

An Anglican Approach to War-Tax Refusal

Preamble

For any individual, the Will of God is an informed conscience. According to the established Anglican theology of ethics, there are three ways in which the conscience is informed, namely scripture, tradition and reason. This paper explores Christian scriptures, with the tradition of the Church of England and its antecedents, applying reason in the process to produce a distinct perspective on opposition to war and the absolute refusal of an individual to collude in war and the things of war, including the refusal to cooperate in taxation to pay for war.

A. The Scriptural Case for Peacemaking: The Old Testament

1. Shalom.

The biblical word for peace is Shalom, implying health, well-being and integrity. Consider Micah's definition of peace:

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

2. "Peace" when there is no peace.

Shalom embraced both a spiritual, internal peace and a relational dimension that involved the whole of society. As the meaning of Shalom expanded, the concept came to mean a wholeness, good health, prosperity, contentment, calm, without division. Simply to boast of an absence of war when the other ingredients of peace were missing, for example in a time of injustice, when there was no wholeness, was to cry "Peace" when there was no peace. (Jeremiah 6.14).

3. Response to "no peace"

The all-embracing nature of Shalom would mean that a state of peace is not defined merely by whether or not there is military activity on a battlefield. **Rather, as Shalom permeates all society, so any state of peace would be dependent on the nature of every activity within society, especially preparations for war and even, in the case of nation states, taxation to pay for war and its preparations.** The prophets warned against those who cried "peace", when there was no peace. A society which did not in itself host military conflict would not be in a right relationship with itself and others, and would not be at peace, when it undertook or prepared for military action in some distant quarter. It is to be expected that those whose vocation was the promotion of peace, would reject such military preparations wherever they were found in society. **It is to be expected that the upholders of Shalom would resist enforced taxation for military purposes.**

4. Creation

God saw creation and that 'it was good'. For human beings, any sense of the sanctity of life was increased by the knowledge that "God created humankind in his own image" (Genesis 1.27). There was the repeated hope and vision of a restoration of such peace and respect. The rainbow that followed the flood (Genesis 8) was the sign of this new hope for peace. Thus too, "The wolf shall live with the lamb..." (Isaiah 11.6) and God's new covenant with all creation in Hosea 2.18: "I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety".

5. Commandment

In the Exodus narrative, the Decalogue includes the commandment (Exodus 20.13 or Deuteronomy 5.17) "You shall not kill", without qualification or exception.

6. Old Testament Prophets

The prophets, almost without exception, attempted to turn the people away from being reliant on force and the state. The most positive expression of this philosophy was spoken by the angel in Zechariah's vision: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4.6). There was a developing understanding of God. The primitive God of battles gave way to Hosea's God of love (Hosea 11.1).

7. The Suffering Servant

Christians identify the prophetic figure (Isaiah 52.13-53.12) of a suffering servant with the person of Christ. A victim suffers voluntarily, without recourse to violence, for the greater good. Even without reference to the passion of Christ, the passage implied that the nation or the king was called to suffer and under no circumstances meet violence with violence.

B. The Scriptural Case for Peacemaking: The New Testament

1. Primacy of the New Testament

The New Testament laid the foundations for the first pro-peace and anti-war movement in Western history. There are a hundred references to peace in the New Testament. Erasmus observed:

To the Jews war was permitted, for the same reason as divorce, because of the hardness of their hearts. But since the time that Jesus Christ said, put up thy sword into its scabbard, Christians ought not to go to war.

2. Anglican Bishops

In an influential 1930 pronouncement, the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops worldwide stated that "war, as a means of settling international disputes, is incompatible with the *teaching* and *example* of our Lord Jesus Christ".

3. The Teaching of Jesus

- “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”. (Matthew 5.9) The makers, the doers of peace were one with God, they were God’s kin.
- “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14.27).
- Matthean and Lukan versions of the Sermon on the Mount exhort love of enemies (Matthew 5.44; Luke 6.28), understood in both private and communal senses.
- “Turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5.38-39).
- “I am the way, and the truth and the life” (John 14.6). The implication is that, in Christ, peace is the way. Peace is not simply a distant, hoped-for end, it is the means by which that end might be achieved. Hence it can be deduced that non-peaceful methods, such as financing and preparing for war, will not bring peace.
- **When challenged about the emperor’s coin (Mark 12.17) and the duty of paying taxation to uphold a military force that occupied the land, Jesus transcended all the emperor’s claims by stating that that which was God’s – i.e. everything – should be given to God. The emperor’s claims were hollow, a chimera, for nothing and no person could stand alongside the ultimate claims of God. In contemporary terms, the emperor’s claims would translate to the budget of the Ministry of Defence. Alongside “Render to God the things that are of God”, those claims are nothing.**

4. The Example of Jesus

- 1st century Palestine was under military occupation, with many parallels to 21st century Iraq. Jesus respected the humanity of those on both sides, whilst refusing to be caught up in the violence of either.
- His closest followers included both Simon the Zealot (terrorist) and Matthew the collaborator. His acts of healing knew no boundaries, and were received by Jews, outsiders and Romans alike.
- Jesus refused to be a military Messiah (John 6). Entering Jerusalem (Matthew 21; Mark 11; Luke 19; John 12) he rejected traditions of the warrior king and instead approached in the way of Zechariah 9.9-10: “Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem; and the battle-bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations...”
- At the time of Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane, a follower wielded a sword, cutting the ear of the high priest’s slave, Malchus. The gospels give different accounts of the episode, each indicating Jesus’ rejection of the method of violence. Jesus’ reported words were: “Put your sword back into its sheath” (John 18.11); “No more of this!”, he said, touching the wounded ear to heal it (Luke 22.51); and most damning and prophetic of all, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you not think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26.53). In other words, the tradition shows Jesus as having the (heavenly) means to resist, but deliberately choosing not to do so, and rejecting the use of arms to protect him as well. The cause, defending Jesus himself, may have been more just than ever was claimed in any “just” war, but it met with rebuke. The way of the sword was not the way of Christ.
- The risen Christ’s Easter greeting was “Peace be with you” (John 20.19-20, 26), the intended hallmark of the resurrection community.

4. Other New Testament writing

- God was identified with the things of peace (as in 1 Thessalonians 5.23, 2 Thessalonians 3.16); and peace was to be sought with holiness (Hebrews 12.14)
- Romans 12.17, 1 Thessalonians 5.15 and 1 Peter 3.9 all exhort their readers and listeners not to repay anyone evil for evil. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
- The New Testament transformed the deadly weapons of human wars and allowed Christians to have only a spiritual armoury in their stead. So Ephesians 6.12-17 speaks of the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit and “as shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace”.
- In the 1930s, when Canon Dick Sheppard considered wrestling “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6.12), he asked, “Doesn’t that describe, quite accurately, what the conscientious objector does when he refuses to bear arms?”

C. The Tradition of the Church

1. The Church Fathers

In almost all areas of doctrine and Christian teaching, the formative period is regarded as the time of the early Church, when the first followers of Christ tried to come to terms with the implications of his life and witness. Pacifism and war-refusal were taken as normative.

- A host of early Church witnesses followed Justin Martyr (d.165) in indicating that an essential part of Christian distinctiveness was that the followers of Christ had fulfilled the prophecy of turning swords into ploughshares and no longer made war on their enemies.
- Irenaeus (Bishop of Lyons, c.177-202) was adamant that “[we] do not know how to fight, but when struck offer even the other cheek.
- Clement of Alexandria regularly asserted that Christians reject war. “For it is not in war, but in peace, that we are trained. War needs great preparation, and luxury craves profusion; but peace and love, simple and quiet sisters, require no arms nor excessive preparation.”
- Origen (185-254) said of Jesus the law-giver, “He nowhere teaches that it is right for His own disciples to offer violence to any one, however wicked. For He did not deem it in keeping with such laws as His, which were derived from a divine source, to allow the killing of any individual whatever”.
- Origen argued that the peaceableness of Christians was the reason for their success: “How would it have been possible for the Gospel doctrine of peace, which does not even allow men to take vengeance on their enemies, to prevail throughout the world, unless at the appearance of Jesus a milder spirit had been everywhere introduced into the conduct of things?”
- Tertullian (160-220) asked “how will a Christian make war, nay, how will he serve even in peace, without a sword, which the Lord has taken away?”, for in Gethseman, the Lord, “in disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier”.
- Tertullian added: “While He is being betrayed ... He to whom, had He willed it, legions of angels would at one word have presented themselves from the heavens, approved not the avenging sword of even one disciple. The patience of

the Lord was wounded in (the wound of) Malchus. And so, too, He cursed for ever the works of the sword.”

- Lactantius: “It will be neither lawful for a just man to engage in warfare... nor to accuse any one of a capital charge, because it makes no difference whether you put a man to death with a sword or with a word, since it is the act of putting to death itself which is prohibited. Therefore, with regard to this commandment of God, there ought to be no exception at all to the rule that it is always wrong to kill a man, whom God willed to be a sacred animal.”
- Maximilian refused entry into the army, claiming, “I cannot be a soldier, I cannot do evil. I am a Christian”.
- Martin of Tours (316-397) refused to shed blood in battle: “I am the soldier of Christ: it is not lawful for me to fight”.

2. Early English examples

In the English Church, examples of unease with war can be traced back to at least the 7th century. The *Penitential of Theodore*, 7th century Archbishop of Canterbury, was not the only document of the age to impose a compulsory period of penance for anyone who had killed in battle. Walter Map, Archdeacon of Oxford, complained about the Knights Templar, that

“they took up in defence of Christianity the sword which had been denied to Peter in the defence of Christ. There Peter had learned to pursue peace by patience: some one or other taught them to defeat force by fighting; they ‘took up the sword and perished by the sword.’”

3. The First War-Tax Refusal in English Christian tradition

At the Council of Oxford in 1197, when a request was made for substantial funds and persons to assist Richard I’s wars abroad, Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln refused this war taxation outright. He argued that he was not bound to produce soldiers or money for foreign wars. He said he would “prefer to return to my native land and resume my normal eremitical way of life” rather than do such a thing. Herbert le Poore, Bishop of Salisbury, took a similar stand. In a fit of rage, the king ordered the confiscation of Church property in the dioceses of Lincoln and Salisbury. Le Poore agreed to pay a fine instead, but Hugh refused. Still, nobody would lay hands on his diocesan property, for fear that Hugh would excommunicate them. The matter was resolved when Hugh went to the king to deliver some appropriately stern spiritual advice. When Richard calmed down he acknowledged Hugh’s courage: “if all the bishops of the Church were like this one, there is not a king or ruler who would dare to raise his head against them”.

4. The Peasants’ Revolt

Although not pacifist in either its motivation or conduct, the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 was a rebellion provoked by the imposition of taxation for overseas war.

5. The Late 14th century poets.

Writing from within an explicitly Christian tradition, early English poets – Langland, Gower, Chaucer – all produced substantive works opposing war and the involvement of Christians in war. A more developed theology of war-resistance followed the disgust of John Wyclif (c.1330-1384) for the wars of the European Church. Wyclif is regarded as a

saint in the Church of England calendar. Wycliffite anti-war expression reached its peak with a petition to Parliament in 1395, which included:

manslaughter by battle or pretending a temporal or religious cause without special revelation is expressly contrary to the New Testament which is a law full of grace and mercy. This conclusion is openly proved by the example of Christ's preaching here on earth which mostly taught one to love and to have mercy on his enemies, and not to kill them. The reason is that for the greater part where men fight, after the first stroke, charity is broken; and whosoever dies outside of charity follows the highway to hell... the law of mercy that is the New Testament forbids all manslaughter. In the gospel is the same law found in the Old Testament, "thou shalt not kill"... And knights who run toward heatheness to get themselves a name for killing men, displease much the King of Peace; for by meekness and suffering our belief is multiplied, and fighters and manslayers Jesus Christ hates and warns: "whoever kills by the sword, dies by the sword".

6. The Church of England

The founding of the Church of England was intended to maintain continuity with the Catholic Church, whilst adopting the best practices of the Reformation. The founding Articles of the Church of England conceded (Article XXXVII) that it was "lawful" (hardly a ringing endorsement), at the order of those in authority, for a person to undertake military duties in wars that satisfied the strict criteria of "just wars", but the language in which the article is phrased clearly implies that such action would be a departure from the norm. In 1937, the Anglican pacifist Paul Gliddon summed it up as 'an extraordinarily unenthusiastic way of summoning us to the colours... paralleled by the lukewarm assent parents sometimes give to the marriage of their daughters, "If she wants to marry him, we won't stop her."' **In its cautious tone and language, the Article implies not only that conscientious dissent from legal demands to support war is also lawful but that it could almost be construed as the norm.**

7. William Law

An 18th century saint of the Church of England is William Law, whose tract *An Humble, Earnest and Affectionate Address to the Clergy* was damning of combatants on both sides of warfare: "Who reflects, how many Hundreds of Thousands, nay Millions of *young Men*, born into this World for no other End, but that they may be Born again of Christ, ...are robbed of God's precious Gift of Life to them, ... [and] have been either violently forced, or tempted in the Fire of Youth, and full strength of sinful Lusts, to forget God, Eternity, and their own Souls, and rush into a *kill* or be *killed*, with as much furious haste, and *goodness* of Spirit, as *Tiger* kills *Tiger* for the sake of his Prey?"

8. The Peace Society

Anglicans were prominent in the influential 19th century Peace Society. One of the founders was Thomas Clarkson, recently commemorated in Westminster Abbey, and the Anglican businessman and politician William Cobden was the dominant opponent of wars in Crimea and elsewhere.

9. The Challenge to Individuals

In 1901, the Revd. A. J. Waldron considered Hosea Biglow's saying:-

“Ef you take a sword and dror it,
An’ go stick a feller thru’,
Guv’ment ain’t to answer for it,
God’ll send the bill to you”.

Waldron believed,

“that the ethics of the question ought to be applied to the individual soldier... I believe... that no Government in the world, no tribunal in the world, can answer for the individual conscience, that every man is responsible, to himself if not to some higher power, for the right of the faculties which he possesses... I know the argument adduced is, that, if he did, he would leave the Army. Then so much the worse for the system. It is condemned on the face of it...

I hold that no man has any right, by any system, legalised or not, to hand over his personal responsibility to any Government, or to any other power. And therefore, he, the man, intelligent and moral, should be allowed to be the judge of what is right for him to do in any war...”

10. The Primacy of Conscience

Waldron’s argument could be extrapolated to the area of military taxation. If every person has to take responsibility for the consequences of his or her own actions, including the consequences of contributing to the funding of armed forces, then a strong case can be made for the right of refusal to make that financial contribution. It is not possible to hand over one’s conscience to another party, even to one’s government. If the government is, according to one’s conscience, misusing the funds it has obtained, then one is entitled, according to one’s conscience, to withhold further contributions to those funds.

11. Anglican Resistance to the First World War

- At the end of 1914, a restructuring of the peace movement and the founding of the Fellowship of Reconciliation involved a number of pacifist Anglicans, including Maude Royden and **George Lansbury, (later, as a borough councillor in Poplar, imprisoned for leading a non-payment revolt against the unjust taxation structure of London County Council;** he subsequently become leader of the Labour Party and Leader of the His Majesty’s Opposition in Parliament).
- Paul Jones (1880-1941), Anglican Bishop of Utah, USA, was removed from his position because of his anti-war stand.
- Conscription was introduced into Britain in 1916. Seven per cent of those who came before tribunals as conscientious objectors to military conscription were members of the Church of England.
- Conscientious objection also took many forms, from the Royal Army Medical Corps, to other non-combatant service within the army, to the Friends’ Ambulance Unit (not restricted to Quakers), to work of national importance, to an absolute refusal to undertake any activity that might be related to the total war being waged by the nation.
- An Anglican absolutist conscientious objector, Harold Brewster, was among a group of men sentenced to “suffer death by being shot” at a military camp in Boulogne. The sentence was later rescinded.
- Another Anglican absolutist was Thomas Attlee, brother of a future Prime Minister, and a senior committee member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

- From 1917-1919 he was subject to a series of cat-and-mouse imprisonments, where he was immediately arrested on release from one prison sentence and given a further sentence. His health suffered irreversible damage.
- **Those who today refuse to pay taxes that fund the military stand in the tradition of those absolutists. Absolutism is not the only form of Christian pacifism, but it is a relevant, recognised and respected witness within the Anglican tradition.**

12. Anglican Pacifism between the wars

Anglicans led mass national peace movements between the wars. Canon Charles Raven, Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, was Chairman of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Most dramatically, Canon Dick Sheppard, Dean of Canterbury and then Residentiary Canon at St. Paul's Cathedral, pioneered the concept of the peace pledge by asking for postcards to be sent to him bearing the message, "*We renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly, will we support or sanction another.*" The response was overwhelming and before long this Peace Pledge Union (PPU) had 100,000 members. After Sheppard's death in 1937, another prominent clergyman, Canon Stuart Morris, became Chairman of the PPU. **Note that Sheppard's pledge includes the concept of refusing *indirectly* to support war.**

13. The Anglican Pacifist Fellowship

From 1937 there has been an organisation that embodies pacifism and war resistance within the Anglican Church. A pacifist rally in Westminster that year, with a procession of clergy to Lambeth Palace, led to the founding of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship (APF). APF today has over 1200 members, who have agreed to the Fellowship pledge:

"believing that our membership of the Christian Church involves the complete repudiation of modern war, pledge ourselves to renounce war and all preparation to wage war, and to work for the construction of Christian peace in the world."

Complete repudiation of all preparation to wage war would clearly include a conscientious objection to payment of military taxation.

14. The Second World War

As well as campaigning for peace at every opportunity, APF had a support role for conscientious objectors, especially during the Second World War. Some conscientious objectors still had to endure cat-and-mouse-imprisonment. Anglican pacifists became involved in social projects as an alternative to military duties. One project run by APF included the provision of a soup kitchen (The Hungerford Club) for down-and-outs beneath Hungerford Bridge in London. The Anglican pacifist novelist, Vera Brittain, worked hard to prevent the obliteration bombing of civilians.

15. The Nuclear Age

Canon John Collins from St. Paul's Cathedral was in the forefront of the founding leadership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). The Revd. Sidney Hinkes was an early Chairman of Christian CND.

16. In the Main Stream of Anglicanism

Complete repudiation of war and the things that make for war is acknowledged as a mainstream Anglican position. Numerous bishops have been Counsellors of APF and two, Wilfred Westall, Bishop of Crediton, and Colin Scott, Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Leicester, have chaired the Fellowship.

17. Forms of Conscientious Objection Today

Around the world there remain conscientious objectors to support, including those in the UK who uphold the principle of Peace Tax. A member of APF Governing Body, Dr. Philip Dransfield from Huddersfield, took the lead in withholding the military proportion of his taxes and was prosecuted as a result. There has already been this precedent within the Anglican tradition of peace witness.

18. Current Wars

APF has been at the forefront of campaigning against all recent wars, including the war in Iraq. Every member of the Fellowship will be opposed to the war and will be using whatever means they have to oppose it and to work for peace. For members of APF this war, as other wars before it, is simply wrong according to “the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ” and so must be opposed.

D. Summary

From the above it can be seen that:

- **A tradition of war-resistance dates back to the foundations of the Christian faith.**
- **It is a tradition rooted in scripture.**
- **The tradition of refusal to pay taxes for war is over 800 years old in the English Church.**
- **Members of the Church of England have an established record of opposition to war.**
- **Since 1937, Anglican pacifists have had their own organisation, APF.**
- **The refusal to pay taxes for war is an expression of a legitimate absolutist form of conscientious objection.**
- **It is a refusal that has Anglican precedent, and a sound basis in faith.**

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