

The Anglican Pacifist Fellowship
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at Houchen House

Bible Study

Why is it wrong to kill?-the biblical basis for not killing.

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9.15 start-This is a vast topic so I will focussing on the Second Testament, after acknowledging the problem of the violence in the First Testament. As I will argue later, I believe the Second Testament is our proper starting point as *Christian disciples*. Also to do justice to the ethical vision of the First Testament, we need to read it *closely* and *comprehensively* and allow it to speak with its own, Jewish, voice before approaching it through the lens of *Christian Discipleship*. My more humble goal is simply to help us clear our *Christian lens*. Before we begin I have three prior questions:

“What are we asking?”

“Why look to the Bible? and

“What do we hope to achieve by an analytical approach?”

I’m going to begin with the last question:

What do we hope to achieve by an analytical approach?

The Roman Catholic contemplative Richard Rohr has said, “We do not think ourselves into new ways of living. We live ourselves into new ways of thinking.” In a recent interview he expanded on this saying what we *first* need, if we are to change destructive social behaviours, is a *transformed human consciousness* from dualistic thinking to a new, non-dualistic, contemplative consciousness. We need to see life with a true set of eyes. He said when we start with our analytical, “judging”, mind it only reinforces our dualistic mindset and our illusion of control. Whereas if we start with a *transformed consciousness* it *is* then useful to apply our analytical, *judging*, mind to discern whether this or that behaviour is appropriate.¹

We are on *retreat*, traditionally a time in which Christians go on a journey of the *heart* towards the kind of *contemplative consciousness* of which Rohr speaks. Perhaps, for a future APF retreat, we could invite someone to lead us on such a journey of the heart and leave our heads at home.

For now I am going to assume we have all begun that *contemplative* journey already and are here simply to ask how God calls us to behave in a world we cannot control.

Now, regarding the topic, the biblical basis for not killing:

What are we asking?

I will assume my topic refers to “not killing people”. However if Rohr is

¹ <http://ncrnews.org/ncrpodcasts/feeds/rohr.xml> A set of three NCR podcasts on “Seeing with God’s eyes”. All three are relevant to our discussion.

right about a *transformed, non-dualistic consciousness* being the starting point for changing our violent behaviour I think that might lead us to value and delight in all life in a whole new way, and it might make us hesitate before unnecessarily taking any life.²

Thinking in the opposite direction I believe every time we take the life of *any creature* to satisfy our own needs and wants we harden ourselves a little to the reality of what we are doing. It is entirely possible to support human life on vegetable rather than on animal protein (in fact one author suggests it takes less than 1/20th of the land to do so) so our slaughter of animals for food seems to be purely about habit and pleasure.³ We tell ourselves this life is not of the same kind or value as our own and close off our spontaneous compassion and love a little so we can do what we need to do and find pleasure in it. This inner process, surely, is the same that allows the serial killer to find pleasure and beauty in torturing and killing; and that allows people to kill each other in war, terrorism or ethnic cleansing.

And what about household pests? Think about how much longer some of them have been on the earth than humanity and consider what sort of planet this might be without bees, wasps, ants, flies, spiders and cockroaches.

Of course throughout nature life is taken to allow another life to thrive. Nature is beautiful and flows with the energy of God's own life and love but is also ruthless, self-serving and cruel. And we are part of nature, including our creative minds and human culture with which we have learned our own brand of ruthless self-service and cruelty.⁴ But the Biblical Creation story tells us we are called, as we live within nature, to bear God's image, God who energises all things with life and love and counts the hairs on our heads and the sparrow which die. This surely calls for us to live *within* nature but *from* the loving, living heart of God, accepting nature's necessities but not emulating its cruelty.

So while I am assuming "killing people" is what we are talking about I do not see this as, fundamentally, a special category of life-taking. For sure there is a special kind of hardening and emotional distancing that occurs

² In the third of the three podcast interviews in note 1 is a simple four step practice for developing the kind of consciousness of which he speaks.

³ Frances Moore Lappe, *Diet for a small planet* (Ballentine Books, 1991)

⁴ I am including human culture as part of nature deliberately, well aware of the philosophical minefield on which I am merrily walking.

when we take a life within our own human species but that may only be because we have already hardened and distanced ourselves from other life on our planet. We have already categorised other life as of a different *kind* or *value* than the life of humans.

So let me lay my cards on the table. Aside from the fact I am a disciple of Jesus Christ and committed to following in the Way of Christ I do not feel about war in a fundamentally different way from slaughtering animals for food or household pest control. But we are the *Community of the Disciples of Jesus Christ* and it is from *that* starting point that I now turn to the issue of killing people and to the more thorny question about the Bible.

Why look to the Bible?

On the face of it, it would seem a somewhat perilous place to go given the amount of human slaughter in the Bible, a great deal of which is, either, sanctioned, commanded or carried out by God. The Jewish Scriptures are filled with everything from God's guidance in petty inter-tribal warfare to divinely commanded ethnic cleansing or genocide in which *failure* to slaughter an entire people at God's command was deemed the worst kind of unfaithfulness. Let's look briefly at three difficult texts.

In Exodus 14: 26-15: 3 we read

²⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.' ²⁷ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸ The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹ But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ³⁰ Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹ Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

15 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:
'I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

² The LORD is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation;

this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

³ The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.

The unambiguous message of this text is that, firstly, God personally willed and carried out this slaughter of the Egyptian soldiers to deliver the Hebrews from bondage and, secondly, employed Moses and the people as agents in this slaughter. That Moses and the people rejoiced in the death of the Egyptians does not necessarily mean God shared their joy. Perhaps God really did mourn the death of the Egyptians. But where is God's heart in the passages which follow? Judges 1 *selected verses*

¹ After the death of Joshua, the Israelites inquired of the LORD, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?'

² The LORD said, 'Judah shall go up. I hereby give the land into his hand.'

³ Judah said to his brother Simeon, 'Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites; then I too will go with you into the territory allotted to you.' So Simeon went with him.

⁴ Then Judah went up and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they defeated ten thousand of them at Bezek. ⁵ They came upon Adoni-bezek at Bezek, and fought against him, and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. ⁶ Adoni-bezek fled; but they pursued him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and big toes... ⁸ Then the people of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it. They put it to the sword and set the city on fire... ¹⁷ Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and devoted it to destruction... ¹⁹ The LORD was with Judah, and he took possession of the hill country... ²² The house of Joseph also went up against Bethel; and the LORD was with them... ²⁷ Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and its villages, or Taanach...or the inhabitants of Dor...or the inhabitants of Ibleam...or the inhabitants of Megiddo...but the Canaanites continued to live in that land. ²⁸ When Israel grew strong, they put the Canaanites to forced labour, but did not in fact drive them out.

The cruelty of the Israelites is not necessarily sanctioned by God but the clear message, especially in literary and canonical context, is that God commands them to take these lands by force and drive out the indigenous inhabitants and that their failure to obey leads to their spiritual, social and political demise. Even more damning is the Holy War law governing such

situations: Deuteronomy 20: 10-18

¹⁰ When you draw near to a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. ¹¹If it accepts your terms of peace and surrenders to you, then all the people in it shall serve you in forced labour. ¹²If it does not submit to you peacefully, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; ¹³and when the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. ¹⁴You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, livestock, and everything else in the town, all its spoil. You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the LORD your God has given you. ¹⁵Thus you shall treat all the towns that are very far from you, which are not towns of the nations here. ¹⁶But as for the towns of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. ¹⁷You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as the LORD your God has commanded, ¹⁸so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the LORD your God.

Note that vv 10-15 relate to peoples encountered *on the way* to the *promised land* while 16-18 relate to the indigenous peoples of the land they were to *possess*. This second stipulation is both why the book of Judges criticises Israel and why God (through Samuel) rejects Saul as an unfaithful King in our next passage. 1 Samuel 15 *selected verses*

Samuel said to Saul, 'The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. ²Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. ³Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." ' ...⁶Saul said to the Kenites, 'Go! Leave! Withdraw from among the Amalekites, or I will destroy you with them; for you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.' So the Kenites withdrew from the Amalekites. ⁷Saul defeated the Amalekites, ...⁸He took King Agag of the Amalekites alive, but utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. ⁹Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep and of the cattle and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was valuable, and would not utterly destroy them; all

that was despised and worthless they utterly destroyed...¹⁰ The word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹'I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands.'...¹³ When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said to him, 'May you be blessed by the LORD; I have carried out the command of the LORD.'¹⁴ But Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of cattle that I hear?' ¹⁵Saul said, 'They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the cattle, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.'...²² And Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the LORD? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.'²³ For rebellion is no less a sin than divination, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.'...And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

Once again Saul's compassion to the Kenites is not viewed as part of his disobedience but his failure to fully destroy the Amalekites, including their women, children and even animals, is. Note the brutality of Samuel, God's faithful, obedient prophet, in slaughtering the King.

Whatever general principles we may derive from the First Testament in support of *pacifism* the overwhelming message is that God, both directly and through his faithful community, slaughters those who oppress them or stand in their way and engages his faithful people in wholesale ethnic cleansing of the indigenous peoples (men, women, children and even their animals) living in lands God gives to them. The danger that the religious life of these peoples could be a snare to them hardly explains the killing of children and animals. Nor would we use it today to defend such behaviour by any nation.

Much changed in the exilic and post exilic periods, Jewish people developing a more "global" vision of God's mission and a more positive view of at least some of their neighbours. Yet it remains characteristic of the First Testament landscape that God's *salvation* is outworked in the most concrete sense in which God, through God's faithful community, or later even through foreigners like the *Assyrians* and *Persians*, and ultimately through *messiah* sets things right on the earth through military force and some times human slaughter.

When the Jewish Rabbi Yeshua ben Yosef whom we call Jesus came on the scene it seems it was widely expected, at least by the common people that *messiah* would take the world by military force, straighten it out, and rule it from Jerusalem.

So why look to the Bible for a basis for pacifism? The Bible is by no means universally accepted by Anglican Christians as the supreme ethical authority. We speak of the three legged stool of ***Scripture, Tradition and Reason***. “***Tradition***” or the on-going teaching and practice of the Church, doesn’t help us very much. The Church seemed all but universally pacifist for the first 400 and has almost universally legitimised war ever since.

What about “***reason***”? Richard Hooker, the theologian generally credited with this threesome, meant by “reason” something like what we call “common sense” or as Methodists express it ***reason*** and ***experience***.

Many Anglicans happily ignore in the Bible that which “common-sense” tells them is not consistent with the Way of Christ. But one difficulty with *common-sense* is how *uncommon* it turns out to be. Not that people lack *sense* but everyone seems to have a *different sense* of the rightness of some things and the wrongness of others. Ironically, on the issue of war, the Church has seemed remarkably “united”, each church tending to lend religious legitimisation and support to the cause of its own state which becomes absurd when, for example, Maori and English, or German and Allied forces are trusting God on opposite sides.

Some Christians hold that the Bible is a touchstone outside of our time and culture that critiques all other sources of authority including ***tradition, reason and experience*** or ***common sense***. But on what basis do we decide that this or that behaviour in Scripture is to be used as a positive model by which to shape our own behaviour or a negative model to be shunned?

Christians have come up with very different answers to this question. In the very broadest terms, *Evangelicals* and other conservative *Protestants* tend to hold that Scripture itself must be the guide to this, that Scripture interprets itself. Other Christians give far more weight to other sources of authority.

We also read a text differently. Christian approaches tend to fall into two broad camps *synchronic* (accepting and engaging with the text as a whole) and *diachronic* (dicing and deconstructing the text).

At this point I must reveal my own bias and admit that I am a *particular* breed of Anglican Christian, an *Evangelical* from a *Pentecostal* heritage

(known, paradoxically, both for its biblical literalism and its creative interpretations of Scripture). I have had a life long passion for *contemplative prayer*, and a commitment to *ecumenism*, *interfaith dialogue*, *engagement with the world*, and *Christian Community*. In dealing with a particular text I tend to accept and engage with it as a whole and to accept the whole Bible as inspired by God and “useful” (2 Timothy 3:16). However that doesn’t mean I see it as all *equally* useful or each part as useful *in the same way*.

We are *the Community of disciples of Jesus Christ*. Rabbi Yeshua ben Yosef whom we call “Jesus” taught from the Jewish Scriptures and acknowledged them as his foundation for faith and conduct. So the Christian Bible is made up of those Jewish Scriptures (albeit somewhat rearranged) plus the story and teachings of Jesus and his first disciples, as remembered, written, edited and collected by the community they founded. Christian identity and behaviour, I believe, is discovered in *the ongoing life of this discipleship community*. The Christian Church, in my understanding, is the *Community of disciples of Jesus Christ*. Acts 11:26 speaks of when we first got the name *Christian*. We are a people committed to *following in the Way of Christ in Community*.⁵ Jesus teaching, then, is for us the interpretive lens for reading the whole Bible.

Jesus stands both in continuity and radical discontinuity with earlier Jewish tradition and, perhaps, nowhere is his *discontinuity* more striking than in the way he disappointed his people’s militaristic expectations of their messiah.

Jesus can say “not one jot or tittle” [of the *Torah*] will pass away until all is accomplished (Matthew 5: 18). Yet he seems to interpret the Torah and other Jewish Scripture according to his own inner knowing of God whom he called *Abba*. He teaches his disciples to *expect* an equally intimate relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and to trust that Spirit to continue teaching them, in community, as he has done (John 16: 12-15).⁶

⁵ This is a very eastern way of learning. In her book *Eat, pray, love* Elizabeth Gilbert speaks of learning to pray from her guru while living in an Indian *Ashram* (from which her *guru* happened to be physically absent). She explains that in India it is not considered necessary for a *guru* to be *physically* present at an *Ashram* for devotees to be shaped by the *guru’s* being and life but it is essential to be in the *guru’s* community. Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, pray, love: one woman's search for everything* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 132-3.

⁶ Jesus seems to me to model for us an approach to our own Scriptures and their relation to the many other ways God’s Spirit speaks into our lives. In the Jewish Scriptures there were many streams of writing through which God spoke. There was the Torah, the “Law” (our Genesis to

He doesn't seem to view his selective discontinuity with earlier Jewish tradition as inconsistent with a very high view of that tradition.

In my own approach to ethical issues I find I am inconsistent. I sometimes give Scripture absolute reign and at others am more heavily influenced by pastoral theology, social or political science or the insights of other faiths. At core I want the freedom to take my cue from Jesus who seemed to read his Scriptures through a lens formed in intimate relationship with God through prayer and, at times, seemed to make quite intuitive judgements about where *Abba God* stood on things, radically departing from past understandings.

But with the enormous fuzziness of Christians and almost universal compromise of Church leaders on the issue of war and killing I think we need a more analytical, biblically conservative approach. As those committed to *following in the way of Christ in community* we need to begin with the writings of the first generation of our community, the *Second Testament* or *New Testament* as it is called in our Bibles. And before we examine what it has to say about our topic we need to set this in the wider context of the moral vision of the Second Testament so that will be the focus of the next section.

Time check-9.35-Discussion-Pairs/group

We will leave the problem of the violence of God in the First Testament for later. I wonder if we could talk about our personal starting point for pacifism. I have acknowledging some very strong personal drivers that have nothing to do with the Bible and then located my own pacifism in

Deuteronomy) the bedrock of everything Jewish. It included a rich blend of *Laws, myth, history, poetry, prophecy, music, ritual and symbol*. Then there was the ongoing story, the *former prophets* in the Jewish Canon (Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings) which connect the *Torah* and the historical context in which it is set to the *latter prophets* of the Jewish canon (most of our books from Isaiah to Malachi). The *former prophets* itself uses the word *Torah both* for the books attributed to Moses *and* for God continuing to speak into the life of the contemporary community by the Spirit through the *latter prophets*. (2 Kings 17:13). Then there were *the writings* including the very rich Wisdom tradition in which God speaks through nature and life and the hymn book of Israel, the Psalms. It was all God speaking. It was all, at a practical level, *Torah*. While Jesus and his contemporaries revered the *Torah* over all other scriptures, their exegesis and hermeneutics could draw creatively on all these streams so that a rabbi might argue an intricate case based on something from the *Torah* juxtaposed beside a single phrase taken from the *lyrics* of a song from in the Psalms. Christians today do not actively tell, preserve, edit and collect ***the ongoing story*** that connects ***the Bible and its historical contexts*** with our ***listening to the Spirit of God in our context***. Nor do we take seriously enough the way God speaks to us through the ***symbols, rituals and music*** of our world and Church culture.

being a Christian Disciple in Community. What are your personal drivers? Where is your Christian starting point for pacifism?

In pairs, 2 minute each for both questions (4 mins total)

9.40 (5mins) Group feedback

9.45-The Ethical Vision of the Second Testament

In Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* Hays begins by defining the *task* of biblical ethics.⁷ The *problem*, he says, is that, while Christians may claim Scripture is the foundation for our faith and practice, the Bible contains diverse points of view and Christians use diverse methods to interpret it (Hays, 1-3). He says we have a fourfold task (I am paraphrasing here):

1. **Descriptive.** *To read the text carefully;*
2. **Synthetic.** *To place each Biblical writer in the context of the whole Biblical Canon;*
3. **Hermeneutical.** *To relate the text to our situation (our time and cultural context); and*
4. **Pragmatic.** *To live the text (or at least suggest how it might be lived in specific, concrete situations (Hays, 3-10)*

Hays then devotes almost 1/3 of his book to his own *careful and comprehensive reading* of the New Testament writers, outlining the ethical vision of each writer, (Hays, 13-185) before proposing a *syntheses* which he expresses first in terms of a single story that “in various ways [they] retell and comment upon.” It is worth quoting in full:

The God of Israel, the creator of the world, has acted (astoundingly) to rescue a lost and broken world through the death and resurrection of Jesus; the full scope of that rescue is not yet apparent, but God has created a community of witnesses to this good news, the church. While awaiting the grand conclusion of the story, the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is called to re-enact the loving obedience of Jesus Christ and thus to serve as a sign of God’s redemptive purpose in the world. (Hays, 193)

Hays points to three *images* which he believes unite the New Testament ethical vision: **Community, Cross and New Creation** (Hays, 192-204).

Explaining **community** he speaks of the Church as a **counter-cultural**

⁷ Richard B. Hays, *The moral vision of the New Testament: community, cross, new creation: a contemporary introduction to New Testament ethics* (N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1996).

community of discipleship and says it is to the Church, not the world, that God's imperatives are primarily addressed.

Speaking of the *cross* he says Jesus death on a cross is *the paradigm for faithfulness to God in this world*. He is particularly careful at this point to point out the ways "cross theology" has been misused, particularly to silence and subjugate women in the Church. So he says the *cross* must not be used by the powerful within the Christian community to subjugate the powerless but, rather, following in the way of the cross is the call of the community as a whole so that all Christians are to renounce violence and coercion.

Speaking of the *New Creation* he says the Church also embodies *the power of the resurrection in the midst of a not-yet-redeemed world*. This image is particularly strong in Paul who uses it as shorthand for living as Christians suspended between Christ's resurrection and second coming. He quotes Paul, "The whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." (Romans 22-23 RSV adapted).

9.50-Discussion (5 mins) Hays has already hinted at how the *cross* might be an *image* of pacifism for those called to "take up their cross and follow", since, for Jesus it was the consequence of "renouncing violence and coercion". But what about the other two images: *community* and *new creation*? How might those shape the call of the Christian to renounce violence and coercion? (*Discuss*)

9.55-As Hays turns to the *hermeneutical* task of *relating the text to our time and cultural context* he outlines the strategies of five theologians: Reinhold Niebuhr; Karl Barth; John Howard Yoder; Stanley Hauerwas; and Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Hays, 207-290)

For **Reinhold Niebuhr** (1902-1971), all ideologies needed to be critiqued by "Christian Realism" and Jesus "love ethic" including pacifism. Niebuhr claims "[T]here is not the slightest support in Scripture for this doctrine of non-violence. Nothing could be plainer than that the ethic uncompromisingly enjoins non-resistance and not non-violent resistance."

However for Niebuhr this is an impossible ethical ideal pointing the individual Christian to a goal of absolute moral perfection rather than providing a basis for constructing a social or political ethic. Niebuhr ultimately sanctions the use of violence by an existing government

authority or for a revolutionary cause to achieve justice. (Hays, 215-225)

For **Karl Barth**; (1886-1968) God is known only in his action and truth is always in the particular (not *abstract principles*), especially in God's concrete self-disclosure in Jesus Christ. For Barth, ethics is about *obeying the command of God* and he leaves no room at all for the Christian to make up their own mind about how to apply the command of God from general "principles". God's command in Scripture is always concrete and normative in every situation. When it comes to war (and killing) Barth is "against it" coming perilously close to contradicting himself by speaking of respect for life since it belongs to God. Yet he warns against absolutizing or idolising life. God remains free to take life and, *in exceptional circumstances*, may command killing. He seems even to allow for God commanding such exceptions directly by the Holy Spirit. He rejects *war* as fundamentally contrary to the will of God yet also rejects absolute pacifism as disobedience as it does not allow room for God to command otherwise. (Hays, 225-239)

John Howard Yoder, in *The Politics of Jesus* argues, "(1) that the New Testament consistently bears witness to Jesus renunciation of coercive power; (2) that the example of Jesus is directly relevant and normatively binding for the Christian community; and (3) that faithfulness to the example of Jesus is a political choice, not a withdrawal from the realm of politics." For Yoder, the cup Jesus drinks before he dies, is the cup of, for one last time, rejecting the very real alternative of *messianic violence* and accepting his destiny, death on the cross. To take up our cross and follow is to share his refusal of violence and accept a similar fate. Yoder embraces the Biblical cosmology of *principalities and powers* identifying these with "superpersonal systemic structures" that are in rebellion against God and oppress humanity. He argues that it is precisely through his refusal to participate in their power game that Jesus "exposed the illusion through which the powers hold us in bondage." (Hays, 239-253)

Stanley Hauerwas emphasises the priority of the formational *community* over any text arguing that, "Only a community already formed by the story of the Kingdom of God can begin to read Scripture rightly." (Hays, 255). For Hauerwas we learn in community, the obedience that precedes understanding, from all our mothers and fathers in the faith identified by that community; and in liturgy, especially the *Eucharist*. He also emphasises *forgiveness, diversity and flexibility*. Knowing we are *forgiven* releases us from seeking security in deception, coercion and violence.

Diversity in Christian discipleship helps us understand our own story. The *flexibility* of always being ready to welcome the gift of the unexpected helps the community know it doesn't control its own destiny. The Church's story is unfinished like "life on the road". Yet by its character it offers "a political alternative" of peace, forgiveness, love of enemies and a rejection of war and violence for "[v]iolence derives from the self-deceptive story that we are in control..." (Hays, 253-266)

For **Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza** the ethical use of the New Testament requires a process of "sifting through patriarchal texts to recover a lost history of women's experience". The Bible is both the source of women's power and the source of their oppression. Her work seeks to recover the original liberating vision embedded in oppressive texts. Fiorenza is a careful and wide ranging biblical scholar who seeks "to restore what has been lost through interrogating these ancient texts with fresh questions." (Hays, 267) The "recovered history" becomes the text for her "liberating vision". On violence and war she is unclear rejecting "passivity and meek acquiescence in suffering" and calling women to act "in the angry power of the Spirit...to feed, heal and liberate our own people who are women." She calls for commitment to "the liberation struggle for women and all people" but does not clarify what form that struggle may or may not take. She denounces men's violence against women but not violence per se. Her concern, rather is how women may survive it and be set free from its destructive effect. (Hays, 266-281)

These four theologians each have different ways of dealing with texts that don't fit their "normative vision". Barth accepts them as simply demonstrating the freedom of God. Yoder perseveres to resolve the issues. Hauerwas celebrates the diversity and then ignores them. Schussler Fiorenza insists the diversity in Scripture is irreducible.

They also each hear the Bible speaking chiefly in a particular "*mode*". For Neibuhr the Bible gives us *principles* or *ideals*, for Barth it is a book of *rules* that must be obeyed absolutely *until further notice*, for Yoder a source of *principles* and a "definitive *paradigm*", for Hauerwas it provides *paradigms* and a *symbolic world* and for Schussler Fiorenza open ended *paradigms* for ethics. Hays draws from these, four modes which he says are all present in the New Testament: *rule, principle, paradigm* and *symbolic world* and says the texts should be "*given authority (or not)*" in *the mode in which they speak*.

Hays says, if we have a personal bias to look for one kind of voice:

1. that will tend to be what we will see there;
2. we will synthesise a unified vision based on that and
3. we will make anything that doesn't fit subservient distorting its ethical message.

So someone looking for *rules* may turn the *story* of Acts 2: 44-45 in which people share all things in common into a *rule* for all Christians. Someone looking for *principles* may suggest the *command* in Luke 12: 33 to sell possessions and give to the poor is not meant literally but points to the *principle* of inner detachment from wealth. (Hays, 294). Hays says we need to learn to read in more than one mode and be wary of using one mode to override the message of the text in another. (Hays, 294)

However the New Testament presents itself to us firstly as a *story* the mode of *paradigm*. We find ourselves drawn into a story and find analogies between the story and the life of our own community. This changes our way of seeing the world (Hays, 295).

We could ask, then, if going to the New Testament for an answer to the question, "Should Christians ever kill or go to war?", as we might go to an expert in law, is the wrong starting point. Perhaps we need to keep hearing it as *story* until we intuitively make the connections of which Hays speaks.

Finally Hays says we need to decide how the authority of Scripture relates to other sources of authority. Again our four theologians have different answers. *Reason* and *Experience* are of much greater influence on Neibuhr than either *Scripture* or *Tradition*. *Tradition, reason and experience* have no authority for Barth. *Tradition and Reason*, for Yoder, must be subservient to Scripture but he makes room for the Holy Spirit to guide the community to a consensus in new situations. For Hauerwas *Tradition* is primary. For Schussler Fiorenza *Reason* plays a high role and *Women's experience* is explicitly paramount.⁸ For Hays, the *primacy of*

⁸ **Pragmatically** The fruit of Neibuhr's influence can be seen in mainstream U.S. Protestantism during the cold war. Hays sees Neibuhr as "docetic" and asks 'If Jesus' ethic "does not deal at all with the immediate moral problem of everyday human life," one may fairly ask whether Jesus own life was a human life.' (Hays, 218). Barth was a leading figure in the Confessing Church's resistance to Hitler symbolised by the Barmen Declaration. Yoder's influence is seen in the "peace churches" rooted in the Anabaptist tradition and his approach can be seen in movements like the Franciscans and many others. Hays comments, "A community shaped by Yoder's hermeneutic will be engaged in a "modelling mission" embodying an alternative order that anticipates God's will for the reconciliation of the world." Hays notes, "the logic of Hauerwas hermeneutical position should

the New Testament over other sources is “axiomatic” in “a community whose identity is...shaped by the Gospel to which the New Testament texts are the original and uniquely authoritative witness. (Hays, 296).

He discusses in some depth *the role of the First Testament* and its *authority in the life of the Church*. For Hays, “Jesus death and resurrection is *the* central decisive act of God for the salvation of humankind [so that] the cross becomes the hermeneutical centre for the canon as a whole. Thus, within the canon, the New Testament has a privileged function.” (Hays, 309). This means that, while “the story that the New Testament tells makes sense only as the continuation and climax of the story of Israel”, ultimately, “*if irreconcilable tensions exist between the moral vision of the New Testament and that of particular Old Testament texts, the New Testament vision trumps the Old Testament.*” (Hays, 309, 336).

10.06-Discussion (3 mins) Looking at Hays’ four modes of hearing the text *rule, principle, paradigm* and *symbolic world* which do you think is your personal bias?

Which mode might you most tend to ignore?

10.09-Violence in the Defence of Justice (Hays, 317-346)

Hays first acknowledges the almost universal acceptance of war by the Church citing the beautiful but ironic stained glass image in a small church depicting “Jesus the Good Shepherd” and dedicated to “the boys of this parish who fought in the Great War.” He acknowledges some great Christians (Bonhoeffer, Augustine, liberation theologians) who have concluded there are times when it is right for a Christian to kill. (Hays, 317-8). We could add C.S. Lewis to the list.

The first passage Hays points us to is Matthew 5: 38-48.

³⁸ ‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; ⁴⁰and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; ⁴¹and if anyone forces

require him to become a Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic Church, however, historically teaches positions on major ethical issues...that Hauerwas cannot accept.” Hauerwas describes himself as a “high church Mennonite!” Hays points to the women’s Church communities that have come into being around Schussler Fiorenza’s work. He suggests it is too early to assess the long term effects of her hermeneutics.

you to go one mile, go also the second mile. ⁴²Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

⁴³ 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

After acknowledging a number of ways Christians "get around" this text (e.g. "an ideal for the eschatological kingdom"; "an interim measure for Jesus disciples"; "forbids self-defence but not defence of another"; "only for a special class of Christian"; "impossible standard to convict us of sin and our need of grace"; "specific social setting") Hays suggests, rather, that the sermon of which these are the "climatic fifth and sixth antitheses ("You have heard that it was said...but I say to you....) "stands in Matthew...as Jesus' programmatic disclosure of the kingdom of God and of the life to which the community of disciples is called." (Hays, 320-1).

He suggests that "the sermon from a mountain probably echoes the Exodus story of Moses" as a "new Torah" for his covenant community. The *antithetical* structure, however is not to suggest a negation of Torah but its fulfilment in a community called to a standard that intensifies and exceeds its own (Hays, 321).

Hays summarises (Hays, 323-4): In Jesus Sermon non-violent enemy love is not an eschatological vision or impossible ideal but, rather, the way of life demanded by Jesus of his disciples who are strengthened by his own ongoing presence (Matthew 28: 20b). Jesus practiced it to his own death and calls his disciples to accept the same fate.

This is not an "interim ethic" for Jesus immediate disciples. Matthew, writing at least 50 years after Jesus death, addresses, precisely, the situation of a Church facing "an extended time until the end of the age". This Church is to "disciple all nations" calling them to obey Jesus commands including that of non-violent enemy love.

While the passage itself deals with self-defence the wider Gospel speaks of

Jesus deliberate renunciation of violence as an instrument of God's will.

Matthew 28: 20 makes it clear *all* baptised believers are to be taught to obey this command. It is neither for a special class of disciple nor merely to show we are sinners in need of grace.

The only exegetical proposal remaining is that this teaching is normative only within a limited social sphere. Hays notes that, in contrast to the other antithetical statements, Jesus seems in this passage to actually *negate* rather than *intensify* the Torah. He says "most commentators note" that the "eye for and eye" rule was probably to limit vengeance rather than command it. (See Exodus 21:24). So the Torah *limits* retaliation. Jesus *forbids* it altogether (Hays, 324-50).

This cannot be applied to false testimony in court which was clearly to be punished, under the Torah, to ensure good social order. Here Jesus, instead, commands his disciples to not resist an evildoer, effectively undermining the Torah's teaching about just punishment for offenders (Hays, 325).

Hays acknowledges a difference in audience. Deuteronomy 19: 15-21 is addressed to the judicial authorities whereas Matthew 5:39 was addressed to the powerless, the victims of hostile actions by the powerful. Hays suggests this indicates the social setting of the community to which Matthew's Gospel was addressed, a community outside the circle of power (Hays, 325).

But if Jesus is not concerned with upholding a "good" social order and can even be seen here to be *destabilising* it this raises serious questions about the application of Jesus teaching to a state looking to the Church for guidance regarding military violence or a Church choosing, prophetically, to offer such guidance. Put another way, if Jesus new community is a *nation* in its own right mixed like leaven in the loaf of the world, Jesus is then not directly interested, in the short term, in the stability of the *nations* but only in the internal stability of his *subversive, destabilising nation*. This still begs the same questions and suggests the Second Testament doesn't, explicitly, give us the answer. We must offer the wisdom we have learned to live, as we have begun in our own lives to practice the subversive ethic of Jesus.

The passage closes with a call to be "perfect" (gk *teleios*) as our Heavenly father is perfect echoing God's call to Israel to be "holy, for I the Lord am Holy" (Lev 19: 1-2) and to be *teleios* before the Lord your God" (Deut

18:13). Hays notes that Matthews point is that “the community of Jesus disciples is summoned to the task of showing forth the character of God in the world.” (Hays, 239).

In Canonical Context

Hays claims “the evangelists are unanimous in portraying Jesus as a Messiah who subverts all prior expectations by assuming the vocation of suffering rather than conquering Israel’s enemies.” (Hays, 329). He imposes silence about his identity as Messiah until he has redefined the title on the cross and calls the disciples to the same vocation (Mark 8:27-9:1). He renounces violence in promoting God’s Kingdom (Luke 9:51-56). He teaches his disciples servanthood (Mark 10: 42-45; John 13: 1-17) and to expect suffering at the hands of those in power (Mark 13: 9-13; John 15:18-16:4a). In all four gospels Jesus death is consistent with his teaching, refusing to lift a finger in his defence, scolding those who try to defend him with violence, and rejecting an angelic “Holy War” (Matt 26:53). He intercedes for his enemies (Luke 23:34a).

In the book of Acts the community of disciples follow Jesus example, preaching, healing, worshipping, sharing, suffering violence but never claiming territory through a military operation (Hays, 330).

In Paul’s writings the death of Christ is God’s peace initiative. God, instead of killing his enemies gives his son to die for them. We are called, in life, to imitate Christ’s self-emptying love (Phil. 2:1-13) and to identify with his suffering (Romans 8:17). Romans 12:14-21 explicitly teaches a lifestyle remarkably parallel to that of Matthew 5. The teaching in Romans 13 regarding the governing authorities “bearing the sword to execute God’s wrath” may be problematic in other ways but do not envisage Christians in this role. Hays concludes, “There is not a syllable in the Pauline letters that can be cited in support of Christians employing violence.” (Hays, 330-331).

It is surprising Hays does not pick up Yoder’s way of dealing with Romans 13: 1-7. Hays earlier notes that Yoder argues for Romans 12 and 13 to be read as a literary unit. “Christians are urged (12:19) never to exercise vengeance but to leave it to God and to wrath. Then the authorities are recognised (13:4) as executing the particular function which the Christian was to leave to God...this makes it clear that the function exercised by government is not the function to be exercised by Christians,” (Hays, 245-6). Yet even here we must ask, if Paul can see the government

as God's instrument at this point is their no place for a Christian to be called to serve the state in this role?

Hays claims the remainder of the New Testament, including the Apocalypse on close inspection, has the same message so that "from Matthew to Revelation we find a consistent witness against violence and a calling to the community to follow the example of Jesus in *accepting* suffering rather than *inflicting* it." (Hays, 331-2). He notes some passages that may be cited in objection.

In **Matthew 10: 34** (not peace but a sword) the "sword" is a metaphor for the division that will occur within families over following Jesus way. In fact Luke paraphrases it instead as "division". Even taken literally the disciples are the victims in the saying.

Luke 22:36b (unarmed disciples exhorted to buy a sword) set in the context of Jesus consistent teaching elsewhere is best seen as symbolic and "grimly ironical". The disciples take him literally as usual and Jesus response may be him continuing with the ironical humour or pure exasperation. In context Jesus shows that he is not exhorting violence a few verses later as he heals the ear cut off by Peter.

In **Mark 11: 15-19** and parallels Jesus seems to use violence in protest against Temple trade. Firstly Hays sees this as a kind of prophetic street play. There is certainly a kind of violence in the way he overturns tables and John even has him making a whip to drive the animals out. But in no sense does he attempt to maintain control over the temple by force. Rather he conducts his drama, leaves, and later teaches about it. Hays suggests that, like the fig tree story, it may also be a veiled warning about the temple's destruction.

The Soldiers in the New Testament (Luke 3:14-15; Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; Mark 15:39; Acts 10:1-11:18) can be taken to "suggest that the New Testament Writers did not see participation in the army as sinful...or a question being debated in their communities". But, as they are all Roman Soldiers it can also be seen in terms of the "power of the Word of God to reach even the unlikeliest people." (Hays, 335).

Hays then turns to the problem of the First Testament Holy War Texts we considered earlier.

The First Testament Holy War texts

Hays, noting the Samuel Story cited earlier and Deuteronomy 20: 10-18,

concludes that, “taken on its own terms, the Old Testament obviously validates the legitimacy of armed violence by the people of God under some circumstances.”

He then adds the point quoted earlier that “if irreconcilable tensions exist between the moral vision of the New Testament and that of particular Old Testament texts, the New Testament vision trumps the Old Testament.”

I find this the least satisfying point of Hays analysis. For sure, this is a book on “New Testament Ethics”. But he seems, for me, to fall into one of the pits we Evangelicals (speaking as one of them) are inclined to. The bible is viewed, as it is by Barth, as a complex law code to be solved and Barth’s other insight that it is also the concrete action of God is somehow missed. If the same God who is revealed to us in Jesus in fact acted in Military violence in the First Testament and if the same God who, through Jesus, called the faithful community to non-violent resistance earlier called the faithful to engage in military violence and even ethnic cleansing as God’s agent, then we need to deal with that. We need to ask the uncomfortable question, “Where was God in these stories? When the Egyptians died and the Israelite sang? When Deuteronomy was written with its Holy War laws? When Samuel hewed Agag into pieces with his sword?”

10.20-Discussion (20 mins) Did Moses and Samuel, simply, get it wrong?

Is the entire story of the First Testament *useful* (2 Tim 3: 16) only as a negative example of the various ways in which religion can be annexed by corporate evil?

Or is Barth correct in asserting God’s *freedom* with regard to taking human life even on a large scale? If so, did God then freely change strategies with Jesus new community and could God, again, by the Holy Spirit, *freely* call an individual Christian to take up arms or a nation to destroy another nation?

10.40-Walter Wink

In *Jesus and non-violence: a third way* Walter Wink gives a compelling case for a different reading of Matthew 5: 38-42, the first part of Hays most crucial text. Wink presented his case in a more academic form as a chapter in *The Love of enemy and nonretaliation in the New Testament* and

in an earlier form in a seminar in 1988.⁹

First of all Wink challenges the KJV translation of verse 39 as “resist not evil” suggesting they served their king well in turning nonviolent resistance into docility. A better translation, he argues, would be “Don’t strike back at evil in kind” or “Do not retaliate against violence with violence.” Or “don’t react violently against the one who is evil”. But, says Wink, Jesus abhors *both* passivity *and* violence. His *third way* is made clear by three examples.

Wink then argues that each of the three actions, offering the left cheek, offering the underclothing, and carrying the load an extra mile, are acts of non-violent resistance, not a passive acceptance of oppression or abuse. Firstly, a right handed blow to the right cheek, he claims, would have been a back-handed blow to humiliate one considered inferior. Turning the left cheek forced the other to either hit with the fist and acknowledge one as an equal or to refuse and accept defeat. Secondly, a poor debtor, hauled into court, his cloak demanded as pledge by a creditor, instead of begging for mercy, removes his undergarment as well and hands it over. Walking out of court naked would not shame the poor debtor but those who would saw him, and, ultimately, the creditor who would be blamed for the scene. Says Wink, “Jesus in effect is sponsoring clowning...The “Powers that Be” literally stand on their dignity. Nothing depotentiates them faster than deft lampooning.”¹⁰ Thirdly, there were severe penalties for a soldier requiring a civilian to carry a load further than a mile. But even the right to impress a civilian to carry it one was a better reminder of their subjugation. Offering to carry it two “recovers the initiative”, reasserts their dignity in a situation that cannot be changed.

Wink outlines what he sees as Jesus “third way”:

- Seize the moral initiative
- Find a creative alternative to violence
- Assert your own humanity and dignity as a person
- Meet force with ridicule or humour
- Break the cycle of humiliation
- Refuse to submit or to accept the inferior position

⁹ Walter Wink, *Jesus and non-violence : a third way* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 9-28; Walter Wink, “Neither passivity nor violence-Jesus third way (Matthew 5:38-42 par.)” in *The Love of enemy and non-retaliation in the New Testament* (Willard M. Swartley, Ed.: Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) chapter 4.

¹⁰ Wink, *Jesus..*, 21.

- Expose the injustice of the system
- Take control of the power dynamic
- Shame the oppressor into repentance
- Stand your ground
- Force the powers to make decisions for which they are not prepared
- Recognise your own power
- Be willing to suffer rather than to retaliate
- Cause the oppressor to see you in a new light
- Deprive the oppressor of a situation where a show of force is effective
- Be willing to undergo the penalty for breaking unjust laws
- Die to fear of the old order and its rules¹¹

Both Wink and Hays acknowledge the same point made by Richard Rohr noted earlier that we are not in control of our world, only of our behaviour within it. Violent resistance flows out of the illusion of control. Non-violent resistance focuses on our own behaviour and reclaims our dignity by living out of our own true heart and using our own power. It has been said that the first rule of chess is to “play ones own game” not the game of the opponent. Non-violent resistance is about playing ones own game and claiming back one’s true personal power.

Wink’s *Jesus and Non-Violence* also provides an excellent source of historical accounts of successful non-violent resistance in a wide range of social and political settings.

10.45-Morning tea

Resources

Books, booklets and articles

Clough, David L & Brian Stiltner, *Faith and Force: a Christian debate about war* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2007) is an unusual book authored by two friends who are scholars on opposite sides of the issue.

Gilbert, Elizabeth, *Eat, pray, love: one woman's search for everything across Italy, India, and Indonesia* (? : Penguin, 2006).

Hays, Richard B. *The moral vision of the New Testament: community, cross, new creation: a contemporary introduction to New Testament ethics* (N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1996).

¹¹ Wink, *Jesus...*, 27-28.

McClendon, James Wm. Jr., *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 300ff, "Is Jesus a Pacifist?" repeats much that is covered better by Hays and Wink but includes a useful argument from "late antiquity" (a period of crusades and knights) that priests and candidates for the priesthood were forbidden to engage in bloodshed being expected to maintain an ethic once practiced by all Christians.

Macgregor, G. H. C., *The New Testament basis for pacifism* (London: The fellowship of reconciliation, 1953) is a much older but carefully written little book. It was first published in 1936. The 1953 edition I borrowed has a price of "Five Shillings" on the back!

Moore Lappe, Frances, *Diet for a small planet* (Ballentine Books, 1991)

Sider, Ronald & Oliver O'Donovan, *Peace and war: a debate about pacifism-Grove booklet #56* (Bramcote: Grove, 1985) is a debate between two Christians on opposite sides.

Swartley, William M., Ed., *The Love of Enemy and Nonretaliation in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) is a useful collection of essays by ten different scholars, broadly from a Mennonite perspective.

Wink, Walter, *Jesus and non-violence : a third way* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003)

Wink, Walter Ed., *Peace is the way: writings on nonviolence from the fellowship of reconciliation* (N.Y.: Orbis, 2000) is a collection of writings from the great peacemakers of our age including the Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Ngat Hahn, Mohandas K. Ghandi and Thomas Merton and many less well known peacemakers including many women.

Internet

<http://ncrnews.org/ncrpodcasts/feeds/rohr.xml> A set of three NCR podcasts interviews with Richard Rohr on "Seeing with God's eyes".

This paper is available online in the resources section of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship Aotearoa New Zealand web site at

<http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/apf>