important authorities.

It is perhaps never clearer how different people use different authorities or norms than with the issue of violence. Time precludes a thorough treatment of this important topic, but one issue must be addressed, namely, the relation between Scripture and tradition. Hays (once again) puts the issue especially well:

This is the place where New Testament ethics confronts a profound methodological challenge on the question of violence, because the tension is so severe between the unambiguous witness of the New Testament canon and the apparently countervailing forces of *tradition*, *reason*, and *experience*. The decisions made by the interpretive community about the relative weight of these sources of authority will go a long way toward determining the outcome of the normative deliberation concerning the use of violence....

Although the *tradition* of the first three centuries was decidedly pacifist in orientation, Christian *tradition* from the time of Constantine to the present has predominantly endorsed war, or at least justified it under certain conditions. Only a little reflection will show that the classic just war criteria...are neither derived nor derivable from the New Testament; they are formulated through a process of reasoning that draws upon natural law traditions far more heavily than upon biblical warrants. It is not possible to use the just war tradition as a hermeneutical device for illuminating the New Testament, nor have the defenders of the tradition ordinarily even attempted to do so. Thus, despite the antiquity of the just war tradition, and its fair claim to represent the historic majority position within Christian theology, it cannot stand the normative test of New Testament ethics....I simply venture the summary judgment—based on the above survey of the evidence—that the New Testament offers no basis for ever declaring Christian participation in war “just.” If that be true, then our methodological guideline insists that the church's majority *tradition*, however venerable, must be rejected or corrected in light of the New Testament's teaching.[34]

In short, Hays argues that Scripture takes precedence over tradition. Even a venerable tradition, such as the just war tradition, must be rejected in light of the biblical witness to pacifism.

Hays concludes his discussion of violence in defense of justice with a powerful challenge to the Church today:

One reason that the world finds the New Testament's message of peacemaking and love of enemies incredible is that the church is so massively faithless. On the question of violence, the church is deeply compromised and

committed to nationalism, violence, and idolatry....Only when the church renounces the way of violence will people see what the Gospel means, because then they will see the way of Jesus reenacted in the church.[35]

Renouncing the way of violence while resisting evil and seeking justice requires, among other things, imagination. That leads us to the final section of this talk.

V. The Way of the Cross: Peacemaking Today

A. Just Peacemaking

Much could be said about contemporary Christian peacemaking, but I wish to focus on two movements. The first is called “just peacemaking” and is most clearly embodied in the work of Christian ethicist Glen Stassen at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. With the term “just peacemaking” Stassen wishes to combine the best of the Christian just war tradition with the best of the Christian pacifist tradition. Or more exactly, rather than highlighting the differences between the just war and pacifist positions, just peacemaking seeks to find common ground between these positions in developing a new paradigm for the ethics of peace and war.

Pacifist Stassen and his just war friends acknowledge that they disagree on the question “When, if ever, are war and military force justified?” However, they ask another question: “What practices of war prevention and peacemaking should we be supporting?” Both questions are important but they need to be separated. In Stassen’s words: “If you believe in the rightness of some wars, you still need an ethic that helps you think clearly about initiatives to peace. If you believe ‘war is not the answer,’ you need to be able to answer the question, ‘then what is the answer?’”[36] In other words, in either case—just war or pacifism—we need to think about effective peacemaking practices.

What Stassen and his colleagues come up with are ten practices that have actually worked to decrease the number and intensity of wars in human history. They were developed “in large part by veterans of World War II and subsequent wars who returned with the conviction that we must build practices and institutions that keep destruction from happening again.”[37] Stassen insists that “we are not talking about peace as a utopian ideal. We are not predicting that there will be fewer and fewer wars....We are not saying that we can abolish war tomorrow. We are saying that these ten practices have in fact abolished wars in specific places and they need our support to spread.”[38]

The ten practices fall into three categories: peacemaking initiatives (1-4), justice (5-6), community (7-10). The practices are:

1. **Support nonviolent direct action.** Follow the example of Gandhi and King, who used boycotts, strikes, marches, public disclosures, and civil disobedience to bring about a more just and peace-filled world.
2. **Take independent initiatives to reduce threat.** Follow the example of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, who initiated and then completed the 1963 Atmospheric Test Ban Treaty, which halted above-ground testing of nuclear weapons and led to a thaw in the Cold War.
3. **Use cooperative conflict resolution.** Follow the example of Cesar Chavez, Dorothy Day, the Polish Solidarity Movement in seeking to resolve conflict by means of this process of reconciliation.
4. **Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and seek forgiveness.** Follow the example of German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who in 1945 acknowledged the guilt of the churches in Germany, and of Richard von Weizaecker, the President of West Germany who in 1985 offered a public apology on behalf of Germany for Nazi war crimes in WW II.

5. **5. Advance democracy, human rights, interdependence.** Follow the example of those who drafted and supported the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948.
 6. **6. Foster just and sustainable economic development.** Follow the example of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which focuses on micro-lending, and all those in this room who supported the Montreal Protocol, the landmark environmental legislation passed by the UN in 1987 that phased out the use of ozone-destroying chemicals.
 7. **7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.** Follow the example of President Carter who, during the Clinton administration, worked with other international leaders to oust the unjust military regime in Haiti.
 8. **8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.** Follow the example of all those in this room who supported the UN when it declared that apartheid in South Africa was a threat to peace.
 9. **9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.** Follow the example of all those in this room who contacted their members of Congress when former President George W. Bush pushed for building a new nuclear bomb, the bunker buster, and wiser heads in Congress, from both parties, prevailed and voted it down.
- 10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.** Follow the example of all those in this room who have joined local peacemaking organizations, e.g., Lakeshore Women for Peace, Holland Friends Meeting, Hope United for Justice, and many others.

Perhaps more important than the details of the just peacemaking proposals is its ability to unleash our imagination to think outside the box. Just peacemaking reframes the discussion from debates about whether a war is just to discussion of what practices of war prevention we should support. The question shifts from “Is the war just?” to “How do we wage peace?” This is something all of us—just warriors and pacifists alike—have a stake in answering.

B. Christian Pacifism

If the just peacemaking movement seeks to stimulate our imagination when it comes to addressing violence, Christian pacifism seeks to stretch the imagination even farther by calling us to respond to violence nonviolently. There are a number of important contemporary Christian pacifists, foremost John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, but time is short and a personal story might best illustrate the power of Christians who creatively seek to resist violence nonviolently.^[39]

Some years ago I was in Belize, in Central America, teaching for a study abroad program. Part of the 10 days I was there included a 3 day home stay with an Old Order Amish community at a place called Clearwater, located in the rainforest just south of the capital city of Belmopan. This group of about 10 families and 70 people is living by choice without electricity or running water or gasoline engines. Light comes from kersosene lanterns, water is lifted from a well, and transportation is via horse and buggy.

Our hosts were most hospitable. We worshipped with them (in English, Spanish, and low German) for almost 2 hours. We did chores with them; I was invited to plow a straight furrow with a stubborn horse and steel plow. We ate with them—in my case with 13 people (3 adults and 10 children) at a long, beautiful, hand-made wooden table. Most of us found their mid-19th century lives both attractive and forbidding.

During our stay I heard about an event from a few years back. An intruder drove by car along the one-way-in-and-out dirt road to the center of the community. He entered the small farm store and, at gunpoint, stole a thousand

dollars of Belizean cash. Word of this intruder quickly reached the men working in the neighboring fields, who rapidly descended upon the store. Being Amish, they were, of course, pacifists and had no weapons. The Amish men confronted the intruder as he was trying to make his escape, but escape he did, only later to be arrested by the Belizean police. When the good folks at Clearwater were notified of his capture, these old-fashioned Christians did two things. First, when they found out that the man was homeless, they resolved to build him a house. In Amish fashion, they had a barn raising and constructed a decent house in a weekend. Second, they invented and printed their own currency, like monopoly money, thereby taking away any incentive future robbers might have to enter their community to steal their money. Their own money, in other words, was worthless outside of their own community. Perhaps our Amish brothers and sisters to the south, steeped in beliefs and stories and practices that embody “it is not lawful for me to fight” because I am a follower of Jesus, can teach us to use our imagination to be peacemakers in a violent world.

VI. Conclusion: A Prophetic Voice

In conclusion I can do no better than to quote Kentucky farmer/novelist/poet Wendell Berry. In his extensive reflections post 9/11, found in his book *Citizenship Papers*, this Southern Baptist with a lover’s quarrel with the Church perceptively and unflinchingly tells the truth. I quote at length.

The present administration [of George W. Bush] has adopted a sort of official Christianity, and it obviously wishes to be regarded as Christian. But “Christian war” has always been a problem, best solved by avoiding any attempt to reconcile policies of national or imperial militarism with anything Christ said or did. The Christian gospel is a summons to peace, calling for justice beyond anger, mercy beyond justice, forgiveness beyond mercy, love beyond forgiveness. It would require a most agile interpreter to justify hatred and war by means of the Gospels, in which we are bidden to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who despise and persecute us.

This peaceability has grown more practical—it has gained “survival value”—as industrial warfare has developed increasingly catastrophic weapons, which are abominable to our government, so far, only when other governments possess them. But since the end of World War II, when the terrors of industrial war had been fully revealed, many people and, by fits and starts, many governments have recognized that peace is not just a desirable condition, as was thought before, but it is a practical necessity. It has become less and less thinkable that we might have a living and livable world, or that we might have livable lives or any lives at all, if we do not make the world capable of peace.

And yet we have not learned to think of peace apart from war. We have received many teachings about peace and peaceability in biblical and other religious traditions, but we have marginalized those teachings, have made them abnormal, in deference to the great norm of violence and conflict. We wait, still, until we face terrifying dangers and the necessity to choose among bad alternatives, and then we think again of peace, and again we fight a war to secure it.

At the end of the war, if we have won it, we declare peace; we congratulate ourselves on our victory; we marvel at the newly proved efficiency of our latest, most “sophisticated” weapons; we ignore the cost in lives, materials, and property, in suffering and disease, in damage to the natural world; we

ignore the inevitable residue of resentment and hatred; and we go on as before, having, as we think, successfully defended our way of life.

That is pretty much the story of our victory in the Gulf War of 1991. In the years between that victory and September 11, 2001, we did not alter our thinking about peace and war, which is to say that we thought much about war and little about peace; we continued to punish the defeated people of Iraq and their children; we made no effort to reduce our dependence on the oil we import from other potentially belligerent countries; we made no improvement in our charity toward the rest of the world; we made no motion toward greater economic self-reliance; and we continued our extensive and often irreversible damages to our own land. We appear to have assumed merely that our victory confirmed our manifest destiny to be the richest, most powerful, most wasteful nation in the world. After the catastrophe of September 11, it again became clear to us how good it would be to be at peace, to have no enemies, to have no needless death to mourn. And then, our need for war following with the customary swift and deadly logic our need for peace, we took up the customary obsession with the evil of other people.

And now [2003] we are stirring up the question whether or not Islam is a war-like religion, ignoring the question, much more urgent for us, whether or not Christianity is a warlike religion. There is no hope in this. Islam, Judaism, Christianity—all have been warlike religions. All have tried to make peace and rid the world of evil by fighting wars. This has not worked. It is never going to work. The failure belongs inescapably to all of these religions insofar as they have been warlike, and to acknowledge this failure is the duty of all of them. It is the duty of all of them to see that it is wrong to destroy the world, or risk destroying it, to get rid of its evil.

It is useless to try to adjudicate a long-standing animosity by asking who started it or who is the most wrong. The only sufficient answer is to give up the animosity and try forgiveness, to try to love our enemies and to talk to them, and (if we pray) to pray for them. If we can't do that, then we must begin again by trying to imagine our enemies' children, who, like *our* children, are in mortal danger because of the enmity that they did not cause.

We can no longer afford to confuse peaceability with passivity. Authentic peace is no more passive than war. Like war, it calls for discipline and intelligence and strength of character, though it also calls for higher principles and aims. If we are serious about peace, then we must work for it as ardently, seriously, continuously, carefully, and bravely as we have ever prepared for war. [40]

In memory of Philip Emerson Beal. Thank you.

[1] Martin of Tours, quoted in Jean Michel Hornus, *It Is Not Lawful For Me To Fight*, revised edition (Scottsdale, PA:

Herald Press, 1980), p. 144.

[2] See, e.g., Hornus and also C. John Cadoux, *The Early Christian Attitude to War* (New York: Seabury, 1982).

[3] "The Journal of John Woolman," in *Quaker Spirituality*, edited by Douglas Steere (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1984), p. 187.

[4] Woolman, *Quaker Spirituality*, pp. 175-176.

[5] Martin Luther King, *Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James Washington (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1986), p. 218.

[6] King, *Testament of Hope*, p. 58.

[7] While violence includes more than war, for our purposes here I will focus/limit my discussion to war.

[8] John Howard Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, edited by Theodore Koontz and Andy Alex-Baker (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), p. 28.

[9] Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, p. 29.

[10] Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, p. 30.

[11] See, e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist," in *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*, edited by Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

[12] Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, p. 29.

[13] Roland Bainton, *Christian Attitudes to War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), pp. 90-91.

[14] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, pp. 95-98.

[15] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, p. 99.

[16] Erasmus, "On the Beginning of War" cited in Arthur Holmes, *War and Christian Ethics: Classic and Contemporary Readings on the Morality of War, second edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), p. 177.

[17] My list is a combination of criteria accumulated from a number of places and from my reading in general. A longer more detailed list is found in Yoder, *Christian Attitudes*, chs. 6-7.

[18] John Howard Yoder, *Nevertheless: Varieties of Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1992).

[19] Mark Allman, *Who Would Jesus Kill? War, Peace, and the Christian Tradition* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2008).

[20] Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 318.

[21] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 320

[22] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 323.

[23] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 323.

[24] Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 323-324.

[25] Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 324.

[26] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 329.

[27] Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 330-332.

[28] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 332.

[29] Fitzmeyer, quoted in Hays, p. 333.

[30] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 335.

[31] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 335.

[32] Hays, *Moral Vision*, pp. 335-336.

[33] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 336.

[34] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 341.

[35] Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 343.

[36] Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008), p. 9.

[37] Stassen, *Just Peacemaking*, p. 11.

[38] Stassen, *Just Peacemaking*, p. 12.

[39] We are hampered in our understanding of non-violent resistance by our ignorance of history and our lack of imagination. The work of Gene Sharp is the remedy for our ignorance of history, for he illustrates how over time humans have successfully resisted evil non-violently. It simply is not the case that the only way to achieve peace in human history is through the use of violence. Indeed, Sharp's writings have been identified as playing an important role in a number of the recent successful nonviolent uprisings in the world, e.g., Egypt. What Sharp points out, among other things, is how distorted our sense of history usually is. From history texts and classes that focus on generals and battles we get a sense that the predominant (if not only) way that positive change is ever achieved is through the use of violence. In fact, while the history of human societies and cultures is bloody indeed, much change for the good has taken place without the use of violence. But we simply do not know these stories and people and places. We have a gigantic blind spot that allows us too easily to assume that the only "reasonable" answer to the issue of conflict and injustice is violence. See his three volume classic *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, and also his more recent *From Dictatorship to Democracy*.

[40] Wendell Berry, *Citizenship Papers* (Washington, DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2003), pp. 14-16.