

## **THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL AND THE PROFESSION OF ARMS – ARE THEY COMPATIBLE? (Part 2)**

By David Phillips

*In the first part of the article (Issue 109) Brigadier Dobbie considered the role of Christians in the military, the pressures on them and began to look at the Biblical texts.*

### **Difficult Texts**

It would be foolish not to acknowledge that there are some verses which at first sight seem to favour the pacifist position.

Typical of these is Matthew 5:39 where the Lord Jesus says: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also”. At face value such a verse seems to run contrary to those we have looked at already such as those in Romans 13. It is axiomatic that we do not interpret any passage of Scripture in a way which would make it hostile to others, for the Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself in revealing truth. Further inspection of the context of these verses shows that reference is made here to the individual whose duties and functions differ from those of the state. In some situations the Christian may find himself having a share in both functions, both as an individual and as a citizen of the state. One commentator quotes an example of a householder catching a burglar redhanded, suggesting that he should simultaneously entertain the malefactor as well as ring the police!

Other difficult tests concern the taking of life which may be part of a soldier’s duty. The Christian knows that the sixth commandment states: “*Thou shalt not kill*” (Ex 20:13 AV) and that Jesus commanded us to “*love our enemies*” (Matt 5:44). We need to note that a more accurate translation is “*You shall not murder*”. Murder is killing on your own behalf – and it is this word that Jesus uses when he quotes that commandment in the Gospels. Additionally many Christians have been helped by a passage written by CS Lewis in his book “*Mere Christianity*”. After pointing out that for some time he had not been able to understand how he could hate some of the things his enemies did (i.e. sin) and yet love them, he realised that was precisely what he had done all his life with himself! Therefore one may still love someone and yet bring him to justice if duty so demands; and in the case of a soldier this may in extremis involve him in taking life.

### **Nuclear Weapons**

This article would be incomplete without some reference to the issues caused by nuclear Weapons. Most Christians who are not pacifists have historically embraced the Just War Theology. Among the most influential Christians who contributed to these convictions were Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. They believed that a nation was only justified in going to war if certain conditions were met. Among these was that the means of waging war must be controllable and discriminate between combatant and non-combatant. The blockading of Germany in World War 1 by the Allies, the bombing of industrial targets in World War 2 and the use of Nuclear Weapons are all examples in the 20th century where this condition was not fulfilled. However, it is doubtful if civilians, such as those who work in munitions factories, or politicians, who direct the waging of war, should be immune. This sensitive and difficult argument can be extended by unscrupulous people to horrifying proportions; but the discrimination insisted on historically by Just Warriors is believed by many Christians to raise such difficulties as to be impracticable in modern times. For example, if every city was to be declared open and sacrosanct, an enemy could place missile systems within them and use them without hindrance. This type of tactic was employed by Argentinian

commanders during the Falklands Campaign in 1982 when they deployed their artillery pieces beside inhabited civilian buildings. This precluded the British artillery from engaging them in counter-bombardment.

Just as it is wrong to allow injustice and violence to prevail within a nation, it is also sinful to permit ruthless and unprincipled enemies to place other nations under such threat that military, political or economic domination could be exercised over them. That is what could happen if unilateral disarmers had their way: for it is doubtful if ruthless dictators would respond to gestures of nuclear pacifism or unilateral disarmament with similar measures. History records no case where the defencelessness of a nation has protected it from attack. Only “*a strong man armed*” (Luke 11:21) is likely to ensure restraint. Since World War 2 it is believed that over 40 million people have been killed in war. It seems paradoxically true that the presence of Nuclear Weapons has prevented this horrifying figure being even higher. Nevertheless the appalling escalation of resources committed to strengthening nuclear arsenals at times, should place urgency on Christians to encourage measures which achieve multilateral disarmament and security. In particular the prayers of God’s children should be directed on those who face such fearsome responsibilities at limitation talks.

### **Comments**

Christians must not only loathe war but seek peace and pursue it; but Christ Himself the Prince of Peace, who declared “Blessed are the peacemakers”, also stated on another occasion “*let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one*” (Luke 22:36). There are therefore times when the ability to use force is commanded. Peacemaking is not synonymous with pacifism. Furthermore it is significant that in Scripture peace is frequently portrayed as being the outcome of righteousness. Many readers will know this from personal experience; for when trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, they have laid hold of His righteousness by faith and come to peace with God (Rom 5:1). “*The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever*” (Isaiah 32:17).

If we wish our nation and world to beat peace, we must pray that leaders will act righteously, not least in applying force only within the conditions which God’s Word allows. Our attitude must be one of “Righteousness at any cost, not peace at any price” for “*Righteousness exalts a nation*” (Proverbs 14:34).

Finally, those of us who have come to know God in Christ can trust Him to empower us day by day to fulfil the aim he has given us – “*to please Him who has chosen him to be a soldier*” (2 Tim 2:4).

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