

The Theological Basis for a State of Peace on Earth:
Why a Genuine ‘Peace Movement’ Can Never Be Political

by

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Abstract

Having previously exposed the irrational basis of State policy in rejecting the application of an ‘irenical perspective’, this article advances a Christian theological foundation on which a state of peace will be achieved through the building of God’s Kingdom on earth. This is done by presenting relevant aspects of the author’s Reader training essays in 1999 which addressed these questions before their practical implementation became possible. A Church Times article in 2011 was the basis for applying a biblical theology to global conflicts using a formula and the results of the trial ‘Peace Games’ of the International Peace Project focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at January 2006. The consequences of not making, or ignoring such assessments, are illustrated with respect to South Sudan and the Holy Land. The nature of the pacifist movements in the 1930s and 1980s indicates that the only genuine ‘peace movement’ is educational and/or religious in the legally charitable sense. The distinction between biblical and secular ‘prophecy’ is briefly summarised to underline the latter in relation to the dangers of another Great Power war arising from the flawed post-Cold War peace settlement.

Background

This Paris Peace Conference Remembered series has already established, and none have attempted to refute, that in England and Wales:

- (i) There is no doubt that, in general, the advancement of international peace is a legally charitable, rather than a political, object based on a judicially defined ‘irenical perspective’ of 9 October 1998, endorsed by the Court of Appeal on 28 June 2000;¹
- (ii) The failure of the UK government to apply an irenical perspective (though the term itself was not explicitly used) is the central conclusion of the Iraq Inquiry Report;²
- (iii) Every Attorney General since 10 March 2000, and the current and previous charity regulator have rejected the application of an irenical perspective with the willing complicity of the Court of Appeal that approved the principle in the first place.³

Thereby the rule of law has been subordinated to government lawyers; strategic principle abandoned to political expediency.

Purpose

Having revealed the irrational basis of State policy in opposing an 'irenical perspective', this article now seeks to demonstrate the Christian theological foundation upon which a state of peace will be achieved through the building of God's Kingdom on earth. Thereby to contend that the only genuine 'peace movement' is educational and/or religious, in the legally charitable sense, working in harmony with the laws of God, summed up in the Golden Rule, as the ultimate determinant of peace or war, whatever public opinion and politics may say.

This article, though, can only be an outline of the issues and challenges relating to its Purpose and not a comprehensive treatment which would have to come later, Deo volente.

Method

The theological issues relating to the stated Purpose may be summarised as follows:

1. The divide between the secular and the theological and how it is to be bridged;
2. The relationship between Church and State in terms of the Church's central mission;
3. The 'building of God's Kingdom on earth' and whether this term is justifiable.

The practical aspects of applying a biblical theology to global conflicts are then considered, via the author's Church Times article of 3 June 2011, in relation to the secular International Peace Project (IPP) and its 'Peace Games', made possible by the judgment of 28 June 2000, to determine a conflict's direction towards peace or war in the short and long term.

A brief assessment of the consequences of *not* making such objective assessments, as in relation to South Sudan, or ignoring them, such as in the Holy Land, will be undertaken. Moreover, the persistent failure of 'peace movements' as they are commonly called, though really pacifist movements even though most people involved in them are probably not pacifists, can be explained by their focus on political policy rather than a just evaluation of each party's position in the conflict. (The logos of IPP and CND bring out this difference.⁴)

The relevance of a secular 'prophetic ministry', and its difference to a biblical one, will be highlighted though both involve the application of irenic criteria not public opinion. This leads to the striking provisional conclusion that *the prophets of old were right in their understanding of how the world works and modern political scientists are mistaken.*

Finally, the significance of the upcoming Armed Forces Day (29 June 2019) focused on Salisbury, the scene of last year's nerve agent attack, will be highlighted for clergy and laity.

God's Kingdom

All the author need do is to repeat selected aspects of his Reader application and training, concurrent with his legal case in the 1990s already cited. The training involved essays of direct relevance to the Purpose here. A Reader or Licensed Lay Minister (LLM) is an officially recognised role in the Church of England dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, which this author has held since 26 September 1999. However, it should be emphasised that the author writes this article simply as a life-long member of the Church of England, and a consultant on the direction of conflict towards peace or war, and not as a Reader or LLM.

It is also necessary to note that, at this stage, only Christian theology is addressed – although this will inevitably touch on the shared Jewish scriptures – but the link to the other Abrahamic faiths, in particular, and our common pursuit of God's purpose of peace/shalom/salaam must follow at a later date.

1. Calling to Reader Ministry: The Sacred/Secular Divide

The relevant aspects of the author's application of 20 November 1995 include his experience:

The attempt to integrate faith and life over the years since [reading peace studies at Bradford University in 1977-81] has taken place in a variety of contexts, both academic and practical. It has further developed my understanding of the way to peace in international relations and in industry, within the perspective of the Kingdom of God... Only now am I beginning to see how the Holy Spirit might be calling me to help bridge the cultural gap between the Christian mission and the secular world.⁵

On Reader Ministry, he wrote:

During this year I have reached the point in my studies at which I understand better than ever before why the world's way, in our own time, tends not to produce lasting peace at an international or industrial level, even when the opportunities for this arise. Conversely the Christian gospel and the teachings of Christ as 'the way that leads to peace' have assumed a new clarity and power for me. So I believe that a reader ministry would enable me to encourage the faithful and also to engage in the missionary work of the Church.

With support from his vicar and Parochial Church Council, he was accepted as a Reader candidate by the Oxford Diocese and began his three years of training in 1996.

2. The Relationship Between Church and State: Its Effect on the Christian Mission

One 'Church in Context' course essay submitted in March 1999 was on the importance of the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine for the future of Church-State relations, which has long been recognised. The author examined this issue '... in terms of the nature and impact of the altered Church-State relations on the historic mission of the Christian Church and the "peace" it was instrumental in bringing into the world.'⁶

This examination led to findings of direct relevance, from the early fourth century AD down to the present day, as set out in this lengthy quotation below:⁷

The Reign of Constantine

....

In conclusion a Christian theological perspective leads to a very different answer to the essay question than a secular perspective. In opposition to our Lord's own clearly stated principle (Mark 12v17) the Roman State had sought, during the Diocletian persecution and on many previous occasions, to force Christians to render to Caesar that absolute devotion and service that is due to God alone. Ultimately the State had failed. The victory of the Church without force of arms but with persevering faith in Christ ensured that during the reign of Constantine the State could never be the master in this sense. That whole period of history was dominated by intense religiosity and concern for life after death so the future aspect of the kingdom of God was bound – in the absence of any theological corrective – to be uppermost in the minds of Church leaders as it was in individual believers and converts. The Constantinian turning point created vast new opportunities for the primary mission of the Church and the peace it was instrumental in bringing into the world. Baus is right, from this future perspective of the kingdom of God, to speak of the 'final success of Christianity.'

However, there is also an inescapable truth in the proposition that in the reign of Constantine the Church gained a master. Less important were the obvious signs of the Emperor's direct involvement in ecclesiastical matters, particularly as this was at the Church's own behest. For what it indicated was Christian failure to resolve differences about doctrinal truth and other matters in a way that upheld the Church as a present sign and instrument of God's kingdom on earth. The causes of this lay in the pre-Constantinian era where the habits of intolerance and worldly exercise of power by the bishops became increasingly entrenched. It was thus a failure to live by the Church's own values, that is, under the sovereignty of God's reign of love on earth which ensured, as Kee puts it, 'Constantine's victory... over the church and its Christ.' The bishops were not at fault in resisting heresy or seeking obedience from their flock; their error lay in thinking that this could be achieved by coercion and, for this purpose, by engaging the services of the State albeit under an Emperor sincerely believed to be Christian. Yet Kee's focus on the present aspect of the kingdom of God also contains a deep flaw: he neglects that very other-worldliness which as an essential part of the Gospel message ensured that Constantine's victory could only be partial and temporary. Even if, in a sense, Christ is crucified again and abandoned by His followers He rises again and draws them back to Him by the 'inexhaustible vitality' of His Gospel. For example, the desert monasticism of the period from about 270 was one such reaction to the notion that the values of Christianity were like those of secular society. For when the tension between the present and future aspects of the kingdom of God reaches breaking point new spiritual powers are unleashed to seek to redress the balance. Still, it may be asked, must the present aspect of the kingdom always be dominated within the Church by worldly values and ideas?

Experience Thereafter

Altered Church-State relations in the reign of Constantine affected experience thereafter differently in the West and the East. Only a brief synopsis of the issues can be attempted here concentrating mainly on Western Europe until the Reformation. For in the Eastern territories 'Caesaropapism', the doctrine that the secular sovereign is supreme governor of the Church within his territories and has the divine right to determine the religious beliefs of his subjects, was never seriously contested.⁸ In the West it took time for the Church to appreciate the dangers of accepting imperial favours and to recognise the extent to which it was being made serviceable to the interests of the State. During the Middle Ages the Papacy vigorously and on the whole successfully challenged the right of secular sovereigns to exercise authority over the Church in ecclesiastical matters.⁹ With the Reformation the issue was raised again, particularly in Protestant states, where as in England the national Church was subordinated to the State.

What is striking is that even when the Church had independence, as in the Middle Ages, it continued to exercise power in thoroughly worldly ways. Indeed Pope Gregory VII went so far as to assert that kings were but officers who could be removed when popes decided they were unfit for service.¹⁰ (He thus violated the principle laid down by our Lord, according to Mark 12v17, just as Roman emperors had done before.) It was this very worldliness of the Church authorities, despite all the advantages that either State protection or indeed freedom from the State brought, which has been said to have taken Christianity further down the road of 'fateful deviation' started under Constantine the Great (though actually before):

... a power-seeking Church... destroyed both the credibility of her claim to a religious mission and the impact of her missionary endeavours.¹¹

That there was damage to her credibility and reputation, insofar as the Church is meant to be a sign of the kingdom of God, can scarcely be denied. One has but to recall, for instance, the corruption of the Papacy in the Middle Ages, the Thirty Years War in Germany or the horrors of the Inquisition. In the latter case the rack replaced the cross and men seriously believed they were saving souls by forcing recantations of heretics when they may only have been damning their own by the use of such methods. For all these failings, precisely because of the future aspect of the kingdom, the Church was still able to make progress in propagating the Gospel.

In conclusion the Church, as in the age of Constantine, was never mastered by Christian states in Western Europe thereafter as far as its historic mission was concerned – the salvation of souls. Yet the present aspect of the kingdom of God, in spite of all reforming Christian movements down through the centuries to the Reformation, did still seem to be dominated within the main denominations of the Church by worldly values and ideas. In this limited sense the Church was mastered. Must this always be so?

CONCLUSION

The perspective of the kingdom of God is so fundamental in this analysis because it was for Jesus Christ and must be for his disciples.¹² The tendency, as in the reign of Constantine, for the Church to emphasise the future rather than the present aspect of the kingdom fits in with those civilisations and nations where other-worldliness predominates on account of the limited prospects for individual happiness or social peace on earth. It is no coincidence that during the recent Lambeth Conference it transpired that the most rapid growth in Church membership was in developing countries – exactly those places where life for individuals and communities is often hardest even for the more affluent.

In England, as with most other developed countries, the national Church has lost worldly power and influence in the face of the advance of secularism and science since the eighteenth century. Church membership has generally declined as materialistic values supplanted belief in an after-life. Consequently greater worldliness has led, in various times and places, to more emphasis being placed by the Church on the present aspect of the kingdom of God.¹³ Yet this, while it may have some positive benefits, has not so far led to any great spiritual renewal or revival within the Church.

Thus the Church of England is no longer the coercive institution it once was while the British State remain its master in a limited but still very worldly sense. Paradoxically, this presents a double opportunity. First, the prophetic dimension of Christianity can be restored¹⁴ because the Church now more readily accepts that the values of the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world (even the nominally Christian ones) are not the same.¹⁵ Thus the biblical insights from the Old and New Testaments can be applied not with any political purpose in mind – since that is the prerogative of the State – but with understanding of the political implications of the kingdom of God and its values. Secondly, the Church can eventually re-establish its credibility and reputation with secular society by, for perhaps the first time in 1.700 years, taking seriously its full share of responsibility under God for peace and justice in the world¹⁶ – that is, ‘shalom’ as the complement to ‘pax’ which is the responsibility, under God, of the State.

This can only come about if the proper balance between the present and future aspects of the kingdom is found. Then secularism, which understands power only in terms of a proper balance between competing forces in this world,¹⁷ will meet its spiritual Waterloo and the world will understand once more that there can be no lasting peace without God and His Prince of Peace, the Saviour of the world.¹⁸ [Emphasis in the original throughout.]

This reference to the ‘proper balance between the present and future aspects of the kingdom’ was addressed in a subsequent essay summarised in the next section.

3. The Expression 'Building God's Kingdom on Earth': A Justification in Christian Theology

The 'Themes of Doctrine' essay submitted in June 1999 dealt with a question critical to the capacity of the Church or individual members to take their share of responsibility under God for peace and justice in the present world. Is the building of God's Kingdom on earth His initiative alone or can individual believers partake in this themselves? If so, on what basis?¹⁹

Only part of the Introduction and the whole of the Conclusion need be repeated below:²⁰

INTRODUCTION

....

St Augustine [in his The City of God²¹] provides an authoritative, prima facie case that the expression 'building God's kingdom on earth' is justifiable in terms of Christian theology. The phrase has been popular in modern theology, too, according to George E. Ladd in his review of the extensive literature on the kingdom of God.²² Nevertheless it remains controversial. So to resolve the issues identified... the first step is to examine the meaning of the 'kingdom of God' via three categories of interpretation:

Futurist eschatology - the kingdom of God remains in the future and will suddenly disrupt human history.

Realised eschatology - the coming of Jesus Christ has already realised the kingdom of God.

'Between the times'

(Inaugurated

eschatology) - the kingdom of God is present now within human history although its final consummation lies in the future.²³

Most New Testament scholarship on eschatology – that is, the 'last things' – supports the latter position but our discussion will commence with the more extreme interpretations of futurist and realised eschatology as each has helped to shape the dominant viewpoint. Indeed it must be stressed that within each category are different and sometimes conflicting opinions. Only a relatively small but, hopefully, fairly representative sample can be presented here due to our space constraints.

...

CONCLUSION

The expression 'building God's kingdom on earth' denotes a process leading to completion. Leaving aside, for the moment, the issue of whether human beings can participate in this process which began by an act of God alone, that is the Incarnation, what has focused – or mesmerised – theological debate on eschatology for more than a century has been the perceived absence of a final consummation of the kingdom of God even after two thousand years. Indeed futurist eschatology would deny that the kingdom arrived at all, or ever could in the manner Jesus is said to have expected,

whilst realised eschatology would deny that any further stage of the kingdom can be anticipated within history for, in its full reality, it belongs to the eternal order people reach only after death. Yet without this final consummation breaking into history – whether or not that implies an end to the space-time universe – it is hard to deny that the forces of evil in the world still hold sway and doubts about Christ’s victory through the cross will remain.

For the many who hold that we are ‘between the times’, as this author does, the meaning of the Parousia is, therefore, critically important for it affects what we believe God calls us to be and to do now. If the final consummation of the kingdom of God is God’s initiative alone involving ‘victorious, coercive power’²⁴ which breaks into history then we can have no role in that but to watch and pray. However, was it ever likely that Jesus would anticipate His return in glory in a manner which contradicted the entire essence of His earthly ministry – loving obedience to his heavenly Father even unto death – when His very name, Emmanuel, means ‘God is with us’? The assumption here is that God is unchanging and always true to His own nature revealed in Christ. Thus the manner of His return would be in keeping with the nature of Jesus’ own ministry revealed in Holy Scripture and confirmed in its historical distinctiveness (and unexpectedness) by such scholars as Wright and Caird. His return, then, would affirm not deny that way of infinite love which would, as in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25vv31-46), involve judgement but one that people bring upon themselves by their reaction to the message and person of Jesus Christ.²⁵ The ‘coming with the clouds of heaven’ (Mark 14v62) would fulfil not supplant the way He taught His disciples to follow; Jesus’ mission in humility is His true glory – not two different stages, as Jeremias contended – for it reveals the nature and power of God aptly expressed by Caird in his inspired commentary on Revelation

[St John the Divine]... redefines omnipotence. Omnipotence is not to be understood as the power of unlimited coercion, but as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible power of self-negating, self-sacrificing love.²⁶

If the constancy of God’s nature is the first assumption behind this reconsideration of the Parousia then the second is the belief that God’s power in Christ is also effective in His disciples. This, too, is attested to by Holy Scripture for the kingdom of God was vested in Jesus and He in turn vested it in His followers (Luke 12v32) and it is effective on earth through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The upshot of this assessment is that the final consummation of the kingdom of God – however it is understood in the apocalyptic language of the Synoptic Gospels – will mean a fulfilment of the way of Christ in which all, who by God’s grace have faith in Him, can participate. This Coming (or Return) is manifest in the Jesus of history so there is, therefore, a sense in which He is always present and yet His full glory lies hidden until the ‘Day’ when the scales are suddenly lifted from the eyes of people everywhere and we behold His wonderful divine power of peace as never before. However, this process is not a purely inward, spiritual matter for the way of Christ transforms individual lives and overcomes social evils in the world of history. No-one

can confess faith in Christ and continue as before – such faith is no true faith at all. The Church contains some who are not, by their own response to Christ, destined to be part of the kingdom of God. The world contains some who will be, for their response will show that God’s kingly rule extends beyond the Church, which is a sign of the kingdom, to all His creation. So, ‘building God’s kingdom on earth’ is impossible ‘between the times’ unless the faithful are rooted in Christ (John 15v4; I Corin 12vv12-13). Salvation by faith but faith that does not bear fruit cannot extend God’s kingly rule. That fruit is inspired by the boundless love of God in Christ and that way of love alone builds the kingdom on earth – it cannot be built on force even though Jesus Himself (and Paul) acknowledged the role power and authority have in this world (John 18v36 and 19v11; Romans 13vv1-6).

Implications

After re-reading the Sermon on the Mount an atheist, who was known to this writer years ago, said bluntly, ‘What damns Christianity is the history of the Church.’ That there is an element of truth in this statement – in the form of conduct contrary to Christ’s own teaching – would be hard to refute. Yet the fact that the attack was against the Church, rather than against Jesus and His Gospel, illustrates the significance of maintaining a conceptual distinction between the Church and the kingdom of God for it is Christian practice which often puts off unbelievers more than Christian beliefs (cf. John 13vv34-5). The other side of the coin, so to speak, are Christians who have given up seeing the kingdom of God as a battle against the forces of evil in the world and either expect God to act alone or, more likely, have abandoned in all but name any expectation of a final fulfilment of His Kingdom within history.

The expression ‘building God’s Kingdom on earth’ is justifiable in terms of Christian theology, provided it is understood that the initiative rests with God in Christ and we are but His instruments. Yet it is also an invaluable source of inspiration, to be accepted in deep humility, that the Lord God Almighty wants us to co-operate with Him in loving obedience to His will so as to overcome evil on earth. Jesus used the agricultural term ‘reaping’ to denote the in-gathering of the harvest so the urban term ‘building’ is surely no less appropriate for modern industrialised societies.²⁷ However, this is not just about new members for the Church but, even more, about entry into the kingdom where the will of God is done on earth as perfectly as in heaven.

None of us can claim to have built God’s kingdom for He does that, by grace, through us. Others, particularly within the Church, know by the fruits we bear whether or not this is so. Even Jesus Christ who is divine did not, according to the Synoptic Gospels, claim to be divine – how much more should we His servants show a proper humility. Nor is this focus on the building of God’s kingdom meant to imply any element of salvation by merit for we can never put God in our debt as our ‘fruit’ and our very being come from Him. Nor can it be taken to mean any change whatever to Holy Scripture and our Lord’s teaching on His Coming in glory. Rather we join with St Paul and the whole company of the faithful down through the ages to proclaim anew:

... and yet, in spite of all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realms of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths – nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.²⁸

A Prophetic Ministry? Modern Day 'Weather' Forecasting

Turning to the practicalities of applying a biblical theology, the author's involvement in setting up the International Peace Project and organising the trial 'Peace Games' in the 2000s, focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ensured this could be comprehensively addressed.²⁹ This was done, first, through an article in a Christian newspaper which will be summarised here. Secondly, the consequences of both the article and IPP Briefing No. 1,³⁰ which encapsulated the fruits of the trial Peace Games, being largely ignored by their target audiences can be contrasted with the Court of history which delivered its own verdicts in South Sudan and the Holy Land in the years that followed. These, the author argues on irenic criteria, have important lessons for those who imagine, on grounds of political expediency, that the formula for applying biblical theology can be safely disregarded. In particular, a genuine peace movement, reinforced by experience from the 1930s and 1980s, can only be educational and/or religious whereas the self-styled 'peace movement' of those times down to the present day was really pacifist politics - British governments have always been able to ensure its persistent failure. Thirdly, the differences between a secular and biblical prophesy can be briefly emphasised although they share a common basis for identifying true from false prophecies. Looking to the future, this must be related to the grave dangers, which the Paris Peace Conference Remembered series of letters and articles is focused on, of another Great Power war and the compelling need for serious secular and theological analysis. (The lack of applied 'science' in the former area by modern political and social scientists is striking.)

A. Applying a Biblical Theology: The Practicalities

The article in the Church Times of 3 June 2011, entitled 'Try Giving Religious Peace a Chance', went through many drafts before it was published.³¹ The author offered a 'formula', analogous to Einstein's famous $E = mc^2$, in order to introduce this biblical theology applied to global conflicts. It will suffice here simply to reproduce the sections which explain the formula and apply the equation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as set out in the IPP Briefing no. 1 (January 2006). In 'C' below, one further quote from this article will be needed.

$$P = mc^\infty$$

...

... The formula shows how Jesus revolutionised our understanding of the way to peace (the 'P' in the formula). While accepting the short-term significance of military power ('m'), he demonstrated, and the Early Church affirmed, against overwhelming odds, that it is the light of his teaching and example that is the decisive factor ('c') for a secure peace.

Thus, in a secularised world, the superiority of this approach is being rediscovered and turned against a realism that has, so far, been resistant to having its worldly understandings put to the test.

The 'P' in the formula is the prospects for a secure peace between antagonists in any area of the world. Many, today, believe that this is a political issue. For them presumably, Jesus wept before the city of peace, Jerusalem, as the most politically inept leader the world has ever known. To prove it, within a week, he had squandered his power base and ended up crucified.

Yet, while his prophecy of war and destruction came true, within three centuries, the community he had founded, led by the Spirit, triumphed over the might of pagan Rome, without throwing a spear in rebellion. The secular realists of our own age have yet to come to grips with the significance of this victory for our time, particularly when another pagan empire collapsed only 20 years ago.

They emphasise the importance of Western political and military might in 'winning' the Cold War, over the place of irenic and liberal ideas in transforming the Soviet Union from within. The consequence of this mindset, as I said in an ostensibly secular analysis in 1993-95,³² would be to create the conditions for future war, not peace. As the values of such an outlook, contrary to Christ, underline the power of coercion, it must lead back to war.

...

This equation can be applied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in mid-2005, I predicted war, when many in the West thought that the opportunity for peace was the best in years.

My rationale was that the military imbalance ('m') increased the risks of war, while the lack of a just and compassionate evaluation of each party by the other was due to their implicit worship of a violent God (contrary to 'c'). This belief would be fatal to 'P'. Thus I argued that religious belief, and not just land, was critical to a secure peace.

Since attempts by the international community are limited to the political aspects of peace, they are likely to fail, and have failed so far. It is as though the Almighty has so arranged the balance of forces in the Holy Land that there could be no peace until there is peace between the religions, based on a true understanding of the nature of God that Christ has uniquely revealed.

To build this true understanding involves testing the explanatory and predictive power of differing analyses of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, either secular or theological, which emphasise force and domination ('m') against those insisting on a just and compassionate evaluation of each party to the conflict ('c' and others as well).

The nature of the God which each faith community worships will be reflected in the beliefs underpinning their analyses. It can be expected to be borne out by how far their differing predictions on the future prospects for a secure peace come true ('P').

What is really promising theologically is the prospect of an interfaith dialogue that brings together a modern understanding of the Hebrew prophets, the Islamic distinction between the lesser and the greater jihad (or 'striving') and 'c' in a common search for peace in the Holy Land.

B. The Consequences of Ignorance

Both the Church Times article (2011) and IPP Briefing No. 1 (2006) were largely ignored at least in terms of any explicit response from their target audiences. Nevertheless the Court of history, by which the author means the force of circumstances relating to the affected areas of conflict, produced a dramatically different result. This Court, under God's sovereign control, points to an important lesson for all the audiences concerned: ignore soundly based warnings and forecasts at your peril. Take South Sudan and the Holy Land as two examples.

While the author's Church Times article did not explicitly refer to South Sudan that conflict area plainly fell within the scope of its concerns especially as the religious conflict between Muslims and Christians had loomed large in the long running Sudanese civil war. The independence of South Sudan, which formed part of a political agreement with the Sudanese government to end that war, had been overwhelmingly approved in a referendum. The author followed the events, as related in the Church Times, involving the Sudanese Anglican bishops seeking and obtaining support from the senior leadership of the Church of England for these moves towards independence. He is not aware of any attempt to apply biblical theology beforehand to assess the prospects for peace or war (and he certainly did not have the resources to do so himself.)

However, in assessing the failure of political expediency as a determinant of policy within the Church, the light shone by the intercessions led by the author in his local church may help. On Sunday 10 July 2011, the day after South Sudan formally became an independent nation, the following prayer was offered at the main service:³³

Grant, O heavenly Father, to every member of the worldwide Church, young and old, understanding of the word of your Kingdom that, individually and collectively, we may bear fruit such as we could never do alone.

May the Church of Sudan, which remains one province embracing north and south even after political independence for South Sudan yesterday, be a powerful witness for peace and reconciliation after decades of conflict and war. We pray especially for Archbishop David Deng that you will guide and inspire him and his bishops at this critical time that Christians, Muslims and those belonging to indigenous religions may compete by peaceful and non-violent means.

Bless the new government of South Sudan with wisdom and understanding, that this newest member of the community of nations may help to banish ignorance and division.

Lord in your mercy

['Hear our prayer']

Then, on Christmas Eve 2013, after civil war had broken out, the author offered this prayer (in addition to one for doctors, surgeons and nurses working in various conflict areas including South Sudan):

Let us pray for those who work for peace on earth.

Lord God, now as then so many destructive conflicts affect the world and cause countless deaths and injuries. Your Son, Jesus, showed us a different way through self-sacrificing love that overcame the world.

Help all those who are working to bring peace especially in South Sudan where Christians who broke away from a Muslim country are now fighting each other.

On this Christmas Eve

Response: Thank you for the good news of Jesus.

Prayer is not useless. It is useless to pray for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be heard while practicing political expediency.

On the Holy Land, the author's irenic perspective in 2006, which he likened there to weather forecasting, had foreseen periodic war between Israel and the Palestinians, barring a change of outlook by the parties on their priorities as between peaceful and military means of conflict resolution. Since the Church Times article in 2011, further wars have been fought in 2012 and 2014 by Israel and Hamas in Gaza, as summarised in Article no. 3 in this series.³⁴

Drawing the strands of these two examples together, to reveal how this weather forecasting works and the lethal consequences of ignorance, it is also now possible to demonstrate that the criticisms made by this author against British governments are equally applicable against 'peace' movements, as they described themselves but were actually 'pacifist'. Both in the 1930s and in the 1980s, governments were able to neutralise their impact precisely because they were linked to a political position the civil population could never tolerate.

The author explained in IPP Briefing No. 1 the 'Peace Games' strategy, based on the legal framework referred to at the beginning of this article:

How does it work? The 'peace games' is a unique strategy aimed at peace involving competing methods of analysing, in this case, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to predict the direction of the conflict, that is, whether a 'climate' for peace or war is being created by the parties in dispute. An analogy with weather forecasting may help. Whether there is likely to be sunny weather or a thunderstorm in a given region can be foreseen by meteorologists but not whether the sun will shine on, or lightning strike, your house. In a similar way *these peace games involve foreseeing whether conditions are being created in which the evil effects of war are likely to be avoided and consequent emphasis put on peaceful, rather than military, techniques for resolving the conflict in future*. If such information, like weather forecasting, is useful because it enables precautionary steps to be taken by those affected then the Israeli-Palestinian peace games can make a difference.³⁵

This kind of prediction had already been attempted, on a prima facie basis, by the author in Project on Demilitarisation (Prodem) Briefing No. 1 (March 1993) looking back:

In the United Kingdom the spectre of the 1930s haunted the 1980s. Despite the obvious fact that Gorbachev was no Hitler British ministers insisted in behaving towards his administration as though some repetition of fascist aggression was possible at any moment. It was, but from elsewhere. Tragically for the UK government and its allies, they so completely misread the signs of the times that they did not see the danger from Iraq nor the opportunity presented by the Soviet Union. In their understandable guilt over the appeasement policies of the National government of the 1930s, the Conservative government of the 1980s determined that they would never be blamed by history for making the same mistakes.³⁶

Then, looking forward, in the final Prodem Briefing A/3 (October 1995), he underlined how the same policy can have contrary effects under opposite conditions:

Too often and too easily false lessons are drawn from history. A classic example is the use made of Winston Churchill's opposition to appeasement during the 1930s in justifying an unbending position against the Soviet Union in the 1980s. For his lone condemnation of the Munich Agreement in 1938 could also be aptly applied to the post-Cold War peace settlement:

We have sustained a total and unmitigated defeat... We are in the midst of a disaster of the first magnitude.

Exactly the opposite policy, pursued in entirely contrary circumstances, has produced not a 'victory' for the cause of peace but a defeat – perhaps, the worst in history. The Soviet Union had broken with the historic tradition of Great Power rivalry leading to war; its reward was a peace settlement that bred resentment and humiliation. The difference this time is that whereas the illusion of Chamberlain's 'peace in our time' was quickly dispelled by the evidence of war the scale of Western failure today, as a result of dispelling the reality of the Gorbachev 'peace offensive', may not manifest itself in a Great Power war for years to come. Even so the end of the negative peace in Europe, that existed during the Cold War, has already led to an amalgam of 'small wars' on the periphery and an attempt at positive peace so bad that it could not work and will not last. Indeed the 'cold peace' to which President Yeltsin has referred is the start of a return to an unstable, mainly negative East-West peace which could lead or contribute to war in any one of several strategic regions of the world.³⁷

Applying irenic criteria now, 24 years later, can leave the reader in no doubt this is our world.

Yet the pacifist movement of the 1930s, with its emphasis on disarmament in the face of resurgent German nationalism and aggrandisement, was as much at fault as the UK government of the time though with a much lesser degree of responsibility. Likewise, in the 1980s, though the case for disarmament was much stronger after Gorbachev came to power in 1984, there was still little or no recognition or acceptance that military power had a crucial role to play in deterring rogue states and war. The nature of politics on controversial issues is

to drive proponents or opponents to extremes which undermines an irenic perspective in favour of pacifism or militarism. That is why, supported by historical experience, the only true 'peace movement' must be educational and/or a religious. It does not exist in the UK today.

The superior coercive power of British governments has historically always prevailed – as with the pacifist movement opposed to the Iraq War in 2003 – over any attempt to change its policy substantially by such methods. The differing logos of the International Peace Project and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament illustrate this point: the former is focused on a peace process, in the form of an athletics competition; the latter is targeted on a peace policy, in the form of semaphore for ND. Time will tell which method will prove more effective.

C. Biblical and Secular Prophecy Compared: Looking to the Future

Consult any good English dictionary and the word 'Jeremiah' will be there defined as, for example, 'doleful prophet or denouncer of the present age'.³⁸ For those who have actually read the book of the prophet Jeremiah in the Hebrew Scriptures, with the aid of commentaries,³⁹ this is only the negative side of the truth. He was a prophet of the New Covenant who saw into the condition of his own Jewish people and urged them to repentance, if they wanted to avoid disaster. Tragically they chose to reject his message and warning, so Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC. Jeremiah was neither a pessimist nor an optimist but a man of a faith who spoke the truth God gave him to declare.

Biblical prophecy, though, was not primarily prediction, as A. S. Herbert pointed out in his commentary on Isaiah:

It expresses the will of God, which, coming into the life of the world through the prophet, brings about that which it declares...

Prediction then is the description of what will be as the result of the divine energy released into the world through the prophetic utterance. The word of the Lord works through the lives and activities of men towards its own fulfilment by the inherent energy of him who spoke. Predominantly, the prophetic oracles were oracles of doom directed to those who had rebelled against God. Yet this is a situation in which persons, divine and human, are involved. The oracle of doom will be fulfilled, unless there is a change in the lives of those who hear. This means that prediction is conditional.⁴⁰

The latter point is equally important in secular 'prophecy'. This author's predictions do not claim to be of the biblical variety and are only secular but still conditional. Yet, as with biblical prophecy, the test of a prediction is whether it comes true – assuming there has been no repentance or change of heart by the people affected. This is how the true prophet, Jeremiah, could be distinguished from his more numerous rivals.⁴¹ Biblical prophecy was a serious business for a false prophet would die.⁴²

Looking to the future, secular predictions through the Peace Games have more limited but still urgent objectives. The Paris Peace Conference Remembered series of letters and articles highlights the risks of another Great Power war coming out of the Cold War peace settlement just as the Second World War emerged out of the flawed legacy of that Conference in 1919.

To have a positive impact in tilting conflicts in the direction of peace rather than war does not require 'conversion' to a new religion even if that happy outcome may voluntarily materialise for some. Rather contributions to the Peace Games can benefit substantially from the insights gained from biblical theology to help meet the highest aspirations of the human race and the supreme purpose of God: reconciling humanity and all creation to Himself in Christ.

The current reluctance or refusal of political and social scientists to submit their views on international conflicts to rigorous testing through the Peace Games is as irrational in its way as the State's rejection of an irenic perspective. As the author concluded in 2011:

IPP is a secular educational charity, which has implemented a framework for conflict-prevention and resolution, based on forward-looking analyses. Competing academic and policy research findings on an area of conflict are presented in an easily comparable way in order to test them against the judgements of history.

In international relations, one of the strangest ironies in this scientific age is the reluctance of secular realists in Britain to submit their findings on the theories or policies that might resolve particular conflicts to comparative review and rigorous testing. We can all reflect on the reasons for this.⁴³

The first reason suggested is the dominance of political expediency in their thinking which militates against any finding that might be at odds with the conventional wisdom. Secondly, though, there is the stupendous thought that it was the prophets of old and the greatest of them, Jesus Christ, who lives today that understood the world rightly as being under the sovereignty of God and His laws, expressed in the Golden Rule, and the age of Enlightenment which now needs to be enlightened.

Armed Forces Day 2019

The focus of this Day on 29 June 2019 is Salisbury, the scene of last year's nerve agent attack. It is also one day after the anniversary of the political assassination on 28 June 1914, which led to the outbreak of the Great War, and the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919, which contributed to the conditions that led to World War II.

Warnings will be issued by this author at that time as to the direction in which the country and much of the wider world is heading. These warnings may be ignored or rejected. However, at least this author, and any others who can see the sign of the times, will have discharged their responsibility to draw attention to the very grave danger of another Great Power war.⁴⁴

Conclusion

No-one needs to take a theological approach in order to participate in the Peace Games. Yet the author maintains that had it not existed he would not be writing this article today. The question for the Church of England is: can we continue to ignore this part of the Good News?

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² See Peter M. Southwood, 'Death of a Peace Settlement – Birth of a Principle', Article no. 1 (18 January 2019) at <https://www.directionofconflict.org/what-we-do>

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²⁷ . However, see Ladd, p. 329. He observes that Jesus said nothing about building the kingdom.

²⁸ . Romans 8: 37-39 (New English Bible).

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