

HOW JUST WAR THINKING AND PACIFISM COINCIDE.

John Howard Yoder, unpublished, undated.

My purpose here is not to make debating points, but to clarify the substance of a perennial debate by looking at the diverse ways in which language is used to attempt to make sense of the debate but at the same time also (often unintentionally) to obfuscate.

Language and substance

People may agree on a form of words but not mean the same thing by it. The word "peace" is a dramatic example of this in much continuing conversation. It tends to occur especially when in the operation of a group process persons who disagree seek wordings which both sides can accept. It occurs when a person formulating a statement wants to avoid offense on both sides.

In other cases one may find persons making verbally contradictory statements, yet be making the same point morally. This is often the case with reference to the word "pacifism". Within the "Historic Peace Churches" some accept and some reject the word "pacifism" as a designation of what they believe. Others who do not consider participation in war to be immoral use the same term to indicate that they only accept war's necessity with regret, or with awareness that it is very costly.

Thought systems and practical commitment

People with exactly the same general set of moral theories and human values may take opposite sides in a given conflict. This difference may be due either to differences in their social and historical locations or to difference in their readings of the facts of the case. Catholics were on both sides of World War I holding the same moral theological convictions: Reformed Christians are on both sides of the contemporary conflict in South Africa. The facts they know are different, or the angles of vision are contradictory.

People with very different stances in principle may find themselves practically allied in short-range commitments. The Bishops' letter *THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE*, to which we shall return, represents such a coalition, as it claims that pacifist and nonpacifist arguments coincide in their present political pertinence. The same is true of my book, **When War is Unjust**. This possibility is the one to which we shall return more carefully later. A very different form of

alliance occurs when extremists on both sides of a political spectrum become allies against the middle, in the hope of profiting from the system's collapse.

How then do we clarify?

The most common first-level effort to make sense of an issue begins by defining as it were from scratch (or by quoting a dictionary) what the specific terms one uses are intended to mean. We may call this "first order semantics". Most people who do this are not as naive as they seem, but they use the appearance of naiveté with a purpose. Eg we see "violence" redefined so as to include structural and psychological pressures, or we see "peace" or "justice" defined in such a way as to imply the rightness or wrongness of some cause, without one's needing to look at the details of the case. This procedure seldom serves dialog, since each usage is already laden with a story of connotations and implications. Unless there is considerable second-order objectivity about semantics, the definitional moves only relocate the debate, or even confuse it.

The alternative is then to seek to identify basic types of mental structure, even if those do not correlate with everyone's past usage, or with that of the Bible. This analysis will have to use words too, but it will not claim that its usage is the only proper one, or that it can impose a proper usage on everyone, the way the first-order arguments pretend to do.

The present text does not pretend to offer such an analysis. It attempts rather, after such an analysis has been undertaken and has thrown some light on the question, to survey what remains of the practical/tasctiual complexities with which this outline began.

We may well take **The Challenge of Peace** first not as a moral position for its own sake (that will come later) but as a report on the history of the usage of some basic concepts. The letter says:

a) That there are two strands of Christian thought on matters of war and peace: the just war tradition and pacifism;

b) That these two are complementary in essence though in tension as to initial statement and logic. They are complementary:

- 1)in the sense that they share the presumption that war is evil;
- 2) in the sense that they both reject uncritically accepting views of violence;
- 3) In the sense that they have lived together in tension in the experience of the Church;
- 4)in the sense that they reject nuclear war;

c) That the combination of the above views constitutes "the Catholic tradition" on the question of the morality of war.

d) that there is some way (pastorally, logically, politically) to administer this complementarity-in-tension so as not to let the commonalities be undercut by the obvious formal and logical differences.

This affirmation of **The Challenge of Peace**, made more implicitly than explicitly, is at the heart of our problem. Can such complementarity be sustained? Are there really rules (pastoral, logical, political) which can be followed to make it work? The total Christian community has long stated a commitment to other kinds of complementarity (Jew and Gentile, male and female, caucasian and negroid, rich and poor) but in the facts of history the record has been rather miserable, especially when the Church had settled in institutionally for the long run, and when believers felt responsible for managing society.

To answer this, a longer-range and more ambitious second-order semantic analysis might proceed more abstractly. It is good that there are people who do that⁽¹⁾. It is proper that when that is done, the shape it takes may be slightly different each time. My suggestion has long been that a fourfold typological analysis is the most fruitful, as argued in **When War is Unjust**⁽²⁾. Here it should suffice to look back through one earlier unsuccessful effort, and then to return to the more careful analysis of the bishops' letter.

here might be inserted other comments on statements of the World Council of Churches from Vancouver to Canberra (a superficial "pacifism" like that which Ramsey and Long accuse of confusion when Methodists say it).

The first question we must address to the interpretation of complementarity⁽³⁾ in The Challenge of Peace is whether affirmations (a) and (c) above are true. Historical honesty demands that we report that this summary is deeply inaccurate. It passes over in an irresponsibly light way the tragedies and treasons of Christian history. In point of fact, most people who considered themselves to be Catholic Christians, between Ambrose in the late fourth century and Spellman in the late twentieth, including most bishops and most parish priests and a goodly number of moral theologians, looked at the morality of war quite differently, namely in one of two other ways:

a) For many, the rule has always been "anything goes", including a formal denial of moral criteria which might stand in judgment on way what orders a ruler gives, or which might in any way provide grounds of for an individual to refuse to kill when ordered. Sometimes it has been philosophized by the likes of Machivelli. Sometimes the imperative to serve unquestioningly has been stated in the name of "the Revolution". Sometimes this understanding has been theologized under the headings of "the divine right of kings". Sometimes its form or foundation has been an oath of absolute loyalty binding the soldier to the sovereign. Sometimes it has been philosophized by the likes of Machiavelli. Sometimes the imperative to serve unquestioningly has been stated in the name of "the Revolution". In these varied ways, the individual has been routinely told that there is no basis for resisting the orders of the ruler. He has been told this,

routinely throughout Christian history, by most of the bishops and priests of the Roman catholic communion, as far as one can tell from the record.

b) Less often, but no less clearly, there have been times when the affirmation of the moral rightness of war has been even stronger. It has been declared by religious figures to be a duty, even to the point of the individual's expecting martyrdom and the nation's making no calculations of probable success. This kind of thinking for a decade sent Iranian teenagers to their death on the Iraqi front, and Lebanese drivers of vans to certain death in vehicles loaded with explosives.

In the middle ages the Christian version of this was the Crusade, and it was specifically Roman Catholic bishops and abbots who proclaimed it a Christian duty to go off to win the Holy Land (or to sack Istanbul) for the cause of the Christ as interpreted by the Church. During the first world War the language of the Crusade was used on both sides by Christian preachers, even though the politicians and the Generals (and the political scientists since then) knew full well that it was not a war that could be justified according to either moral or technical military considerations. The logic of the holy war is present wherever unthinking heroism is demanded (go down with the ship, fight to the last man) and when surrender is equated with immorality or treason. The holy war thought patterns are still at work.

How then can The Challenge of Peace tell us the just war logic and the pacifist position are the Christian tradition? Because their reference (i.e. that of Bryan Hehir and Bruce Russett who guided the writing) is to the insightful minority of moral theologians and of religious, for whom neither "holy war" nor "anything goes" was acceptable. That foreshortening, avoiding responsibility to recognize that most Christian citizens, most Christians called to arms, most Christian sovereigns, most catholic bishops and priests for a millennium and a half were taking the "holy" or the "anything goes" views, is a peculiar product of the modern Roman Catholic self-understanding. The readiness of Roman Catholic intellectual leaders to move forward into improved understanding in the present and future does not include overt repentance about the errors and atrocities of the past. We have just seen this again about Columbus.

Theologians may avow honestly that the criteria of the just war tradition were not respected in the past few centuries⁽⁴⁾, but bishops are supposed to move forward in the mood of fiction according to which future truth is not permitted to "make ancient good uncouth". Some of this development can be welcomed, as a way of letting events teach us the inadequacy of past stances, an openness which Vatican II canonized in the phrase "discerning the signs of the times."⁽⁵⁾ Nonetheless the historical account in The Challenge of Peace is simply, statistically, false. The people of whom that account is true were a slim minority of theologians and prophets. It belongs to the nobility of the JWT as conceptual construct that it could provide the mental backbone and the vocabulary for that heroic minority; for the Victorias and the de las Casas'. But it falsifies history to make those men, who were not supported by Catholic sovereigns or the hierarchy at the time, representative of "catholicism".

That it is an historical fiction does not make the complementarity thesis morally uninteresting. It has an intrinsic logic. Politically pacifism and JW may well form coalitions against the other less restrained postures. At Harvard, where Bryan Hehir's PhD certification involved Ralph Potter, the thesis held by Potter⁽⁶⁾ and widely propagated by James Childress⁽⁷⁾, was well established as an intellectual construct. It is worthy of being elaborated despite the fact that the bishops' use of it (or that of their amanuenses) to avoid avowing full responsibility for the originality of their leadership was formally disingenuous.

In his presidential address to the association Concerned Philosophers for Peace James Sterba stated another form of "complementarity" argument.

Richard Miller⁽⁸⁾ has made more of the question

This review of the theme now lays the foundation for my own right answer. In what ways are the two positions in fact, honestly and with theological integrity, complementary?

The pacifist position does need to respect the agenda of the JW posture in that the costliness of following Christ⁽⁹⁾ loving the enemy and need to be faced openly. When the JWT evaluates cause, intention, and proportion, it identifies values which are authentically at stake, which the pacifist should not cheapen, and should not claim are not at stake. I don't think that pacifism does that; but in the tense unity of the debating church, the dialogue with the JW stance helps to keep it serious. Some pacifists, from Tertullian to Tolstoy and beyond, have interpreted the meaning of Christian faithfulness in the face of war without granting the assumption that it was their moral duty to come with a cost minimisation strategy for the nonChristian Empire. That did not mean that they ignored the cost of renouncing war. Sometimes they believed that the stance from which the imperial ideologues did their cost-benefit reasoning about causes and proportion was skewed. Sometimes they believed that a sovereign God guides history for the good of those who love him, in ways that are inscrutable to humans. None of these convictions means disregarding the JW sensitivity about proportionate stakes, but it puts that sensitivity in a wider frame of reference.

Another set of pacifists, from from the Reinhold Niebuhr of the 1920's, Gregg⁽¹⁰⁾ and Shridharani⁽¹¹⁾ to Lakey⁽¹²⁾ and Sharp will respond by taking up the challenge of proposing alternative morally more acceptable ways to defend those values and avoid or minimize those costs. The sweeping consensus from Niebuhr to Ramsey to Miller according to which pacifists cannot consistently do this is intellectually unworthy. They can do this only by making judgments which it is not their prerogative to make, according to which only a radically deontological, Tolstoyan or Amish social withdrawal has moral integrity. There are consequentialist, aretological, narrative alternative challenges to war, which do in other ways care about the stakes in a conflict and the cost of renouncing war.

1. E.g. Richard Miller earlier Paul Ramsey Speak up and Wm. V. O'Brien
2. Minneapolis Augsburg 1985. Now I would call for a still longer list, especially respecting the need that there be formal recognition of the weight of the pop macho position (John Wayne, Rambo) where violence overruling restraint is seen as a moral duty irrespective of the cause and means.
3. The word "complementarity" first became notorious as part of a debate within German protestantism in 1957-58, when it was argued, in a symposium in which Helmut Gollwitzer was involved, Germany's accepting rearmament within NATO and pacifism were mutually supportive and reciprocally compatible. The slogan was Frieden mit und ohne Waffen.
4. Jesuits John Ford in the 1940's and John Courtney Murray in the 1950's get a lot of deserved credit for saying this; I do not want to detract from that. But my point is that Catholicism was not saying that. Most bishops and most parish priests and most moral theologians and most military chaplains were not saying it. Ford and Murray were almost alone.
5. As I have sought to describe it in chapter 1 of my Nevertheless (Scottsdale 1992 p. 15), the way Popes from Benedict XV to the present have condemned war, present in our minds in John XXIII's Peace on Earth and in Paul VI's visit to the United Nations, has its own special "pastoral" shape. When set up against the four= or fivefold typology I have described, is "none of the above" and has been compatible with all of them.
6. War and Moral Discourse and McCormick Quarterly
7. Childress source, less finely in James T. Johnson's phrase "original question"
8. Miller title making the coherence of the two views is already a program within the complementarity thesis which he then argues is taken with inadequate refinement by the various authors he criticizes. That thesis adds more appearance of cohesion to the debate than really fits.
9. The present discussion, like The Challenge of Peace, is specifically in a Christian setting. There are other kinds of pacifism whose moral claims and commitment would call for a different argument.
10. The Power of NonViolence
11. War Without Violence
12. George Lakey is only one voice of the movement, rooted in one wing of Quakerism and tested by activism, represented by the Movement for a New Society and the Resources Center for NonViolence.

