

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

*Essays on the subject of
Christian Pacifism*

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IT WONT WORK - A "Must Read" Poem by Harold
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<http://home.pacific.net.au/~amaxwell/pacifist/wontwrk.htm>

Preface

THE PEACEMAKERS MANIFESTO

Love Your Enemies, bless those who curse you,
Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those
Who spitefully use you and persecute you.
that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven;
(Jesus – Matthew 5:43-45)

Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God;
for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."
No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink;
for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(Paul – Romans 12:17-21)

Christian Pacifism is founded in TRUE Bible based Christian Faith.

It is an eternal WAY OF LIFE, unaffected by either history or secular information. It does not change with time or local political circumstances.

IT IS BASED ON WHAT JESUS SAID!

Christian Pacifists do not make rules for those who do not profess Christianity! Nor do we demand that those who believe in the necessity of war, must live by Pacifist standards! Nor do we expect that those who believe in the necessity of war, will understand the Pacifist faith.

However, we do believe that TRUE followers of Jesus ought to be PEACEMAKERS whose way of life is measured by nothing less than the uncompromised PERSONAL non violent standards taught by JESUS, in the Sermon On The Mount.

THE "PEACE MOVEMENT"

In the media the term "Peace Movement" is often used to describe various activities by many individual groups concerned with lobbying governments for "peace". However there is in fact no single united front. The 21st century "Peace Movement" seems to be comprised of an uncomfortable "mixed multitude" of Catholics, Protestants, Anabaptists, Quakers, Humanists, Greenies, Feminists, Political Activists etc. (and sometimes even "Draft Dodgers" and "Tax Withholders"!) Very often, the motivation for secular PACIFISM seems to be FEAR of Nuclear War, or FEAR of invasion, or FEAR of other similar unattractive events. (and let's face it those are no different to the usual motives for WAR!)

The popular methods chosen to promote the cause of PEACE include political action, litigation, marches and demonstrations, and even civil disobedience. (It is "unfortunate" that many of these activities in the cause of PEACE, sometimes seem to include a remarkable measure of verbal and physical VIOLENCE!) Indeed, it seems that Jesus is rarely mentioned. His teaching in The Sermon On The Mount is seldom promoted or discussed as the major source of PACIFIST conviction.

THE CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE

Please, we are not saying that there are no Christians in that "mixed multitude". However we are convinced that they are promoting a lost cause! Jesus himself predicted that this world would know NO peace, this side of His Second Coming. The Bible says clearly that there can be no peace in this

world until it is purged of violent men and the violent institutions organisations and kingdoms which they maintain!

It is therefore quite futile for Christians to work for something which Jesus said could never happen this side of The Day Of Judgment! Until that day comes PEACEMAKERS must learn to live at peace (and not necessarily survive) in a violent world.

History shows that those who do try to live as CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKERS will inevitably face some degree of misunderstanding, and even persecution, from those who do not understand.

WHAT WE ARE

So far as we know how, we are law abiding citizens. That means that we give proper respect and true loyalty to those in authority, and attempt to keep all the laws of the land in which we live, except for those RARE occasions where human laws and goals conflict with those of the Kingdom of God.

Christian Pacifism begins with the conviction that simple obedience to Jesus, is the ONLY RIGHT WAY TO GO.

It is NOT founded in FEAR of what might happen to us.

It is founded in LOVE FOR OTHERS and a deliberate choice to do unto others ONLY what we want them to do to us.

These highest standards of love taught by Jesus, not only point to what we MUST do, but also clearly define things that we must consciously choose NEVER to do to those we love! (including even those who choose to make themselves our enemies)

We sincerely believe that "Love thy neighbour" means that even the worst enemies should receive no less from a Christian, than he would give to a best friend! (That is what Jesus did for us when He died on the cross.)

We believe that it is far, far, better to peacefully accept even the worst kind of personal loss at the hands of aggressors, than to use any form of violence to defend ourselves, our family, or our possessions, at the cost of potential injury, or death, or destruction of the property of others, including even our worst enemies.

And we do accept that in the face of determined aggression, Non Violence and Non Resistance, in obedience to Jesus, may well prove to be VERY costly in personal terms. We are prepared to suffer and to die for our conviction that this is how God wants us to live.

WHAT WE ARE NOT

We do not need to join or make an alliance with any "PEACE" organisation.

We do not need money to promote our cause.

We do not ask for YOUR money to fund OUR activities.

We take no political action.

We are not draft dodgers.

We are not tax withholders or tax avoiders.

We are not marchers, demonstrators or protestors.

We are not flag burners.

We are not advocates or supporters of any form of public civil disobedience.

We do not seek publicity in the Media for our "cause". (That includes NOT calling in the newspapers or television reporters for "interviews" to put our side of the case.)

We are not cowards! It takes REAL courage to be a CHRISTIAN PACIFIST! Over the centuries, many have paid the ultimate price to remain faithful to the non-violence teaching learned from their Lord and Master - JESUS CHRIST.

Chapter 1

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

*There are of course many Christians, who sincerely believe that in time of war, it is their duty to serve in the military. On the other hand there are many (including the writer of this article) who believe with equally passionate sincerity, that service in the military is a denial of the teachings of Jesus. Those who believe this way are prepared to lay down their lives, if necessary, to demonstrate the love for enemies, enjoined by Jesus. This article is not written with any intention of making war about peace! Nor is there any desire to offend those whose convictions are opposite. But, on behalf of other Christian Pacifists, I do want to present a case for why we believe that Peacemaking and Christian Pacifism are **non negotiable** elements of the Gospel of Peace.*

THE GOSPEL CALL

The Gospel of the Kingdom begins with a call to repentance. (Matt 4:17) In the Sermon On The Mount, Jesus defines what repentance means. He reaches deep into our personal space, to touch virtually every area of human life. We are challenged to re-evaluate our actions, and even our secret thoughts, towards our neighbor. We are called to renounce our “rights”; to possessions; to legal redress; to reputation; and even to personal safety.

We are called to repentance from all manner of hatred for enemies, and all forms of resistance against evil, and all acts of revenge,

We are called to be peacemakers instead of war makers! That, Jesus said, is the path we must walk in order to become sons of God. (Matthew 5:9,45)

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

The Gospel is not only about forgiveness for sins. It is much, much more. It is also the Good News about inheritance of the kingdom of God in the future. And it is the Good News about the **eternal way of life** which restores fellowship with God now, and prepares us for our place in that future kingdom.

Believing the Gospel means believing that Jesus is the **Prince of Peace**; it means believing that Jesus was, and is, and will be for all eternity, the living example of what it means to be a peacemaker. (Isaiah 9:7)

It means believing **all the words of Jesus**, including those which call us to join Him **now** as peacemakers and sons of God.

THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

For this writer, Pacifism is a non negotiable element of the Gospel of Peace.

That is what Jesus did himself; that is what Jesus commands us to do; and that is what Jesus commands us to preach **in His name**.

Believing that about Jesus will change us. It will change **for ever**, our attitudes and actions, our goals in life, and even the career we choose. It will change how we deal with both friends and enemies.

RECOGNISING LOVE

Jesus laid down His life for friends and enemies alike. (John 15:13 & Romans 5:8-10) This is how He commands us to love. (John 13:34-35)

How shall we demonstrate this love which Jesus left as **the test**, by which the world is invited to measure our discipleship? (John 13:34-35) How is it possible to claim that we love as Jesus does, if we do things which are clearly NOT love at all?

It is imperative that we ask ourselves some hard questions about what it really means to be peacemakers.

It is even more imperative that we accept the hard answers to these questions, if it is really true that our whole aim in life is to become children of the living God.

How is it possible to love our enemies, do good, resist not evil, and yet be ready to strike back at the aggressor?

How is it possible to shoot at the enemy, or drop bombs on him, or threaten him with all the other horrors of modern warfare, when our REAL calling is to pray for him and bless him? (Matthew 5:44 KJV)

How is it possible for us to delude ourselves that praying for the defeat of our enemies, is what Jesus meant by "blessing"? Is not such a prayer really a curse instead of the blessing to which our calling commits us?

How is it possible for two Christians in opposing armies, to shoot at each other, instead of laying down their weapons to pray together and be reconciled?

How could two Christians in opposing armies, who do shoot at each other, convince the world that they love one another with that divine love which Jesus says is THE mark of his disciples. (John 13:35)

How is it possible for a Christian to make war against any man, friend or foe, for whom Christ died and for whom he also is commanded to take up his cross with Jesus?

How is it possible for a Christian to make a career in a military organisation, which trains its servants in the best methods to hate and maim and kill? and binds them by OATH to do those things on command?

How is it possible for a Christian to swear an OATH, to obey orders which require him to commit these sins?

How can such "Christians" ever give meaning to the self sacrificing love which took Jesus to the cross? How can we ever claim to carry a cross with Jesus, if our own love falls short at the point where our safety IN THIS LIFE is threatened?

Certainly, if the example of Jesus means anything at all, we have not attempted to live at peace with all men, so far as it lies with us, (Rom 12:18), until we have determined that we will go ALL THE WAY to preserve peace even to an undeserved death even to an unjust crucifixion! Nothing less can adequately demonstrate the Divine love that cannot be quenched by even the worst evil devised by carnal men. **To this we are called!** (1 Peter 2:21)

ELEMENTS OF PEACEMAKING

If we are peacemakers :-

- we will not defend ourselves against aggression.
- we will not make war.
- we will not assist others to make war.
- we will not work in any situation directly associated with the manufacture of the instruments of destruction.

Peacemakers act in ways which deal with others as we wish to be dealt with in return. Some practical applications of this are :-

- turn the other cheek instead of resisting aggression.
- love our enemies.

- do good to those that hate us.
- pray for those who mistreat us.
- never protect ourselves by threatening another.
- never take revenge.
- if our enemy is hungry, feed him.
- if he is thirsty give him a drink.
- overcome evil only with good.

It is not possible to give meaning to any of those things with swords in our hands.

CONQUERING THE ENEMY WITH LOVE

If enough people believed Jesus, and obeyed Him, there could never be another war. In fact, His way is the only way in which the evils of war can ever come to an end. Some of us believe this so completely that we are prepared to put it into practice, regardless of the cost. Jesus left us that example! It is our calling to follow Him in this radical way of peace.

A man who loves his enemy enough, wants to see that enemy become a friend. That means for me, that no matter what my enemy does to me, I will return only friendship.

Even if he so hates me as to seek my life, or the life of my loved ones, threatening our safety with all the horror of modern warfare, my best proof of my love for him is to refuse to do that back to him and his loved ones.

If he cannot be moved to peace by that demonstration of love, then, in the cause of peace, I must lay down my life for him. He is the one who needs to live not me. If he lives, perhaps he will eventually learn his need for the change that I have already experienced.

If it costs me my own life, or something even more precious than that, to give him that opportunity, that is the final expression of my love for him. That is the love we learn from Jesus. That was our salvation when Jesus gave Himself for us, on the cross.

I can afford to love my enemy that way. My life and that of my loved ones, is far safer in God's hands than in mine. I can afford to lose my life so that he can live, for I am already eternally safe! And it would be my very great pleasure to wake on resurrection day to find him standing beside me, at last, as a friend!

WAR AND ITS VICTIMS

A recent newspaper statistic claimed that there are currently more than 40 wars in progress around the world. In those wars it is not only soldiers who die. Civilians die too. Women and innocent children die or suffer as terribly as the professional war makers.

They suffer and die as you read this.

Today, this awful problem extends far beyond the actual time of open warfare. In our generation, the methods of warfare leave their mark, long after "peace" has been declared, and the soldiers have left the battlefield.

For decades afterwards innocent civilian victims must contend with devastated cities, and chemically polluted environments. They must live with the ever present threat of the countless millions of landmines that have been left behind to carry on the maiming and killing while men proclaim that they have made "peace"!

The responsibility for those wars and their terrible aftermath, cannot be left only with the governments involved. It must be shared equally by the defence industries of the Western world who are willing to take enormous profits from all that death and suffering and destruction. It must also be shared by those who will take their bread and butter from working in those industries.

To assist in any way in making war, whether as a member of the military forces, or as a civilian in the defence industries which support it, is to become a contributor to the wickedness, and hatred, and obscene disregard for suffering, that is one of the deepest problems faced by the human race.

To make war, or to assist those who make war, is to be part of that problem.

Disciples of Jesus no longer want to be a part of that problem. Instead, they want to be numbered amongst the sons of God, who have GOOD NEWS about God's answers for the violence that infects this evil world.

Do we love each other? As Jesus loves us each, equally? If we come against each other with swords in our hands, threatening each other's lives, THE WORLD IS ENTITLED TO REJECT THE VALIDITY OF OUR CHRISTIANITY!

Peacemakers do not carry swords. Instead they beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. They refuse to learn how to make war, ever again, for all eternity. (Isaiah 2:4)

Instead, they proclaim peace, seek peace, and if necessary, lay down their lives to make peace by not fighting back.

This is how they take their place as sons of the living God.

Chapter 2

PACIFISM & CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus clearly identified true children of God as people who choose to love enemies and do good to them, praying for persecutors and blessing them instead of hating and cursing them. (Mat 5:43-44 and Luke 6:27,35)

"Blessed are the peacemakers", He said in Matthew 5:9.

It is an essential, non-negotiable part of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, as Jesus preached it, that it is the peacemakers NOT the war makers who belong to the eternal family of God.

Personally, I do find that to be GOOD NEWS.

I do not believe that I would find it at all pleasant to spend eternity in the company of those who were still war makers at heart and who had never learned, instead, to commit their cause to God.

It was at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus called for obedience to his teaching about the way of life that pleases God, as a condition of acceptance for entry to the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matt 7:21-23)

Jesus said that those who hear His words and do them, build a house which will stand for ever.

Those who presume to call him Lord without obeying, are building a house on sinking sand. (Matt 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46).

In another place He said that those who do not obey, do not love either Him or His Father, at all. (John 14:24).

The Apostle John said it even more bluntly when he wrote that those who claim to know Jesus while disobeying, are LIARS, devoid of the truth. (1 John :4)

If we take Jesus, literally, at his word, true faith in that word leads us to the conclusion that obedience to his GOSPEL OF PEACE is the only way to God. No man comes to the Father except by Jesus. (John 14:6)

The Sermon on the Mount is all about finding God through His Son. If we listen honestly to Jesus, receive His teaching, surrender to him as Lord of all life, are born again to new life in the Spirit of God, and begin to obey with all our heart it is inescapable (at least to me) that to become a peacemaker in any real sense of the word, is also to become a pacifist.

This is part of the repentance to which Jesus calls us.

This is part of the new nature which we must put on as we are created after the likeness of God, in TRUE righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:20-24)

No man can truthfully claim to be a peacemaker and, at the same time, continue to make war, justifying it in himself and condoning it in others. No man in this position can possibly be doing what Jesus meant when He called **all men** to make peace with God and each other.

If we take Jesus at his word (and I do), only the mind of a carnal man, not yet reborn as a child of God, could reach any other conclusion.

Of course the cost of such radical obedience is potentially very high.

Jesus warned us of this cost when he said that following him could result in loss of family, friends, houses, lands, possessions and even life itself.

To obey the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, literally, as he meant us to, can lead to exactly that.

That is why he said that we could not be his disciples, without first counting the cost and renouncing all that we have. (Luke 14:33)

It is implicit in what Jesus says, that we CAN expect to suffer loss or be defrauded, when we refuse to defend ourselves, our loved ones, or our rights to reputation, possessions or freedoms. But it is, without question, our calling to leave all redress in the hands of our God. (Romans 12:14-21).

It is not unlikely that we WILL be hit the second time, when we turn the other cheek!

However none of this is meant to cause anxiety about our future!! Has he not promised that if we do make obedience to Kingdom righteousness our first priority, that he will continue to provide our needs? (Matt 6,33) And has he not also promised that if we do suffer loss for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, we shall receive much, much more in this life, and that in the Age to Come, we shall also receive eternal life?

These promises are indeed as much a part of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as anything else that Jesus said. Our problem is that few of us dare to believe them enough to commit our safety and our possessions into God's hands instead of our own.

It is simply not possible that any part of this high calling can fit into the framework of military service, or its support industries, in any way.

Repentance, Jesus said, is the way to prepare ourselves for the Kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount defines clearly the standard by which real repentance is measured.

Repentance encompasses turning away from every sin, every way in which we have been a party to evil, every action and every thought in which we have hated our brother.

Purity of heart and peace making must replace lust and covetousness and war making, at all levels of thought and action.

The truly repentant heart will confess its failures and seek forgiveness for all that has grieved God. This will certainly include godly sorrow for all past involvement in war making or preparation for war making. These things can have no place, ever again, in our lives.

This is pacifism. This is peace making. This is the inevitable consequence of becoming a true child of God.

It is prophesied that in the Age to Come, the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. They will never again learn to make war. (Isaiah 2:4)

They will learn this from their rulers, those followers of Jesus who have already, in this life, put on the new nature in which peace making is a fundamental eternal quality.

There will be no place in that age for any aspiring ruler who has rejected the Lordship of Jesus in this, or any other aspect of his teaching about the life of the Kingdom.

Some people want to class this teaching about pacifism, as non essential and contentious. Others become verbally violent in opposing it!

My own position is that it is totally essential. It is a matter of salvation.

For me, it is simply not possible that the same Christ who taught the Sermon on the Mount, could now change that teaching to tell some disciples that they must be peace makers, others that they may (or must!) be war makers, and still others that it does not matter either way! That is confusion.

I will not make war with you about Pacifism!

If you disagree with me, then so far as it depends on me, I will try to live at peace with you. (Romans 12:18)

However, peace can never mean either compromise or silence.

I may not achieve peace by pretending that it does not matter.

I may not keep silent about something which I believe affects the eternal welfare of those who seek the Kingdom of God.

For conscience' sake, I will insist that Pacifism is essential Christian doctrine and I will continue to warn those who will hear the words of Jesus, that it is the PEACEMAKERS who are called the children of God.

Chapter 3

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND PACIFISM

It is inevitable, in any discussion on the subject of Christian Pacifism, that sooner or later, someone will point to the Old Testament stories about Moses and David and many others who engaged in war, apparently with God's approval.

I do not deny these stories. Nor can I deny that many of those who were clearly not pacifists, are listed amongst the faithful in Hebrews chapter 11.

How do we explain those stories, in the light of Christian Pacifism?

I confess that I do not know the answer to that awkward question.

What I do know is that I may not use any of those stories to invalidate the clear teaching of Jesus that it is the peacemakers who are the children of God and that it is the meek who shall inherit the earth, in the Age to Come.

In the transfiguration vision given to Peter and James and John, God make it very plain that it was Jesus with whom God was pleased, above Moses and above Elijah. In future, they were to listen to Jesus, rather than either Moses or Elijah. (Matt 17:5)

The practical implication of this is that if there is any apparent conflict between anything that Jesus says, compared with what we read about Moses and Elijah, or anyone else for that matter, we are to resolve that conflict by listening only to Jesus.

Jesus alone is THE WAY to God. There is no salvation in anyone else.

I am a disciple of Jesus, not of Moses.

Jesus plainly taught in the Sermon on the Mount, that as a child of God, I am committed to turn the other cheek to the aggressor, love my enemies and do good to them.

I do not see how it is at all possible to obey that, without being a pacifist.

I have committed myself to follow Jesus, no matter what it costs.

That for me is the end of any Old Testament "loopholes" used by others in their vain attempts to justify disobedience to the Son of God in this fundamental and essential element of Christianity.

Chapter 4

NON COMBATANT MILITARY SERVICE AND PACIFISM

Many Christians who are convicted that they should not directly participate in warfare ask questions which draw a distinction between "active" military service and non combatant roles in the armed forces. Such roles exist in the medical corps, various clerical duties, stores administration, etc.

Some Christians do mistakenly see these as a valid alternative.

Others, I fear, see it as the "easy option", compared with the cumbersome procedures required to obtain recognition as a Conscientious Objector and total exemption from military service.

For others it is preferable to the potential open persecution which is suffered by many Conscientious Objectors.

Australia is one country which does make provision for exemption from Military Service on the grounds of religious conscience. However, the procedure is not easy and is fraught with the risk that if the application is not successful, a prison term can be imposed. In the 1950s, some of my friends suffered several months of military detention, when their names came up in the ballot and for conscience' sake they had to refuse to respond to the compulsory draft which was in force at that time. For some of them with young families and heavy financial commitments, the cost was quite high. However, they were fortunate compared with other young men in other countries and other times, who paid a much higher price for their faith. For all of these, life would have been much easier, if non combatant service had been seen as a valid option.

Were they wrong? Did they suffer persecution unnecessarily?

Or was it after all what Jesus meant when he spoke of persecution for the sake of righteousness?

I believe they were right.

Few realise that under Australian military law, non combatants swear the same military oath to enter the service, undergo the same basic training in the use of weapons and, in extremity, can be ordered to bear arms and fight. (The requirement to swear an oath ought to be, in itself, a warning signal and a barrier, for those who take the teaching of Jesus seriously.)

However the actual bearing of arms is not the real issue.

To be in non combatant military service, is to be a part of the total war machine, trained to destroy, and dedicated to do so on command. Whether they admit it or not, noncombatants are a part of the essential SUPPORT SERVICES without which the killing machine could not function effectively. Even if they are remote from the battlefield they are as much a party to war making as the men who fire the guns and drop the bombs,

No matter how they rationalise it, their supporting role assists in war making. It is NOT what Jesus meant when He called us to do good to our enemies. It is certainly NOT PEACE MAKING.

It is disobedience to Jesus. It is sin.

It is no doubt, for many, a sin of ignorance. However, when light comes, as it surely will to all who are led by the Spirit of God, godly sorrow will lead to repentance.

It is the PEACEMAKERS who are children of God. (Matt 5:9).

Chapter 5

SHOULD CHRISTIANS BAPTISE MILITARY PERSONNEL?

QUESTION

Should Christians baptise military personnel and officers of the law as the apostles did in the first century?

ANSWER

Perhaps the question is a bit too simplistic. There are a number of OTHER important questions which should be asked, ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS, before deciding whether it is appropriate to baptise a soldier (or anyone else for that matter).

One soldier might qualify another might not! (It would be no different for a bank robber, or an adulterer!)

Baptism is for "Remission of Sins". (Acts 2:38) It is the response to belief in the Gospel. If it is what it should be, it is the visible outward sign of a repentant heart.

The Gospel preached by JESUS, calls ALL of us (soldiers included) to become peacemakers and forgiveness does depend on BOTH Repentance AND Baptism. (Acts 2:38)

The NEW COMMANDMENT given by Jesus, calls us to love one another, as sacrificially as Jesus loves us. Jesus said that ALL MEN would be able to know whether we are disciples or not, by our response to that commandment. (John 13:34-35)

Could you be convinced that another Christian loved you, while he was busy shooting at you, or dropping bombs on you? Could you convince yourself that you were doing what Jesus meant, while you were busy doing those things to other people? And could Christians who were making war on each other, convince UNBELIEVERS that they were doing what Jesus would do?

It comes down to how we measure REPENTANCE on the part of a soldier who is responding to the Gospel. It is difficult to understand how a soldier could make a commitment to become a peacemaker (Matt 5:9) without at the same time REPENTING of war making. It would seem to be logical to at least ask the question about his plans for the future, before proceeding with a baptism!

If he was determined to remain a war maker, ready to either to give orders, or obey orders, to kill on command (including other "Christians" on the opposite side!) one would have to ask whether he yet understood the REAL cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus.

Disciples who have committed themselves to follow Jesus in radical obedience to the Sermon On The Mount, ought to be very uneasy about proceeding with the baptism of a soldier, who did not yet understand what Jesus meant when He called us to become "Peacemakers".

The early history of the Church records the cases of many Roman soldiers who became Christians and laid down their arms, at great personal cost.

Of course there is still the specific case of Cornelius to consider. (Acts 10) Read:

Chapter 6 - CORNELIUS AND PACIFISM

Chapter 6

CORNELIUS AND PACIFISM

As a pacifist, committed to the ideal that one cannot become a child of God, without also becoming a peacemaker, I am regularly asked about Cornelius, who became a Christian whilst still a Roman soldier.

Let us be clear about this. I do not say that a soldier cannot become a Christian.

However, I do believe that a soldier cannot give meaning to his profession of Christianity, without repenting. And I do believe that Christian baptism is only to be given on the basis of clear evidence of repentance which results from belief in the Gospel.

In the case of a soldier, real belief in the words of Jesus will certainly lead to a change of heart about making war.

Jesus taught clearly that it is the peacemakers who are the children of God.

A soldier who wants to follow Jesus must learn to love his enemies and do good to them. He must lay down his weapons.

I can draw no other meaning from the words of Jesus.

What then about Cornelius? Did he leave the army?

The awkward truth is that the Bible does not tell us one way or the other, what Cornelius did about his army service.

We cannot use his case, as it stands alone, either to justify remaining in the army, or leaving it, following conversion.

Did Cornelius know what Jesus preached about peace making, before he made his decision? Did he have enough information to know the potential cost of his decision?

It is surely not without significance that Peter refers in his sermon, to the GOOD NEWS OF PEACE. And it seems certain that what is recorded in Acts is a very condensed version of what Peter actually said.

If that is true, then we may be certain that Peter included enough in what he did say about the teaching of Jesus on peace making, to enable Cornelius to understand the full meaning of repentance for a soldier and to count the cost of his decision to follow Jesus.

What we do know for certain, about Cornelius, is that he responded to Peter's sermon about obedience to God (Acts 10:34-35),

He responded to the Good News of the PEACE preached by Jesus, (verse 36), and the forgiveness that follows belief in the message. (verse 43).

We know that Cornelius' commitment to Jesus was so complete that God was able to pour out the Holy Spirit exactly as He did for Peter and for those others who believed on the day of Pentecost.

We also know, from John 14,15-17, that the Holy Spirit can only be received by those who love Jesus and obey Him. This is confirmed by Peter, in Acts 5,32.

It therefore seems inescapable that what God saw in Cornelius, was a heart's commitment to follow Jesus without reservation.

That would inevitably lead Cornelius to a re-evaluation of his future as a Roman soldier.

Could he, as a follower of Jesus, continue to fulfill the duties of a Roman soldier?

Could he, for example, believe the Gospel and still continue to follow orders which might require him to execute or imprison a fellow believer?

Could he pass on a command to the soldiers under him, which might lead to the killing of fellow Christians?

Can we, for a moment, imagine that Cornelius was in charge of the soldiers who years later beheaded Paul or crucified Peter?

Could it possibly be a Christian soldier who received and obeyed the order to put James to the sword?

Could he now defend himself or the empire and still fulfil his new calling to turn the other cheek to the aggressor?

Could he continue as part of an occupation army, dedicated to maintaining "peace" at swords point, under threat of violence and death for those who refused?

The answers are surely obvious.

History records the fate of many other Roman soldiers who became Christians and laid down their arms in obedience to their new calling.

They paid the price in their own blood.

What then of Cornelius?

I confess that I do not know for certain, what became of him.

It is, of course, possible that he failed his test when the time came and that he fell away from Christianity, when he faced tribulation and persecution on account of his calling to be a peacemaker.

The parable of the sower does allow for that possibility. (Matt 13,20-21)

However, that does seem unlikely. It is surely far more credible to speculate that this first Gentile Christian to receive the Holy Spirit, went on to prove his repentance by obeying the Gospel of Peace, paying the inevitable price for being the first Roman soldier to become a Christian peacemaker.

Chapter 7

HERE ARE TWO SWORDS

(Luke 22:35)

When Jesus first sent out his twelve disciples, (and later, the seventy others), they were told to take nothing for their journey; no staff, no bag, no bread, no money; not even a second tunic. (Luke 9:3)

With this command, he set them free from concern about how they would be fed and clothed, while giving their whole priority to preaching the Kingdom of God. As labourers for the Kingdom, they were worthy of their hire and they would lack nothing.

Later, in another setting, he reminded them of this with the question, "Did you lack anything?" (Luke 22:35)

Of course they had to answer that they had indeed lacked nothing.

It was after receiving this admission that he said to them:-

"But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one."

It transpired that two of them had already done just that!

In spite of all the preaching they had heard from Jesus about turning the other cheek, it would appear that the disciples had now begun to think that they were in need of some means of self defence. No doubt their concern arose at least in part from the warning Jesus had given them about his approaching crucifixion, just prior to leaving for Jerusalem. (Matthew 20:17-20) Thomas, at least, seems to have indicated some concern for their safety, in response to the invitation from Jesus to go with him to Jerusalem, following the death of Lazarus. (John 11:26) Thomas' concern was well founded. The raising of Lazarus had precipitated a plot by the priests to put Jesus to death. (John 11:53)

Was this when they bought those two swords? It does seem likely.

Luke tells us that Peter had his sword with him at the Last Supper. And he was ready to use it! *"I will lay down my life for you"*. (John 13:37) Peter had temporarily lost his vision of the Gospel of the Kingdom, with its radical calling to love and bless enemies, instead of fighting to defend his master.

Just a few hours later when he did draw that sword in a futile attempt to defend Jesus, he was severely rebuked for his action. He should not have used it. He should not even have been carrying it for such a purpose, and if he continued he would perish. (Matt 26:52)

What then did Jesus really mean when he made that statement about buying swords?

We have been conditioned by tradition to read the words in Luke as a new command, *replacing* an earlier one in Luke 9:3.

However, perhaps we need to remember that this interpretation of Jesus' words comes from a church that has been largely unfaithful in obeying the Sermon on the Mount; a church whose continued justification of warfare betrays just how little they have understood Jesus on this subject.

I suggest that this interpretation does not fit with the teaching of Jesus at all.

It is not in harmony with Jesus' own refusal to call angels to his defence.

Nor is it found anywhere in the subsequent teaching or example of the New Testament church.

Nowhere again in the New Testament, after that serious failure by Peter, do we read that any other first century Christians bought swords, carried swords, defended themselves against persecutors, or made war.

I suggest that we need to think again about what Jesus really meant.

It would take only a minor adjustment in the TONE in which we hear Jesus speak those words, to completely change their meaning. IF WE WILL RECEIVE IT, Jesus must have spoken in a tone of voice which delivered a stern warning against what two of the disciples had already done!

Jesus was not telling the disciples that he WANTED them to buy swords! Instead, His words are actually a reflection of the failure he now discerned in their hearts.

He was putting His words to THEIR THOUGHTS and contrasting their current BEHAVIOUR with His own earlier teaching. He was challenging them to return to what they should have known, if they had properly understood all that they had heard him say and do.

This is NOT a new instruction, changing his earlier direction. It is a REBUKE for their failure to remember their calling. This is reinforced by Jesus' abrupt dismissal of the conversation with the words, "*It is enough*".

Jesus had certainly seen those two swords before he spoke.

It must have seemed like a sword through his own heart to realise that, even at this late stage, the disciples had still not grasped his message about loving enemies.

To read this incident in any other way presents us with an impossible contradiction of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

The Gospel of the Kingdom sounds a clear call for all to BELIEVE that they must now begin to love their enemies and turn the other cheek to the aggressor. It is the peacemakers who are the real children of God.

PEACEMAKERS DO NOT CARRY SWORDS!

Chapter 8

EATING THE PROFITS OF WAR

A recent newspaper statistic claimed that there are currently more than 40 wars in progress around the world. In those wars it is not only soldiers who die. Civilians die too. Women and innocent children die, or suffer as much or more than the professional warmakers. They suffer terribly, and die terribly, as you read this.

Other wars are now "finished", but the destruction continues!

It has been claimed that the "residue" from some of those "finished" wars includes more than 100 million live landmines still in place. Those landmines continue to claim innocent civilian victims (including many children). In our Western world we are regularly confronted by graphic television documentaries which portray the suffering of those who have been maimed by those legacies of wars which although concluded, refuse to go away.

The responsibility for those wartime and "peacetime" deaths and maimings, lies not only with the governments who were involved.

It must be shared equally by the governments of countries who although not at war themselves, permit their arms manufacturers not only to remain in business, but also to sell the weapons directly or indirectly, to the warmakers.

It must be shared equally by the managers of the "defence" industries of the Western world who are willing to take a profit from all that death and suffering and destruction.

It must be shared equally by those employees who are willing to take their bread and butter from working in those industries.

It must also be shared by those shareholders who provide the money which finances the arms manufacturers who divide the "spoils" of war amongst themselves!

And just for good measure let us include in that assembly, those Christian Churches who not only tolerate members who are involved in those "fringe" war activities, but also encourage them to put their tithes and offerings, earned from the suffering of the victims of war, in the collection plate!

Of course it is entirely possible that there are many sincere Christians who have not thought through the implications of their sometimes remote involvement in the wickedness of the wars of our world, (and the equally wicked aftermath).

For these we ask the following questions :-

- Do you work in a defence industry?
- Do you work for an Arms Manufacturer?
- Do you hold shares in a company which manufactures Weapons of War?
- Or do you hold shares in a company which although not itself a direct Arms Manufacturer, supplies the raw materials, or re-invests some of YOUR money in ownership of companies in the Defence Industry?

(In today's complicated and incestuously interlinked business world you can be made the unwitting partner in many things which Jesus definitely would not approve. The responsibility is yours to know EXACTLY what is being done with YOUR money!)

Think about it!! Pray about it! And if you love Jesus If you love your neighbour as yourself then as far as humanly possible, and as God opens you eyes when you pray for wisdom consider whether you should abdicate from all involvement which contributes your actions, or your money, or your approval, towards the suffering of your neighbor in other lands!

And while you are thinking about your response to this challenge, perhaps it would also be good to prepare your personal "Judgement Day Speech" in advance about how YOUR war involvement, direct or indirect, fits with those uncomfortable words of Jesus :-

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the LEAST of these brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40 NIV)

CHAPTER 9

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE UNDER ATTACK

QUESTION

Should young ladies carry mace, or a small hand gun etc. in their purses to protect against attackers?

Would gouging at the eyes of an attacker, or a crippling karate chop, be sin if being wrestled into a kidnappers vehicle?

ANSWER

Spraying someone with mace, or gouging their eyes, is hardly "turning the other cheek", is it? There must be a better way to do this, without compromising the words of Jesus!

In Australia Mace is prohibited. (So are other alternatives such as capsicum sprays) It is ILLEGAL to carry them, or use them for self defence. So of course, in this country that is not an option for Christians. (Romans 13:1-5 & 1 Peter 2:13-15) I suspect that at least some USA states probably have similar laws.

However the illegality of mace is NOT the real issue. The REAL issue is whether or not we BELIEVE Jesus enough to lay our safety on the line, by doing things His way instead of ours. Believing Jesus that way is called FAITH. It is also called "taking up our cross".

The Sermon on the Mount has a lot to say about how Jesus wants us to handle things when our "legal rights" to personal comfort, financial security, possessions, safety, and even life itself, are threatened. Radical obedience calls us to abandon all of the usual HUMAN concepts of safety through justice in the courts, or superior strength in battle. It calls us, instead, to follow the way of peace and non-violence, as God's best answer to aggression and oppression.

It is a TOTAL way of life not a "part time rule" to be followed only when there is no danger to test our faith!!!

Of course it does take REAL faith to lay down our "rights" that way, and not return evil for evil, when we are threatened with harm. (Especially when it might cost us our lives!) However that is an essential element of our Christian calling! (1 Peter 2:20-21)

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is about those three young men, who were threatened with a terrible death by burning, if they refused to bow down to the King's idol. (Daniel Chapter 3)

They told the king that God was indeed able to save them, IF HE CHOSE TO. But that wasn't the real issue. They were going to obey God, WHETHER OR NOT He saved them even if it should cost them their lives! (Verses 15-18)

That is the challenge of The Sermon On The Mount. It calls us to measure our safety in terms of our LONG TERM eternal security, by God's ETERNAL standards not by human standards for short term comfort in this present mortal life!

Of course there are some other practical issues which the question does not address.

What if the kidnapper snatches the handbag BEFORE the young lady can get the mace out? What if he has a knife at her throat, or a gun at her head? What if he is bigger and stronger? What if he has a Black Belt in Karate, and knows how to defend himself against "eye gouging"? What if he has

taken the victim by surprise, and has already rendered her unconscious before she can attempt to retaliate?

Those questions only serve to emphasise that the HUMAN answer has a VERY limited and uncertain chance of success. It can't EVER be GUARANTEED to work EVERY time!

Our REAL safety will ALWAYS lie in God's hands, not our own. I have come to BELIEVE that the best way to place our safety in God's care, is to do things EXACTLY the way Jesus says even at the risk of losing everything! (Luke 9:23-26)

Forget about the Mace!!
Don't even think about owning a handgun!!
Skip the Karate lessons!!

Just in case that all sounds a bit too threatening, there is a promise from which I personally take great comfort. God says that He will NEVER allow us to be tested beyond our strength! God PROMISES that when temptation comes, there will ALWAYS be a way of escape. (1 Corinthians 10:12-13) Most often, the best way to find it will be to respond to temptation with a difficult CHOICE to do what Jesus says!

Sometimes God waits for that choice from us, before sending the angel to walk with us in the furnace! (Daniel 3:25-28)

And sometimes, in the face of personal danger, the wisdom of God postpones "rescue" until the OTHER SIDE of the grave.

However, Jesus does promise that even if obeying Him should cost us our life, that is NOT the end!

When Jesus returns from Heaven, there WILL be a resurrection to ETERNAL LIFE for those who belong to Jesus!

THE SHORT ANSWER?

"Do not resist one who is evil". (Matthew 5:39)

"Repay no one evil for evil Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:17-21)

CHAPTER 10

TERRORISTS AND REVENGE

Nearly a decade ago now, a great evil was committed against the citizens of the USA. It was an act of terrorism, on a scale which almost defies the imagination of normal peace loving people. It was a sin of murder, committed by evil men, in which many unsuspecting and innocent people died without warning.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem when He foretold the impending "terrorist" invasion, and destruction of the city -- and the slaughter of its people. (Luke 19:41-44) And his followers surely cannot help but feel the same deepest **COMPASSION** for those citizens of New York and Washington who lost family and friends in this great disaster.

But let us keep a few things in perspective.

The several thousand killed by this act of terrorism, is far short of the **60 MILLION** who suffered and died in World War 2.

In terms of destructive power, and sheer terror, it does not even begin to approach the scale of the nightly "Thousand Bomber Raids" against Nazi Germany in World War 2, or of the atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Nor does it begin to match the daily suffering in developing countries like Africa, Ethiopia, India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, etc. Or the destructive forces unleashed against innocent and powerless victims, by abortionists!

Nor, if we believe Jesus, will it be the last such event! The Bible predicts that we may expect MANY MORE similar events ALL OVER THE WORLD, in the time which Jesus said would be like the "Days of Noah" -- when "*the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and FILLED with violence*" (Gen 6:11) and "*every imagination of the hearts of men was ONLY EVIL continually*". (Gen 6:5)

With this act of terrorism against the USA, our Western World was changed irrevocably. It changed our expectations. It affected our culture, our life style, and our economy, in ways which we still only beginning to understand fully.

Nevertheless, great as the potential is for FEAR of further acts of terrorism on a similar scale, it can only be **VERY** tiny, compared with what is predicted by the Olivet Prophecy for the final days just prior to the second Coming of Jesus!

We have not yet arrived at the time when "*the powers of the heavens will be shaken*" and all over the world "*men will faint with fear and foreboding of what is coming on the world*"?. (Luke 21:26) When will that be? Indeed has it now already begun? Only God knows that day and hour -- but to our limited vision it does not seem that it can be very far away.

Let us prepare our hearts for it. God's people are promised that they do not need to "**FEAR the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday**". (Psalm 91:5-6)

CHRISTIAN REACTIONS

The Governments of the world have unanimously joined with the USA to express revulsion for this terrible deed. And it was, of course, predictable and inevitable, that the citizens of the USA would cry aloud for **JUSTICE** and **REVENGE** against the perpetrators.

In the face of all those angry cries for revenge, our Christian Faith, and our commitment to the Gospel of the Kingdom of Peace, is sorely tested. It would be very easy to be swept along by the

emotions of the masses still howling for blood, nearly a decade later!

What is the correct reaction for those who are disciples of Jesus?

And what of our own safety when we do follow his lead?

In the current climate of reaction against the evil of Terrorism proclaiming the Sermon On The Mount as **THE TRUTH**, and **THE WAY**, revealed by Jesus for dealing with Terrorists could be **VERY** unpopular.

Shall we -- who have already been forgiven so much ourselves -- cast the first stone against others who do not yet know their need?

Could we carry a cross for those who have done this evil thing? Could we die for **THEM**, rather than put them to death?

Could we forgive? Should we forgive? (Matt 18:35)

Must we turn the other cheek? And preach the Good NEWS -- even to men such as this?

The Apostle Paul challenges us to **REFUSE** to avenge any such evil, and instead leave it **COMPLETELY** to the wrath of God? (Romans 12:19)

"WEEP WITH THOSE WHO WEEP"

But:

*"Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all....
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God;
for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."
No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink;
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Rom 12:15-21)*

CHAPTER 11

PACIFISM and TERRORISM and WARMAKING

A friend alerted me to the Editorial in the Wall Street Journal for 11 October 2001, which is headed:

Quote

WHEN WE MUST FIGHT

Even Pacifists Must Support This War. Those who refuse are reminiscent of the Oxford Union in 1933.

BY SCOTT SIMON

End quote

If you are interested, you can read it all for yourself at:

<http://www.opinionjournal.com/editorial/?id=95001302>

The bit that stood out most for me, was the closing sentence:

"It is better to sacrifice our ideals than to expect others to die for them."

Of course this is NOT new! It reflects the same thinking that has always confronted Pacifists in times of war. It assumes that Pacifism is no more than an **IDEAL** which cannot work in the current situation -- and therefore, must be abandoned temporarily while we wage this current (allegedly) "just war".

And it reflects the same basic mistaken presumption that war makers have always used to justify fighting back:

"MAKE WAR to make peace"!!!

However Pacifism is **FAR MORE** than a mere ideal!

It is a part of the Christian believer's transformed inner nature. It is what he believes to be **THE TRUTH**! It is an expression of **FAITH** in the teachings of Jesus!

Those who have truly experienced it, **WILL NOT AND COULD NOT EVER** inflict evil on others, no matter what the provocation. Like Jesus, they would far rather suffer themselves -- even lay down their lives -- than inflict suffering on others.

CHRISTIAN PACIFISM and NON-VIOLENCE is way of life, that responds to evil by not returning evil. And it does not change in the face of changing external pressures or circumstances.

It is a part of what Jesus has taught us about loving our neighbor as ourselves:

"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." (Matt 7:12)

It is the outworking of obedience to the second greatest commandment:

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Matt 22:39)

And without it, **NO ONE** is yet a true disciple of the one who laid down his own life to save us -- while we were yet enemies. (Romans 5:8)

The personal cost of that ideal is **VERY** high! It can even cost us our lives.

But then isn't **THAT** an essential element of the Gospel call to Discipleship, which Jesus left us? (Luke 14:25-33)

CHAPTER 12

IT WASN'T FAIR!

By any recognised standard of human justice, the torture and crucifixion of Jesus was UNJUST, UNFAIR, and UNDESERVED! Wicked men suborned false witnesses to perjure themselves against Him. When that didn't work, they managed to manoeuvre Him into a position where failure to reply truthfully, would be a denial of His God and His Divine parentage. So He confessed THE TRUTH that He is indeed the Son of God -- and for that they convicted Him of Blasphemy, and put Him to death.

There was no law He had broken - nothing at all in Him - NOTHING AT ALL - to warrant such a death. Although created exactly like other men, in EXACTLY the same sort of mortal flesh (Heb 2:14-17) - and although subjected to all the same temptations (Heb 2:18; Heb 4:15) - He OVERCAME, where all others failed! He was, all His life, HOLY, HARMLESS, UNDEFILED!! (Heb 7:26) - The "beloved Son" in whom God is well pleased. (Matt 3:22)

And only AFTER men had done their worst, did GOD declare His Son INNOCENT, on all counts, by raising Him from the dead! (Rom 1:4) How can we explain such delay on God's part? Why didn't God intervene BEFORE men had dealt with His Son in such wicked ways?

Whether we like it or not, - whether we agree with it or not - God needed to allow it to happen that way - for our salvation! The Scriptures say that this terrible injustice done to Jesus by wicked men - this undeserved PENALTY for sins of which He was not guilty -- was a BLOOD SACRIFICE which has become a RANSOM paid by Jesus for OUR PARDON from the guilt and the penalty of sins which we did commit! (Mark 10:44; 1 Tim 2:6; Gal 4:5; Titus 2:14)

Without that, we would have no pardon - no hope of immortality - no hope of an eternal inheritance!

- * Jesus, Paul says, "*died for the ungodly*". In this "*God has shown His love for us*". Through this, IF WE ARE WILLING TO ACCEPT OUR GUILT AND REPENT, we can find a way to forsake our enmity against God - and be reconciled! (Rom 5:6-10)
- * Peter says that Jesus has "*suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God*". (1 Pet 3:18)
- * And John says "*We love because He first loved us*". (1 John 4:19)

A SUBSTITUTE?

Somehow, in this awful miscarriage of human justice, a RANSOM has been paid for our pardon! Ransom in this context means that the life of Jesus was given in exchange for ours! And although the Scripture does not use this word, it is inescapable that in some way, Jesus has made Himself a SUBSTITUTE for US!

BUT IS THAT FAIR?

How can it be FAIR - How can it be JUST - that God should require the death of an innocent man, in order to forgive US? In human terms, THAT isn't "FAIR" at all!

BUT neither was it FAIR that we committed the sins which made it necessary! And it wasn't "FAIR" at all that God should have to give His Son to save us from the penalty of OUR SINS! **But God went the second mile about that!** And He gave Jesus anyway!

It wasn't "FAIR" at all that Jesus should have to allow Himself to be condemned to death by wicked men, without a single word in His own defence, when he wasn't guilty of anything! **But Jesus went the second mile about that**, and gave Himself - NOT for any need of His own - but because WE needed a Saviour - to save us from the penalty justly due for our sins.

"Second Miles" are never "fair". That isn't how you measure them! They can't legally be required of you! If they were a "legal requirement" there would be nothing given!

Second Miles are travelled by your own voluntary choice - because you see a need which you CHOOSE to meet - and you are willing to PAY the PRICE of meeting that need.

GOD'S STANDARD OF FAIRNESS

God does have a standard of "fairness" for dealing with sinners. It is based on attitudes and actions!

For wilfully unrepentant, sinners:

"FAIR" is being punished and put to death on the day of Judgement!

For repentant pardoned sinners:

"FAIR" is being forgiven and NOT punished and NOT put to death on the day of Judgement.

"Yet your people say, 'The way of the Lord is not just'; when it is their own way that is not just. When the righteous turns from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, he shall die for it. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness, and does what is lawful and right, he shall live by it. Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways." (Ezek 33:16-20)

IS REPENTANCE ALONE, ENOUGH?

NO! -- To be forgiven, and pardoned, requires MORE than our repentance! It also requires the death of Jesus as a "Blood Sacrifice", in which He surrendered His life as a **RANSOM** for sinners. Whether or not we understand all about exactly how that "works", and whether or not we "like" some of the implications of that, the overwhelming message of Scripture is that a human BLOOD SACRIFICE is also required. (Heb 9:22)

And just for good measure, we need to know that IGNORANCE is NOT a valid excuse for sin!

*"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. **SO THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE!**"* (Rom 1:18-20)

Under the OT laws of God, when a man who had sinned in ignorance became aware of his sin, he had to make the SAME REPENTANCE and the SAME BLOOD SACRIFICE as any other sinner! (Levit 3:27-35)

Paul says the same thing in Acts 17:30-31. When we become aware of our "sins of ignorance", we also become RESPONSIBLE for repenting of them, JUST LIKE ANY OTHER SIN! The Gospel is designed to bring us to awareness of ALL sins, whether of ignorance or otherwise! It calls us to make an adequate repentance, which means admitting what we did was wrong, that the fault is ours alone, and that we need to change our ways. It requires us to accept the sacrifice made for us by Jesus.

Then - and only then - *"Though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right, if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has taken by robbery, and walks in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right, he shall surely live."* (Ezekiel 33:14-16)

HOW CAN WE BECOME AWARE OF OUR SINS, INSTEAD OF IGNORANT?

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

But who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me!

Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression." (Psalm 19:7-13)

THE BOTTOM LINE

FAIR? If we ask it about Jesus, THAT is the wrong question! It is about US!!

What is FAIR is that WE admit our guilt, and our need for pardon, and in HUMILITY, gratefully accept the GIFT which has been offered -- far, far beyond the limits of all human concepts and standards of "fairness"! And what is also FAIR, is that we should choose of our own free will, to accept our need to give ourselves to love Jesus in return for what He has done, and OBEY His COMMANDMENTS! (John 14:15, 23)

That is FAITH in action. That is Grace in action!
PRAISE GOD FOR HIS LOVE!

What, you might ask, has all of that got to do with PACIFISM?

When Jesus allowed himself to be put to death – unjustly – he left us the **ultimate** example of PACIFISM IN ACTION.

He didn't need to let it happen! He could, he said, have called 12 legions of angels to his defence!

BUT HE DIDN'T resort to that violent answer. Instead he chose the way of non-violence and non-resistance, and committed his cause completely to God. And he calls us to follow that same self-sacrificial example.

*“For to this you have been called,
because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example,
that you should follow in his steps.
He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips.
When he was reviled, he did not revile in return;
when he suffered, he did not threaten;
but he trusted to him who judges justly.
He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,
that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.
By his wounds you have been healed.”*

(1 Peter 2:22-24)

CHAPTER 13

CHRISTIANS, POLITICS AND VOTING

THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

In Australia we live under a system of government known as **Democracy**.

This is traditionally defined as:

- Government of the people,
- By the people,
- For the people.

This means that the people of the nation rule over themselves.

Decisions are taken by a vote in which all citizens are required to participate. When a vote is taken the will of the majority prevails and the constitution requires the minority to submit to and support that decision.

On most matters the people are required to delegate their vote to Parliament which consists of a number of representatives, appointed from among the people, to speak and act on their behalf.

For the appointment of these representatives, the nation is divided into a number of areas, called electorates, each of which elects its representative, from time to time, by a system of preferential voting. All citizens are required to participate in this process.

Occasionally, a particular issue is considered of sufficient importance for all citizens to exercise an individual vote in a Referendum, at which the will of the majority prevails.

The system is complicated by a system of party politics, in which groups of people join together to promote particular policies in Parliament.

When elections are held the party with the most members elected to Parliament holds the balance of power and the mandate to implement their policies.

Sometimes independent candidates, who do not belong to any political party, are elected on the basis of particular policies which suit the mood of their electorate. However, few independents have any real power to influence policy unless it also happens to suit the party in power.

The Majority vote.

It is often not realised that, in a democratic system, all who participate in the voting process are committed to accept the majority decision.

Participation in arriving at the majority decision, implies responsibility for abiding by and implementing that decision.

Preferential Voting.

In a preferential voting system, even the candidate least preferred by any minority, may be favoured by the majority, and thus become the representative to whom ALL, including the minority, must delegate the power to speak and act on their behalf in Parliament.

This means that ALL who vote, share responsibility for the actions of their elected delegate and, ultimately, the combined decisions of Parliament.

Christians in Parliament.

Christians elected to Parliament, either as members of a political party, or as independents, are in a minority situation where they unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-16).

They will also find themselves with divided loyalties and a conflict of interest, serving two masters and two kingdoms, with different values and goals.

Parliament exists to do the will of the people who elected the representatives.

Christians live to do the will of God.

Christians who wish to enter Parliament as members of one of the major political parties must first sell their soul, their conscience and their undivided allegiance to the party in order to gain the necessary pre-selection nomination from the party.

No Christian can do this without, in some way, denying Jesus before men.

Christians who wish to enter Parliament as independents must first win the popular vote of the unbelieving majority in their electorate. This inevitably requires ear tickling and compromise.

Democracy and The Kingdom of God.

God's kingdom is not a democracy. It does not run on the popular vote of unbelievers. His kingdom is a **theocracy** in which there is only **one** will, **one** opinion, **one** vote.

Christians who delegate their authority to representatives, elected by an unbelieving majority, will one day have to answer to God for their part in giving power to a Parliament which has legislated in favour of such things as:-

- Abortion
- Prostitution
- Homosexuality
- Gambling
- Easy divorce and remarriage

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS.

Three times Jesus refused to become ruler of an earthly kingdom.

1. He refused to bow down to Satan in order to gain the throne.(Luke 4:6-8).

Christians who sell their souls to a political party, compromise their position, or tickle the ears of unbelievers, in order to win the vote, have bowed down to Satan to receive a throne.

2. He refused to be made ruler by the popular choice of the people. (John 6:15). For those who follow Jesus and share in his kingdom, this excludes any thought of seeking power by democratic process.

Christians who participate in the democratic process, have assumed a part in rulership of an earthly kingdom which, in so many ways, is in rebellion against God.

3. He refused to allow his servants to fight to establish an earthly kingdom by force.
(John 18:33-36).

His kingdom is not of this world. In his kingdom the only power to rule, is that of love. He does not impose his will by legislation or the force of numbers, but says simply, "*If you love me you will keep my commandments*". (John 14-15).

His servants will not choose any other way.

GOD RULES IN THE KINGDOMS OF MEN

In His sovereign will and for reasons not always revealed to men, God often allows men to come to power whose actions could not be endorsed by any follower of Jesus. (Daniel 4:17,32,35).

Too often, Christians who claim they have prayed to find God's will, before voting for a particular political party, are found to have given their first preference against the one that, for His own reasons, God raises to power.

Too often, other Christians find their first preference in power, and acting in rebellion against God.

There is a sober warning in this.

HOW CAN A CHRISTIAN STAND OUTSIDE THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM?

- By refusing to seek earthly answers for problems which require heavenly answers.

This world needs the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not a better parliament!

- By not taking part in the rulership of the people, by the people, in a kingdom "of this world".

- BY NOT VOTING AT ALL!

BUT ISN'T VOTING COMPULSORY?

Yes Voting is compulsory unless you have a valid excuse.

To refrain from voting on the grounds of conscience, arising from religious conviction, is regarded by the authorities as a valid excuse.

However, the onus is on the individual to establish that he does have a valid reason for not voting.

Usually this excuse is requested in writing. If the excuse is not offered or accepted, a fine can be imposed. In any case, when conflict arises, the Christian is called to obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

WHAT ABOUT VOTING INFORMALLY IN SECRET?

This is not really an option for a Christian.

Firstly, it is against the law to deliberately vote informally.

Secondly, such an action, taken in secret, is hardly the way to confess Jesus before men. (Matthew 10:32-33)

THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY.

The role of the Christian in our society is to call sinners to genuine repentance. The more effectively this is done, the more likely it is that the democratic majority and minority, both, will reject us as readily as they did our Lord.

Any Christian who finds himself elevated to power through the favour of the unbelieving world needs to search his heart in the light of the warning issued by our Lord:-

"Woe unto you when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."
(Luke 6:26).

CHAPTER 14

CHRISTIAN PROSECUTORS?

What we say here applies not only to Christian Prosecutors, but also to Christian Magistrates and to Christian Police Officers and to Christian gaolers and to Christian Executioners!

Bible Digest gives due respect to those Authorities whose role it is to make and enforce the laws which govern our community. So far as we know how, we obey those Authorities and keep those laws.

Nor do we attempt by force or politics or civil activism, to impose our conscience on others who are comfortable with the involvement of Christians in the "Law Enforcement Industry".

But we do assert that those who claim to love Jesus and obey Jesus, ought to be PEACEMAKERS who live by the PERSONAL non violent standards which are to be measured by nothing less than ALL the teaching of JESUS, in the Sermon On The Mount and other places in the Gospels. That teaching, taken to its logical conclusion, effectively disqualifies Disciples of Jesus from any involvement in any of those areas of employment.

Christian Prosecutors and Police and Magistrates and Gaolers and Executioners, would do well to ask themselves some hard questions about their understanding of the story of "The Woman Taken In Adultery". (John 8:1-11)

The story is well known.

There is no doubt about the guilt of this "prisoner"! She was caught in the act.

The penalty under Jewish law was DEATH BY STONING. (And that Law was set in place God Himself!)

When asked what should be done with her, Jesus did not question at all what the law said. But He did ask a VERY awkward question about who was free to carry out the Death Penalty. He said "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

As it stood, there was only ONE in that crowd who was without sin! AND HE SAID "Neither do I condemn you".

In speaking as he did, Jesus removed from ALL OTHERS WHO OBEY HIM, the right to carry out the Death Penalty (or any other penalty for that matter) **and He declined to carry it out Himself!**

In doing so He did not bend the Law, ignore the Law, abolish the Law, or change the Law, but FULFILLED the Law! (Matt 5:17)

That means that Jesus found something in the Law that made it RIGHT not to inflict the immediate penalty! (Right for His Father who made the Law, right for Himself as Son of God, and right for all others who obey Him).

Our question for Christian Prosecutors is this :-

Mr. Prosecutor, are YOU without sin? Of course you are not!!!!

Then how can you possibly claim the approval of Jesus for the pursuit of a career which will effectively cast that first stone at MANY OTHER SINNERS who find themselves in the same position as that woman?

We KNOW from the example in that story, that JESUS **would not** act to carry out that Death penalty.

Would Jesus then take the role of prosecutor? Would He call the witnesses for the prosecution to give the evidence which convicts?

Would He demand that the Jury convict, and that the Judge impose the death penalty? Would He press for the the full weight of the law in other ways?

Would Jesus :-

- Throw the switch on the electric chair?
- Pull the latch on the hangman's trapdoor?
- Drop the cyanide capsule into the gas chamber?
- Give that lethal injection which puts a man down like a dog?

Would Jesus command (or silently condone) what He would not do Himself, for those who call themselves disciples?

I think not and that story about the woman taken in adultery is my reason for believing that I have heard him right!!!

Yes, I do believe in a FUTURE Judgment! And I do believe that THEN (and ONLY THEN) Jesus will become the judge who imposes FINAL sentence on unrepentant sinners!

But that is not for TODAY!

For today Jesus continues to say :-

"Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her."

Will we hear Him? and will we love Him enough to obey Him? at any cost?

I cannot answer that question for anyone else, nor can I impose MY conscience on anyone else,

But I can suggest that you go direct to Jesus with your answers to those questions!

Chapter 15

Christian Policemen

There is no disrespect intended here for those dedicated men and women who devote a lifetime to the preservation of law and order in our society.

Indeed God says that "*they that bear the sword*" in our secular society are "*powers that be*" (Romans 13:1) APPOINTED BY HIM as "*ministers*" to restrain and punish evil. (Romans 13:3-4)

And He commands that we honor them and respect them. (verse 7)

However that does NOT mean that God approves of Christians working in that role!

Many of the activities which are essential elements of the Police "job specification" are incompatible with TRUE Christian Discipleship.

THE OATH OF OFFICE

Police must swear an OATH of office before they are admitted to active duty. In cases where religion forbids the swearing of an oath, an "affirmation" can be an acceptable alternative. Christians of course do NOT swear oaths, but that is not the real issue here. It is the content of the oath (or affirmation) that is the real problem. It requires them to

"SEE AND CAUSE - HER MAJESTY'S PEACE TO BE KEPT AND PRESERVED - AND WILL PREVENT TO THE BEST OF MY POWER - ALL OFFENCES AGAINST THAT PEACE"
(quoted from - THE THIN BLUE LINE - **OATH OF OFFICE - Police Officer**
http://www.policensw.com/info/misc_gun/oath.html)

THE JOB SPECIFICATION

In the performance of their Oath, amongst other duties, Police Officers must:

1. use "reasonable force" to subdue violent parties resisting arrest, or attacking other members of the public.
In extreme circumstances that includes "deadly force".
2. bear arms in the execution of their duties.
In most cases this means they carry batons and/or guns which they are required to use if necessary.
3. prosecute offenders to the full extent of the law.

Of course all of these are in direct conflict with the NON VIOLENCE commanded by Jesus in the "Sermon on the Mount" for TRUE disciples.

NOTE

This paper reflects information applicable to the Police Forces of Australia. Readers are encouraged to check local conditions in their own countries for themselves.

However it is noteworthy that in many other less "civilized" countries police are renowned for extreme violence, including the use of torture, to extract information and confessions. How could a REAL Christian in those countries possibly be a member of a Police Force in which such activities are condoned?

Chapter 16

Christian Pacifist Tax Withholding?

**“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Jesus)
“Pay Taxes to whom taxes are due” (Paul)**

Many Pacifists argue that it is morally wrong to finance war by paying taxes. Because of this some have resorted to war tax resistance, either by refusing to pay tax at all, or by withholding the percentage of their tax, estimated to be spent on the armed services.

Of course this form of non-violent civil disobedience is illegal, and anyone who refuses to pay tax can incur significant penalties.

The Bible spells out the answer in clear words!

Christians do not need to agonise over any perceived moral dilemma about paying taxes of any sort! Regardless of what use the Government makes of them, good or bad

**CHRISTIANS ARE OBLIGATED TO PAY THE TAXES
IMPOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT!**

For those who want to follow Jesus,
THERE IS NO OTHER OPTION AVAILABLE!

The Bible verses quoted at the top of this page say it all! (But we will say a bit more anyway!)

When Jesus said "*Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s*" (Matt 22:21) He was answering a simple direct question from Pharisees who were seeking to find an occasion against Him. They had asked "*Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?*" (Matt 22:17)

Those Jews to whom Jesus spoke, were living in a land under military rule from Rome. Israel was occupied by Caesar's army! And there was no doubt at all, that some portion of the taxes that He told them to pay, was a "*war tax*"!

So, in simple obedience to Jesus,
Christians pay their taxes even their war taxes!

"Let every person be subject to the governing authoritiesnot only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due."
(Romans 13:1,5-7)

"Be subject for the Lord's sake, to every human institution" (2 Peter 2:13)

"Let none of you suffer as a wrong doer" (1 Peter 4:15)

Those who incur penalties for avoidance of Tax do so as the result of disobeying a direct commandment from Jesus.

They are NOT being persecuted, and they are NOT martyrs!
They are suffering as wrongdoers.

CHAPTER 17

PACIFISM - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following selection of questions and answers is taken from the "PEACEMAKERS FOR JESUS" Web Site at URL - <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~houslrd/pacifist.htm>

These questions are amongst those most frequently asked by opponents of Christian Pacifism. Some of these questions are very emotional in personal terms. They are usually asked in an attempt to show that The Sermon On The Mount is "impractical", and that violence MUST be used (at least sometimes) to overcome evil! And they are often asked by those who have not yet repented of their own support for, or personal involvement in warmaking!

Of course the consequences of turning the other cheek and never attempting to overcome evil with evil, can indeed be VERY costly. But that does not mean that Jesus got it wrong!

Question 1 - Do you think it was wrong for Christians to fight against Nazi Germany during World War 2?

Of course, I am NOT condoning the evil that Germany inflicted on the rest of the world!

But from a different perspective, I guess the GERMAN Christians who fought against "our side", and who were on the receiving end of all those Thousand Bomber air raids, and the aftermath of D-DAY, are still wondering about that!

Christianity cuts across national boundaries. German Christians and Christians from other nations, who truly love each other, (John 13:34-35) will NOT shoot at each other FOR ANY REASON. Instead they will lay down their arms and pray together!

From opposite sides of the conflict, in common cause, they will LOVE each other and love their enemies. They will love both sides with equal fervour, blessing both, doing good to both, and praying for both. (**And they will do that without engaging in any acts of treason against the government which rules over them.**)

If we take the Sermon on the Mount seriously and literally, as I believe Jesus means us to, (otherwise WHY DID HE SAY IT AT ALL?) it is no more acceptable for a USA, English, Russian, or Australian Christian to fight and kill and destroy in self defence, than it is for a German Christian to do the same in aggression.

In that war neither side was TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK. Neither side was loving enemies, blessing enemies, doing good to enemies, praying for enemies.

Indeed, I can recall that the churches of the day were full of Christians who were actively PRAYING AGAINST the enemy. In those prayers they were effectively CALLING DOWN CURSES on the enemy!

As a child during World War 2, I heard many conversations by adults, in which the common theme was revenge! The good guys, were all actively TAKING vengeance on the enemy, instead of leaving it to the wrath of God. (Romans 12:18-21) They were actively overcoming evil with evil, (which is the OPPOSITE of what Paul says in that passage).

Question 2 - If I were a German during World War 2, I would rather have died than served in that army.

Many German Christians did die rather than serve in the German army. (They were shot.)

Some years ago I met a German migrant to this country, whose father was one of those German Christian Conscientious Objectors who were shot by the German authorities, for refusing to go to war. He and his family paid a very high price for his faith in Jesus.

It is less well known that in most wars, there have been AMERICAN Christians have gone to prison, rather than serve in the USA army!

I have not heard of any being shot, but I have read one story of a couple of young Hutterite Anabaptists who died in prison, (in WW1) as the result of the mistreatment they received at the hands of unsympathetic gaolers)

In Australia, some of my older friends did serve prison terms for refusal to bear arms in WW2. Others narrowly escaped prison, but for punishment were sent far away from their families for several years, to carry out civilian work activities of "national importance".

Some years later, during the time of the compulsory military training which was in force here in Australia in the 1950s, my brother and several friends were refused recognition as Conscientious Objectors and served military prison sentences.

More recently, in America during the Gulf War, more than 2500 U.S. soldiers filed for Conscientious Objector discharges. Of these nearly 100 were imprisoned. (This last piece of information from a survey by the War Resisters League)

I don't have statistics for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, but it can be expected that there will be many soldiers who have applied for recognition. There was one case which made the headlines recently, about a US army sergeant already in prison, who was granted reduction of a prison sentence being served for his refusal to serve in Afghanistan because of his religious beliefs as a Christian.

Question 3 - Is there such a thing as a "just war"?

It isn't our fragile HUMAN concept of justice which decides whether we fight or not! Our conscience about fighting in any war ought to be shaped by what Jesus said.

With the experience of a lifetime behind me, I have discovered that HUMAN perceptions of justice are often influenced (sometimes very subtly) by an individual or national self interest!

I have also observed that the general population's perceptions of justice seem to depend to a very large extent on who writes the propaganda to which they are exposed!

In any case, my understanding of true justice is contained in what Jesus says about non resistance to evil. That leaves no room at all, for meeting force with force, or aggression with aggression. It leaves no room at all for returning evil for evil in any shape or form.

Question 4 - What am I supposed to do if I see my wife or daughter or sister or mother about to be raped? Would you not use violence to save them from a "fate worse than death"?

This is a VERY EMOTIONAL question!!! (Emotion is regularly used in this way to attempt to manipulate the feelings of pacifists!)

Of course EMOTION says This MUST be a case where Jesus has got it wrong! This time I have to fight! Surely this is one case where ***it must be O.K. to get violent!***

Alas emotion often jumps in ahead of common sense!

What if common sense takes a second look and says "Oh no! He is seven feet tall and has a black belt in Karate, or is the World Kick Boxing Champion, or here I am a cripple in a wheelchair?" (or something else equally impossible for MY HUMAN ABILITIES).

I am helpless! Violence won't win the day. I must find another way.

Then Faith intervenes and FAITH says "*for with God NOTHING will be impossible*" . (Luke 1:37) (And with God nothing is impossible not even combining obedience to Jesus with the protection of the potential victim without resorting to violence.)

It is my belief that the best protection I can give to any victim of aggression, (potential or real) starts with, and ends with, NON-VIOLENT obedience.

I can pray!!! I can place my own safety on the line by intervening VERBALLY with something that God gives me to say at that moment for that need, and then I can wait for God to move in answer to my obedient response.

If it does not work that way I have no better answer!

However, the nature of temptation and testing being what it is, I cannot expect God's intervention until I have faced the prospect of total loss and committed myself unreservedly to obedience.

If there is any point at which I will abandon my obedience and then take things into my own hands, my faith falls short of what it needs to be.

Read the story of those three young Jews who were cast into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 3) Their obedience was not conditional on God saving them from the fire. It was unconditional, whether God saved them or not. They obeyed because it was right to obey. And THEN they were saved!

We will never walk with the angel in the fire, until we come to that point.

Now having said all that, there is a promise in the Bible that is my security. (And the security of anyone whose safety is in my care). That promise tells me that God will never place me in a position which is more than my present level of FAITH can bear!

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 says "*Therefore let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*"

If I am committed to obedience and overcoming, THERE IS ALWAYS A WAY OUT!

GOD SAYS SO! And with a promise like that, who wants to tie God's hands by planning ahead for disobedience?

I am not saying that finding the way out will always be comfortable. At the outer limits of faith, it seldom does feel comfortable!

Question 5 - *If I allow a burglar to invade my home and kill me, how will I ever be able to minister to the burglar or anyone else?*

It seems much more logical for me to shoot the burglar, have him arrested if he survives my gunshot, and then minister to him!

I am so glad Jesus didn't think that way about those who crucified Him!

Alas if you shoot the burglar and he dies, he is LOST for ever!

Actually, it seems much more logical to me, to show the burglar that even in the face of death, you are committed to turn the other cheek, in obedience to Jesus!

It seems much more logical to show Him that loving Jesus, and obeying Jesus, means more than life!

In any case, perhaps it is not your place to minister to the burglar. Perhaps in God's plan, that is left much more effectively to someone else, after you are dead!

And perhaps your faithfulness unto death Rev 2:10 & 12:10) could be the turning point for His salvation. (I do believe that Paul's presence at the death of Stephen was a major milestone in the process of his conversion).

Isn't that what carrying a cross is all about?
