

# Kenotic Warfare: Christian Action against Aggression

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It is a sad comment on human nature that warfare has been a feature of life from time immemorial. It is almost certainly true to say that there has never been a day without a war being fought somewhere in the world. Much of what passes for history is a chronicling of aggression between groups, tribes and nations, resulting in conquest, subjugation and slavery of one by another. The Bible itself witnesses to this, warfare filling the pages of the Old Testament. If it is not a feature of the New, it is only because its peace was enforced militarily by the Romans, who would suppress any rebellion without hesitation or mercy.

But this seems hardly consistent with Christianity. Warfare seems so obviously a result of sin that Christians can hardly approve of it. How can it be compatible with following the one known as the 'prince of peace', who promised to give his peace? If he did want to change the nature of human society, he rejected the usual human approach of force. Although he did claim that overwhelming military might was available to him, access to 'more than twelve legions of angels' (Matt. 26:53), he did not use it. Rather than exploit the chance that he had of establishing an earthly kingdom that might have been available to him on his triumphal entry to Jerusalem, when he could have accepted the kingship and use what was overwhelming popularity, he chose instead the path that led to the cross. Pilate seemed to have recognized the possibilities for rebellion that rested in Jesus, and justified the crucifixion on those grounds. However sarcastically, he executed the 'king of the Jews'.

Jesus' path to the cross has, in the area of warfare as in other human activities, given an example for Christians to follow. Indeed he commanded Christians to 'take up your cross'. It is hardly surprising that Christian history has had no shortage of those who have believed that taking Jesus as Lord demands an acceptance of a principle of non-violence, even the non-resistance of evil. His example in *kenōsis* (Philp.2:7), and of course also his words, most notably in the Sermon on the Mount, have been the inspiration for Christian pacifism. What other way could there be when the Master himself taught people to love their enemies, to turn the other cheek, not to resist the aggressor? The message of the Sermon on the Mount would seem to be crystal clear, even though it has always been subject to qualification, such as

seeing turning the cheek as refusal to respond not to aggression, but to indignity. The words of Jesus cannot be seen as empty when he carried them to a consistent fulfilment in his actions on the cross. He accepted the evil done to him, refusing to resist, refusing to do what would have seemed to be possible to the Son of God, resisting evil more directly, and obliterating it with divine force. And the sentiments expressed by Jesus find an echo in other parts of the Bible as well. If by his action, Jesus enabled reconciliation with God, imitating his model should achieve reconciliation between people as well; war becomes superfluous. Such was the case in the early church, healing the tremendous divide between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:11f.); the same Spirit who did that can heal similar divides today. His choice of humility in *kenōsis*, of non-resistance, has, for many, justified a rejection of warfare, an adoption of pacifism. God adopted *kenōsis* for the sake of giving freedom; it is hardly consistent with it to apply force. The Russian Molokans embraced pacifism for just this reason, as did Tolstoy.<sup>1</sup> But was this also just a special case? Is it that Jesus could follow a personal stand of non-resistance only because of who he was, so that the cross was a unique action because there Jesus was effecting atonement? The Jews did not consider imitating God impossible.<sup>2</sup> Or was it only for 'special' but not ordinary Christians, a common medieval attitude, where clergy were exempt from war? Or was his action acceptable because it did not actually harm anybody else? Notwithstanding the pain and distress caused to his mother and disciples, of course.

However, Philippians 2 presents *kenōsis* as an example to be followed; does this apply to warfare? This was the stance of the early church, significantly in a situation of what could be severe persecution. At that time, Christian participation in war was not countenanced; there is no evidence of Christians in the army before 170 AD, although there was increasing participation thereafter. Hornus<sup>3</sup> chronicles the attitude of Christians in the pre-Constantine church, who in general refused military service. He particularly cites the opinions of Tertullian, Cyprian, Hippolytus, and Martin of Tours, the latter of whom gave his book its title, *pugnare mihi non licet*: 'It is not lawful to me to fight.' Justin assumes that all Christians are pacifist.<sup>4</sup> This is an attitude shared by many today, notably, of course, Quakers, Mennonites, and, outside of orthodox Christianity, Jehovah's Witnesses.

Although a pacifist attitude is not absent in the ancient world, as in the case of Socrates, who said that it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it,<sup>5</sup> it is striking that the early church attitude was distinctly contrary to both their Old Testament predecessors, as the events of the Jewish rebellions against Rome show, and to the existing worldview, as exemplified by Rome. The teaching and example of Jesus is the only explanation for this contrast. 'Blessed', he said, 'are

the peacemakers' (Matt. 5:9). It is then highly significant that the early church is often held up as a model for the modern, which should then include its pacifism.

The adoption of this attitude may be supported by the observation that self-limitation would remove a lot of the cause for aggression. Warfare is often motivated by the desire for acquisition of what is possessed by the other.

What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war with your members? You desire and do not have, so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war (Jas. 4:1-2).

For Christians, such a desire to acquire for its own sake must be contrary to the attitude of Jesus, and a refusal to display what one has, also in imitation of him, must also reduce the temptation to aggression. The ancient Cyreniatics avoided warfare by adopting poverty.<sup>6</sup> If there is self-restraint, then the desire is largely undercut. This is of course not to say that self-limitation would immediately remove all aggression. Wars are fought over pieces of ground that are actually next to worthless. However, a refusal to live ostentatiously, to parade wealth, can go a long way to reduce that temptation, even if it does not eliminate it. A longing to acquire is a part of humanity, the opposite of *kenōsis*.

It was this that was specifically repudiated by Jesus in his path of *kenōsis*. Whereas Jesus refused to grasp at equality with God (Philp. 2:6), sin was due to a lack of humility, a desire to be like God, to acquire equality with God. Warfare and aggression are manifestations of that same sin. Even if they sometimes aim to resist evil, they do it through evil, seeking to cast out devils by the devil (Matt. 12:24).

At the same time, Jesus effectively repudiated most of the reasons for which people go to war. He undercut the basis of the existence of his own people in his attitude to the law, and effectively rejected their culture. Paul could confidently exclaim a couple of decades later that there is no longer any Jew or Greek (Gal. 3:28). He rejected that great call of today, for freedom, by taking the form of a servant (Philp. 2:7), so that Paul could continue that there is no longer slave or free. (I am not aware of any wars fought over that third great division in humanity also overcome in Christ, that between male and female!)

### Christian pacifism

In addition to the command and example of Jesus, the early church also justified their rejection of warfare on other grounds. A common feeling was that it was wrong to defend one's state, when for Christians, as citizens of heaven, belonging to one country is no longer relevant.<sup>7</sup> The prohibition of blood (Acts 15:20) was often interpreted as against bloodshed (a medieval archbishop obeyed this by warring with a club rather than a sword!)<sup>8</sup> Any killing can well be seen as infringing the right of God over life; a person does not have the power to reverse what has been done. More particularly, it went against God to harm his special creation; they were also concerned that they might kill fellow believers. And of course belonging to the army of the day was associated with paganism. The *sacramentum*, or oath of allegiance

that a soldier took, was usually seen as contrary to the *sacramentum* to Christ in baptism; a Christian could have no divided loyalty.

Pacifists feel that confronted with the choice between violence, so causing suffering, and allowing suffering, they are compelled to the latter, even if it seems unjust. It is better to suffer evil than to do it. Augustine, despite his advocacy of the just war, said that a Christian is one who 'prefers to endure evil so as not to commit it rather than to commit evil so as not to endure it'.<sup>9</sup> He accepted the loss of possessions, life, rape, as the only ultimate value is heavenly, but urged fighting for justice.

Some of these points have fallen away in the modern context, although the basic one of obedience to Jesus' words and example is still valid. Other issues have arisen; Quakers have sometimes supported their pacifist stance by insisting that obedience to the 'inner light' renders military discipline impossible. Particularly in the modern situation, spending on arms can be seen as stealing from the poor; Davis,<sup>10</sup> however, feels that even such colossal expenditure must be seen in the context of what is spent on other things such as alcohol.

Even in the more traditional churches, many have felt that anything other than pacifism is an evasion of the plain intention of Jesus. Of course, evasion is very often an option that can be adopted. In his youth the author was always set upon a career in aircraft engineering, but when his degree course was finished, the most profitable career would naturally have fallen in the military arena. The moral problem was evaded by taking a different job at a lower salary, which did not have the same moral problem attached to it. Yet there were many who saw no inconsistency in coupling a Christian stand with the development of armaments. He was also glad that he was born at such a time and in such a place that he was not confronted with any form of military conscription. When teaching in Swaziland, there were those with him from an America pursuing the Vietnam adventure whose motive for being there was at least partly from a desire to avoid the 'draft'. His closest brush with the problem came in the closing years of *apartheid*, when white South Africans were compelled to carry arms against those referred to as 'terrorists'. Those with permanent residence were expected to participate on threat of the withdrawal of residence, but such threats were not consistently carried out, fortunately, as he ignored the demand.

And he has never been in a situation where his child or wife was in such a situation of danger that it would seem that the only way of resolving it would be physical violence. What would Jesus do in such a situation? This has commonly been distinguished from the question of war; although the early church rejected warfare, it certainly followed the New Testament in seeing the value of the military for police purposes, giving law and order. Christian opposition to war was not just opposition to Rome. Secrétan suggested that the early church could support this action of *militare*, but not when it became active warfare, *bellare*.<sup>11</sup> Martin of Tours even stayed in the army for two years, taking his stand only when he was called upon to kill. Participation in *militare* can be seen as part of the obligation of 'rendering to Caesar' (Matt. 22:21), or the support of the state (Rom. 13:1f.), but which can also be withheld when the demands of the state become unacceptable (Acts 5:29).

## The demand of justice

Perhaps an immediate reason for force is the feeling that there has been injustice. If a person feels that he or she has been treated unfairly, the natural reaction is retaliation, and that this is only just. If this is not done, of course there will be injustice. By following the path of *kenōsis*, Jesus himself suffered injustice, which may well be the lot of anybody trying to follow his example. But, on the other hand, what he achieved by his suffering was the reconciliation of the love and justice of God; justice for others was achieved, yet without their suffering. But, in fact, Jesus' action was not a total abrogation of justice even for himself, as he was later glorified (Philp. 2:10). His *kenōsis* was not a surrendering of power, but its self-limitation, and then only temporary. Christians can be confident that their adoption of *kenōsis* likewise will not result in ultimate injustice. Paul can urge the disciples not to avenge themselves; he quotes Leviticus 19:18, in the war-like Old Testament: '(V)engeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord' (Rom. 12:19).

Part of the motivation for participation in warfare is that it is also morally questionable for a person who has refused active participation in warfare to accept the benefits of the sacrifice of others; this is also unjust. It is of course difficult not to benefit without actually leaving the country, so perhaps the moral issue does fall away. Pacifists also generally suffer for their stand, sometimes from the law, sometimes from those around; their stand is never easy. There is also a sense that this argument has a parallel in the act of Jesus for salvation, which is a gift from the sacrifice of another; of course Christian discipleship can very often involve considerable personal sacrifice and suffering.

The justification for force often rests in a motive of love and justice for those being protected, at least allegedly. Extreme pacifism, however, rejects this; Hauerwas rejects the right to violence for the sake of justice; he was influenced by the Mennonite Yoder. Jesus' claim to fulfil the law comes in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. However, would it not be wrong to stand and not resist an intruder who is intent on stealing, on harming one's children, on assaulting one's wife? Objections to a pacifist standpoint do, of course, become much more pointed when applied to a personal situation of aggression. A policy of non-resistance is much easier to advocate in the impersonality of warfare, especially in its modern practice, but not so easy for a woman, or even a man, confronted with a thief or a rapist. Early Quakers could kill a burglar, deliberately choosing evil, but not a soldier acting in good conscience. Acceptance of the situation is in a sense participation in the sin. The same is true for somebody witnessing a personal assault.

Is it not wrong to 'turn the other cheek', when the cheek belongs to somebody else? The Sermon on the Mount does not speak of protecting others, but of injury to oneself. Pacifism can be a rejection of the love for a neighbour, indeed done from self-interest. It is not acceptable if it comes from cowardice or from a desire for tranquillity. Abraham, the example of faith, fought, but it was not for himself, but for Lot; indeed he refused the spoils (Gen. 14:23). The question however arises as to what should be done; the natural reaction is of aggression and harm to the villain, which in itself involves wrong. Thus, although Ambrose and Augustine

believed that it was the obligation of Christian love to defend the innocent, it should be only in proportion to the offence.<sup>12</sup>

But if this is true, does this not also apply to warfare, at least when the motive is to defend others from aggression? Macquarrie<sup>13</sup> notes the hesitation of Bonhoeffer, who says that there is no reason to suppose that Jesus was concerned with political freedom.

## The 'just war'

Objections to pacifism are not difficult to find. It seems obvious that evil and aggression should not just be ignored but must be deliberately confronted and overcome. The argument for a just war centres on the suffering of the victims, especially when they are innocent. It makes their relief the highest motive. Should not the evil of a Hitler be resisted in the name of the goodness of God? Pacifism, in the real, fallen world seems impracticable; Augustine rejected any hope of perfection on earth. Luther, in a sharp distinction between 'real' Christians, and others, even nominal believers, and Niebhuur in his recognition that groups of even committed Christians behave differently from individuals, thus say that force in society remains essential.

The attitude of the early church is often dismissed as due to a connection between war and idolatry, or an unenlightened eschatology. Surely the words of Jesus could be applicable only in a hyperbolic fashion, an expression of an ideal, an exaggeration of a more reasonable approach to evil, or perhaps valid only as a kind of interim ethic, expressed only in anticipation of the imminent end of the world? Macgregor<sup>14</sup> does not hesitate in rejecting these options, insisting that they are intended to demonstrate to the world what a Christian stand really is, to provide an example of a Christian lifestyle. War may well lead not to the reduction of evil, but its increase, provoking brutality. Weakness is certainly no guarantee of the removal of aggression, as the Jews under Hitler discovered. It is then morally wrong to do nothing, to ignore the suffering of others. Bonhoeffer, the German pastor and theologian, became convinced that it was better to try to kill Hitler than to acquiesce in the evil that was done, so participated in the plot to assassinate him. He followed a policy of implementing the lesser evil; this is often seen as a justification for war, although in a situation of war, all restraint is quickly lost and tremendous evil results.

It is this which underlies the theory of the so-called 'just war'. This was not just a response to the political acceptance of the church by the Roman empire after the conversion of Constantine, but certainly that event made a just war policy a possibility. But with Constantine, not only did the state accept the church, but effectively the church accepted the state; thereafter it became acceptable for a Christian to participate in violence that was government sanctioned, with the proviso that the cause was in fact "just". And with the situation that in many wars, both sides claimed 'just war' legitimization!

However, this was giving a legitimacy to the state that many Christians would not sanction; rather the existence of any state is not the optimum for God, but only a concession, as the story of the establishment of the monarchy under Saul makes clear (1 Sam. 8:6f.). The state is a second best, tol-

erated only because of human wickedness, which is also of course the root of war itself. The Anabaptists felt that the New Testament inaugurated a radical new order, and that government is necessary for sinners only.

It is the connection with the state that accounts for the presence of divinely sanctioned warfare in the Old Testament. The early church distinguished this from the New, and often interpreted it spiritually, so not justifying physical war. Certainly the New Testament, and many of the fathers, even Tertullian, who definitely opposed warfare, used military metaphor. More likely the difference is that after Christ, God's dealings were with the individual, whereas before him it was with the nation; there is no 'Christian state' at all comparable to a theocratic Israel. It is also the case that the Old Testament wars, at least those sanctioned by God, were not so much for political reasons; David was condemned for his census, which was aimed at assessing his military potential. Rather they were against evil and unbelief. Even the New Testament does not enjoin pacifism against these. Ambrose, one of the earliest advocates of the just war, felt that it was permissible as the enemies of the time were Arian heretics; he still supported pacifism in private concerns and for the clergy. This is the logic behind a third attitude to war, that of the crusade, but this has been effectively discredited; in any case, again, there is no such thing as a Christian state which could do this.

The arguments for a just war put forward by Augustine and reiterated for centuries thereafter were, of course, in the context of a sacral society, an identification to a large degree of Christians with the State. With the secularization of the last couple of centuries that is no longer the case. Christians, as Christians, are no longer identified with the political agenda of the saeculum. They need feel no obligation to defend the state, and the church does not need defending in the same way. Politically, they are free to refuse war, an attitude commonly castigated as fatal to the state; Bainton<sup>15</sup> cites opinions from Celsus to Machiavelli and Nietzsche. Celsus mocked the assumption of pacifism by Clement of Alexandria, saying that if all acted in that way there would be lawlessness.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to say that early Christians rejected the state. Rather, they appreciated the law and order, and peace that it gave. However, although it may well have a 'moral duty of self-defence', this does not mean that it should be defended by military means; rather, it should be supported in other ways, such as through prayer, as Tertullian urged.<sup>17</sup> As Origen insisted, Christians do fight, but by prayer.<sup>18</sup> Christians are no longer forced, with the early monks, to follow the path of Jesus only by abandoning the state, and so human society completely. It is no longer an issue as it was for pacifists of the early modern era, who took a variety of attitudes towards participation in society and especially in government.

### Modern warfare

As well as with the passing of the 'Christian state', the traditional arguments for a 'just war' have come under severe questioning with the unique situation of the modern world. In common with so many other aspects of life, the means of

warfare have altered dramatically over the last century or so. The obvious change has been in the weaponry employed, but there has also been a fundamental shift concerning the people who are involved. Macgregor<sup>19</sup> remarks that modern warfare particularly depersonalises; this would further negate a kenotic attitude which rather seeks wholeness and the full personhood of the other.

Previously wars were fought between armies of soldiers, and their action was not primarily directed at those not in the armies. The course of events often did not affect the rest of the populations until one side won a victory and there could well be raping, looting, and many other actions, against the civilian population. But they were often not involved directly in the actual fighting. That changed with such tactics as the use of concentration camps designed to remove the support of the actual combatants by sympathetic civilians. Then developments in weaponry were also such that whole populations could well be the intended targets of warfare. Particularly with the advent of aerial bombing, it was not only military objectives which were targeted, but deliberate attempts were made to inflict damage upon those not directly involved. Especially in the Second World War, bombing was carried out of whole cities. If originally this was done to damage capacity to wage war by destroying transport infrastructure and the manufacturing of munitions, a secondary motive was to undermine the morale and courage of the whole population. Subtly this seemed to become the main purpose on both sides, from the blitzing of London to the carpet firebombing of Dresden. The climax of this was the dropping of the first weapons of the atomic age, firstly on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, and then on Nagasaki. The moral justification of these horrendous acts was that by so doing, the war would be shortened, and the loss of life, both of Japanese, and particularly of American invaders, would actually be reduced. The possibility of dropping the first bomb onto a military target was hardly considered, and even the idea of a demonstration of the power of the weapon in an unpopulated area merited only a ten minute discussion in a tea break;<sup>20</sup> in fairness, it does seem that Japanese scientists believed that the bombing of Hiroshima could not be repeated as they thought that the Americans did not have sufficient radioactive material.

The advent of such weapons of mass destruction, to be added to by biological weaponry, and the threat of the extension of the chemical warfare used in the trenches of the First World War to civilian targets, has modified the old argumentation about pacifism. There have been some who have argued for the elimination of such terrible weapons, simply because of their destructive capabilities, but who feel that so-called conventional weapons are morally more justifiable. Certainly the use of both nuclear and biological agents could well have an effect far wider than the designated target, which would naturally involve non-combatants, and moreover could well have far-reaching effects on the entire biological interaction of the world, even the extinction of much, if not all, of life. Some feel that their use can never be 'just'. Paradoxically, however, nuclear weapons have been justified as causing peace, by deterring aggression. Attacking a nuclear power would be tantamount to suicide. For very many years the threat of nuclear war and of 'mutually assured destruction' kept the peace between superpowers,

and naturally no other nation would dare to attack any of the few nations with nuclear capability.

### **The willingness to sacrifice: the suicide bomber**

Yet it was not long before even possession of those weapons did not guarantee victory, with the Americans withdrawing from Vietnam and the Soviet Union from Afghanistan. In such cases it was clearly seen that military might and economic strength did not guarantee victory. Even the use of massive amounts of conventional power had not been effective against comparatively ill-equipped but determined opponents, even if that power had been used against civilian as well as military targets in an attempt to undermine the will to fight.

In more recent years these David and Goliath scenarios have been extended even further with a new feature of warfare, the emergence of the suicide bomber. Here the practicalities of the situation have again commonly meant that the targets are not military, which simply because of their very nature involves high security, but 'soft' civilian targets: buses, trains, shopping malls. Again, their use cannot satisfy the traditional criteria for a 'just war'. Significantly most modern examples are motivated by Islam, and can be seen as a 'crusade'; ironically western action is caricatured as being by 'crusaders', a harking back to the tragedies of the Middle Ages, but hardly appropriate when applied to the modern secularized West.

Now warfare is being waged not just by a small and poorly equipped army but by individuals who are prepared to give their lives against what would otherwise be overwhelming force. Of course, much of the power of this form of action does lie in the pain and destruction that the bombs cause. In this sense there is little difference from more traditional warfare, or even from an Hiroshima. The intention has again been to inspire fear and destroy the will to fight. But what makes this method so effective is the means by which it is done, the willingness to sacrifice that enables the delivery of the weapon in otherwise impossible circumstances. A willingness to sacrifice oneself, as in the Japanese suicide bombers in World War Two against American ships, is proving almost impossible to prevent and confront. The power of these methods of warfare, for that is what it is, lies in the willingness to sacrifice. And is this not where the power of Jesus' action lies (cf 2 Cor. 12:9)?

### **The power of sacrifice**

It is this which adds sense to what Jesus was doing in *kenōsis*, and particularly on the cross. Sacrifice must be an aspect of a Christian response to aggression, to give up what is wanted by the aggressor for the sake of peace. Confronted by a refusal to retaliate, the aggressor often ceases aggression. This alone has often proved effective; 'a soft answer turns away wrath' (Prov. 15:1). The cross "disarmed the principalities and powers, triumphing over them" (Col. 2:15), even if the final victory was achieved only in the resurrection. Jesus deliberately acted in a way that could be effective

where conventional warfare and the use of force have failed. His choice to go to the cross has been effective in changing human activity. Humanly speaking, he could not confront the strength of either the Jewish or the Roman systems of the day, but by his willingness to empty himself, to sacrifice even his life, he successfully overcame both of them.

Jesus' action was therefore not the same as the otherwise highly commendable practice of some in a situation of warfare who choose not to participate in the action, but to do what good they can in it. Such people as the Quakers who, as convinced pacifists, volunteered to serve in a situation of war, but without contributing to the war effort. They even served as stretcher bearers in the horrors of the trenches of the first world war. Their action, although sacrificial, was not primarily intended to solve the problem of war, but only to help in it.

But by choosing the path that he did, that of sacrifice, Jesus could be accused of inaction, of not doing good, of ignoring the pain of others. Not only did he refuse to confront aggression and injustice directly, to the anger of the Zealots, the revolutionaries of his day, but by going to the cross he refused to continue the great works that he was doing. If he had not allowed himself to be crucified, he could have continued to do great good for the hungry, the sick, the sufferers in body and mind. By his deliberate choice, he perpetuated their suffering. It seems that for Jesus, there were more important things than the alleviation of pain. It is not just a rejection of this world in confidence of the next; in fact the acceptance of *kenōsis* is rather an affirmation of this world.

In a sense, Christ can be likened more to the prisoner who embarks on a hunger strike to force compliance with his or her demands. What Jesus was doing was perhaps even closer to the adoption of passive resistance, or of the civil disobedience as practised by such as Gandhi or Martin Luther King, which has been in itself so effective in the right circumstances. Hornus<sup>21</sup> suggests that an attitude of positive nonviolence was the stand of such as Tertullian and Origen; they called it *patientia*, but it is an active response, not a quietist acceptance. Paul's attitude was to 'overcome evil with good' (Rom. 12:21), as following his Master's injunction to love enemies, not ignore them. These do avoid the destruction and especially the loss of life, that a bomb produces; this is a contrast to the action of Jesus, for the only damage and loss of life was to him. His action was constructive, the giving of life, not its taking.

In all these cases, whether those in traditional warfare, of passive resistance, the suicide bomber, or Jesus, the intention of actions such as those is to change the minds of those who set the policies that were seen as wrong. But unlike traditional warfare, which so typically simply results in a desire for revenge, a growing spiral of destruction, and the hardening of attitudes, the power of actions such as those lies in the willingness of people to sacrifice, even their lives, for the sake of changing minds.

What Jesus was doing was not just accepting evil, and certainly not avoiding it, but positively turning it into good, just as Paul promises (Rom. 8:28). In fact war has always produced a good side along with its horrors. There are countless stories of those who have gone into situations of great danger, of those who have risked for others. War memorials

everywhere are emblazoned with that wonderful text, so unhappily wrenched from its context: 'greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (Jn. 15:13).

Is not change in people one reason that Jesus had for going to the cross? Is not the 'joy that was set before him' (Heb. 12:2) the great 'cloud of witnesses' of the previous verse, who could not be there without the sacrifice that Jesus was prepared to make? It was certainly not the selfish hope of paradise through martyrdom that is at least part of the motive behind the modern bomber; after all, Jesus had this already before he embarked on his journey of *kenōsis*. His motive was to benefit others, which would be by changing them, for which the forgiveness of sins through his death was an essential part. The Philippian hymn uses the example of Jesus as a motive for the improvement of the attitude of the Philippian Christians who would read it. They were already converted, but the example of Jesus is often presented as motivating a response in others to repent as part of their acceptance of Christ in conversion. Certainly this can go far to meeting the issue of war, for in many cases, the problem is indeed simply that of aggression, an attitude that has to be changed if war is to be avoided.

But Jesus was not just giving his life to remove aggression, laudable though that is. He died to encourage others to imitate his policy. Much of the power of passive resistance and of the suicide bomber is when the numbers of those who are taking these actions multiplies. The effectiveness of actions such as those of Gandhi to change people depended on the participation of a mass of people. Part of the power lay in the sheer numbers who acted. By his example, others were motivated to imitate, and ultimately the desired effect followed. In the same way, the effect of the example of Jesus is multiplied through the imitation of his example by his followers. Jesus was effective not only in changing the mind of the aggressor, but also in giving an example to follow; the purpose of Jesus' *kenōsis*, as the Philippian hymn indicates, is that his followers would share his mind.

Where the action of Jesus differs from that of passive resistance is, of course, that as in the case of the suicide bomber, his actions went to the ultimate, to death, where passive resistance usually does not. The hope, as in the hunger strike, will naturally be that the result will be achieved before the ultimate cost is paid, and there is always a chance of the authorities resorting to forced feeding to avoid the power of sacrifice. This is because the action of Jesus is not intended just to change people by example; for this, as in passive resistance, death is not actually necessary. Rather, by going to the cross, Jesus was also atoning for sin, and for that death was needed, for 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom. 6:23), and he took that death as a substitute, so that sinners might live. But more than this, in accepting that atonement, and uniting with him, people again change, not by the force of an external example, but by an inner regeneration. Non-resistance in itself cannot remove aggression, but conversion, which results in love and peace in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), both can and does. In non-resistance, Christians do not just remove aggression, and although they cannot enable reconciliation with God as Jesus did, they can actively portray Christ as the answer to it.

The sacrifice of Jesus, like that of the bomber, was not

intended to just help in the situation, but definitely to cause change. But there is a most significant difference. The power of the suicide bomber lies in the destruction that it produces, and in the difficulty of its prevention, but not in its sacrifice; that is incidental and unfortunate. For Jesus, the power of what he did lies not in destruction, but is constructive, the gift of new life. It was the power of sin that was destroyed. Of course, to do this, his death was essential, for only by the shedding of blood, by the giving of his life, could there be forgiveness (Heb. 9:22).

Thus the action of Jesus was not pacifism, and certainly not in the sense of passivism. In fact, Jesus most definitely took action, both in incarnation and in the cross, doing what was the best to confront evil, but without doing it in a way that was itself evil. It is this principle which should be the paradigm for a Christian response to aggression. His action was more than trying to do good in the situation, but aimed at changing it. What Jesus was doing was not just avoiding conflict, but positively enabling good. The Hebrew *shalom* bears both nuances, indicating both absence of strife and positive prosperity; likewise the Greek *eirēnē* has a root idea of 'linkage'.

## Practicalities

In imitation of Christ therefore, the usual practice would seem to be of non-resistance, but also of attempting to take positive action in reconciliation. The attacker should positively be helped, and in particular towards a new attitude. The question is of course, how this is to be done.

This is never easy. What does the person do who is about to be raped? Can the example of Jesus who advocated turning the other cheek, and who gave himself up to his tormenters, be followed? Is physical assault on the rapist the only practical solution? Jesus did once take up a whip to clear the Temple, as opponents of pacifism are fond of pointing out. It must be observed that what was endured by Jesus was far, far more than people are called upon to suffer, especially bearing in mind that it was not only the physical and mental anguish but the spiritual, in that he experienced separation from his beloved Father. There are, after all, always worse fates that can be experienced. It must also be remembered that there is a promise in the scriptures that no temptation given is impossible, but God will provide a way out (1 Cor. 10:13); and here the temptation can well be that of direct retaliation.

And the second part is even harder. What can be done in a positive sense?

It would be nice to be able to lay down practical rules and guidelines as to how these very real issues are to be dealt with, but that is not the way of God. Christian ethics have an inherent flexibility, as the basis is not a written code, as in the Old Testament, but sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit. And yet this leading does not come in a total vacuum. The Old Testament law does not have to be obeyed in a legalistic sense by Christians, but it still gives a very clear indication as to the mind of God, such that a person must be very sure of his or her leading before acting in a contrary manner. But such is possible. Jesus, although on the whole acting as a good Jew, did feel that it was right to disregard

the Sabbath on occasion. Peter and John, although generally law-abiding, had to affirm that it was necessary to 'obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29).

It is here that the example of Jesus in his *kenōsis* does provide a clear guide for Christian action. But just as his action was motivated and enabled by the Spirit (Heb. 9:14), so must the imitation by his followers be. It is the action of the same Spirit who enabled what Christ did to interpret the example of Christ into the direct practicality of a situation. It is noteworthy that the Philippian hymn is introduced by the little phrase 'any participation in the Spirit' (Philp. 2:1), where the word 'participation' translates the Greek *koinōnia*. It is in fact this community, whether between individuals or nations that should be the goal of Christian action, and where correct response is such a vital matter. It is that which is guided by the Spirit whose 'fruit' is peace (Gal 5:22), and so the harmony of *eirēnē*.

### Notes

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- 19 Macgregor, op. cit., 77.
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