

JPJRS 4/2 (2001) 101-120

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4289506

Stable URL: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4289506>

Keywords: Models of authority, Peace, Servant leader, Peace in the Bible

Abstract: See below

Peace

Biblical Perspectives

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1. Introduction

1.1. Biblical perspectives – in the plural. Rightly so. For there are several. To perspectives on peace correspond those on war. Both war and peace can have three dimensions: historical-political, cosmic-eschatological and interior-spiritual. Spiritual peace is often born of, and grows through spiritual warfare against injustice and sin. Both are therefore accorded encouragement and support. Eschatological war is envisaged with ardour because it is the definitive elimination of whatever is hostile to authentic and lasting peace. As for historical-political war and peace, the biblical picture is somewhat complex. There are biblical periods, passages and perspectives that extol war and violence, conquest, massacre, loot, arson and total destruction of peoples and places. Some of these are presented as mandated by God. Other times and texts seek to wean people away from sword and slaughter, and to educate them to peace. Still others condemn and reject violence of every sort, and challenge all to unite in love to build a gentle world of harmony and peace. Only this last perspective, together with spiritual war and end-time

cosmic conflict, is to be found in the Christian Scriptures while the varieties of outlook indicated above are present in the Hebrew Bible. This assortment calls for concrete illustration and reflection. It is a challenge for the Indian Church and the universal Church. But first we must place ourselves in context.

2. The Context

2.1. We turn to the Bible for visions of peace, and for inspiration to work together towards a culture of friendship and concord. We do this in the context of widespread violence and conflicts as well as of concerned efforts to create understanding and unite peoples in love. The anger and bitterness caused by the partition of India is still smouldering. The tension between India and Pakistan has not eased. There have been a few armed conflicts. We count the killings in Kashmir. "In the last 11 years more than 70,000 people have been killed in the 'internal war.' There are more than 15,000 war widows and thousands of orphans. While some 30,000 persons are in detention, there are a few thousands who have 'dis-

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Abstract: Biblical perspectives - in the plural. Rightly so. For there are several. To perspectives on peace correspond those on war. Both war and peace can have three dimensions: historical-political, cosmic-eschatological and interior-spiritual. Spiritual peace is often born of, and grows through spiritual warfare against injustice and sin. Both are therefore accorded encouragement and support. Eschatological war is envisaged with ardour because it is the definitive elimination of whatever is hostile to authentic and lasting peace.

appeared.’ The whole social fabric of Kashmir has been rent apart.” (Koshy 2000: 1,3). We think of the bloody clash of various senas in the killing fields of Bihar; and of the unrest and violence in India’s north-eastern states.

Conflicts and civil wars have been going on in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Ireland, Serbia, Chechnya, in some Central and South American countries, and many parts of Africa. We remember the Zionist invasion of Palestine with the connivance of some western powers; the uprooting of settled populations; Israel’s expansionist wars; and the oppression and killings that continue. We know now that in the Balkan conflict, NATO’s attack jets fired weapons tipped with depleted uranium: 10,000 rounds in Bosnia in 1994-95, and 31,000 in Kosovo in 1999. European soldiers who served there are now dying of leukemia, or suffering from a range of symptoms including cancer, fatigue, hair-loss, and sleeplessness. Several NATO members and a team of UN scientists suspect radio-active contamination, and demand investigation (Bultmann 2001: 15-16; Schott 2001:17; People’s Reporter 2001, nos 17 and 18). The savage conflicts of the last century continue to cast their bloody shadow across our paths. World War I killed 8.6 million people. A quarter century later World War II left 50 million dead. We recall with horror the holocausts of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Vietnam. Since 1945, several minor wars, guerilla combats and conventional weapons have taken some 10 million lives. In sum, the twentieth century slaughtered over 90 million people (Bastian 2001: 10-11; Swaim 1983: 75).

2.2. War means that resources urgently needed to alleviate human distress are diverted by the powers that be to the service of destruction and death. General Dwight D. Eisenhower does not hesitate to name the thing: “Every gun made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed” (Swaim 1983: 97). J.S. Whale concurs: “conquest is always cruel, even when perpetrated by God’s elect; and empire is always huge robbery, whether Roman or British, Muslim or Christian” (in Davies 1991:116). Carter Swaim points out that “between 1970 and 1979 Japanese military expenditure rose from \$1.58 billion annually to \$10 billion. Except for China, this was larger than the entire national budget of any other country in that part of the world. In the 1980s Japan acquired from the United States military aircraft at the cost of \$4.6 billion. In the 1950s and 1960s US aid to Iran totaled some \$2 billion chiefly in arms and military technology. In the years 1974-78 Iran bought \$16.3 billion worth of arms from the US” (Swaim 1993: 81-84). “American economy is completely geared to military production” (Swaim 1993: 87). “The US has military bases in almost half a hundred countries”, and they cost billions. “Between 1960 and 1970, military expenditure abroad accounted for 86.6 per cent of the country’s \$85 billion deficit” (Swaim 1983: 85,92).

Arms manufacturers and gun-runners – these parasites and merchants of death – make a career of selling weapons to both sides in any actual or potential conflict. “This deadly business, con-

tagious as smallpox, has enormously multiplied since World War II, when big business and big government learned how to enrich each other's coffers", by feeding conflicts and blocking peace efforts" (Swaim 1983:81-82; Lasserre 1974:202). "War impoverishes the earth, and preparation for war impoverishes society. Everyday the world is spending well over \$1 billion in preparation for war." Now, "the money required to provide adequate food, water, education, health and housing for everyone in the world is estimated at \$ 17 billion a year, about as much as the world spends on arms every two weeks" (Swaim 1993: 91; Development Forum 1980: 8). Military spending is wasteful. Disarmament provides more jobs than armament. "Two B-1 bombers cost \$ 204 million. For that sum Americans could build 11,000 low cost homes and give work to 20,000 unemployed; operate twelve 600 – pupil middle schools for 35 years and thereby create 37,200 jobs; operate 70 neighborhood clinics for 30 years and thereby create 27,800 jobs" (Swaim 1983: 99-100). And yet the powerful go on playing Star Wars and Web Wars, "regardless of the misery of millions of innocents" (Aranha 2000: 3).

2.3. Still, peace is what most people want and seek. The World Council of Churches has called on peoples to dedicate the opening decade of the century to the culture of non-violence and peace. In August 2000 the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders met at the United Nations in New York. Some 1500 participants from over 100 countries signed a "Commitment to Global Peace" (Cur-

rent Dialogue 2000/36: 45-48). On Hiroshima Day, August 6, 2000, Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia administered a pledge at Gandhi Smriti, Delhi, affirming the necessity of a climate of peace to achieve development, equality, and justice, and decrying the excesses committed by major nuclear powers whose follies the new powers should not repeat by investing in weapons of mass destruction. Our scarce resources should be used to meet the pressing basic needs of the deprived millions of our world. In November 2000 an Inter-religious International Conference, organized by the Asian Muslim Action Network, met in Dhaka to discuss ways of building a culture of peace. Its convener, Asghar Ali Engineer, commented on the four key concepts of the Holy Qur'an: justice, compassion, wisdom and service. Jihad is not war against people, but striving against injustice; that is the path of peace.

Such is the context in which we turn to the Bible, with Alfred Tennyson's prayer on our lips: Ring out the thousand wars of old, Ring in the thousand years of peace.

3. Yahweh, The Lord of Hosts, The God of War

3.1. What resources does the Bible have to sustain our quest for peace? The books comprising the Bible are not consistent and do not share a common outlook on questions of war and peace. Biblical traditions on these realities developed over several centuries, reflecting a variety of political, cultural and social situations. Three main periods

may be noted: There is, first, the pre-monarchical period stretching from Moses to Saul, from around 1300 to 1000 BCE. There follows the monarchical period from David to the Exile, the 10th through the 6th centuries. Finally we have the Exilic and post-Exilic period, the years after 586 BCE. Each of these periods relates differently to the three dimensions of war and peace indicated at the beginning. In the pre-monarchical period political war dominates; belief in cosmic-eschatological war is absent; scant attention is given to spiritual war; and little is said about peace of any kind. In the monarchical period too political war prevails, but concern over spiritual war begins to develop, and glimpses are had of eschatological war. Consideration is given to political peace; emphasis is laid on spiritual peace; and eschatological peace is taken care of. In the post-exilic years accenting of spiritual peace continues, and major developments occur in visions of eschatological cosmic peace (Randall 1998: 107-108).

3.2. Most accounts of pre-exilic conflicts and wars, and of the part Yahweh is said to have played in them are far from being incentives to peace. Yahweh afflicted the Egyptians with a series of plagues to force them set his favorite people free. When this step failed, Yahweh took the extreme measure of striking dead all the first born in Egypt, men and beast alike (Ex. 11:4-7; 12: 12, 29-30). Yahweh fought for Israel when they, out in the desert on their march to freedom, were pursued by Egypt's army: He overthrew the Egyptians in the middle of the Sea of

Reeds. A 12th century victory song celebrates Yahweh as a warrior:

horse and rider He has
thrown into the sea.

chariots and army He has
hurled into the sea.

You unleash your fury, it
consumes them like chaff.

You stretched your right
hand out, the earth swallowed them (Ex. 14:14, 24-31; 15:1,4-8,12,21).

Another victory song, Deborah's, also dating to the 12th century, extols Yahweh as warrior who marched at the head of Israel's army and caused a whole Canaanite force to fall by the edge of Israel's sword (Jg. 4:4-16; 5:2-31). Many war stories deal with Israel's conquest and settlement of Canaan. These wars of naked aggression were 'holy' wars, a holocaust demanded by Yahweh. The overthrown cities, with all their inhabitants, and, often, all living things in them, were "dedicated to Yahweh under the curse of destruction". Thus, when Israel, led by Joshua, captured Jericho, "they enforced the curse of destruction (herem) on everyone in the city: men and women, young and old, including the oxen, the sheep and the donkeys, slaughtering them all" (Josh 6: 17-21). Similarly Israel slew the entire population of Ai while taking the cattle and the spoils of the town as booty. "The number of those who fell that day, men and women together, was twelve thousand, all people of Ai. Joshua then burned Ai, making it a ruin for ever more" (Josh 8:18-29).

Much the same was the fate of numerous (some 31) other cities west of the Jordan (Josh 9-21). In every case,

the main actor, the War Lord, is Yahweh. It is He that delivers cities and princedoms to Israel and insists on their extermination through massacre and arson. Sometimes Yahweh himself enters the fray, throws armies into disorder, or showers hailstones and kills them. The Bible assures us that “Yahweh had decided to harden the hearts of these men so that they would engage Israel in battle and thus come under curse of destruction, and so receive no quarter but be exterminated as Yahweh had ordered Moses” (Jos. 11:20; Dt. 7: 1-6; 20: 10-18). It was Yahweh that ordered Moses to “exact full vengeance for Israelites on the Medianites”. War followed, every male was killed, including children, and “all the women who had ever slept with a man”; and the town was set on fire (Nb. 31:1-17).

In the monarchical period conflicts and wars became more frequent: between Saul and David; between David and his neighbours like the Philistines and the Amalekites; and between Israel and Judah. Most of these are described as Yahweh’s wars. “The Deuteronomistic writings develop an extensive theory of Yahweh’s wars”, and ultimately invoke Yahweh as warrior, god of war (Preuss 1997: 341-344). “Devour all the peoples whom Yahweh your God puts at your mercy, show them no pity.”; “tear down their altars, smash their standing stones, cut down their sacred poles and burn their idols” (Dt. 7: 1-16). It may be noted that the conquest and settlement tradition and the tradition of divine gift of land became particularly popular, predictably, during the exile in Babylon (Prior 1997: 32-33). “The entire impression left with the

modern reader by the narrative of Hebrew Bible is one of violence being not only tolerated but fostered and glorified. This impression seems to be present throughout the Old Testament” with its holy wars, retaliatory legislation, centrality of the kingly house and imprecatory psalms (Yoder 1971: 85-86). “The Bible poses a fundamental moral problem for anyone who takes it at face value: The invasion, occupation, pillage and killings are presented “as having not only divine approval but as being mandated by the divinity. This presentation of God as requiring the destruction of others poses problems for anyone who presumes that the conduct of an ethical God will not fall lower than decent secular behaviour” (Prior 1997:34).

3.3 If this is the case with the Bible, could this text possibly make any significant contribution to the cause of peace? The fact is that it has been used in the past as an incentive to and a justification for violence and war, conquest and genocide. “The Bible, commonly looked to as the supreme source-book of liberation, has functioned as a charter for oppression both in the past and the present”. Texts carrying divine command to “devour” conquered peoples and show them no pity (Dt. 7:16), have been used “in support of colonialism in several regions and periods in which the native peoples were the counterparts of the Hittites, the Girgashites and others. The first six books of the Hebrew Bible reflect some ethnocentric, racist and xenophobic sentiments. On moral grounds one is forced to question whether the Torah continues to provide divine legitimacy for the occupation of other people’s land and the virtual an-

nihilation of indigenes” (Prior: 40, 34). Arnold Toynbee notes that it was the same biblically recorded conviction of the Israelites that God had instigated them to exterminate the Canaanites that sanctioned the British conquest of North America, Ireland and Australia, the Dutch conquest of South Africa, the Prussian conquest of Poland and the Zionist conquest of Palestine” (Prior 1997: 39, 250; Toynbee 1954: 310). The Crusades (1095-1274 CE) “exemplify how the Bible has been employed as an agent of oppression.” Papal justification of violence rested ultimately on the Old Testament (Prior 1997: 35).

Zionists have been using the Bible to justify its invasion and take-over of Palestine, its many wars (1948, 1966, 1967, 1973, 1982, 1993, 1996), the uprooting of a long settled population and their endless harassment and oppression. Yigal Amir, the assassin of Yitzhak Rabin, claimed in court that in doing the bloody deed he was following the Torah, and he was not alone: ‘it was God’ (Randall 1998: 8; Prior 1997: 41-44). When in 1977 President Carter spoke of human rights and the Palestinian Homeland, evangelical Christians came out with a public affirmation of their faith “in biblical prophecy and Israel’s divine right to the Holy Land”. The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon was interpreted as “the end-time fulfillment of biblical prophecy” (Prior:41). The result is that for Palestinian Christians the Bible has become problematic. “The Old Testament has fallen into disuse. How can the Old Testament be the Word of God in the light of the Palestinian Christian experience with its use to support Zionism and to offer to Pal-

estinians slavery rather than freedom?” (Ateek 1991: 283).

The fact is that for centuries before the emergence of Zionism Christians have been using the Bible as “a blunt instrument of oppression of people”. Michael Prior recalls the colonial exploitation of the Bible, “leading to the exploitation of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, the humiliation of non-whites in South Africa and, in our own day, to militaristic and xenophobic Zionism” (Prior 1997: 291-92, 294). “The black people of South Africa recognize the central position the Bible occupied in their colonization, national oppression and exploitation. Many young blacks consider the Bible to be an oppressive document and call for its displacement (Prior 1997: 44, 105). In the history of western religion a Bible-based “holy-war theology linking death, sacrifice and divine satiation has emerged time and again and is still a religious factor in the Middle East today.” (Randall 1998: 129). Representatives of Andean Indians were clear about “the role of the Bible in the destruction of their civilization” when, in an open letter addressed to the visiting Pope John Paul II, they asked him to take back the Bible and give it to their oppressors (Prior 1997: 260).

“In the light of history, one must question whether the values of the Torah can be relied upon to promote justice and peace, and underpin the imperatives of human rights” (Prior: 1997: 40).

3.4 But how is it that Yahweh is so bellicose and hawkish, so glaringly partial to Israel and hostile to others? The phenomenon is best seen against the

story of Israel's religious development from the polytheism with which they entered Canaan in the 13th century BCE and into which they constantly fell back (as is attested in the collections of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles), to Yahweh-polytheism of the pre-monarchical period (13-11 C. BCE), "in which the Hebrews chose and worshipped one, that is, Yahweh, from among a number of other Canaanite deities". This then developed, in the early monarchical period (10-8 BCE) into Yahweh-henotheism "in which Yahweh was raised above all other gods as the national god of the Israelite people". In religious henotheism, the chosen god is the guardian of the tribe, not the Creator and Shepherd of the universe. The tribe's interests are his interests; their enemies are his enemies. The very presence of the 'enemy' can pollute the land, which the deity gifts to his devotees. With that, "the theological justification for holy war" is in place. Pre-exilic henotheism is the ambient of the extermination stories we have recounted. During the late monarchy (8-6 c. BCE), "the Hebrew faith began slowly to recognize that their national deity was a god whose power extended to other nations". It is in this period, in the 8th century prophets, that the first glimpses of Hebrew monotheism may be caught. Finally in the Exilic and post-Exilic years they arrive at Elohism-monotheism, that is, faith in the One and Only God, Creator and Ruler of the whole Universe. The first clear expression of Hebrew monotheism is to be found in Deutero-Isaiah 45:14-24. Scholars argue that this development was substantially shaped by influ-

ences of Zoroastrian monotheism during and after the Exile (Randall 1998: 102-122).

4. Yahweh-Peace

4.1 Jean Lasserre observes that "from the point of view of Christian ethics, a study of the OT is bound to be disappointing;.. By and large the OT ignores that respect for human life, that unconditional love, that non-violence which form the general climate of the New Testament. Everywhere in the OT human life is cheap and the best believers have scarcely felt any scruple about shedding blood; believers are almost all warriors; only Jeremiah is non-violent". Nevertheless, scattered through the Old Testament's pages, "there is another strain, universalistic and pacific" (Lasserre 1974: 59-61).

Albert Randall concurs. In the Hebrew Bible war is a dominant theme. Conflict and bloodshed receive twice the attention given to peace. Peace seems inconsequential during the oral tradition and the writing period – centuries of violence and destruction, of conquest and defense, and loss of sovereignty. But there is also "a spiritual theme whose importance far transcends that of death and war: peace". The need for peace and the hope of peace were always there, "awaiting the right voice to bring them to awareness". Indeed, the spiritual foundation of the Hebrew Bible is peace; "the reality which lies at its core is, a God who created humans for peace. Thus the spiritual greatness and genius of the Hebrew Bible is found (in) its awareness of the relationship among peace, righteousness, justice, salvation and God" (Randall 1998: 188-189).

4.2 Already in the period of the Judges, in the days of Medianite oppression, Gideon experienced God as peace. "Peace be with you", is what the Angel of Yahweh said to him; "have no fear". Gideon built an altar there to Yahweh and called it, "Yahweh-Peace" (Jg 6:14-24). There are passages in the Bible that disapprove of bloodshed, and there are prophetic texts that demand and foretell an end to wars. David is glad that Abigail's intervention prevented him from killing and exacting revenge (1 S 25:31-35). God declares David disqualified to build a temple to home the Ark of the Covenant because David was a man of war and had shed blood (1Ch 28: 2-3). Isaiah proclaims that in the final days nations

Will hammer their swords
into ploughshares
and their spears into sickles.

Nation will not lift sword
against nation,
no longer will they learn
how to make war (Is 2:4).

Micah, prophesying in the same period, delivers the same message of peace: when God will judge between many peoples and mighty nations,

They will hammer their
swords into ploughshares
and their spears into billhooks.

Nation will not lift sword
against nation
or ever again be trained to
make war.

But each man will sit under
his vine and fig tree
with no one to trouble him
(Mi 4:3-4).

Isaiah continues to project his vision of peace. He names the future Messianic ruler the Prince of Peace. In the days of this Prince, the oppressor's yoke and rod shall be broken; the clanging footgear of soldiers and the clothing rolled in blood shall be fed to the flames; and the scion of David, given to us, will be named

Wonder-Counsellor,
mighty-God,

Eternal Father, Prince-of-Peace,

to extend his dominion in
boundless peace.

in fair judgment and integrity (Is 9:3-6).

The entire entourage of the Prince of Peace will bespeak peace. He will not ride on a war horse, so powerfully described in Job (39:19-25), but on a donkey, as foretold by the prophet:

Rejoice, daughter of Zion,
Your king is approaching.
Humble and riding on a
donkey.

He will banish chariot
from Ephraim

And horses from Jerusalem.

The bow of war will be
banished,

He will proclaim peace to
the nations (Zc 9:9-10).

When this King rules with God's own justice, the Psalmist can ask the hills and the mountains to

bring peace to the people.

In his days uprightness
shall flourish

and peace in plenty till the
moon is no more.

From oppression and violence he redeems their lives,

their blood is precious in his sight (P.S. 72:1-3, 7,14).

Sometimes prophets urge Israel to surrender to an invading army, not because war is evil in principle, but because the invasion is divine punishment to which one must submit (Jr 21:8-10; 27:8-13). On other occasions they denounce weapons of war and warlike alliances not, once again, because war is immoral but because it is futile (Is 30:1-7; 31:1-3; Jr 17:5). In disqualifying David, a man of war who had shed blood, to build a house for the Divine Name, it is not clear whether war is being condemned as unethical or merely as ritually polluting (1Ch 28:1-3).

4.3 But there are two stories that constitute a firm rejection of war and violence, and resound as a powerful advocacy of peace and friendship. A large armed force with horses and chariots, sent by the king of Aram to capture Elisha, (who through prophetic visions had been revealing to Israel's king every sinister move of Aram), was struck sun-blind and led by the prophet to Samaria. Israel's king was happy, and proposed to put them to death. The prophet's reply reflects the spirit of the Prince of Peace: "Do not kill them... offer them food and water... and let them go back to their master." This was done. The outcome? "Aramean raiding parties never invaded the territory of Israel again" (2Kg 6:8-23). The message is, if you want peace, practise peace and love the enemy.

A similar scene is enacted later through the intervention of another prophet. In the days of the idolatrous king Ahaz of Judah, Israel invaded the south, killed thousands and "took two hundred thousand captives, with quantities of booty, carrying everything off to Samaria." The prophet Obed went out to meet the victorious troops. He castigated them for the slaughter they had committed and for their plans to enslave the survivors. "Now listen to me", said the prophet; "release the captives you have taken from your brothers, for the fierce anger of Yahweh hangs over you". Some of the chieftains supported the prophet. So "the soldiers gave up the captives and the booty." The captives were given clothing and sandals, food and drink, and donkeys as needed and taken back to their brothers in Jericho (2Ch 28:1-15). That is how biblical tradition of unlearning war and building peace kept growing.

Progressively the Hebrew people did demythologize military might and reinterpret the meaning of their call. They were not chosen to dominate the world but to witness to God's saving justice and universal love, and to assume the burdens of our common humanity and be a suffering servant (Is 42:6-7; 49:6; 53: Am 9:7; Jon; Swaim 1983: 17). The conviction spread that the king should not acquire more and more horses and chariots and that security did not lie in arms and armies. Those who trust in horses stumble over corpses. The prophetic judgment on war and weapon may be summed up in a word: "Not by might, not by power, but my (Yahweh's) Spirit" shall the people live

and prosper (Dt 17:16; 1 S 8:11-12; Ps. 33:17-17; Na 3:3; Zc 4:6).

When Yahweh will cleanse Israel of her infidelities, and betroth her to himself anew, life and society and the earth as a whole will be refreshed too; mainly thorough the abolition of war:

When that day comes I
shall make a treaty for
them

With the wild animals,
with the birds of heaven

And the creeping things of
the earth;

I shall break the bow and
the sword and warfare,

And banish them from the
country,

And I will let them sleep
secure (Hos 2:20-21).

The psalms see the dawn of peace
as one of Yahweh's wonder-works:

Yahweh puts an end to
wars over the whole world,

He breaks the bow, snaps
the spear,

Shields he burns in the fire
(P.S. 46:8-10).

The psalms invite us to be still and experience the peace which enfolds the earth, and thus come to 'know' the God, supreme over the whole world as distinct from the godling who cares only for one tribe, and is ready for their sake to destroy the cosmos. The King whom God has promised and the people have been dreaming of will redeem the poor, the weak and the needy from oppression and violence; their blood is precious in his sight; and in his days "mountains and hills (will) bring peace to the people" (Ps. 72:3-4, 13-14).

In brief, after the fall of Jerusalem (587 BCE) the promise of peace became central to the message of the prophets, especially of Deutero Isaiah. In this collection the divine covenant of peace comes to be viewed eschatologically. This world, now under God's judgment and broken, will in the end be new created and made whole in righteousness and splendour (Is 65:17-19; 11:6-9; 29:17-24; 54:10; 62:1-9). And Yahweh is going to "send peace flowing over her like a river" (Is 66:12). "The message concerning the renewal of the covenant of peace blossoms into the promise of the universal and everlasting peace; and the coming of the day of salvation is frequently linked with the Prince of Peace (Is 9:5-6), who as God's Anointed (Is 61:1ff), is the bringer and founder of the Kingdom of Peace" (Beck and Brown, 1976: 779).

5. Christ Is Our Peace

5.1 Peace (shalom, eirene) is the opposite of chaos: of external chaos like war and famine; and of internal chaos like lust, greed, fear, despair, anger and confusion (Randall 1998: 268 f.). It is more than the absence of social-political conflicts and wars. Positively it designates the state of being well, being complete and whole, being victorious, prosperous, healthy, safe and free, and having sufficient physical and spiritual resources. It includes friendly relationship between persons and peoples (cf Jg 4:17); 8:9; 1 K 5:4, 26; 9:25; 22:27, 45; Is 7:14; Mi 3:5, Zc 8:12; Ml 2:5). Associated with covenant and judgment, peace is something to be sought and achieved (Ps. 34:14; Zc 8:16-19). It is inseparable from commitment to

justice and truth, and is indeed often synonymous with these (Na 1:15; Jr 6:6; 8:11, 15). Righteousness and God's peace are indivisible: justified by faith we are at peace with God (Rm 5:1-3). That is why the Prince of Peace is also the bringer of justice (Is 6:5-6; 11:1-9; 40; 48:18; 60:17). Justice and peace embrace (Ps. 85:10-13). Ultimately shalom is God's gift, closely linked to grace and justification (Is 9:5-6; 26:6, 12; 48:18; 52:7; 54:10; 55:12; 60:17; 66:12; Jr 6:13; 8:11; 14:13). In fact, it sums up all the blessings of God and is associated with God's blessed presence. Hence, it approximates salvation (Healey 1992: 206 f).

For God is the God of peace, not of disorder and chaos (1 Cor 14:32-33; Rom 15:33). The God who overcame primal chaos and established an ordered world of beauty and peace (Gn 1), also raised Jesus from the dead, thus overthrowing the ultimately chaotic, and disclosing himself as the God of life and peace (Heb 13:20-21). Through Christ, God continues to undo disorder and death, and to reconcile all things and make peace (Col 1:18-20). God makes peace by putting us and the world in right relationship with himself in forgiving love through Christ and the spirit (Phil 4:4-5; Eph 4:2-3; Gal 5:22-23; Rom 16:20; 1 Thel 5:23; 2 Thel 3:16). And the right relationship or righteousness, which God has enshrined in history for everybody's taking, is the Person of Jesus: Jesus, the Peace of God enfleshed. "Justified by faith we are at peace with God through Jesus Christ" who died for us to reconcile us to God. In his death Jesus also reconciled us to one another, breaking down divisive

walls and hostilities which separated persons and peoples, cultures and traditions, thus uniting them into a new humanity in his crucified Body. He therefore is himself our Peace (Eph 2:13-18).

5.2 That is why at his birth angels sang peace (Lk 2:8-14). Peace is named in nearly every New Testament writing. There are almost 150 references to peace in the NT, while there are but 180 in the entire OT, which is more than double the bulk of the New. Peace then is a major theme of Christian scriptures. These identify Jesus with Prince of Peace of Isaiah 9:5, and with the humble King of Zechariah 9:9-10, who banishes chariots and horses and bows of war, and proclaims peace to the nations.

Jesus stood for complete non-violence not only of the hand and the outward deed but also of the heart as well and inward dispositions. He radicalized the old commandment, you shall not kill. He deepened it: you shall not be angry with your sister or brother, nor hurt them even with an abusive word, not even if they are unfriendly, hostile and oppressive. Rein in every instinct to hit back, and reverse all traditions and philosophies of revenge and retaliation. Meeting stench with stench only fouls the air the more, and that for everyone. Jesus wants our response to every situation to be positive and creative, capable of transforming it for the better: love your enemies; pray for your persecutors; offer the other cheek; let go your tunic too; offer to carry the baggage a second mile; forgive seven times seventy times, endlessly; recognize the primacy of reconciliation with your sister/brother over

worship of God; and know that what God wants is mercy, not sacrifice. In short, “set no bounds to your love as your heavenly Father sets no bounds to his” (cf Mt 5-6). Such gentle relationship is the Temple of the God of Peace.

Jesus turns down the offer of kingship and armed power. He refuses to join the Zealot movement and its violent struggle against colonial oppression. He offers pardon, life and peace to a sinful woman, setting aside the death penalty prescribed by the law (Jn 8:1-11). The entire framework and horizon of his ministry, traced by healings, feedings and raising of the dead and befriending of outcasts, spell life and peace. His inaugural sermon, his ‘manifesto’ (Lk 4:18-19), implies a critique and rejection of military action: the passage he cites from Isaiah 61 points to a series of sufferings caused by wars, by the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in particular. So does also his decision to devote much of his time and attention to the service of the victims of hunger, disease and derangement caused in large measure by the deep exploitation of the land and its people by Roman imperialism for almost a century (since 63 BCE).

Jesus is peacemaker. His life and death were a peace-making ministry through which he reconciled alienated groups among themselves, and an estranged world with God. Peacemakers therefore resemble him, and share in his special relationship to God, and will be called God’s own children, God’s daughters and sons (Mt 5:9). It is not surprising then that both before and after his death Jesus should bequeath to us his peace – a peace which the world

cannot give, and which is vastly different from the Pax Romana achieved through total war and slaughter, and maintained by sword and repression (cf Jn 14:27). Jesus’ peace is not born of the sword but of the unspeakable love that led him to lay down his life for his friends and to pray for his killers (Lk 23:34; Jn 15:9-16). The word about “his” peace/ “my peace” seems to suggest some special import to the peace-salutation with which Jesus greets his friends (Lk 24:36; Jn 20:21; Mt 28:9), and which otherwise would be no more than social custom or convention.

No wonder the early Christians soon came to recognize Jesus’ message as ‘the Gospel of peace’ (Acts 10:36). For the NT perspectives on peace place us in a world vastly different from the OT world of human holocausts and wars of annihilation. The NT, even Paul, once a man of violence, now a disciple of Jesus, urges us “to be at peace with everyone” to the utmost of our ability; never to pay back evil with evil; never to try to get revenge; to give food to your enemy if he is hungry; never to curse persecutors but ever to bless them (Rom 12:14-21). We are to “seek peace with all people, and let no root of bitterness poison life and relationships (Heb 12:14-16). Wisdom that comes from above is pure and peaceable, and “the peace sown by peace-makers brings a harvest of justice” (Jar 3:17-18). Our call is to be loving and compassionate, to repay wrong with blessings, and to “seek peace and pursue it” (1Pet 3:8-12).

The Christian scriptures, then, are suffused with the gentle light of the God

of peace, and permeated with the breath of the Prince of Peace, with the presence of the Spirit of Peace, and with the memory of peace-makers, of bonds of peace, and of grace and righteousness which are inseparable from peace. Our mission, then, is to preach peace, to make peace, and to prepare hearts and communities to welcome the gift of the Kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace. God's gift of peace, our experience of peace and our hope of everlasting peace in life with God is the heart of the Christian revelation.

5.3 But on the other hand, what about NT texts that speak of battles and wars, and NT writers who use military language? And about Jesus who too speaks about swords? These passages have been cited in the past in support of a theology of 'just war,' and in justification of numerous conflicts and extensive massacres committed by 'Christians'! Did not Jesus say that he had come to bring not peace but a sword? Not unity and harmony but dissension and strife? (Mt 10: 34-36; Lk 12: 51-53; 2:34). And on the night of his arrest, as the crisis was drawing near, did he not tell his disciples to sell their cloak and buy a sword? They replied that they already had two swords. And he said, "That is enough" (Lk 22: 35-38). A note in the New Jerusalem Bible interprets this to mean, "The sword will be needed for protection". And did not St. Augustine and others after him use these sayings to support holy war? However, in both passages, 'sword' is used figuratively; it stands for suffering and martyrdom which discipleship was sure to bring with it. In Gethsemane the dis-

ciples fail to understand, and Jesus cuts the conversation short. Is not the word 'enough' a mild rebuke? A literal interpretation would contradict Jesus' command to a follower to put his drawn sword (dagger) back in its scabbard (Mt: 26: 51-54 Jn 18: 10-11). It would go against the whole tenor of Jesus' teaching and practice of endless forgiveness and love of enemies, and his consistent refusal to be king after the pattern of the Herods and the Caesars. It would also be ridiculous to suggest that two swords – actually two small knives – were deemed enough with which to confront the armed might of the empire! (Swaim 1983: 52-53; Randall 1998: 230-32).

Jesus praises a centurion's faith (Mt 8: 5-13; Lk 7:1-10); the Baptiser instructs soldiers to be just and fair (Lk 3:14); a Roman soldier is baptized and received into the Christian community (Acts 10:1-9). Would it be proper to argue that, since none of these was asked to leave his profession, Jesus and his friends had no objection to military action in a just war? The letter to the Hebrews recalls some judges like Gideon and Barak who, through faith, became brave fighters and victorious conquerors (Heb 11:32-40). This could be interpreted as allowing believers to participate in war and as providing basis for a theology of political war. But the text is actually saying that neither faith-based war nor war-linked faith brought their practitioners perfection and salvation. They were "not to reach perfection except with us" and for us God did make better provision, which is Christ, our peace (Randall 1998: 232-36). The

solitary military metaphor Jesus once used refers not to political war but to the cost of discipleship and the spiritual struggles required to overcome covetousness and selfishness (Lk 14: 30-33). Paul is more generous with military terms (Rm 7:14-25; 2C 10:3-5; Ep 6:12; 1Th 5:8; 1Tm 1:18; 6:12; also 1Pt 2:11; Jm 4:1-2). But every case is a metaphor for spiritual war against passions and dispositions, which tend to breed political conflicts.

In sum one might say that the recorded teaching of Jesus (a) provides only "highly questionable grounds for a theology of just war"; (b) repudiates all wars of extermination; (c) provides excellent foundations for a theology of spiritual war; and (d) shows that the descriptions of eschatological wars (Mt 13; Lk 19 and 21; Mt 24) are clearly symbolic (Randall 1998: 249-50; Swaim 1983:54-55).

Then there is the Book of Revelation, the most war-oriented and intimidating book in the Christian Bible. Numerous passages speak of war and conflict: the wars of the Dragon (ch 12 and 13); of the foul spirits (16); of the kings and the Beast (17); and two battles of the end (19 and 20). These eschatological visions are marked by powerful images of combat and violence. "They dominate so powerfully that the Lamb, the Suffering Servant, the Prince of Peace, seems overshadowed by the Warrior Messiah of God's herem (holy war of extermination) against evil. Although Revelation ends with a vision of eschatological peace, the metaphorical (or, for some, real) violence and destruction preceding the New Jerusalem

is as spine-chilling as the Hebrew Bible's herem" (Randall 1998: 256).

Nevertheless, the central message of the New Testament is unconditional, infinite love and compassion. "This peace rather than war lies at the heart of the Christian revelation". "Neither in the Gospels nor in the other books of the New Testament is there an unquestionable foundation for a theology of political war" (Randall 1998: 237, 256). Those who seek to base such a theology on the NT are trying to beat ploughshares into swords rather than follow Jesus in sowing and reaping (Mt 13; Jn 4:35-38). M. Langley, having explored the subject of Jesus and revolution, comes to the same conclusion as Hans Kueng (1976:570): "No strategy of violence, but only one of non-violence, can be deduced from the example of Christ". He adds that "we would not be true, either to the example and teaching of Jesus Christ, or to the demands of a God of justice and love, if we did not seek to advance the Kingdom by recognizing the Rule of God and by working for a more just and humane society" (Langley 1992: 980-81).

6. To Conclude

6.1 The political wars of conquest and extermination were fought by the Hebrews from within a narrow and fierce henotheistic religion. Such destructive notions as exclusive choice of one tribe and extermination of the rest are incompatible with moral monotheism. Theologians of chosenness and holy war are laughable "for their historical ignorance and theological stupid-

ity”. Ignorance, because those who use the Bible to support violence and war overlook the fact, now unanimously affirmed by scholarship, that the Pentateuch and conquest-settlement narratives are not history but reconstructions of the past in terms of the people’s religious and political ideologies around the close of the 7th century BCE. “The archaeological evidence points in an altogether different direction from that suggested by Joshua 1-12. It suggests a sequence marked by a gradual and peaceful co-alescence of diaspora peoples into a group of highland dwellers.. The Exodus-Settlement account reflects a particular genre, the goal of which was to inculcate religious values rather than merely present empirical facts... Israel’s origins were within Canaan, not outside it. There was neither invasion from outside nor revolution within. The legendary account of Joshua 1-12 offers no legitimizing paradigm for land-plunder in the name of God. Indeed the extra-biblical evidence promotes a respect for the evolution of human culture rather than for a process that can deal with change only by war of violent destruction” (Prior 1997:251-52).

It is a grotesque irony of history that the Nazi theology of anti-Semitism was “little more than a modification of the herem of pre-exilic Judaism”. It fits well with the holy wars in Judges, Samuel and Deuteronomy (Randall 1998: 216-17). Zionist invasion of Palestine, 1948, and the atrocities the invaders have committed ever since as well as claim to the land as a divine gift – all this argues a regression to the henotheism of pre-exilic warriors and a

retreat from monotheistic faith and the world fellowship it enjoins. But Christian history is no stranger to a similar betrayal of the One God, Creator and Father/Mother of all, whose love is always there to save. One recalls with sadness and shame the crusades, the feudal conflicts, the wars of European nation-states including wars of religion; the American Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Vietnam and Iraq Holocausts; the Atlantic slave trade, the violent and fraudulent colonial take-over of the earth with its resources and peoples and the wars of the 20th century. “Just as many Christians today look back at Germany and question how such distorted theologies could have developed within Christianity, many Black and Indian Americans (and Africans, Australians and Asians) look at Christianity and question how it could ever have been used to support the atrocities of slavery and the slaughters of manifest destiny”. How did this religious travesty come about? (Randall 1998: 217-18).

6.2 Most prophetic traditions and post-exilic literature stand for peace and call upon everyone to end all oppression, to render justice to the poor, to respect the foreigner and care for him, to beat swords into ploughshares, to place our trust in the God of justice and compassion and never in horses and chariots and fire and sword. Jesus radicalized these demands and attitudes, and became the embodiment of harmony and peace at great cost to himself. But we, by war and violence, have betrayed God and his Christ and their Gospel of wholeness, and the promise of a new earth where the lamb and the lion would feed and rest together and where “no

hurt, no harm (would) be done on all (God's) holy mountain" (Is 11:6-9; 65:12-25). Our wars mock the Cross of Christ, and block the power of his Resurrection from transforming the world into a thing of beauty and peace.

But we can still turn aside from the way of Julius Caesar, Hernando Cortes and Adolf Hitler, and choose to follow Jesus along the path of non-violence and love, on the way of the cross and self-sacrifice. We can still decide to work with his Holy Spirit to recreate the world. The Lord Jesus refused to defend himself, refused to call down angel hosts to fight for him; he rebuked the disciples who would call down fire from heaven on the unfriendly; he urged love and respect for everyone, including enemies. He was trying to create around himself "a society like no other society mankind had ever seen", one that was radically, religiously and economically mixed and not 'purist'; one with new patterns of relationship between persons, nations, social classes, and sexes; forgiving offences and suffering violence without

ever seeking to return them; and sharing the earth in love. That new group was to be a leaven to transform the world. Has it perhaps disappointed him deeply?

6.3 The peace perspectives of the Bible are summed up in the prayer Jesus taught us. The Our Father is a way of peace and commitment to its practice. Invoking the God of peace, Creator of the world, as our Father/Mother, amounts to embracing humankind as a dear family and everyone as a brother or sister to be cherished and served. The prayer invites us to welcome the Reign of God and become part of it. It urges us to cling to the Father's will and do it, for 'in his will is our peace.' The path to that peace is a fair, loving sharing of the earth and its blessings, as well as a generous forgiving of whatever hurt this process might cause. In brief, the way of peace and peace itself consist in seeking first God and his Reign, and the justice and righteousness of that Reign. To live the Our Father is to live His Peace. That is our challenge as Indian Christians.

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