

For Further Reading

de Veber, L.L., et al., *Public Policy, Private Voices: The Euthanasia Debate* (Toronto: Human Life Research Institute), 1992.

Hamel, Ronald (ed.), *Choosing Death: Active Euthanasia, Religion, and the Public Debate* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press), 1991.

Oosterveen, Gerald, "Decisions at Life's End", *Presbyterian Record*, March 1993, 32-33.

Regan, Tom (ed.), *Matters of Life and Death: New Introductory Essays in Moral Philosophy*, (2nd ed.). (New York: Random House), 1986.

Scott, John, "Waiting for Death, Waiting for Life", *Catholic New Times*, February 21, 1993, 10-11.

Tattie, George, *Euthanasia: A Christian Perspective*. (Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada), 1982.

Recommendation No. 16 (amended and adopted, page [29](#))

That the statement on euthanasia be adopted and referred to presbyteries and sessions for study and use in pastoral care.

PEACEMAKING

At the 118th General Assembly (1992) the International Affairs Committee submitted a report "Theology of Peace-making" which was "received as a starting point for creating a definitive statement on peace-making" and the Assembly asked that comments on the statement be forwarded to the Committee (A&P 1992, p. [331](#)). The Committee requested that the Associate Secretary, Justice Ministries monitor the responses, be responsible for redrafting the document, and bring the revised statement to a future Assembly. Over thirty replies were received from presbyteries, sessions and individuals. The Church Doctrine Committee commented on the statement in a report to the 119th General Assembly (1993). The statement was also produced in booklet form and all copies were distributed. In addition, the Life and Mission Agency has produced a 10 part study entitled "Practising Peace: Living with Conflict". Five sessions deal with peace and conflict issues close to home, and five deal with international issues. No statement of this size can adequately cover all relevant topics and concerns. Nevertheless, given the current state of the world, the need for a statement to help guide reflection and action is crucial. The revised statement follows.

A THEOLOGY OF PEACE-MAKING

(Note: All biblical quotations in this statement are from the New Revised Standard Version.)

We affirm that God is
at work when people are
ashamed of the inhumanity of war
and work for peace with justice.
We pray for peace
to him who is the Prince of Peace.

Living Faith, 8.5.3.

1.1 Introduction

As Christians and Canadians, we are committed to the task of peace-making in our families, and in the local, national and international community. Fundamentally, we understand that peaceful co-existence is based upon treating people as equal in the eyes of God. This is a basic premise in The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Living Faith. The section on Justice (8.4) leads immediately into a concern for World Peace (8.5). Presbyterians affirm that "Christ, the Prince of Peace, calls his followers to seek peace in the world" (8.5.1). In addition the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms states:

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association.

The task of seeking peace includes examining the root causes of conflict, poverty, disease, tyranny and environmental disasters. We are called to consider how the sinful desire for ever-increasing wealth and domination over others has produced a bitter harvest which disrupts true peace for everyone. Thus, we are called to seek justice in all areas of our common life - economic, political, social, etc. - in order that the conditions that make for peace are established everywhere. How can the pursuit of genuine peace be distinguished from the activities that destroy it? Above all, how can we witness and minister in the name of the God of peace in our time and place in God's world?

1.2 The God of Peace

In the Bible, peace (the Hebrew *shalom* with its Greek equivalent *eirene*) embodies a wide variety of meanings. These include wholeness, well-being, prosperity, security and freedom from war, oppression and injustice. It is founded on mutual relationships of harmony, respect and goodwill between individuals, families, communities and nations. It includes humankind's stewardship for all forms of life (Gen. 1:26).

The source of peace is God, who offers a relationship rooted and grounded in never-failing justice, mercy and steadfast love (Ex. 34:6,7). The relationship of justice and peace is expressed in Psalm 85:8-11:

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

God's commitment to the joining of righteousness and peace is revealed when Moses encounters the burning bush which is not consumed. From the bush, the LORD declares: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land" (Ex. 3:7,8). God condemns a government that allows an identifiable group of people to become objects of prejudice and hatred. The mask is torn off from Pharaoh's reasonable sounding argument for slave labour and violent population control (Ex. 1:9-10,16). The security of the nation does not justify ruthless actions.

Unexpectedly, the first act of resistance against Pharaoh's tyranny is carried out by Hebrew mid-wives who refuse to obey his order to kill all Hebrew baby boys (Ex. 1:17). The action of the mid-wives reflects the Apostle's assertion that "we must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29). Their action represents a non-violent response to tyranny in the name of the God who demands justice, and it is an example that peace makers, through the ages, have emulated.

The Exodus narrative then tells of the miraculous delivery of the Israelites from this oppression. It is the clear witness of Israelites throughout the centuries that God alone saved them from slavery and the threat of genocide. After crossing the Red Sea, Israel's liberation and the destruction of Pharaoh's army is celebrated. The people sing in triumph: "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation... The LORD is a warrior..." (Ex. 15:1,2,3).

The pivotal event in the Exodus narrative comes when God gives the law to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. The purpose of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17) and other laws found in the Pentateuch is to enable a group of outcasts and wanderers to better function as the chosen people of God. The commandments announce the fundamental need to show

respect and love both to God and one's neighbour. Jesus approves the lawyer's citing the need to love God and neighbour (Lk. 10:25-28).

In Joshua 6, there is an account of the Israelites being led by Joshua to overthrow the city of Jericho. The LORD declares: "See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers" (6:2). The proof of God's support is that the walls of Jericho will tumble down, not by armed siege, but by the Israelites marching around the city, a long blast of a ram's horn, and a great shout from the people (6:3-5).

Just before the great shout, Joshua gives a rousing speech to his troops. He tells them that they are following God's will. "The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction" (6:17). When the walls fall, the soldiers devote to destruction "by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and donkeys" (6:21).

This idea of a Holy War, when God chooses sides in a conflict, is a disturbing message in Hebrew Scripture. It is one way that Israel remembers gaining freedom from slavery in Egypt, and conquering the land of Canaan.

There is a dissonance in the orchestra of scripture between the non-violent resistance of the Hebrew midwives and the killing of all the people and animals of Jericho. Jesus speaks against aggressive malicious anger, against violent retaliation, and for loving one's enemies (Mt. 5:21-26,38-48). This message is very different from Joshua's speech to his soldiers encouraging the destruction of the whole city (Josh. 6:17).

Scriptural warrants for armed conflict are to be interpreted with the same reservations which Jesus brings to divorce (Mk. 10:1-12). There may be warrants for divorce in scripture, but it is not the way God would have us act towards others. God did not create us to wage war on one another. "We affirm that God is at work when people are ashamed of the inhumanity of war and work for peace with justice." (Living Faith, 8.5.3) Rather, God made us to be stewards of creation (Gen. 1:26-27) and to come together as many different nationalities to worship and learn from God (Isa. 2:2-3).

1.3 The Prince of Peace

In struggling to be peacemakers we need to ask ourselves: "What happened to the one who proclaimed the message of peace in his words and actions?"

Peace is not a possession to be jealously guarded. It is a gift for everyone which turns the world upside down (Acts 17:6-7). In Luke's Gospel, Mary proclaims in song that the coming Messiah is good news for poor and marginalized persons like herself (Lk. 1:46-55). In contrast, Herod sees the birth of the Christ child as a deadly threat to the privilege and power that he and a few others enjoy (Mt. 2:3).

These contrasting responses continue in the story of Jesus' life as recorded in the Gospels. Jesus scandalizes the morally upright by his strong identification with marginalized people in his society (Mk. 2:15-17). He has compassion for children, the poor and oppressed, the sick and the handicapped.

Jesus publicly denounces leaders in his homeland for accepting the privileges of their class, while exploiting the most helpless in their society. "They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation." (Mk. 12:40) He feels righteous anger towards people who use their privilege and power to oppress others (Mt. 23, Mk. 102:13-14). In Jerusalem, Jesus disrupts the exploitive practices which have crept into Temple worship. He cries out: "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." (Mk. 11:17)

Jesus challenges the assumption of the rich that accumulating wealth for themselves is a right and sensible thing to do. He points out that all people, including the wealthy, are vulnerable to death and answerable to God for their actions (Lk. 12:16-20).

Jesus also confronts religious leaders in his society with the violent means that they and their predecessors have used to get rid of God's prophets. Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants (Mk. 12:1-11) climaxes with the tenants deciding to kill the heir so they can act in the vineyard in whatever way they please. The religious leaders understand the analogy being applied to their relationship with Jesus. They want to have Jesus arrested, but are afraid of the crowd (Mk. 12:12).

Is it any wonder that many members of the power-elite recognize Jesus as their enemy? His leadership threatens a system which gives success to those motivated by greed and/or the desire to dominate others. For the sake of maintaining the religious and civil system, this Jesus must die! (Jn. 11:50)

Like the Hebrew mid-wives before him, Jesus resists the evil powers in the world by non-violent means. When he is arrested, Jesus tells Peter to put his sword away. He warns his disciples that "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt. 26:52). Jesus consciously chooses not to call down a great army of angels who could have given him military victory (Mt. 26:53). Instead, he continues to witness to God's peace even to the point of being killed by crucifixion. God affirms and blesses Jesus' actions. God raises Jesus from death. By that act, the power of sin and death are overthrown (1 Cor. 15:56-57).

1.4 Can war be just?

In the twentieth century, churches continue to justify war against opposing nations, with terrible results. For example, in the Falkland War, the church leadership in Argentina and Great Britain both believed that their side had the just arguments concerning the sovereignty of the islands. The influence of nationalistic perspectives was a strong factor in the dissonant proclamation. The Body of Christ was divided. Christians fought and killed one another.

The practice of humans sanctioning a holy war is dangerous. It is too easy for arrogance and propaganda to influence our judgement about whether God "wants" us to wage this war. It is too tempting to believe that if we win, then we are on the side that is right. At the same time, "we know that nations have fought in self-defence and that war, at times, may be unavoidable." (Living Faith, 8.5.2)

A more judicial means of determining whether a war could be sanctioned is to look at conflict by the standards of the Just War Theory. It was first formulated by Augustine (d. 430) at a time when Christianity had gained a new status as the privileged religion in the Roman Empire. Augustine agreed with the earliest Christian theologians that Christians should not defend themselves against violence. He did, however, argue for the rightness of violence to defend the innocent against evil. Then, basing his thought on ancient Greek just war principles, he formulated the theory that has influenced Christian thinking to the present.

Many theologians have continued to reflect on the Just War theory. Even with some differences in modern versions, there is consensus on the essential points:

1. The war must have a just cause.
2. It must be waged by a legitimate authority.
3. It must be formally declared.
4. It must be fought with a peaceful intention.
5. It must be a last resort.
6. There must be a reasonable hope of success.
7. The means used must be proportional to the end sought.

In addition, there are three conditions for the conduct of war:

1. Noncombatants must be given immunity.
2. Prisoners must be treated humanely.
3. International treaties and conventions must be honoured.

This theory of just war assumes a premise of reluctance towards entering into conflict. It assumes a deep desire for resolution and a lasting peace. It also assumes that ordinary

citizens of "the enemy" should not be killed, and that those whom we fight against should still be thought of as human beings.

As the end of the twentieth century approaches, the reality of war has a tight grip on our world. The technology of war has progressed at an accelerated pace from horses and chariots to shrapnel bombs, landmines, and other extremely sophisticated and powerful weapons.

We protest against the world arms race
that diminishes our ability to fight
hunger, ignorance, poverty and disease.
We fear nuclear war
and the devastation it would bring.
Living Faith, 8.5.3

In the 1990s, violent conflict is a brutal fact. The news media reports on places like Somalia, Bosnia, Croatia, Georgia, Haiti, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine. These are just some of the present flash points in our world. It sometimes seems that as peace accords are signed in one part of the world, regional conflict breaks out in another.

In practice, the wars of humankind are founded on principles which contradict the just war theory. Nations enter war against other nations because it is perceived to be in their own national interest. The propaganda machine of a country works hard to show that this is a war where "our side" is good, and "the other side" is evil. Often, it is waged and escalated because a leader's pride or honor is involved in not backing down, but standing up to the opponent. Walter Wink gives the example of "Saddam Hussein's suicidal refusal to withdraw from Kuwait, or President Bush's personalizing the war against Saddam Hussein as if it were a face-off between just the two of them." (Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992, p. 213)

The truth is that war affects all of the society where it is being waged. The criteria of "non-combatant immunity" is shattered by the reality that from 1700 to 1945, fifty percent of those killed in war have been civilians. Walter Wink points out that the proportion of civilian deaths jumped to 74 percent in the 1980s, and in the 1990s appears to be close to 90 percent. The sheer numbers of humans killed in war in the twentieth century is also alarming, especially in comparison with the past:

1500s - 1,600,000 killed
1600s - 6,100,000
1700s - 7,000,000
1800s - 19,400,000
1900s - 107,800,000 + (Project Ploughshares, 1993)

It is hard to imagine that in the twentieth century at least 53.9 million civilians have been killed in war. This slaughter of people shows some of the horror of war, at which our advanced war technology has allowed us to excel. "The tragic evil that comes with war, the slaughter of men, women, and children must rouse us to work for peace." (Living Faith, 8.5.2)

We do not live in a perfect world, but in one where human fallibility leads to injustice and conflict. It is incumbent on us to support defenders against aggressor states when all attempts at peacekeeping fail. However, we do so in sorrow, acknowledging the fallenness of creation. This means that the Church cannot participate in the justification of human warfare as good and holy. Nor can Augustine's teachings be used to justify war where "collateral damage" is a code word for children, women and men being killed, injured and sentenced to years of poverty, disability and disease. God does not glorify our wars, nor allow us to freely take joy and satisfaction from defeating our enemy. The loss to our world of human and natural resources is too great. Consider the loss which comes from destroying a society's ability to transport and communicate, from defoliating farms and forests, and from burning oil fields. All these destroy the well being of our descendants!

1.5 Working towards peace

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation of 1955 is based on the conviction that the sovereign Creator is establishing God's reign in heaven and earth (1.1). This Declaration proclaims the hope of Christ "coming again for the healing of the nations and the perfecting of the church" (12.2). In the task of evangelism, the Church "promotes righteousness and peace" (8.6). God calls Christians to work for a just, peaceful society in the here and now. This means both recognizing the reality of human conflict and demonstrating the effectiveness of non-violent action.

In Canada, as in many other countries, there are both armed forces and police. The Declaration affirms this practice. "He [Christ] commissions the civil authorities with the right and duty of using force under law against internal disorder and external aggression." (3.2) (cf. Rom. 13: 3-4)

The threat by those who use force for selfish gains is real. The police seek to curb and limit the activities of those who gain wealth and power by illegal means. Canadian armed forces, under the United Nations flag, have been peacekeepers in critical areas where conflict can be an explosive force. They have interposed themselves in areas like Cyprus, Somalia, the Middle East and the former Yugoslavia in the hope of enabling peace talks to succeed.

One of the dangers a nation faces is equating the perceived national interest with what is right. This occurred in Canada, for example, when the state escalated the 1991 protest at Oka into an armed conflict between Canadian soldiers and Aboriginal peoples. The position of the state was that the national interest required a strong response to a perceived threat to the state's authority.

In the "Statement on National Unity" (A&P 1978, pp. [367-372](#)), our Church declares that:

... the Christian faith ... places on majority groups in society the responsibility of honouring the linguistic, cultural and religious rights of the minorities in their midst. Indeed, the bias in the New Testament is specifically toward those who make up the disadvantaged of whatever nature.

It is our task as Christians to analyze who benefits from certain actions of the state. Far too often it is the majority group. Minorities are not treated equitably and are prevented from taking their rightful places in society. Justice "protests against everything that destroys human dignity." (Living Faith, 8.4.3) Christians who are members of the majority group are called to constant self-examination lest majority opinions become substitutes for the imperatives of the gospel.

Non-violent actions which create positive change means are being taken in the modern world. For example, in the Philippines, both the Protestant and Catholic churches have had a long history of non-violent teaching. Under the leadership of those committed to non-violence, half a million people were trained on how to protect a democratic electoral process. From this movement came the peaceful demonstrations which eventually brought down the Marcos regime.

Other hopeful signs in the 1990s are the movement towards democracy in South Africa, the accord between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and the peace accord in El Salvador. After years of violent conflict, the lesson learned is that the way towards peace cannot be found in fighting an enemy and oppressing citizens. Rather, peace comes through reconciliation and working together towards a common goal.

These examples are in keeping with the Declaration's affirmation of human responsibility to challenge state authority when it claims absolute power and seeks to control people's thoughts and views (5.2). Non-violent action also takes seriously our Church's confession that "the weapons of her [the Church's] warfare are finally not of this world" (6.2).

This lesson is one that we know is true for relations between individuals, in families and in communities. It is also true for relations between different groups of people and nations.

1.6 Being peacemakers

As Christians, we pray for peace to the prince of peace (Living Faith, 8.3). Those who follow Jesus are called to a radical commitment to seek justice and peace for all people. Jesus does not promise that following him will lead to being well-liked and respected in the community. Rather, being a disciple of Jesus can lead to division even in families (Mt. 10:34-38), as people choose sides or feel threatened by Christ's teachings. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him. This is not just an individual commitment. It is one we make with many other people of faith who long with all their hearts to see God's reign come on earth as it is in heaven.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God." (Mt. 5:9)

Further Reading:

Bainton, R., *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace; A Historical Survey and Critical Re-evaluation*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961.

Bender, Ross and Sell, Alan (eds), *Baptism, Peace and the State in the Reformed and Mennonite Traditions*, Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1991.

Blainey, Geoffrey, *The Causes of War* (3rd ed), London: MacMillan Press, 1988.

Cameron, Neville, "Reformed Theology of Peace-making", written for the International Affairs Committee, 23 p (1992)

Craigie, Peter, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

Crowdis, John, "The Gospel and the Business of War", written for the International Affairs Committee, 10 pp (1992)

Cox, Gray, *The Ways of Peace: A Philosophy of Peace and Action*, New York: Paulist Press, 1986.

Eller, Vernard, "War and Peace from Genesis to Revelation", Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981.

Epps, Ken, "Armed Conflicts in the World in 1991", *Compass*, Jan/Feb 1992, pp 34-35.

Fraser, Brian and Parker, Thomas (eds), *Peace, War and God's Justice*, Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1989.

Mendlovitz, Saul H. and Walker, R.B.J. Walker, *Towards a Just World Peace: Perspectives from Social Movements*, London: Butterworths, 1987.

Regehr, Ernie, "Conflict will Persist but War Doesn't Have to", *Contact*, Jan/Feb (1992), pp 38-40.

Swaim, J. Carter, *War, Peace and the Bible*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1982.

Weingartner, Erich, "The World Church and the Search for a Just Peace" (in *Canadian Churches and Foreign policy* (ed) Bonnie Greene, Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1991.

Wink, Walter, "The Myth of Redemptive Violence: Exposing the Roots of 'Might makes right'", *Sojourners* April (1992), 18-21, 35.

Wink, Walter, *Engaging the Powers*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992.

Winn, Albert Curry, *Ain't Gonna Study War No More; Biblical Ambiguity and the Abolition of War*, Philadelphia: Westminster/John Knox, 1993.

Recommendation No. 17 (adopted, page [29](#))

That the above statement be adopted as a statement on the theology of peace-making.