

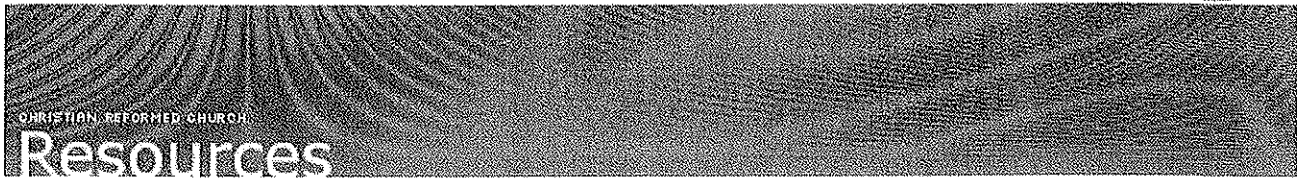
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Ethical Decisions About War

BASIC PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

The Law of Love and the Sixth Commandment

The supreme moral principle which bears on the knotty questions surrounding the Christian and war is that we must love our neighbor as ourselves. This principle, derived explicitly from our Lord's command, (Matthew 22:39), summarizes the Christian's obligation to his neighbor—an obligation elaborated in the second table of the Ten Commandments (cf. Romans 13:9).

The single commandment from that second table most obviously relevant to the questions at hand is, of course, the sixth: "You shall not kill." But what, exactly, does the sixth commandment prohibit? Does it prohibit all taking of human life? Does its stark and simple form imply that taking another human's life is always and everywhere immoral? Or, rather, does it prohibit only the wrongful taking of human life? Does it starkly and simply imply that all murder is wrong?

An examination of the Hebrew verb in Exodus 20:13 is not immediately conclusive. Though a few translators, and many interpreters, have rendered it "murder," suggesting that the commandment is directed not against all killing, but only against all wrongly motivated killing, the verb itself (*r_sah*) is elsewhere used in the Old Testament for even unintentional, apparently accidental and unmotivated, killing (Deut. 4:41-3; 19:1-13; Josh. 20:3, etc.). This might lead one to think that if, in the eyes of God, not only murder, but also "involuntary manslaughter" is always wrong, then surely no war stands much of a chance of being pleasing in God's sight.

What is quickly apparent, however, is that the committing of an act normally wrong, even an act simply and explicitly forbidden in one of the Ten Commandments, is not always and under every circumstance wrong. After all, one often noted and vexing fact about the Old Testament is that the same God who commands the Israelites not to kill (in the sixth commandment) elsewhere commands them in detail to kill the enemy (I Sam. 15:3, etc.). Indeed, the very verb under consideration (*r_sah*) used in the sixth commandment against killing is used in a commandment to kill in the infliction of capital punishment in Numbers 35:30.

A final note on *r_sah*. In some of the prophetic and wisdom writings, *r_sah* does seem to refer (disapprovingly) to that complex of wrong motive, act, and primary intention we call murder (e.g., in Hosea 6:9, Job 24:14, and Ps. 94:6).

Thus, our conclusion is that a mere reading of the Hebrew text in Exodus 20:13 is only a beginning. Even a comparative word study of *r_sah* is insufficiently illuminating. For, in the first place, the referent of this verb is clearly not confined to what we could call murder—though it does sometimes refer to murder. In the second place, though the verb is generally used in the sixth commandment to prohibit "killing," it is also specifically used (in Numbers 35:30) to command (a special sort of) killing. Since God never commands the performance of an action which is, in that case, wrong, we may conclude that the doing of what *r_sah* refers to (let alone what the two other Hebrew verbs we translate "to kill" refer to) is not always wrong. At the very least, it has not always been wrong. Still, this does not tell us nearly as much as we want to know with respect to our present questions about the Christian and war. The only thing we are so far safe in assuming is something we already knew before studying Exodus 20:13, viz., that murder, no matter what Hebrew verb we may be translating, is nowhere countenanced in the Old Testament. To take another human life for the wrong reason is, clearly, always wrong. Both the sixth commandment and the Lord's summary command which includes it ("Love your neighbor as yourself") plainly proscribe at least murder.

The question at the heart of the Christian-and-war issue is, however, whether every killing, including every killing in wartime, is an instance of murder. Does the Old Testament, particularly, regard every killing as wrong killing? As we have already seen above with respect to Numbers 35:30, (many additional passages could be adduced), it does not. Does the Old Testament, then, regard every killing in war as wrong killing? Again, clearly not. The Old Testament documents report that the Israelites were sometimes commanded by God to destroy God's enemies by the sword. The

books of Joshua, Judges, and particularly I Samuel abound with examples of such commands. These incidents have troubled the church for centuries. Some early and enduring heresies have sprung from what their founders took to be intolerable implications about the nature of the Old Testament God found in these incidents. Surely, we who confess a Reformed doctrine of biblical inspiration are not ready to scrap or to explain away these troublesome passages about the war-like God of the Old Testament. Still this does not tell just what relevance they have, in the new age of Christ, for a statement on the Christian's proper attitude toward war. For one thing, we have no modern nation, no sovereign states which are also identical with the people of God. We have no theocracies. In fact, we regard all tendencies to claim a special national alliance with God as idolatrous and wicked. The particular relationship which obtained, then, between God and Israel now obtains between God and no modern nation. It obtains, in fact, only between God's Christ and his church. But the church does not engage in earthly, physical warfare.

For another consideration, we must reflect on the fact that even if we had some modern nation privileged as Israel was to be true church and state at once, we still would not necessarily know how to identify it or what to do with the celebrated Old Testament war passages. Does it follow from the fact that God once commanded war with the Israelites as his army that he now favors (say) the Germans? Again should we not be at once suspicious if a modern Chinese prophet, singularly godly in an atheist country, reported that God had commanded the Red Chinese to attack the United States as a judgment on our apostasy? The truth is that we are rightly wary of any modern reports of God's command to some one nation to attack and destroy some other nation or nations.

In the third place, consider again the difficulty of applying the Old Testament war passages to our modern situation. Suppose God once told the Israelites to slay not only men and warrior-men, but also "women, infant and suckling . . ." (I Samuel 15:3). Does it follow that we may do things like that today? Nowadays, soldiers who kill unarmed women and children are often tried and punished by courts of their own country.

This leads to a fourth, and perhaps the most important, consideration. What God wills for our moral lives shows progression. The history of God's deeds and of God's words is a history which always moves toward a better match between God's perfect will and his commands to stubborn, sinful, and blind human beings. It was one of the great insights and one of the persistent themes of such Reformed thinkers as John Calvin that God continually accommodates himself to us in the history of his dealings with us. He leads us along. What he may allow early because of certain desperate historical circumstances or because of our "hardness of heart" (cf. Mark 10:2-9) may not always be allowed—let alone commanded.

In fact, so far as the present question is concerned, it does seem that by the time Jesus Christ, our Lord, preaches his Sermon on the Mount, we are in a new moral atmosphere from that of the bloody war and total destruction we find, for example, in some passages of Samuel. Adding the views of certain of his contemporaries to the context of his sermon, Jesus says again and again, almost as if by way of refrain, "You have heard that it was said . . . but I say to you . . ." Several particular instances of his teaching in this form seem directly relevant.

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment . . ." (Matthew 5:21f.).

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:38f.).

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:43f.).

It seems clear that any truly biblical position on the ethics of war for Christians must come to terms with passages like these. Moreover, it seems clear, even without a full exegesis of these famous passages, that these passages indicate a progression of God's will from the old era to the new, and a new way for Christians typically to deal with neighbor and enemy alike. If, as we have seen above, the Old Testament reports of God's commandment to kill entitle us to conclude that not every instance of killing is an instance of murder, that, under some (as yet unspecified) condition it may be right to kill, these New Testament sayings of our Lord show us that the controlling attitude of the members of the Kingdom is love. Such love specifically includes enemies.

But if it may sometimes be right to kill and if we are to love even our enemies, the obvious question is whether these things are consistent with each other. Now, to love neighbors and enemies means to seek their good. This we may infer from the explicit parallelism of the Lukan version of Jesus' counsel to enemy love;

"But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you . . ." (Luke 6:27).

The question is whether it is ever possible to do good to an enemy at the same time that one kills the enemy. Can killing an enemy ever be an instance of showing love to him? Again, we may put our question a final way. Suppose it

be said that the sixth commandment, when posited for the life of gratitude after the habit of John Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism, generally tells us that we must preserve and enhance life. Then our question becomes whether it is ever possible to preserve and enhance life by killing an enemy. This question will be taken up specifically in the section below on the Christian's dilemma.

The final issue which confronts us before we go on to consider War and the Christian's Dilemma is what, exactly, we mean by the good of others which love of neighbors and enemies alike seeks to promote. This is the sort of formal ethical question which, of course, the Scriptures do not neatly and specifically address. This is rather the sort of issue which Christian scholars discuss after steeping themselves in the Scriptures.

Perhaps it would be fair to say at the outset that by the good of others, which love seeks to promote, Christians do not mean the same thing as secularists mean by it. By the good which we seek for others we do not mean merely their greatest pleasure, or their best physical and emotional well-being, or their happiness conceived in purely material terms. What Christians mean by the good of others is their being rightly related to the God and Father of us all, their realizing the coming of the Kingdom of God in their own lives by reconciliation with him through Christ, and their living a life of conscious obedience. The primacy of this first-order or ultimate good may be deduced from the centrality of it in Jesus' early preaching and from his explicit command to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these [other] things shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6:33). After considering these "other things" in the immediate context, after reviewing as well such passages as Matthew 25:31-46, Romans 12:9-21, and throughout the epistle of James, we may propose that the "other things" which love seeks for neighbor and enemy are, roughly in descending order of importance, justice, i.e., a fair distribution of all secondary goods and a proper redress of social grievances and retribution for wrongdoing; freedom from murderous and destructive assaults on lives and habitats; emotional, intellectual, economic, and physical prosperity.

War

Because we live in a fallen world, these several goods are regularly threatened by human readiness to hate instead of to love, to dominate others instead of to serve them, and to secure one's own freedom and prosperity by violently removing that of others. When large numbers of people, especially nations, exercise such dominance and express such hatred by the use of military arms, the universally feared and sometimes hideously devastating spectacle of war occurs. War is a great and impressive example of human fallenness. Wars commonly arise from a sinful and aggressive tendency to dominate others, to exploit others financially (cf. James 4:1, 2), to hinder the freedom of other peoples of the world, and to regard their various claims to human good as somehow less valid than those of one's own nation.

Though courage and heroism are sometimes evidenced and just protection of the innocent sometimes achieved in war, still, the fallenness which makes warring such a regular—some would say, necessary—feature of our existence is a matter for the profoundest regret. In their instigation, wars usually manifest a massive failure to love. Once begun, by their diminishing the value of life; by their robbery of happiness by their massive cost in human life, time, and energy; by their notorious tendency to spread their menace, and by their fertile spawning of vice, stealing, and lying, wars commonly produce a morally nauseating atmosphere which Christians detest.

God's response to this massive evil—as well as to all other evils—was to send, at last, his own Son as a personal Word of reconciliation and peace. In the new age of peace, God's plan for reconciling human beings to him and to each other has been ushered in by Christ and is now entrusted to those who bear his name and act as his body. Following both the teaching ("Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God") and the example of our Lord, we who claim his name must live peaceably ourselves, furnishing to the world conspicuous examples of peace-loving, harmonious living, and must also privately and publicly denounce war and strive to prevent it by prayer, by redressing the grievances of oppressed people, by prophetic calls to peace, by urging the faithful exercise of diplomacy, by entering the political arena ourselves, and by strong appeals to all in high places to resolve tensions by peaceful means. Christians must be reconcilers.

The Christian's Dilemma

Because of war's notorious evils, then, and because of the unique mission of peace-making entrusted to God's people in the new age, war waging and war participation raise grave moral questions for every serious Christian. It would seem, on the face of it, that since war in its several forms inevitably involves the killing of other human beings—including, nearly always, vast numbers of non-combatants—Christians should simply refuse to participate at all. Christ says, "Love your neighbor as yourself," and, as we have already seen, it is remarkably hard to see, again, on the face of it, how one could love his neighbor as himself at the same time as one was intending to kill his neighbor.

Thus, from near the beginning of the Christian church, some Christians have chosen to be pacifists. Pacifists, employing, among others, the sort of argument just given, typically refuse participation in any directly war-related

activity.

Yet pacifism, it may be said, falls into a sin of omission. For, while it is true that under ordinary circumstances and all other things being equal, the killing of human beings is forbidden by God and is morally wrong, it is also true that the abandoning of relatively innocent people to the murderous assaults of armed and lawless invaders is immoral and a breach of responsibility to love one's neighbor. While rightly abhorring war, then, and even abhorring the evil visited upon defenseless people, pacifism fails to prevent or minimize such evil even when it is possible to do so. Sometimes pacifists suppose that "You shall not kill" is an exceptionless command. Sometimes pacifists suppose that the use of force and, particularly, of killing force is always inconsistent with the preservation and enhancement of human life. Pacifism shows real and courageous love for those who attack. It takes with utter seriousness Christ's admonition to love one's enemies and to do good to them. There is enough biblical weight in the formulation of the pacifist position and enough moral sensitivity and ethical rigor in its elaboration and defense that certain Christians, including some particularly courageous and exemplary Christians, have always been attracted by it.

Still, it must finally be said that pacifism is mistaken. However deeply pacifism sees into human fallenness and into the Christian's dilemma, it does not see far enough. What it fails to see is that (as we shall argue below) loving one's neighbor as oneself, loving one's enemy, and preserving and enhancing life are not necessarily inconsistent with the taking of life. That is, though the supremely relevant command for our inquiry, viz., "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" seems *prima facie* inconsistent with the sometime taking of human life, is not actually inconsistent with it. This command may be—indeed, must be—obeyed even if the actual physical lives of some (say, relatively guilty) neighbors cannot thereby be preserved.

On the other side from pacifism, and scarcely of the same moral quality, is militarism. Where militarists are not, in Hitler's fashion, plainly murderous and imperialistic, they are at least obsessively interested in and delighted with their own nation's striking capability and hair-trigger readiness for retaliation. Where militarists do not urge blatant aggression, they often urge, at least, not a measured defense, but merciless annihilation of the enemy and the enemy's children. Where militarists do not seek imperialistic invasion of the enemy's land, they may still seek, on defense, not justice but revenge. Though, to the great shame of the name of our Lord, the Lord's cross has sometimes appeared in the front rank of militarists, it should hardly need saying that the truculence and glorying in might of militarism is distinctly foreign to the followers of the Prince of Peace.

At once dismissing militarism, and reluctantly parting ways with the often tempting position of pacifist brothers and sisters, the best Christian answer to the question of war-making still appears to be what has traditionally been called the "just war" theory. The various just war theories, like all other Christian responses to the problem of war, seek to answer the question we have been posing all along—and here pose again: killing human beings is forbidden by God in the sixth commandment. If the commandment is stated positively, in solidly Reformed fashion, so that it commands us to preserve and enhance life, our problem remains. It is hard to see how one can obey the sixth commandment in either of its forms in case one kills. That is, how can one preserve life by taking it? On the other hand, given the murderous attacks on the innocent peculiar to a fallen world, how can one preserve their lives, the lives of the innocent, without the use of force, including, inevitably, killing force? If actively killing some (attacking) neighbors seems wrong, so does passively allowing some other (attacked) neighbors to be killed when we are able to prevent it. According to the Heidelberg Catechism's exposition of the sixth commandment, loving the neighbor includes our attempt "to protect him from harm as much as we can" (A. 107). One of the ways we do this is by the election and support of the divinely mandated institution of government. Governments are equipped with the power of the sword (Romans 13) to protect those who are threatened and attacked by marauders. Of course, the "prevention of murder" for which "government is armed with the sword," according to the Catechism, may sometimes occasion the use of that sword.

Now the Christian just war theory says that though murder is always wrong, killing for the purpose of preserving and enhancing life may not always be wrong. Obviously, "killing for the purpose of preserving and enhancing life" sounds paradoxical, or worse. It is paradoxical. Yet, because we live in a fallen world, because the Kingdom has not yet fully come, it may sometimes be necessary, for the greatest preserving and enhancing of life, to kill those who threaten it.

An example may be helpful. Suppose a man with a machine gun opens fire on a crowd at a sports event. Suppose, moreover, that a policeman (for instance, a Christian Reformed policeman), himself wounded in the spray of bullets, squeezes off a dying shot at the assailant and kills him. Has the policeman done wrong? Surely, he has taken another human life. But, no doubt, overall he has preserved many lives in that arena by taking one. Overall, he has been obedient to the command to do good to one's neighbor(s).

Thus it may be within the positive intent of the sixth commandment sometimes to preserve and enhance life by taking life. The largest scale instances of this will occur in time of war when a nation defends itself or another relatively innocent nation against the murderous attacks of the enemy. In such a case, the preservation of life (even, if

necessary, by killing) is not a violation of, but an instance of obedience to, the sixth commandment. If the protection of the innocent cannot be secured without resort to the armed restraint of lawless nations, then a Christian may have to bear arms and a Christian may have to kill. The presence of sin occasions the Christian's dilemma—whether by action to sacrifice the lives of the assailants or by inaction to sacrifice those of the innocent—and because the good which the Christian seeks to promote includes justice, the Christian may have to decide in favor of protecting the innocent. If the grievance is particularly clear and particularly acute, the justice factor may, on occasion, even justify the sacrificing of a larger number of aggressors' lives for the sake of protecting a smaller number of innocent lives.

Another example may be useful. Suppose five strong young men attack one fragile old man. They demand his money and begin to kick him when he will not, or cannot, produce it. If he is not rescued from this merciless beating, he may die. Any rescuer, however, must contend with the fact that the five are armed and will not be distracted from their prey without force, or threat of force. We may want to say that even if defense of the old man cannot be achieved without the use of force, including killing force, against the young men who, let us say, have now begun to fire their weapons, still, the rescuer may not have done wrong. The rescuer may, in fact, have done right in taking, as necessary, three, four, or five lives to protect one or two. He may be obliged, in other words, to do good by upholding justice even on those occasions when, by doing so, more lives are lost than would have been lost in case innocent victims had simply been sacrificed to the whims of their murderers. Justice is a weighty factor in the calculation of what the good is which love seeks to promote.

Now there are in the eyes of God, of course, no completely or purely just wars at all. That is, in a perfect world there would be no wars—"just" or not. The fact is that every war is carried out in the wreckage of human life and the frustration of human hope, and is ended with suffering still to be visited upon children's children for years to come. "Just war" is therefore an easily misunderstood expression. Yet, as argued above, some nation's participation in war may, on occasion, be justified and promote justice. The difficulty lies in determining, by intelligence, sensitivity, and prayer, just which instances of participation in war are justified and which are not.

Obviously, most of the reasons for waging war are Christianly impermissible and considerably outside the kingdom of God. Christians readily recognize that most reasons for going to war are wrong. Christians know, for instance, that the call to bear arms in a war of sheer aggression is morally wrong and may not be heeded. Christians know that merely economic war-making is immoral. Christians know that all land-hungry, imperialistic war-making is wrong. Christians also know (on the basis of Romans 12:17, for instance) that vindictive, hateful, striking back in rage is unchristian behavior. And they know that, in the moral arena, means are as morally significant as ends, that therefore, no war activity which by its aiding the obliteration of human society would destroy—or have a serious chance of destroying—more good than it preserves can be Christianly supported.

Christians know, in other words, that all disproportionate defensive war-waging is wrong, and that all-out nuclear war, disproportionate war-waging's clearest example, is ipso facto immoral and unsupportable by any Christian. (See report of the Committee on the Problem of War, Acts of Synod 1964, pp. 314-316.) Finally because of the uniquely Christian love of peace and mission of reconciliation, Christians know that all national truculence, all inclination—surely all eagerness—to fight, all crusading spirit, every proud display of weaponry and glorying in military might, is thoroughly immoral and contrary both to the letter and spirit of everything our Lord teaches.

Christians ought to go to war reluctantly and only when the alternative is clearly worse. Christians may participate in limited, defensive war only when the alternative consists in allowing lawless men to kill, ravage, decimate and turn to ashes the lives and habitats of innocent people. When every responsible attempt to solve differences has failed, when the good of the attackers has been consciously balanced against the good of those attacked, when there is a massive and unprovoked threat to life and peace, when, finally, the decision to engage in war has been legally taken, then a Christian may take up arms in defense of the innocent and rest in the conviction that in a dark and brutal world he is obeying Jesus' command to love neighbors as well as he can.

The State

The questions surrounding a Christian's participation in war inevitably raise, as well, the question of the view one holds of the state and its authority. There have been Christians who have questioned the legitimacy of the state itself, as well as its right to use military power. Such a view of the state would have a great deal of bearing on how one would respond to a call to military service. With such a view one could even feel virtuous in rejecting the government's call to military service regardless of the circumstances under which the call came.

Other Christians have taken the position that the government has a God-given authority such that when the government orders a Christian citizen to take up arms and fight in a war his duty is not to question what his government is doing, but simply to obey. On this view those in government are answerable to God for the moral choices of the nation but the citizens are not. On this basis it is neither the task nor the right of the Christian citizen to

evaluate his government's decision to go to war. Such a view of the state will also have a great bearing on how one would respond to a call to military service.

Neither of the above views will square with what the Scriptures teach about the Christian's relation to the state. The first of these does not give due recognition to the God-given authority of the state. The second position above fails to recognize that the God-given authority of the state is not ultimate.

The first part of Romans 13 is often the focus of discussions of the Christian and his relation to the state. It is important that we understand both what Romans 13 affirms and what it does not affirm. In Romans 13 we are called upon to recognize and submit to the God-given authority of the civil government. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (13:1). So, Christian citizens owe the state obedience in all matters that are within that God-given authority.

However, Paul's recognition of the God-given authority of the state may not be used to justify the conclusion that God wants us to obey every directive of every authority figure regardless of how that figure exercises his power. Only God has a sovereignty that is unlimited. Every human sovereignty is restricted by the higher claims of God's commandments and limited to the sphere for which the authority was given.

While Romans 13 does not specifically lay down the limits of human authority, it has much to say about those limits indirectly, by setting forth the nature of human authority. Paul declares that all authority flows from God (13:1), and that human authority is only the means of carrying out a God-given assignment. As Paul puts it, the ruler "does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer" (13:4). Since the wrath of God, which the ruler is to execute, relates to man's sin, the ruler's task bears a clear relationship to God's commandments, and to the righteousness and justice required by those commandments.

The God-given authority of the government cannot be detached from that purpose and still claim the unconditional obedience of the person whose loyalty is to God and whose obedience to the state should flow from that loyalty. If the ruler uses his authority to satisfy his own power urges, advance the fortunes of himself and his friends, or reshape the world to his own private wishes, in these actions he has no right to the support of the Christian citizen. And if the ruler orders a citizen to participate in some action that is in violation of one of God's commandments, or to refrain from participation in some action which God requires, the Christian citizen's higher loyalty to God and his commandment must then show itself.

It is important to reflect not only on what Romans 13 says but also on what other biblical materials have to say on the relation between the believer and the state. While biblical history illustrates over and over again that God in his sovereign purposes is able to use sinful kings and even heathen powers to achieve his redemptive goals, the biblical picture of civil authorities is not a very lofty one. In the biblical materials the state does not finally come through as an institution to which believers owe unquestioning allegiance. The Bible is full of warnings that sin may express itself in the demonic abuse of power. Daniel and his friends submit the orders of the king to the test of whether those orders conform to God's commandments. When Daniel and his friends conclude that those orders do not conform, they refuse to submit to them and are sustained by God both in their judgments and their actions. The Old Testament prophets regularly expose and oppose not only the sins of pagan kings but also those of the kings of Israel and Judah. In the New Testament Jesus tells us to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" but carefully sets that in the context of "render unto God the things that are God's." The book of Revelation warns of what the state may become, using language such as "beast," "dragon" and "great whore."

Thus, in the biblical materials on the Christian and the state there is a kind of tension. There is need to recognize the God-given authority of the state and to discern where that authority requires loyal obedience. But there is also the need to recognize where the use of authority becomes sinful and where our deeper loyalty and obedience to God must prevail. While the state is called to serve as a minister of God and must be obeyed when it serves as such, Christians cannot uncritically obey the state on the assumption that it is always fulfilling that calling.

In view of the above, in times of war the duty to obey the God-given authority of the state in no way cancels a Christian's duty to act in conformity with God's law. If the state commands a Christian to kill his fellow man, he cannot escape moral accountability for his act by saying that God commands us to obey the government and the government ordered him to do it. God commands both the citizen and the government to obey his commandments; when the state violates God's commandments, God calls upon the Christian to obey God rather than men.

If the state engages in a war in a clearly immoral way, the moral problem of a Christian is also not limited to military service. It is the duty of a Christian citizen to oppose such an immoral action not only by refusing to bear arms but also by a forthright prophetic witness, and by refusal to support the war through war-related industry or war-related taxes as well.

While the duty to obey the higher authority of God and to oppose and resist immoral actions by the state applies under any form of government, there is a special application of this duty in a democracy. In a democracy, in which citizens have some voice in government, the citizen has a greater opportunity to influence the actions of government and an accompanying greater responsibility for the actions of his government than the citizens in a monarchy or a dictatorship.

Not only national actions but national attitudes as well are a concern for the Christian in relation to the state. The Christian should bring prophetic witness to bear on any attitude that treats the God-given authority of the state with disrespect or that gives a false ultimacy to the state. The Christian should especially be on guard against the attitudes of anarchism, militarism, and (national) chauvinism, and should recognize the sinfulness of all three. The Christian must reject and bear witness against the stance of anarchism, with its view that all government is evil and unnecessary, and with its refusal to honor the God-given authority of the state. The Christian must also reject and bear witness against militarism, with its glorying in might, its love of weaponry, its spoiling for a fight, and its sometimes reckless race to produce more devastating armaments than the other members of the family of nations. Similarly, the Christian must oppose the attitudes of chauvinism, with its overweening love for one's own country, which exalts that nation and its people above the claims for recognition and just treatment of the other nations of the world. The Christian should recognize the sinfulness and worldliness in each of these attitudes and respond accordingly.

There is, assuredly, a kind of patriotic love for one's country which is altogether wholesome. That patriotic love flows from a love for one's neighbor as commanded by God, and is only a broader expression of that love. To love one's country in this sense means to respect the God-given calling of one's nation and the worth which accompanies that calling. It means to seek and defend the true well-being of that nation within the framework of that calling, willingly making personal sacrifices in order to do so.

However, it is important to recognize the difference between such a wholesome Christian patriotism and a chauvinism that calls for unconditional loyalty to one's country, exalts one's own country above all others, and is willing to deny justice to other peoples if that denial advances the power of one's own nation. It is important that a Christian recognize the difference between Christian patriotism and that idolatry which loyally supports the action of one's own country regardless of whether it is right or wrong.

To be sure, a Christian ought to love his country whether it is right or wrong, but he ought to express that love differently when the action of his country comes in conflict with God's commandments. On the individual level love for one's neighbor may sometimes require calling one's neighbor to repentance and changed behavior. So also, love for one's country may sometimes require the Christian patriot to raise a prophetic voice against the actions of his country. When patriotism is placed in this context, it is altogether fitting that the Christian exercise a patriotic love for his country. The Conscience

One of the key concepts in a discussion of ethical decisions relating to war is the conscience. There have been various views of the conscience, and one's view of the conscience is important, because that view has much to do with both the role one assigns to conscience and the way one deals with conscientious objections, either in oneself or in another. Conflicting views of how a Christian should relate to war have often involved conflicting views of what the conscience is and how it is to be treated.

Common to the various views is the recognition that the conscience is an inner voice addressing the individual concerning the rightness or wrongness of his conduct. In Romans 2:15 the Apostle Paul recognizes that even the "Gentiles" have consciences that accuse or excuse them. But various views differ on the question of whose voice it is that speaks within, with what authority it speaks and how seriously it is to be taken.

One set of views tends to see the conscience as the voice of God himself. If one so defines the conscience, this has implications. If conscience is simply the voice of God, then the conscience has absolute authority and may not be questioned. On this basis the validity of the testimony of conscience can never be challenged, either by a fellow human being or by a government that wants to send one to war. In war the individual conscience must be the sole judge of whether the individual will participate in a war. So, too, one's duty to one's own conscience is simple obedience and one's duty to the conscience of others is simply to urge them to follow their consciences.

Another set of views sees the conscience as merely an element in the human make-up, a human faculty that makes judgments concerning right and wrong. Like depth perception, which judges distances, the conscience is seen as a human faculty that judges morality. If one so defines the conscience, this also has implications. On this basis the testimony of conscience is nothing but a subjective human judgment. Like all subjective human judgments, it can be freely challenged, impatiently rebuked, or lightly dismissed. It speaks with no authority, for it has no objective reference. On this view the nation can freely send the individual to war regard-less of whether the individual's conscience objects.

Neither of the above views of conscience fits the biblical data on conscience. The Apostle Paul makes clear that the conscience is not to be treated simply as the voice of God, for the conscience can be weak, or mistaken, and does involve subjective judgment (I Corinthians 8). However, the conscience is also not to be lightly dismissed or treated with disrespect, for it is something important in one's relation to one's Lord. To "defile" or "wound" the conscience is a matter of serious spiritual consequences, as Paul sees it (I Corinthians 8:7-13).

While the voice of conscience is not simply the voice of God, it is also not simply a subjective judgment without objective reference. The voice of conscience is perhaps best described as the inner voice that testifies for the moral authorities we recognize. Some voice of conscience speaks to everyone (Romans 2:15), but the content of that voice varies according to the authorities and standards which we consciously or unconsciously recognize. For some, the voice of conscience may merely reflect the values of family, friends, and society. But a sensitive Christian conscience is responsive to the values of the Christian fellowship, and, beyond these, to God as he reveals himself in the Scriptures, in his law, and in the person of Christ. The sanctified Christian conscience is one in which God's law is "written in the heart" (Psalm 119:10, 11; II Corinthians 3:1-6, Hebrews 8:10, 11).

Thus the conscience of a Christian is very much involved in his commitment to his Lord. One cannot trample upon his conscience, or permit another to do so, without serious spiritual damage to his commitment (I Corinthians 8:7-13). To act in flagrant conflict with one's conscience is moral suicide. This means that the genuine conscientious objection of the Christian should be dealt with very carefully not only by the individual himself, but also by the fellowship of believers and the nation.

However, while the Christian's conscience includes what he hears as his Lord's call to obedience, it is important to recognize that the conscience may hear imperfectly and may be mistaken. It is also important to understand that the conscience is not a static thing, but is capable of growth and is shaped by social influences. The Christian conscience is in a lifelong process of being shaped by the Word of God in the fellowship of believers. This social influence is not only taking place constantly, but it is proper that it should. One of the purposes of the communion of saints and the admonition of the church is the shaping of the moral discernment of the individual in order that he grow up into mature judgment (cf. Ephesians 4:13).

This means that a Christian who is struggling with a moral decision about war ought never to isolate himself from the counsel of fellow-believers as he seeks the light of the Word. The Christian who is faced with the decision of whether or not to participate in an act of war should not presume to decide that question without thoroughly examining the moral issues while receiving the fullest counsel of the Christian fellowship in understanding those issues. Similarly, the Christian fellowship ought to recognize its responsibility to the conscience of the individual and should enter in the fullest possible way into that counsel.

Nevertheless, when the time for decision arrives, the church may not presume to dictate to the conscience of the individual. During the process of counsel, the believing fellowship may work hard in an effort to reshape the conscience of the individual so that he comes to a conclusion in harmony with the conscientious convictions of the larger fellowship. However, when the outcome of the process is clear, the church must urge the individual not to violate his own conscience but to act in integrity with his own conscientious conviction. In the final decision, the church may not appoint itself the ultimate judge over the individual, because not the church but Christ is the Lord of the conscience.

The Church

One's view of the church and its role in moral decisions can also have much to do with how one handles a decision-making situation relating to war.

Some see the task and concern of the church as a purely spiritual role, and then define the spiritual as dealing only with man's relationship with God. This view tends to see the church as concerned with personal salvation, with sound doctrine, with private and public worship, but not with deciding when the government ought to wage war, or whether the individual ought to participate and how. Those who so view the spiritual role of the church usually also affirm that the church should not "meddle" in politics and in social problems in general.

If some one takes this view of the church's role, he will likely be annoyed by requests that the church take a position on war, or race relations, or any social problem. Moreover, when faced by a question of his own involvement in war, whether by duty in the armed forces, by work or investment in industry producing war materials, or by paying taxes which support a war effort, he will tend to make his decisions in isolation, without consulting the body of the church.

But the above view does not square with the biblical picture of the church in relation to its members. The role of the church is, indeed, spiritual. But the moral questions of whether and how we participate in the waging of war that kills our fellow human beings are spiritual questions. God's commandments apply to all of life, especially to our treatment of our fellow human beings, and social questions inevitably involve us in the matter of our obedience to our Lord. So

the church that is concerned about our spiritual life must be concerned about how we relate to a war that kills our fellow human beings, and the church should rightly become involved in the decision-making process.

However, there is the further question of how the church ought to become involved. Here, again, one's view of the church makes a great deal of difference. Different views of the role and authority of the church in relation to the moral life of its members can result in quite different approaches.

One danger to be avoided is the tendency to see the institutional church as a legislator for moral decisions. If one sees the church this way, he tends to look to the church for a code of moral behavior and to reduce his own moral question to one of whether he is obeying the authority of the church. Whether that moral authority is seen as flowing from a pope through a hierarchy of priests, or flowing from a synod through the assemblies of the church, the impact may be about the same. Such an individual may find a sense of security in doing what the church has said is right, or he may live with a sense of guilt because he knows the position of the church and does not follow it. Either way, he sees the church as the legislator for moral decisions and the authority for his conscience, and tends to feel he is in a moral vacuum in areas where the church has not spoken.

While the church should become involved in moral decision-making, it should not be involved in that fashion. The church is not a legislator for moral decisions and should avoid even the appearance of taking over that role. Christ alone is Lord of the conscience (cf. I Corinthians 4:3-5; Matthew 15:8, 9). The task of the church is not to subjugate the conscience of the individual, but to enlighten it, and to seek its mature responsiveness to Christ the Lord. As observed earlier in this report, the conscience of the Christian needs the fellowship and witness of the church in reaching mature moral decisions. But that assistance must be given in a way that respects the nature of the church's moral authority, as well as its role in relation to the conscience.

With respect to such difficult questions as war, this means that the church should witness freely to what the Scriptures teach, and urge the individual to expose his conscience fully to all the relevant issues, and this within the context of the fellowship of the church. However, when that process has been followed, the church must urge the individual to act in integrity with his own conscientious convictions as to the will of his Lord, and must accept and support him in the exercise of them, even if those convictions should disagree with those of a majority of the church.

Simply stated, the true task of the church in relation to war is the proclamation of the Word. The church should bear witness forthrightly to what the Scriptures teach and to what the church sees as the clear implications of those teachings. The pulpit of the church should stimulate the consciences of the members by speaking to the moral issues of the day, including wars when they occur. When clarity and consensus can be reached, the assemblies of the church should also address the membership, the government, and society at large with its testimony to the standards of Christ and what they mean in the current situation.

In time of war a painful price in conflict may be paid by the church that forthrightly bears witness concerning the rightness or wrongness of its nation's behavior. Nevertheless, when clarity and consensus can be reached on that question there is no good reason why the assemblies of the church should not openly declare what they see as the moral duty of the nation and its Christian citizens.

This task is rendered especially difficult by the fact that not all instances of war-making are clearly moral or immoral. In some of them information is so limited and the moral issues sufficiently complex so that the church may simply be unable to reach clarity and consensus. In such cases the church can nevertheless explore the relevant moral issues not only through sermons and Bible study, but also through debates, colloquia, study committees, and the advice of those with special qualifications to address these issues.

However difficult the task, the church cannot escape the responsibility to address moral questions. The church must speak in order to stimulate and enlighten the consciences of its own members and also in order to arouse in government and society an awareness of the claims of God's law and the meaning of God's call to reconciliation.

Introduction To The Guidelines

In setting forth the foregoing teachings of the Word of God concerning the responsibilities of Christians relative to war, the committee believes it has presented the foundation for providing guidelines to the members of the church who must make the difficult decisions concerning involvement in war and to the assemblies and officers of the church as they seek to fulfill their respective prophetic and pastoral callings. However, before listing the guidelines it is necessary to make some important observations which are fundamental to their proper utilization.

A. We believe that the following statements express biblical principles and should underlie all decisions about war:

(1) All wars are the result of sin, and though God may use wars in his judgement on nations, it is his purpose to make all wars to cease.

(2) The supreme standard for all moral decisions is the will of God. When Jesus said, "Love your enemies," he taught that there are no exceptions to God's command to "love your neighbor as yourself." In all circumstances the Christian believer must live by the law of love enunciated by the sovereign Lawgiver and Judge and exemplified in his Son.

(3) A. The Christian should obey the state when it orders him to act within the framework of righteousness. Conversely, he should disobey every order of the state to perform acts contrary to the will of God, and he may not obey such demands of government as require him to sin. The Christian must obey God rather than men.

B. Careful distinction must be made between basic biblical principles and the guidelines set forth to assist Christians in living by those principles. All Christians must surely agree that the root cause of all war is sin; that God "makes wars cease to the end of the earth;" that Christians are called to be peacemakers. But there have been and probably will continue to be significant differences among Christians on how to implement these principles in the real world of hate and violence. There are several factors that stand in the way of unanimity among Christians when they are required to make decisions about war.

(1) The complexity of international politics and economics and the secrecy and deception ordinarily employed in international relations make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain the pertinent facts that must be known in order to judge the morality of participation in any given war.

(2) The difficulties inherent in cross-cultural communication often make it hard to understand other nations, their problems and objectives.

(3) Sin affects the capacity of Christians to evaluate accurately and honestly the grave and complex moral issues in a world in tension between sin and righteousness. National and personal interests and prejudices tend to overcome concern for the righteousness of God and the welfare of society on a world-wide scale.

(4) Inability to look into the future prevents Christians from perceiving the full effect decisions about war will have on the future of society.

In the face of these difficulties it is not possible for the church to arrive at a neat set of morally binding rules for her members relative to war. At best she can offer guidelines that mark out boundaries, point out directions and dangers, and stimulate the mind to thoughtful, honest evaluation of the issues at hand. Such guidelines can do no more than assist the church and her members in translating into practicality and in implementing the principles of Holy Scripture. Moreover, the church cannot expect that any set of guidelines, however carefully drawn and conscientiously employed, will necessarily result in a unanimous evaluation of any given war. Conscientious members of the Christian community sometimes interpret differently the various authorities which form and nurture the individual conscience. However, the church can hope and pray that they will provide help for the development and proper functioning of the Christian conscience as the proper means for Christian decision-making in a sinful world.

C. In his unrelenting opposition to all war, the committed pacifist may not despise and reject a fellow-Christian whose conscience persuades him of the legitimacy of his nation's armed response to aggression. Nor should the Christian, whose conscientious patriotism readies him to take up arms against aggression, scorn and condemn the Christian pacifist whose conscience forbids him to engage in or encourage any act of violence. The Bible in a number of places approves passive resistance, and, although this report concludes that war is sometimes necessary, and participation therein justified, we do not hesitate to point out that Christian pacifism has a long and respected history. The difficulties inherent in the problem of war and Christian participation therein, together with the imperfect moral state and limited wisdom of every Christian, summon all members of the church to mutual understanding and tolerance of the conscientious convictions of one another.

Guidelines

In the name of the Prince of Peace the synod of the Christian Reformed Church adopted the following guidelines for making ethical decisions about war in the hope that, with the indispensable guidance of the Holy Spirit, they will be useful to all who seek to do the will of God in matters involving war.

1. Christians faced with problems concerning war should respect their need of the communion of saints, remembering the affirmation of Scripture: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (I Peter 2:9). By divine grace Christians are bound to God in holy covenant, and by faith are united to Christ in one body. Therefore they should realize that weighty moral decisions are made responsibly before the face of God only if the prayers and counsel of the covenant fellowship are sincerely sought and lovingly offered.

2. If the nation has or is about to become involved in war or in any military action against another nation, Christians, as morally responsible citizens of the nation and of God's kingdom, should evaluate their nation's involvement by

diligently seeking the answers to the following, drawing on the counsel of fellow-members with special qualifications as well as pastors and the assemblies of the church:

- a. Is our nation the unjust aggressor?
 - b. Is our nation intentionally involved for economic advantage?
 - c. Is our nation intentionally involved for imperialistic ends, such as the acquisition of land, natural resources, or political power in international relations?
 - d. Has our nation in good faith observed all relevant treaties and other international agreements?
 - e. Has our nation exhausted all peaceful means to resolve the matters in dispute?
 - f. Is the evil or aggression represented by the opposing force of such overwhelming magnitude and gravity as to warrant the horrors and brutality of military opposition to it?
 - g. Has the decision to engage in war been taken legally by a legitimate government?
 - h. Are the means of warfare employed or likely to be employed by our nation in fair proportion to the evil or aggression of the opposing forces? Is our nation resolved to employ minimum necessary force?
 - i. In the course of the war has our nation been proposing and encouraging negotiations for peace or has it spurned such moves by the opposing forces or by neutral or international organizations?
3. If a Christian cannot conscientiously engage in a given war or in alternate service, his refusal must be within the framework of law. He must expose himself to the due process and even the penalty of the state whose laws he has knowingly, publicly, and conscientiously broken. He should not "go underground" or flee the country except under conditions of extraordinary oppression or intolerably brutal tyranny.
4. If an individual must make a personal decision about involvement in war, he should seek the prayers and guidance of his parents and other members of his family group. The family, in turn, should provide such guidance and prayer support. If there are continuing disagreements within the family, the various members should exercise mutual respect, forbearance and charity.
5. A Christian who believes it is sinful for him to serve in a given war, or who conscientiously objects to serving in any war, should notify his church and be open to its counsel.
6. When the nation faces international crisis or war itself, those who preach the Word must seek the direction and support of the Holy Spirit so they will be able to declare prophetically from the Scriptures what Christ is saying concerning the issues at stake. Furthermore, the love of Christ must be forcefully and compassionately proclaimed in order, in the face of differing opinions in the church, to preserve the unity and fellowship of the body of Christ and to guard against sinful nationalism and hatred of people of other nations.
7. Pastors should recognize their special responsibility to counsel all members and families of the church who are required to make decisions relating to war. They must take particular care with those families where differences are so sharp as to threaten that loving Christian communion which is expressive of the covenant of grace.
8. Remembering that the moral decisions respecting participation in war are among the most agonizing faced by any Christian, the members and assemblies of the church should not reject fellow-Christians whose conclusions and decisions differ from the majority, but in the name of our longsuffering Savior exercise understanding and forbearance. They should also provide counseling and other necessary support to those whose conscientious stand brings them any sort of hardship.
9. The members of the church, out of reverence for the righteousness and justice of God, should be willing always to test the policies and practices of all governments by the teachings of Holy Scripture, and never assume a blind and proud nationalistic spirit that regards one's own nation as always above criticism. Moreover, they should consider it their duty under God to give discreet expression to their conscientious views in whatever manner is open to them.
10. Whether to prevent the outbreak of war, to hasten the cessation of hostilities, or to encourage support of or resistance to a given war, the assemblies of the church, by means of public testimony or petitions addressed to the governments concerned, must give clear and courageous witness to the teachings of the Scriptures.
11. In order to give informed witness in times of war and international crisis, the assemblies of the church should use the best available resources in areas such as ethics, law, history, international relations, political science, economics, and psychology. The assemblies should also urge knowledgeable Christians to offer freely their services to all in the

Christian community to whom war or the threat of war present pressing problems--both conscientious participants and conscientious objectors and their families.

12. Christians should use their rights and privileges of citizenship to secure such legislation as is calculated to prevent unjust war, correct moral wrong, and establish just policies.

13. Christians who hold public office must give total allegiance to Christ the King and firmly resist every compromise of righteousness and justice in the conduct of government. Specific

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