



## **Lutheran Theology and the Witness of Peace\***

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The Lutheran Church is not normally considered to be one of the “historic peace churches” of Christianity. Even the question of conscientious objection appears to be a rather recent concern within its traditions. Consequently the relationship between the Lutheran theological tradition and the pursuit of world peace, with special attention to pacifism, could be considered an attempt to mix “oil and water.” Aren’t pacifists the Anabaptists of the Reformation whom Luther refuted so resoundingly for being deficient in their obligations to the wider society and for turning the gospel into a law?

But the gap that might be perceived between the legacy of Martin Luther and today’s peace movement is more a matter of perception than reality. Present-day reflection on peace must center around two significant problems that were absent from Luther’s time and place: the nationalism of nation-states and the advent of nuclear weapons. When one reevaluates the Lutheran heritage in terms of today’s new meaning of warfare, connections are obvious.

In the first section of this essay I will review three positions from the “Lutheran tradition” that have been used as a basis for constructing an approach to the question of war. Two of these are the theory of the “two kingdoms” and the “just war” theory, both of which have received a level of formal recognition in Lutheran church bodies. The third is a position that understands nuclear war as a sign of the coming Battle of Armageddon and uses the “holy war” or “Crusade” theory, a position that has been rejected in official Lutheran statements and yet is expressive of the actual position of many Lutherans today. In my analysis, all three of these positions are internally weak in the area of understanding the Lutheran view of human community and, therefore, all three tend to have been used to give uncritical support of nationalism and wars of nation-states. Finally, in the second portion of this essay, I

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propose an alternative basis for a Lutheran approach to peace, rooting the witness to peace in the act of justification by grace through faith.

### **I. THE LUTHERAN TRADITION ON WAR**

Within Luther’s theology one finds the streams of thought that prepare for the more international and global perspective of the interrelatedness of human community that today’s pursuit of peace demands from the churches. And the core of Luther’s theological framework, in

particular his focus on justification, faith, and righteousness, has direct relevance for today's situation. When nuclear war hangs as a threat over all, the Lutheran churches have no choice but to raise their voices and deeds emphatically in favor of world peace and international cooperation.

It is therefore incumbent upon Lutheran theology to articulate peace on earth as God's will that is being achieved through the lifestyles and commitments of people. It is imperative that the personal and corporate witness of the church's discipleship is clearly on the side of peace and against war, a Christian pacifism that is accountable to the facts of history.

### *What is Pacifism?*

There is no common definition of pacifism. It can be defined as a strong position against an individual's participation in military service, including a renunciation of violence in solving human disputes. Some pacifists reject any form of military service and violence, while some people consider themselves pacifists while not claiming that all wars will always be unjust, leaving open the possibility of military service in a particular war effort.

Some pacifists are opposed to military service but will accept any alternative form of civilian work such as working in munitions factories. Others reject both military service and also any civilian work (including the payment of taxes) that would directly or indirectly support a war effort.

Pacifism's adherents have varied in terms of whether they reject all war, or only most wars, and whether the violence of warfare can be meaningfully distinguished from the "legal force" of unjust social structures and political institutions. In North America the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and The American Lutheran Church (ALC) have recognized both conscientious objection (a refusal to engage in any form of military service) and also selective conscientious objection (a refusal to be a combatant in a specific war or military exercise) when the basis of that position is a person's faith in God and a conscientious decision that all war or any particular war is unjust.

Arguments in favor of pacifism and world peace have generally been developed from two kinds of perspectives. First are the arguments based on appeals to universal humanism and pragmatism: peace is in the common good, and pacifism (as a rejection of war) is the most practical way of achieving peace and minimizing violence even if it means the apparent surrender of a country to an "outside enemy." This form of argument was common in the first part of this century but was dealt a serious blow in the 1930s when the League of Nations

found that moral persuasion was insufficient to stop the expansion of Japan, Germany, and Italy. Despite this apparent setback, the pragmatic argument has been revived in recent years with some people arguing that there is no pragmatic justification for any use of nuclear weapons. The ALC has formally recognized such a position as "nuclear pacifism," namely, the belief "that any use of nuclear weapons is unjustifiable" ("Mandate for Peacemaking," 1982).

A second form of argument in favor of pacifism is developed purely on the basis of religious conviction irrespective of the pragmatic success of pacifism. Peace and non-violence are the way in which God's people are intended to act in this world regardless of the consequences; it is a matter of faithfully following God. Luther's "theology of the cross" is an

important resource for developing this position. To uphold pacifism on the basis of religious conviction has been traced back to the beginnings of Christianity, and this position was continued during the Middle Ages as one of the perfections to be sought after by monks and others who would be perfect before God. In the modern period some Christian nations have exempted clergy from compulsory military service, but only the traditional peace churches (such as the Quakers, Mennonites, Brethren, and Doukhobours) have seen pacifism as a calling for all people to practice.

In generalizing the traditional stance of the Christian churches in the modern world, it should also be added that the momentum has been to favor military service and war when one's nation is threatened by an outside enemy, but the churches have given a general call for pacifism when it comes to participating in civil disobedience or insurrection against the established state. This stance is being challenged today by a growing tide in the churches of the world that condones Christian participation in movements of social revolution to overthrow unjust governments, while at the same time advocating pacifism in terms of the relations between nations.

Perhaps today's most difficult challenge to a position of total pacifism is the Third World's experience of exploitation and injustice wherein revolutionary activity for social liberation is frequently seen as a justifiably better option than a passive rejection of revolutionary involvement, which leads to a passive acceptance of the injustices of the *status quo*. The personal journey of the Nicaraguan priest Ernesto Cardenal to a position supporting the Sandanista overthrow of the Samoza regime is expressive of the moral dilemma being faced. The situation can be compared to that of the German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who, during his year of studies in New York, was strongly influenced by pacifist sentiments (a position unheard of in German Lutheranism at that time) but who later was involved in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler and overthrow the Nazi government.

In such cases the question is one of discerning a legitimate use of force, and this is often evaluated in light of a person's own social standing. Is it possible to bring about major changes in social structures without "violence" being inflicted against those who hold power and privilege, whether it be the violence of personal injury or the violence of lost power? To liberate the oppressed from injustice means that the oppressors must be liberated from their power, and even the Hebrews' attempt for a "non-violent" escape out of Egypt was only successful when God liberated Pharaoh in the Red Sea.

Martin Luther knew "pacifism" in two forms. One was the passivity extolled in the monasteries as a "perfection"; the second was the pacifism of some of the early Anabaptists. In both cases Luther does not seem to have rejected the model of pacifism itself; rather, the brunt of his attack was to reject both of these movements for retreating from their responsibilities in the world. Both the monk and the Anabaptist had put themselves into a situation of being cut off from their neighbors in need. The serious offense was not so much their pacifism but their withdrawal from participation in the total human community in favor of their own narrowly defined communities of obligation.

Pacifism cannot be justifiably defended if it means passivity towards evil. Certainly one of the greatest problems faced by pacifists has been the tendency of the dominant powers

(including the churches) to see pacifists as persons unwilling to fight against evil. There is neither pragmatic nor theological justification for being passive while one's neighbors in the world community suffer from injustice, violence, or exploitation. To be a pacifist means to be actively working for justice and peace in God's world. To be a pacifist means to live in the fullness of the love of God for humanity, which means being continually present to assist the neighbor who is in need.

From the Lutheran point of view, pacifism cannot be accepted if it is a "selfish" action, but only if it is away of living constantly orientated towards serving one's neighbors in the human community. This orientation would mean that pacifism is ultimately an act of faith, an act of living under the grace of God. As the mode of Christian discipleship, pacifism cannot be restricted to any legalistic code that dictates in advance the legitimate moral choices for specific situations: specific facts of human need are one of the sources that will influence and direct one's conscience. God's call to discipleship is always embodied in the lives of particular people in particular contexts, and we cannot always decree in advance what God mayor may not call upon us to do.

The critical factor in defining pacifism is not to debate "what kind" of pacifism is legitimate but to regard pacifism within the total formation of one's disposition towards justice and peace, namely, faith in God, as a result of which different kinds of actions will be appropriate in different life situations. To reflect theologically on pacifism does not imply the exposition of a "program of action" for all situations in life; rather, it implies ongoing Christian reflection on the decisions and commitments that one has made in life by evaluating those decisions in light of the Bible and our theological traditions. The purpose of such reflection is to make our witness for peace more loving, more faithful, and more effective.

### *What is the Lutheran Theological Tradition?*

As with pacifism, "the Lutheran tradition" is also a variegated reality. Some tend to see it as a monolithic mass of doctrines, but this is far from being the case with the totality of the tradition. North American Lutheranism, perhaps because of its position as a minority religion, has tended to narrow the scope of what it means to be a Lutheran. It appears that this has happened by drawing upon certain German theological traditions that have emphasized doctrines as the defin-

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page 137

ing marks of "authentic" Lutheranism. But Lutheranism in Europe is a diverse collection of theological positions wherein Lutherans are largely united by the institutional structures of the state churches rather than any common allegiance to "doctrines" or even major portions of the *Book of Concord*.

The Lutherans who came to North America from Europe brought with them a cluster of theological traditions and practices, many of which have been ignored in the published works that outline "Lutheran" theology. The German tradition of Lutheran theology (which has wide divergences within itself) must be seen alongside the Scandinavian heritage (which tended to ignore both Luther and the *Book of Concord* for centuries). The academic traditions that emphasize doctrine (and, frequently, obedience to the state) must be seen alongside various streams of Pietism which emphasize the living of Christianity (including pacifism, which many

Pietists leaned towards). These are some of the many strains that are included in “the Lutheran tradition.”

The nationalistic Lutheran military theology of Nazi Germany must be counterbalanced by the flight of the South Russia Germans to the New World in order to avoid (among other things) conscription into the Russian army, showing that Lutheranism does not imply a blind obedience to “the state.” The Lutheran tradition includes Pastor J. P. G. Muhlenberg’s impassioned sermon in 1776 in favor of the American Revolution, after which he removed his clerical vestments to reveal the uniform of a colonel in the Virginia army. The Lutheran tradition includes Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer who avoided enlistment in the German army while at the same time the Lutheran pastors of Germany (including those of the Confessing Church) were enlisting en masse to demonstrate their loyalty to their state, even though many of them claimed to detest Hitler and the Nazi program.

The narrow nationalism and ethnic pride of some Lutheran groups contrast with the global and international witness of many Lutherans, and both are part of the Lutheran tradition. The sad legacy of Nazi Germany is counterbalanced by the post-war leadership of the German people in pursuing world peace and the work of the Lutheran Church in East Germany to provide for alternatives to military service in that country. The post-war era has also seen an alarming rise in U.S. nationalism that has adversely affected some programs of the Lutheran churches in that country, a recent example being the LCA’s statement on “Peace and Politics” which gives an uncritical divine blessing to current U.S. foreign policy.

In Lutheran theology some concepts (especially the “two kingdoms” and the “law and gospel” theories) have been used uncritically to allow the rise of nationalism and militarism, while the same concepts have been expounded by other theologians with quite different implications being drawn. In fact there are so many versions of these concepts that it is often difficult to separate “what Luther really meant” from the many subsequent interpretations of Luther.

The purpose of this present essay is not to refight the battles of the past but to draw upon positive sources in the Lutheran tradition to outline a theology that will hopefully affirm and expand the Lutheran witness to justice and peace in society. One cannot allow mistakes and aberrations from the past to limit the scope of one’s theological reflection in the present. New theological directions

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page 138

and possibilities for articulating the Lutheran witness to peace are being provided through such developments as the Lutheran Peace Fellowship, the ALC’s 1982 statement “Mandate for Peacemaking,” and the “Statement on Peace” currently being circulated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (official convention action on the statement has not yet taken place). The recognition of conscientious objection and selective conscientious objection by the ALC and the LCA also signifies the positive thrust that Lutheranism is making at the present time. And in this whole area the Lutheran churches of North America are still “catching up” with the heightened concerns and awareness of the Lutheran churches in Western Europe and parts of the Third World.

### *The Two Kingdoms Theory*

For many Lutherans a discussion of any issue that involves church and state must begin

by recognizing the “two kingdoms” theory. Luther himself never spoke of a “two kingdoms” theory. Rather, the phrase refers to a later summarizing of Luther’s comments on church-state relationships by Lutheran theologians. Luther frequently spoke during the Reformation about the need to distinguish the functions of church and state in society. The core of Luther’s position was that church and state are entrusted by God with different means of accomplishing God’s purposes in the world, two different ways of “governing” (“two kingdoms”). The individual Christian is at one and the same time a subject of both kingdoms: both a member of a political realm and also a member of the Kingdom of God which is represented in the church. The state makes civil laws and has the “power of the sword” (the authority from God to coerce people to obey those laws). The state also has the power to raise armies to provide for legitimate defense against invading states. The church, on the other hand, has no authority to use the power of the sword. Its only “weapon” for the spreading of faith is the power of God’s Word, in particular the power of persuasion. Luther was critical of the church of his day for being too involved in the exercise of political functions but even more importantly he was concerned about the political leaders meddling in the affairs of the church. In theory Luther did not subordinate the state to the church, nor the church to the state; rather, both are equals with different spheres of responsibility. The individual Christian is responsible to both.

In later Lutheran theology the “two kingdoms” theory emerged in different forms. In a more conservative form, Luther was interpreted as meaning that the church should never interfere in any of the actions of the state. The state is concerned to provide for people’s material needs, and the church is concerned only about people’s inward spiritual needs. The church is not to be concerned about the material estate of people, nor is the state to be concerned about bringing about obedience to the Christian faith. Because it is the state which has the power of the sword, it is not the role of the church therefore to decree which military actions might be legitimate—it is the calling of the ruler to make that decision. The only responsibility of Christians is to obey their rulers in the material and political sphere. Consequently, participation in military duty is ex-

pected of Christians since they are members of the kingdom of this world; however, in terms of their participation in the church, they are called to be totally passive, renouncing all self-defense and self-justification, quietly suffering injustice rather than selfishly fighting for their own good.

The two kingdoms theory has also received some more positive interpretations so that the following position could be defended: the two kingdoms represent different functions in society but not a distinction between different kinds of moral claims. Both the church and the state have social responsibilities. Essentially the two kingdoms theory is seen as recognizing the fact that different people in different circumstances must follow different procedures in exercising their social obligations (i.e., a prince has a different set of obligations and procedures to follow than does a pastor), but this does not mean that Christian morality terminates when one leaves the church building. Christians are to bear witness to God in everything they do in life, even if they are engaged in government leadership, being a court magistrate, and so forth. They are responsible in each of these different callings to follow the procedures appropriate to their task. Consequently, the two kingdoms theory would expect the church to protest wars of national self-interest and greed. Although the church must not exercise the power of the sword, it does have an obligation to appeal to the state to exercise that power in a just manner.

The various interpretations of the two kingdoms theory indicate that caution should be exercised in appealing to it, if in fact there is a desire to maintain it. In the United States (and in Canada) the two kingdoms concept has been consistently misunderstood by seeing it as a variation of the separation of church and state practiced in the United States (which Luther never intended). The essential moral problem created is the tendency of the church to give an uncritical blessing on the state to do what it wants to do, the church not being willing to provide a critical voice of conscience or protest.

A major study of the history of the “two kingdoms theory” has been done by Ulrich Duchrow.<sup>1</sup> In looking at the variety of interpretations given this idea over the years and reappraising Luther’s own view, Duchrow sees positive potential in some of its aspects. The “two kingdoms” are God’s way of combatting the “kingdom of the Devil” that seeks to conquer God’s earth. The “two kingdoms” are thus working together to establish God’s perfect kingdom on earth in both a spiritual and a material sense.<sup>2</sup> Luther’s model emphasizes that people have the authority and the power to bring both the “spiritual” and the “temporal” realms under God’s service, thus strongly affirming the value of human works. Furthermore, the “two kingdoms” should not be equated with simply “church” and “state.”

But the “two kingdoms” idea, notes Duchrow, has been constantly misused.<sup>3</sup> One type of misuse has been “to support an undifferentiated adapta-

<sup>1</sup>*Lutheran Churches—Salt or Mirror of Society?: Case Studies on the Theory and Practice of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine*, ed. Ulrich Duchrow with Dorothea Millwood (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation Department of Studies, 1977) 1-27, 290-322.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 291.

tion to existing power structures, without any critical evaluation of them.” This allows nationalism to misuse religion with the state controlling the church. A second type of misuse develops “a dualistic differentiated adaptation to existing power structures,” thus making the connections between Christian faith and political responsibility ambiguous since religion and politics are seen as autonomous within narrow spheres of responsibility. Duchrow also feels it is erroneous to apply “law and gospel” to a two kingdoms framework, thereby implying that the gospel is only for the church and the law is only for the state.

Duchrow generally concludes that there are so many misunderstandings of key elements in Luther’s own idea, including the very term “kingdom,” that “these traditional concepts should be avoided as much as possible in further systematic studies.”<sup>4</sup>

From today’s perspective, responsibility for world peace cannot be limited to government officials; all Christians, especially in a democracy, bear responsibility for what their government does. The two kingdoms theory may define different functions for church and state, but it does not allow for a moral separation between “secular” and “Christian” spheres of responsibility. A Christian is responsible to the whole of society.

Perhaps the major problem with the two kingdoms idea is that it has generally proven to be uncritical with respect to the rise of nationalism in the nation-state world of today. Luther, of course, was unfamiliar with the nation-state concept, but today’s wars are essentially wars between nation-states. Instead of the nation-state model, Luther’s writings on society suggest a

broader concept of “community” wherein people are in relationships of obligation to one another irrespective of political boundaries and social structures. When Luther spoke of the obligations of the individual in society, he did not conceive of national boundaries being limits to one’s responsibilities, but that has been a common experience in the nation-state system. Modern “nationalism” can be defined as a religious zeal for one’s own nation to the detriment of other nations. Luther’s two kingdoms ideas were easily used by nation-states to promote uncritical allegiance to one’s nation no matter what it might do, in contrast to Luther’s own perception of transcending criteria for justice to which all states would be accountable.

Although Luther’s discussion of the “two kingdoms” has not proven itself to be a curb against nationalism, it has positive points that could be used profitably. One of Luther’s concerns was to reject the use of religion to justify war, something which he saw happening in the Peasant War of 1525 and on which basis he also criticized the Crusades of the Middle Ages. The positive thrust of this concern is evident in light of the way that modern nations have used religion to justify their own causes. To take Luther seriously on this point would call the churches to reject any attempt by governments to attach a religious blessing to a war effort, be it a blessing from a specific church or an appeal to a common “civil religion” of the people.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 318.

### *The Just War Theory*

In reading recent Lutheran church statements and talking with pastors and lay people, it is common to find appeals to the “Lutheran just war tradition.” The classical Christian theory of the “just war” argues that a Christian can justifiably be a soldier and engage in combat if the war is “just,” and the theory outlines a number of criteria that must be met in order for a war to be considered “just.”

However, prior to the 1960s, the use of the just war theory does not appear to have been widespread in Protestantism as a vehicle for opposing wars; it was primarily used to support wars. Persons supporting a war effort simply assumed that their nation was “just.”

The just war theory has had increased popularity since the Vietnam War as a basis for criticizing a particular war effort. Prior to this time, pacifists tended to be people who were opposed to all wars, under any circumstances, arguing perhaps that there never could be a just war. With the Vietnam experience the just war theory was revived by some to argue that, although they were not total pacifists, nonetheless they found this particular war objectionable and unjust. Consequently the Lutheran churches of the U.S. recognized selective conscientious objection to provide for these people.

The just war theory has received new life in recent years due to the increased feeling by many that the theory is valid and, further, that it actually is a criticism of war rather than an uncritical blessing of war efforts. Many now feel, for example, that any form of nuclear war would be unjust and therefore should be rejected, even though they personally might not argue that all wars are automatically unjust.

But the background of this theory is sufficiently questionable that caution should be exercised in referring to it as “an historic Lutheran position.” Although there is a brief and unamplified reference to “just wars” in the *Augsburg Confession* (Article 16), the theory receives no elaboration; and, in fact, Luther was totally silent about it. The classical just war theory with

its detailed analysis of how a war could be “just” was largely elaborated by the scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages whom Luther rejected, and his silence could be interpreted as a rejection of this theory of theirs as well.

Luther developed two frameworks when addressing the question of war. The first, noted above, was his two kingdoms theory on which basis crusades and insurrections were rejected. Second, in his treatise “Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved,” Luther developed a simpler but firmer stand against war between “equals”: the only justifiable war is a war fought in self-defense. “Worldly government has not been instituted by God to break the peace and start war, but to maintain peace and to avoid war”<sup>5</sup> (the immediate question at hand was whether there should be an offensive Crusade against the Turks, which Luther rejected, saying that the Turks should be attacked only as a means of defense).

<sup>5</sup>*Luther's Works: American Edition*, gen. eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (55 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress; St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-76) 46.118, also pp. 120-121, etc. Hereafter cited as *LW*.

In this treatise Luther sees ambiguity in trying to apply a universal law or rule to the question of Christian participation in war,<sup>6</sup> and perhaps he was thinking of the “just war theory” as being too detailed to guide Christian conscience. In what is perhaps a more direct reference to the just war theory, he admonishes Christian soldiers not to place any trust in the justness of the cause for which they are fighting, but to trust God alone. The Christian soldier should pray: “Dear Lord, you see that I have to go to war, though I would rather not. I do not trust, however, in the justice of my cause, but in your grace and mercy, for I know that if I were to rely on the justness of my cause and were confident because of it, you would rightly let me fall...because I relied upon my being right and not upon your sheer grace and kindness.”<sup>7</sup> This seems to suggest that Luther felt there never could be a “just” war but that the lack of a “fully just” cause does not mean that the Christian should avoid military service. Luther was defining a position that lies between the total pacifism of the Anabaptists and also any suggestion that Christians should automatically participate in any war they were admonished to support.

When considered from the point of view of its actual functioning in history, the just war theory has had problems and perhaps Luther was anticipating some of them. The just war theory presupposes a transcending criterion for evaluating justice to which the parties in a dispute can appeal, but in fact what usually happens is that people assume that their own nation has the just cause, and thus, instead of making it difficult for people to participate in a war (the clear bias of the just war theory), it usually becomes an easy religious justification for supporting the policies of one’s nation.

An appeal to a transcending norm was perhaps theoretically possible in the setting of the Holy Roman Empire when the Empire, undergirded by a common Christian faith, could present disputing factions with a different viewpoint; but the rise of nation-states meant that people were generally unable to perceive any vision of justice beyond the interests of their own nation.

Another problem is that the general bias of the just war theory, but also of Luther’s own viewpoint, is in favor of the *status quo*. Social structures and divisions of power are generally to be kept as they are. While this was blatantly obvious in Luther’s rejection of the Peasant War, it also underlies his view that war is only justified as a means of defense. Consequently the theory supports the vested interests of established powers.

If the just war theory is to be used, it must be undergirded by a broader vision of the scope of human community than that of the nation-state. Only from a broader framework of understanding might it be possible to perceive transcending criteria for justice, in light of which foreign policy decisions of specific nations can be evaluated. Only then can the theory begin to fulfill its intended function of being a check against war rather than a convenient way of appealing for religious justification of a war effort.

Perhaps one should not expect the “just war theory” to be a fully adequate basis for the Christian witness to peace since the theory was largely for-

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 123.

mulated not to advocate peace but to establish conditions for war. Specifically, the assumption is that the individual Christian is faced with the question of performing military service and seeks to establish guidelines for going to war. The wars of today are much more complicated and cannot be reduced to this specific individual decision. Advanced technology, chemical and biological warfare, and the advent of nuclear weapons have greatly minimized the importance of individual soldiers for a war effort. A much smaller number of people can bring about much greater destruction, and wars can even be fought with a large segment of the population refusing to enlist. A witness to peace must also include the citizen’s general support for a government and its foreign policy, the citizen’s payment of taxes and indirect economic support for a war machine, and the total framework of establishing peace among nations rather than simply preparing for a war, just or unjust.

### *Armageddon and the Holy War*

In addition to pacifism and the just war theory, the third major theory in Christian history dealing with war has been that of the Holy War or Crusade. This view was largely developed during the Middle Ages as a justification for wars designed to protect or expand Christendom. Although largely associated with the desire to conquer the Holy Land for Christianity, crusades have appeared in other forms as well.

Luther strongly rejected the Crusade or Holy War theory. This comes through in his writings against the Peasant War of 1525 when he admonished the peasants for using religious appeals to justify their cause, and again in his writings on the Turks when he argued that they could be resisted as a form of defense but there should not be an offensive war against them to expand Christendom. Luther’s “two kingdoms” theory held that Christianity could only be expanded by the power of the Word and persuasion, not by the use of force.

The relevance of this discussion for today is that, although there is a tendency to understand modern wars within the just war framework, in fact most have been fought as nationalistic “holy wars.” The assumption is that God is on the side of our nation (“For God and King,” “For God and Kaiser,” “In God We Trust”) and therefore God’s blessing falls upon the wars fought by our nation. The difference is that where the Crusades of the Middle Ages were justified on religious grounds, in the modern world nationalism has become a secular form of religion that demands the same form of loyalty. The religious zeal formerly attached to the Christian faith is now bestowed upon the nation.

This secularization of the crusade into wars of nationalism is a crisis of faith. People are asked to place their ultimate allegiance in a political system or economic ideology and to give their lives fighting for it. This is a form of idolatry.

This secularizing of the Holy War has also been developed in the U.S. and Canada by associating it with the “Battle of Armageddon.” In the book of Revelation, Armageddon is the site of a battle waged by God against the fundamental forces of evil on earth. This imagery has appeared in many places in a secularized form, Armageddon being interpreted as the coming battle between

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page 144

the United States and the Soviet Union. By applying a literalistic interpretation of the Battle of Armageddon to the nation-states of the modern world, the result is the conclusion that a final nuclear war between the superpowers is inevitable, it will be a showdown between American Christian capitalists and atheistic Soviet communists, and if nuclear weapons are used then it will be a most spectacular proof of the truth of the New Testament prophecy! Consequently this viewpoint gives justification for the manufacture and intended use of nuclear weapons by the United States.

This theory is also deficient in the area of social analysis. A broader vision of human community must replace a nationalistic view of the world. The New Testament does not portray the forces of good and evil as being divided by national borders; rather, God’s distinction between good and evil follows a different pattern. The “Statement on Peace” being circulated by the ELCC rebukes the idea as follows: “We deplore any attempt to use religion to portray the actions of any particular nation or social system as receiving divine sanction (Rev 13:7). God’s own war against the powers of evil does not respect the political boundaries of our nation-states.”

### *Community*

The ELCC statement develops a broader concept of community to speak against both the Armageddon mentality and also the use of nationalism to support war efforts. “The Church is called to be a fellowship of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17-21), a community of peace, made up of people scattered among the many nations of the world. The church is not defined by the boundaries of nation-states or economic ideologies, but by the person of Jesus Christ, who is the vine joining together many different branches (John 15:1-6, 1 Cor. 12:12-13). The church must demonstrate that the important divisions of the world are not national or ethnic boundaries. Rather, good and evil, justice and injustice, are found both within and transcending every human boundary.”

The ELCC document continues: “By recognizing that Christians are branches on a vine that transcends human boundaries, we are aware of the solidarity we have with all of the oppressed, the victims of injustice, and even our ‘enemies’...Wars are not simply fought between ‘nations;’ they are also fought between God’s children...A war against another nation can be a war against members of the body of Christ...In Christ we share a bond with those people that national, economic, and ideological hostilities must not diminish.”

Luther’s concept of community went beyond the question of formal religious adherence, but he did use Paul’s image of the church in 1 Corinthians 12 to describe the wider human community: “we are all one body of Christ the Head, and all members one of another. Christ

does not have two different bodies, one temporal, the other spiritual. There is but one Head and one body.”<sup>8</sup> Following Paul’s analogy, Luther sees all of the vocations of life as different functions that different people perform as parts of one Body, the purpose

<sup>8</sup>“To the Christian Nobility,” *LW*, 44.130.

for everyone being to serve their “neighbors” in the community. Luther envisioned a solidarity between all people in the context of community that ignored loyalties to a nation state or its hierarchies of power and economic ideologies. For Luther, the important thing in community life is not structures, cultural patterns, or the promotion of a “way of life,” but the important factor is service to the neighbor. In human community all people have certain mutual and inter-dependent obligations towards one another. The prince has obligations to the peasant, the baker has obligations to the pastor, and vice versa.

It is this assumption of the inter-relatedness of all of the members of human community that gives a primary basis for Lutherans to protest the division of the world into nation-states and ideological camps. It is the wider view of community, and our inter-relatedness with those who are victimized or oppressed in the world, that provide an important framework for interpreting the “two kingdoms,” “just war,” and “Holy War” theories. There can be no limit to the scope of the Christian’s commitment to justice and peace in society, for Christ is the one Lord of both the church and the state, both the temporal and the spiritual and allegiance to this one Lord prompts a unity and wholeness of allegiance in one’s life. The Lordship of Christ, the message of monotheism, the universality of the gospel, is a constant denunciation of all of the human barriers and divisions, hierarchical social structures and cultural ideologies that have been established between people.

The Lutheran churches have generally defined the synodical boundaries of their churches along provincial or national borders. The flag or other symbols of the host nation are frequently in view, and the singing of national anthems is not unknown in Lutheran gatherings. An important contribution to world peace would be the overcoming of the nationalistic perspective in favor of an international view of human community wherein the only important facet of our life together is to respect and care for the obligations we have for one another, and especially with our neighbors who are in need.

## II. LUTHERAN THEMES ON PEACE WITH JUSTICE

### *Justification and Reconciliation*

In outlining a Lutheran approach to witnessing for peace, the starting point should not be the negative question of responding to war (through pacifism, just war, or holy war theories) but a positive articulation of justice and peace as the core of Christian discipleship. Anew theological language is emerging, a language of peacemaking as represented in the thrust of the ALC’s statement “Mandate for Peacemaking,” and in the ELCC statement which likewise develops the ministry of reconciliation as abridge between pacifists and those adherents of the just war theory who are increasingly uneasy about war. Through these and many other recent statements from world-wide Christianity a new language of peace is emerging that calls for a united Christian witness for world peace rather than debating differences of past responses to “war.”

The ALC states the positive witness in these terms: “The gospel proclaims reconciliation between God and rebellious humanity, leading to peace among all God’s creatures.” The ELCC document sees the starting point as being the

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page 146

ministry of reconciliation, rooted in the reconciliation of justification with God, which encompasses inter-human and ultimately inter-national relationships: “the New Testament clearly calls for Christian discipleship to be the pursuit of reconciliation and peace. We are called to reconcile neighbors with each other, just as Christ has reconciled us to God (John 15:12). We are called to be God’s instruments in achieving peace and justice for others.”

In both of these statements one can perceive the presence of the central teaching of Lutheranism, the logical basis for a theology of discipleship of justice and peace: justification as the source and basis of Christian discipleship in the world. To base peacemaking on justification means to understand discipleship as an activity of the gospel rather than “the law.” It means that the pursuit of justice and peace is always an act of faith in God rather than faith in political or economic systems. It means that the only basis for analyzing social problems is people and interpersonal relationships, not laws or ideologies that demand a legalistic adherence regardless of the immediate circumstances.

Paul Althaus writes, expressive of a common Lutheran understanding, that “the doctrine of justification is not simply one doctrine among others but—as Luther declares—the basic and chief article of faith with which the church stands or falls, and on which its entire doctrine depends.”<sup>9</sup> Althaus also writes that justification is the starting point and source for Christian ethics: “Luther’s ethics is determined in its entirety, in its starting point and all its main features, by the heart and center of his theology, namely, by the justification of the sinner through the grace that is shown in Jesus Christ and received through faith alone. Justification by faith determines Christian ethics because, for the Christian, justification is both the presupposition and the source of the ethical life.”<sup>10</sup>

But all too often the Lutheran tradition has made justification an inward, private, individualistic event, ignoring its social and cosmic dimensions, and has then discarded it in favor of arguing for an “ethical response” to the gospel on the basis of a secondary idea such as the “two kingdoms” or “law and gospel.” Such secondary ideas detract from the unity and wholeness of God’s redemptive activity. The net result is that the Christian’s life of discipleship is no longer seen within the wholistic context of faith and grace but is placed into the context of works, law, and human strivings.

Likewise “the peace of God” has too often received an individualistic interpretation as one’s inward disposition towards life apart from its ramifications for world peace. But our relationship with God through justification, a relationship of justice and peace, is the source and model and power for a life of justice and peace with others in the human community; it is justification that empowers us to witness to God’s justice and peace in the world. The transformation of being reconciled with God cannot be separated from the transformation of all relationships in human community. The gospel of justification is not simply “talk” about reconciliation but rather the gospel is God’s *power* of reconciliation in the

<sup>9</sup>Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 224.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) 3.

world. Consequently the witness to justice and peace is not a “task” laid upon Christians but the natural disposition of Christians who live by God’s grace.

### *Justification and Commitment*

“Justification” is the process or event in which humanity is reconciled with God, being restored in a relationship of love and trust (faith) with the Creator and the creation. The reception of justification into a person’s life is signified outwardly by baptism. Baptism is the outward sign of the new working of God’s grace in a person’s life.

Justification is never a private or individualistic event; it is always social or communal, involving the believer, Christ, the entire Communion of Saints, the church on earth, and the community of all humankind. Justification is not the transformation of an individual’s essence but the transformation of one’s relationships in life: our relationship with God which includes our relationship to all other people and the rest of God’s creation.

“Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). The love of Christ which justifies us and restores our relationship with God is the same love which is shared through the Christian with other people. Reconciliation with God includes reconciliation with the neighbor; indeed, they are the same thing. “Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God” (1 John 4:7).

The 1982 national convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada adopted a “Statement on Justice” which bases Christian social concern on the experience of justification. The ELCC recognized justification as a source of commitment and awareness: “The source of commitment to social justice is the relationship of loving justice which God establishes with people. Our relationship to God through faith permits us to glimpse the reality of justice and peace and helps us to envision God’s original intention for the creation. Our impatience with injustice is rooted in what we have experienced of divine love, namely the just relationship we have with God through faith in Christ.”

Justification is the starting point for the Christian’s reflection on social injustice and oppression. Justification is our experiential confirmation that oppression and victimization are never God’s will for humanity. The experience of justification allows us to share in the “dream” of God’s future Reigning over all (the Kingdom of God) which will replace the “nightmare” of our present existence. Justification is the basis of our realization that there is “more” to life than that which is immediately obvious and that the present structures of social oppression and victimization are not our only choice: God’s reconciliation sets another choice before our eyes. Injustice, exploitation, and war are not God’s will for humanity, but the result of sinful humanity’s rebellion against the Creator.

### *Not “How” but “What”*

Much of the past theological study of justification has taken its agenda from the historic disputes of the Reformation when the central issue was the “how” of justification: are we justified with God on the basis of faith and therefore saved

by faith alone, as Luther held, or are we saved by a combination of faith and good works as the

popular view in the church of that day held? In general “what” justification is was not debated because the issue was “how” justification is achieved and the connection between justification and final salvation. Today the question of “how” justification is received must also include a clarification of “what” justification means and its implications for understanding the Christian’s life of discipleship.

The term “justification” means literally “to become just” or “righteous,” and the Greek word “justify” is the verb form of the noun “justice” or “righteousness.” For the authors and the original audience of the Bible, the connections between justification and social justice were clear and obvious. Justification is God’s activity of establishing justice (“righteousness”) in the world for all people, which establishes peace (*shalom*) as the result.

Although Paul’s use of the term “justification” has been the central interest of Lutheran theology, the Pauline texts actually say very little about what justification means because the vast majority of Paul’s texts focus on the “how” of justification. Paul develops the specifically Christian message that justice/righteousness is now received through faith in Christ and apart from “works of law.” Consequently biblical scholars have noted that the meaning of “what” justification is must be developed in light of the prior usage of the concept in the Hebrew-Jewish background.<sup>11</sup>

### *Justice as Relationship*

The Bible sets forth two possibilities for human life. Either we have a good relationship with God and our neighbors in human community; in which case we are “just” or “righteous” before God and neighbor; or else we have a bad or distorted relationship with God and neighbor, in which case we are “unjust” or “unrighteous” with respect to God and neighbor.

In the Hebrew Scriptures (the Christian’s “Old Testament”) the root *sdq* is used to form the noun “justice” (righteousness), the verb “to justify,” and the adjective “just” (righteous). When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into the Greek language around the year 250 B.C. (this translation is known as the Septuagint), the translators usually employed variations of the Greek term *dikaios* to translate the *sdq* terms.

There are several pitfalls in translating the Hebrew and Greek terms into our modern world of thought. A special problem we face is that although Western society has tended to separate justice from such concepts as love, mercy, and one’s direct relationship with God, the Bible does not isolate justice from these other aspects of God’s relationship to humanity. The Biblical concept is integrated into the wholeness of life and, specifically, all of one’s relationships.

<sup>11</sup>Gottlob Schrenk, “*Dike, etc.*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76) 2.187: “the term [*dikaios*] obviously follows very strictly the OT understanding.” Cf. also Alan Richardson, “*Salvation, Savior*,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Buttrick *et al.* (4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 4.173.

in life. The expansive meaning of the Hebrew *sdq* is illustrated by the variety of English words used to translate it in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, including justice, righteousness, justify, vindication, deliverance, salvation, saving deeds, saving help, righteous help, equity, uprightness, truth, triumph, victory, and prosperity.

Biblical scholars are increasingly seeing the primary meaning of the *sdq* terms as referring to inter-personal relationships seen on a cosmic scale: relationships with God, with all of humanity, with the whole world of nature. Justice is God's power that harmoniously relates the entire creation to its different elements. However, human sinfulness is constantly rejecting God's power of justice, so that God's intended balance is upset. The process of salvation is the story of God working to reinfuse the world with justice so that its corollary and end result of "peace" will be experienced by the whole creation.

In his theology of the Old Testament, Gerhard von Rad summarized the importance and expansiveness of justice as follows: "There is absolutely no concept in the Old Testament with so central a significance for all the relationships of human life as that of *sdq*. It is the standard not only for man's relationship to God, but also for his relationships to his fellows, reaching right down to the most petty wranglings—indeed, it is even the standard for man's relationship to the animals and to his natural environment. *Sdq* can be described...as the highest value in life, that upon which all life rests when it is properly ordered."<sup>12</sup>

The exact nature or "requirements" of justice will vary from one context to another, and any individual person will operate in life with many different kinds of relationships; yet God's power of justice is one unifying element. There is no distinction or separation made between "secular" versus "religious" relationships: all of life is sacred; the activity of relating to others is a common characteristic of both God and humanity. It is God's justice that sustains the entire life of the community.<sup>13</sup>

To say that justice is "relational" is not to say that it is a form of "relativism." A position of ethical relativism would claim that there are no transcending standards to make a moral evaluation in specific situations; there is nothing beyond the immediate relationship between two people that can function as an outside guide or source for evaluating the situation. If justice were simply a human activity, invented by human culture, then ethical relativism would indeed be the result. But because justice has its source in God, it can never be made totally dependent on human whim.

Israel knew that God was just because God always acted justly towards her people: it is God's actions for justice and liberation that provide the transcending vision of justice. The most important basis for understanding justice was always God's own actions with respect to the world. People are called "to do justice" because of God's own activity of salvation (e.g., Isa 56:1). God's actions are loving, truthful, compassionate, just, forgiving towards the victims of injustice, and they are judgmental towards the perpetrators of in-

<sup>12</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Volume I: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 370.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 374-375.

justice, and because of God's activities there is a transcending basis for knowing about justice.

None of these activities, of course, provides specific details of action for specific life situations, but this revelation does correct the temptation either to reduce justice to ethical relativism or, on the other hand, to ground its transcending attributes in some form of "natural law" which blindly decrees what is and is not right to do in the world, inevitably concluding that that which "is" is that which "ought to be."

## *Peace*

Closely related to the concept of justice is peace (so closely related that I prefer to use the phrase “justice and peace” to refer to God’s activity with respect to human life). The Hebrew term *shalom*, usually translated as “peace,” frequently overlaps in meaning with the Hebrew *sdq*.<sup>14</sup> *Shalom* can be translated as completeness and wholeness, with connotations of health and prosperity, spiritual and political harmony, and blessing. It means safety and good life, security, harmony between history and nature, political security, the absence of warfare, and making treaties of nonviolence. Again there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular, the personal and the corporate: “peace of any kind is a wholeness determined and given by God.”<sup>15</sup> Peace and justice are bound together because peace is seen as God’s activity and gift which is the result of justice (Isa 32:17).

To understand peace as the fruit of justice means that we cannot regard the simple absence of war between nations as a sign of peace: peace must be based on justice. One of the serious shortcomings of the LCA statement “Peace and Politics” is that it too quickly sanctions the quest for “security.” “Temporal peace” is seen as “the work of God’s preservation” instead of the work of God’s redemption. Consequently approval is given to “peacekeeping” as simply the negative prevention of war, using “mutual threat” to establish “security” irrespective of the presence of justice in human community. Then “peacekeeping” is to be supplemented at some time by “peacebuilding” which is “the establishment of the conditions of justice among people.”

The problem is that the sanctioning of “peacekeeping” without justice puts the cart before the horse: there is no peace here. Order and security are elevated over justice. We should never speak of “peace” in any form unless justice is its presupposition. The gospel of peace reveals that the lack of exterior violence is not peace: preoccupation with external security only supports oppression and injustice within nations. “Peace” is only present when nations are both internally and externally at peace. To seek security “at any price” means that the victims of injustice are paying the price.

<sup>14</sup>E. M. Good, “Peace in the Old Testament,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 3.704-706.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 705.

## *Christ and Justification*

From the Christian viewpoint our reconciliation with God is possible because of the initiative God has taken towards us in the person of Jesus Christ. God’s grace means that the infinite God became a finite human being so that there would no longer be a barrier between the finite and the infinite. In this re-union with our Source (we are the “image of God”) our relationship with the Creator is healed and once again made whole. God’s agenda for the world becomes our agenda, not that it is “our” work, but it is God’s will at work in us because we are incorporated into Christ.

The experience of grace is never individualistic because it always comes to us in an interpersonal, community context: there is no “unmediated” access to God. We only know Christ when we know our neighbor, and we only know God’s will as we know our neighbors’ needs. In Luther’s terminology, we find Christ in our neighbor because our neighbor is Christ for us.

It has been noted that the continuity between the pre-Easter message of Jesus and the post-Easter message of the early church is found in Jesus’ message of the coming Reigning

(“Kingdom”) of God, a message which the early church transformed into God’s Kingdom being present in the person of Christ. We must understand Paul’s idea of justification within the context of his Christology and Jesus’ message of the Kingdom. But a tendency in many Lutheran (and other) circles has been to approach the Scriptures backwards by interpreting Christ and the Kingdom within the context of an individualistic interpretation of justification. Jürgen Moltmann feels that some Lutheran interpreters have been misled by taking Romans 4:25 (Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification) as meaning: the *only* reason Christ died and was raised was to make possible our personal forgiveness of sins. The prominence given to Romans 4:25 in the *Augsburg Confession* (Article IV) and the *Schmalkald Articles* (Section II) is seen by Moltmann as contributing to this false and narrow interpretation.<sup>16</sup> However, neither of these confessional documents actually limits the meaning of justification to a personal forgiveness of sins, and neither claims that Christ, Church, and Kingdom have the promulgation of individualistic forgiveness of sins as their sole purpose for being. The problem Moltmann addresses must have its source in later schools of Lutheran thought.

Moltmann goes on to note that for Paul personal justification is not the “goal” of the Christ event. Rather, the goal for Paul is the total reconciliation of the world, the total Reigning of Christ over all, the new community of people united with the “Son of God.” Furthermore, the initial reconciliation of justification, in Moltmann’s view, leads directly to Paul’s focus on “new life” for believers. For Paul, “God did not deliver Christ up merely ‘for our sins’ He was, in general, not merely raised ‘for our sakes’; he was raised for the sake of the new creation of the world and the universal lordship of God.” Justification is always orientated towards Christ and God’s future.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation: Collected Essays*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 165, also pp. 151-152.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 166.

Ulrich Duchrow, from his study of the “two kingdoms” concept, reached similar conclusions on Luther. God’s righteousness is being infused into the whole world (temporal and spiritual, political and private, church and state) in order to bring about the perfection of God’s Kingdom. “Luther’s conception of the doctrine of justification may be said to express the flow of God’s righteousness into the whole of His creation. Faith under his spiritual governance and sanctification under His temporal governance indicate simultaneous processes—the first personal, the second corporate.”<sup>18</sup>

To be justified is to be grafted into the vine that is Christ (John 15), thereby being joined with all of the other branches on the vine in an intimate, mystical way. To be justified is to become a member of the physical “body of Christ” on earth, thereby standing in a new relationship with all of the other members of the body, that we may work together the work of Christ in the world. To be justified is to share one another’s burdens as Christ has shared our burdens. To be justified is to love our neighbor as ourselves. To be justified is to experience righteousness and *shalom*, justice and peace, and to live by the power of God’s will without compulsion. To be justified is to experience the fulfillment of our life in terms of its *telos*, its intended purpose and ending. To be justified is to discover Christ in our neighbor. To be justified is to walk where Christ walks—with the poor, the oppressed, the victimized, with all those who

are suffering from social and natural violence. To be justified is to live a life of justice and peace.

### *Justice is not a Human “Virtue”*

For Paul the essential problem was to demonstrate that the justice of God is now given to people apart from the “works” which they have performed to earn this gift. In reading Paul we must note two sources of difficulty: the Greek meaning of “justice” and the Jewish debate over justification.

The New Testament writers followed the pattern of the Septuagint by using the Greek *dikaios* terms to translate the Hebrew concept of *sdq*. But unlike the Hebrew understanding, the Greek-Roman concept of *dikaios* held that there are certain eternal and absolute standards of virtue, and human justice is the attempt by people to attain those virtues in their lives. The mixture of Greek-Roman thought into later Christianity often led to the idea that “justice” is ultimately rooted in God’s Law which is an absolute and eternal standard for human conduct, and therefore “justice” is a human pursuit to imperfectly approximate God’s standard on earth. With this development the connection between justice and the gospel was obscured.

Because of the inevitable gap between a divine ideal of perfect justice as a virtue, and the sinful and imperfect human attempts to approximate that ideal, Bible translators have often used the term “righteousness” in texts which they feel refer to the divine standard or activity, and they have used “justice” in those texts which they feel refer to inter-human attempts to approximate the ideal even though the Greek or Hebrew terms are identical.

<sup>18</sup>*Lutheran Churches—Salt or Mirror*, 308.

This decision of translation is further complicated by the meaning in English, as well as in other Western languages, of the word “righteousness” which in non-theological usage has the nuance of “uprightness,” being virtuous. by the standards of a law or norm. Our English word “justice” has similar problems insofar as it is defined in light of our secular courts of law which attempt to “approximate” a standard of justice in a specific case or situation at hand.

Although the Greek term for justice as a virtue is used in the New Testament, biblical scholars in our century generally conclude that the primary meaning in the New Testament is derived from the Hebrew concept of *sdq* rather than the Greek and Roman concept of law and virtue.<sup>19</sup> Paul is speaking about God’s justice known through relationships, not a standard or virtue to which one must attain.

### *Justification Precedes Works*

A second factor in understanding Paul is the debate on justification in his own day. In those texts where Paul speaks of “justification” his one concern is “how” justification is received. His message is clear: it is received through faith for the sake of Christ, apart from a person’s obedience to “works of law.” The one condition is faith: when we trust God to rule over our lives we are justified by God.

Within the New Testament the vast majority of usages of the *dikaios* vocabulary is found in Paul’s letters to the Romans and the Galatians. Paul apparently only uses “justification” terminology in passages where he is disputing the “Judaizers”<sup>20</sup> or, as they are more properly identified in Galatians, “the circumcision party.” This was a group of early Christians who

advocated the full Jewish law as binding on all Christians, especially Gentiles who converted to Christianity. Thus Paul uses the justification terminology primarily in the context of a debate against the legalism of the circumcision party probably because justification was an important term in their vocabulary.

What was the dispute with the circumcision party? In the Gospels we can see Jesus addressing problems of legalism in religion. A common view of the day had placed all facets of the Jewish law (cultic practices, rites, ethics, and later traditions of interpretation) on an equal standing. Jesus, however, emphasized a theme from the prophets calling for distinctions to be made between the more important and less important matters of the law. It is more important to practice justice and to help one's neighbor than to obey laws prohibiting activity on the Sabbath; love of God and love of neighbor are the essential plank in light of which the rest of the legal customs are to be evaluated.

The important matter for Jesus is not law but love or, as an equivalent, a relationship of faith with God. Earlier Israelite traditions had emphasized the

<sup>19</sup>Above, note 11.

<sup>20</sup>John Reumann, *"Righteousness" in the New Testament: Justification in the United States Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue* (Philadelphia and New York/Ramsey: Fortress and Paulist, 1982) 41, 55-56. However Reumann disagrees with the conclusion that therefore justification was not an important concept for Paul.

importance of faith, and Jesus repeated that message with an emphasis on love as the defining quality of faith. To have faith in God means to love God and neighbor just as God has loved us.

Paul uses the language of justification when engaged in a similar kind of debate. In his debate with the circumcision party, Paul was arguing "how" God was establishing the "new humanity" on earth, the new community of justice and peace. The Christian message was that the Kingdom is now in the process of fulfillment; therefore one can now participate in the Kingdom of the last days by being justified with God on the basis of faith in Christ. But the circumcision party apparently argued that doing the works of the law was the precondition for God declaring people to be just and, therefore, agents of justice and peace in the new human community of God's Kingdom.

No, said Paul, justice received through Christ is God's justice received apart from the law and human fulfillment of works of law. Obeying the law cannot be a precondition because, if you take the full scope of the law seriously, no human being can ever attain to all of the good works defined by the law. Obedience to God's will is not a precondition (if so, no one could be saved) but rather is God's promised fulfillment, that which God will bring about in the lives of those who have been justified through faith. God will be at work in the lives of those who trust Christ to bring about conformity to the divine will of justice and peace in their lives. The precondition is faith in the sense of surrendering our own ambitions and desires and trusting in Christ to act in our lives.

### *Faith and Hope*

The message of justification through faith is a message of hope that casts out fear from our lives. Fear of death and judgment, fear of the power of evil is conquered by Christ's Resurrection. To merely pursue peace as external security is to live by fear; but if we live under

the gospel of justification, then faith casts out fear. It is “fear of the enemy” and the desire for security that legitimates the militarization of our society. To live by the gospel means that fear is being taken out of our lives so that our motive for peace is not fear but love. This is the basis not only for the Christian’s approach to national foreign policy, but it is also a reminder for the “peace movement” which occasionally exposit “fear of nuclear war” as the motive for peace. Faith means learning to reject the motives of both fear of war and fear of the enemy in favor of love as our motivation for peace.

Christian faith does not mean a blind trust that God will deliver our souls from the evil of this world; rather, it means that we are joined into the God who is working to redeem the whole of creation. Christian hope is not naive optimism: it is hope within despair and in spite of despair, hope that is sensitive to the brutal facts of history while recognizing that history alone does not define the meaning and limits of human existence. There is “more” to life than our world presently recognizes. It is the Christian vision of the “more” that keeps the witness faithful regardless of the difficulties of the apparent situation. As noted in the ELCC statement, “whether or not all war can ever be removed from history, our calling as Christians is not to condone [war] but rather to be a light

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page 155

to all nations regarding the paths of peace and justice.” Our call is not to be successful but to be faithful. It is faith that orientates our lives rather than the quest for apparent “success.”

Christian faith and hope might seem like another illusory ideology except there is an important difference: God’s hope is undergirded by God’s power. God’s power is no magic guarantee that things will go as we desire, but it does mean that we are strengthened to continue the daily struggle against sin, strength which we receive through the ongoing renewal of our lives in daily repentance and Holy Communion. Every day God’s power renews us in a relationship of justice and peace so that the renewal of all relationships in the world might proceed at God’s pace. The cross of Christ draws us to take up the crosses our neighbors must bear so that in the cross we are joined together with all who suffer, all who are victimized, all who suffer from injustice. By God’s grace we know that the ultimate victory belongs to God alone—not to any single nation or social system. In the words of the ELCC statement, “there are many opportunities before us to counter the messages of fear and despair being propagated by those promoting war. We continue to work and witness for peace as an act of faith in God the Creator....The ultimate victory belongs to God alone.”

### *God’s Power of Salvation*

The important factor is not our own accomplishments but God’s grace being allowed to work through our lives in the world. There is “growth in faith” but this “growth” can hardly be categorized into different steps or moments of life, nor can it be easily divided into states of “justification” versus “sanctification.”

Righteousness (justice) is not simply a verbal label that God assigns to us for the sake of Christ, but it is also the power and activity of God at work in our lives. This understanding has always been present in Christian traditions, but the recognition of this point in recent Lutheranism owes a certain debt to biblical scholarship. John Reumann credits Ernst Käsemann for proposing in 1961 that “the righteousness of God” is not simply a gift (as Bultmann noted,

arguing against those scholars who had placed “the righteousness of God” into legal categories) but it is also the *power* of God.<sup>21</sup> As a power, the righteousness of God “compels those whom it addresses to enter into its service.”<sup>22</sup>

More recently Moltmann developed the theme as follows: “The righteousness of God which reveals itself in the gospel to the godless is therefore both gift and power, assurance and promise, obedience and liberty. It does not yet set man down at his goal, but only puts him on the road to it. It makes him part of the process through which God establishes his divinity, his justice and his glory, and brings the whole creation into his own liberty....It is possessed in the rejoicing of the divine sonship and in sighs shared with the whole suffering creation—the one is not without the other.”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 50, citing Ernst Käsemann, “God’s Righteousness in Paul,” *The Bultmann School of Biblical Interpretation: New Directions?* (*Journal for Theology and the Church* 1; New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 100-110.

<sup>22</sup>J. Reumann, “Righteousness” in the New Testament, 51.

<sup>23</sup>J. Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, 166-167.

The reality of God’s loving justice as a power infused into human life means that subdividing the salvation process into “steps” misses the point. God’s power is at work in our lives making us just, bringing about Christ’s good works through us, establishing peace with justice in the world, and providing us with a daily reaffirmation of our reconciliation with God. The problem in the Lutheran academic tradition has been making justification only a word of forgiveness so that “sanctification” becomes only a series of reaffirmations of this word of forgiveness. But God doesn’t pronounce judgment without supplying a remedy for the injustice; nor does God pronounce forgiveness without supplying the power to overcome sin.

There has been debate over whether the person involved in justification is “just in fact” or whether God is engaging in a verbal fiction: “for the sake of Christ I’m going to pretend that you’re just even though you aren’t.” The positive aspect of the latter interpretation is that it expresses the truth that God justifies those who are sinful. But the view of a verbal fiction has serious problems, such as making God to be a liar, and more importantly it becomes the basis for condoning all manner of evil works that are suddenly “hidden from God’s sight,” making it possible for people to claim to be “Christian” regardless of the lack of any Christ-like qualities to their lives.

The problem in this discussion is that the starting question poses the wrong alternatives. When God’s justice is understood as a *power* entering human life (rather than merely a verbal action) leading to God’s justice being expressed in that person’s life, the false dichotomy of a passive reception of forgiveness versus a life of loving justice towards the human community is overcome. It is the power of grace received in baptism that makes it possible to witness to God’s justice and peace, the power of God which will bring about good works in and through our lives.

### *Growing in Faith*

Justification is the basis of future *hope* but not a total fulfillment of the future in the present. Justification “puts us on the path” to the future fulfillment, but insofar as God’s justice is given to us freely as a gift, we are already in a state of total justice and salvation. Insofar as we

continue to live without faith and justice in our lives, we are in need of God's ongoing forgiveness and restoration of faith and justice in our lives.

Luther's understanding of the problem of shortcomings in the Christian's life has been seriously misrepresented by some. One can find a position which holds that the life of justification is *simul justus et peccator* (simultaneously one is a perfect saint and also the worst of sinners). The argument in question goes: "we are totally perfect saints insofar as we are passively just before God on the basis of faith, but as soon as we try doing some good works we inevitably fall into sin and must therefore be driven back to our state of passivity." Because the underlying concept is dialectical, we expect no improvements to our condition in life, no improvement in our moral character; rather, we continually fall into total sin until we die, at which time God will make us perfectly saints and the dialectic will be abolished.

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page 157

This understanding of sanctification fails to understand Luther's own position. Luther developed the concept of *simul justus* later in his career (specifically in the Galatians commentary of 1534) and the idea is clearly intended to supplement his earlier views on sanctification but not to supplant those views. According to the analysis of Paul Althaus, for Luther "God would, under no circumstances, declare man to be righteous if he did not also intend to make a new man out of him and if he had not already begun to do this with the gift of justifying grace."<sup>24</sup> Hence, says Althaus, the event of justification, is "the beginning of the essential righteousness created through Christ's effective presence in faith."<sup>25</sup> "The already present righteousness is both a complete and partial act, depending on the way in which it is viewed. It is complete when viewed as acceptance by God and as participation in Christ's righteousness....It is partial as man's new being and new obedience."<sup>26</sup>

Or, in terms of his discussion of "alien righteousness" and "proper righteousness," Luther said that our alien righteousness (from God) does make us totally saints, but the fact that we continue in various ways to present obstacles to God's grace in our lives means that the actual inherent righteousness of our own selves remains imperfect. It improves with time, yet remains imperfect. The proper understanding of Luther's *simul justus* is not that there is no process of improvement or maturing with respect to righteousness, but that the maturing process takes place within the framework of our total justice before God through Christ and our imperfect actualization of that justice because sin continues to work in our lives.

### *Law and Gospel*

The Lutheran academic tradition has frequently reached theological dead-ends by applying its theory of "law and gospel" to the salvation process. In this specifically Lutheran theory (other churches do not recognize it) our first experience of God is that of "law," namely, feeling God's wrath and anger towards us because of our sin of failing to do everything that God requires of us, therefore arousing guilt and leading us to despair. Our second experience is the gospel which is defined as God's word of forgiveness for our sins which is supposed to free us from our guilt. But because we remain imperfect, and the law continues to accuse us for our imperfections, every day we fall into sin again and feel God's anger against us, and every day we must renew our reception of God's forgiving words in the gospel.

The law-gospel theory is often related to the "two kingdoms" idea, saying that God's will

on earth is expressed through two diametrically opposed means, the law and the gospel. But just as the two kingdoms idea has received a great variety of interpretations in Lutheranism, so has the law-gospel theory. Sometimes it is used to object to the infusion of Christian principles into social issues (by saying that the gospel cannot be turned into a law) and sometimes it is used

<sup>24</sup>P. Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 236.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

to defend Christian social action (if one accepts the law as having a so-called “third use,” the ability to inform Christian ethics without exercising an accusatory function).

God’s law is revealed not only in the Bible but also in “nature” through the reason and conscience of all people. In addition to this general awareness of God’s law, civil governments are understood as enacting laws that ought to be in conformity with God’s law. To the extent that a Christian is a member of a political society, the two kingdoms theory would say that the social involvement of Christians is only allowable within the framework of the law, and one should not attempt to bring about a specifically “Christian” ethic of the gospel in the social-political realm. The revelation of the gospel is only a guide for life within the context of the church.

As with “justification and sanctification,” the law-gospel imposition of a time sequence into the salvation process is problematic since it accounts for neither the biblical evidence nor the life experiences of many people. When Jesus called the disciples to “follow me” he didn’t first preach the law to arouse their guilt; they simply obeyed his call to discipleship. This was the starting point of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s alternative to the “law-gospel” theory developed in his book.

### *The Cost of Discipleship*

The Lutheran law-gospel sequence must assume that God has *two* kinds of power at work for salvation, undercutting the unity of God’s power of salvation and coming close to denying monotheism. The field of Christian “ethics” becomes meaningless: what is the point of saying we “ought” to do something when, before we have even done it, we know we will fall short of what God requires and hear only God’s condemnation driving us back to the spoken word of forgiveness and away from completing actions of justice and peace in the world? The law-gospel theory, with its presupposition that everything we do falls under law, and that under the law we receive daily condemnation, relativizes all of God’s commandments into one lump of sin in need of repentance so that no theological distinction can be made between greater and lesser evils.

This form of the theory would say that there is really no moral difference between the militarist who causes a war and the pacifist who resists that war; in either case the person falls short of the perfection demanded by the law and stands condemned, and therefore both are simply persons in need of God’s grace and forgiveness. Such a viewpoint makes any study and discussion of issues irrelevant and leads to a blurring of the specific demands of the gospel in different situations.

A theology based on “law and gospel” will constantly focus attention on the guilt and forgiveness of the moment, spending a great deal of time making sure that people feel guilty and forgiven, and what is lost is the all-important vision of God’s promises for the future. The future

becomes simply “heaven” at the expense of the future of human life in history. For example, the traditional interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount in the school of “Lutheran orthodoxy” sees it as a list revealing God’s commands we have broken; hence it is only an instrument for God’s law to arouse guilt within us for falling short of the

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page 159

required perfection. On the contrary, a proper reading of the Sermon on the Mount sees it as words of promise—God’s promises of what God’s power *will* bring about in the lives of disciples.

Understanding the future promises of God’s grace for human life is important for the justice and peace ministries of our churches because the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount and similar texts is important for establishing a biblical basis for the pursuit of justice and peace. Too often I have encountered people who categorize church programs for world justice and peace as legalistic and guilt-arousing, and it certainly is true that, when one looks at the problems facing today’s world, there is a lot of guilt that is appropriate for church members to take upon themselves. But I have heard people say that they just can’t look at yet another problem in life because they feel so guilty, and yet they can’t do anything about resolving the problem.

In preaching and teaching justice and peace in our churches, we must make certain that we are encouraging people from the perspective of God’s grace and promises, not from a threat of God’s law. The revelation of problems in the world should evoke healthy guilt in us, but there is a difference between healthy guilt and unhealthy guilt. Healthy guilt leads to positive action to remedy a problem; unhealthy guilt leads only to selfish introspection and ethical paralysis. We need to look at the problems of injustice and war from the perspective of God’s grace: let us thank God that we are made aware of the problem, let us thank God that we can therefore do something to resolve the situation, let us thank God that Christ is at work to redeem sinful situations, and let us have the strength to follow Christ into those situations.

Guilt is never a legitimate motivation for Christian action; only the loving justice of faith is a legitimate motive. In order to have the witness of our churches proceed from the basis of a healthy motive it would be helpful to remove the “law and gospel” framework from our approach to social issues, following, for example, Bonhoeffer’s use of the theme of “discipleship.” The gospel of justification, justice and peace, must be the one source of our life and witness. The church’s theology must provide the guidance, support, and encouragement needed for Christians to live a life that combines an inward disposition of faith and love with the outward actions of justice and peace. Both a legalism of works and an inward preoccupation with guilt and forgiveness must be avoided.

We need to affirm the Bible’s wholistic approach to salvation, the wholistic nature of the Christian life in which God conforms our desires and our deeds to God’s power of justice and peace. God justifies and sanctifies us, and the power of God seeks to be at work to bring about the good works of God’s justice and peace through us. Our calling is to stop resisting God.

Because justification orientates our lives to God’s future, justification is the basis and epistemological norm for all actions of justice and peace. In Moltmann’s language of the eschatological framework of justification, we do not have a blueprint for the future but we do have an “anticipation” of the future in the present. This anticipation involves both knowledge and

deed, understanding the future as it relates to the present and understanding the present as it

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page 160

relates to the future.<sup>27</sup> Consequently it is the gospel that critiques our present historical reality because the present reality of society falls short of what God intends it to be.

To live by faith and grace is to live a life witnessing to justice and peace in the world. This cannot be construed as “pacifism” if pacifism is defined as a legalistic avoidance of force in all situations of life. In the Lutheran context, ethical obligations are always defined by the needs of one’s neighbors in the human community. We are to remain totally free of any ideological bondage so that God’s power of justice and peace may work through our lives.

If pacifism means an uncompromising rejection of war, then Lutherans indeed ought to be pacifists. To live by faith means to acknowledge a higher source of truth than any nationalism. God’s justice and peace never sanctions or even condones war, but always works for the uplifting of the human community. The important thing is that our faith always directs us to our neighbors in need, the victimized and the oppressed of the world, so that their agenda becomes our agenda through Christ. To follow Christ means to surrender selfishness and personal gain totally in favor of “the others.” To follow Christ means to renounce the Devil and all of his works and all of his ways, including the ways of war and violence. The practicality of pursuing peace is not always evident in the world, but God’s grace means that our works need not appear “practical” in order to be accepted by God. We are not called to be “successful” but to be faithful to the gospel.

Is there a Lutheran basis for pacifism? The recognition of conscientious objection and selective conscientious objection by Lutheran churches answers in the affirmative regarding direct participation in war. But we need to go beyond the specific question of the individual enlisting in the military to see the witness of peace with justice at the very center of the life and teachings of the church. Pacifism in the broader sense of a witness to actualize peace is not simply “an ethic” or an “optional issue” that some might find interesting, but is at the very center of the gospel itself. When we come to understand the gospel in its fullness we will come to understand Lutheranism as an “historic peace church.”

<sup>27</sup>J. Moltmann, *The Future of Creation*, 41, 45-48.