

Pacifism?

Introduction

A vital subject

This is a hugely important topic.

Consider; it may be the worst human sin (outside of personally offending God) – the killing of another human; a human being made by God, in the likeness of God and owned by God.

There are only two sides to this coin; killing a human person is either always wrong or sometimes right (it is obvious that murder, or indiscriminate killing, is iniquitous).

Jesus told us that the greatest love on earth was a man dying for another person.¹ Conversely, the greatest hatred is seen in killing another person.

Therefore, every believer needs to study this matter carefully before he is ever in the position of coming close to committing this act. Yet this matter is rarely discussed properly, seldom preached about and is hardly ever mentioned in systematics. Consequently, Christians can end up serving in the army and killing people without having considered the ramifications.

My background

I was a pacifist before I became a Christian; indeed I saw no reason to take any life at all unless there was a need – such as killing animals for food. Although I would kill insects if there were an infestation, I even avoided unnecessary killing of insects. As a poor student I once lived in a house that had mice but I trapped them humanely and set them free elsewhere.

When I became a Christian my commitment to pacifism was increased and bolstered by what I thought were obvious passages of Scripture. Thus I had problems with a 'Holy' or 'Just' War, as expressed by some favourite teachers. In fact, such a war is as rare as hen's teeth; indeed, the so-called 'Good War' of WWII is a blatant lie, foisted upon us by those in power. It was an unnecessary, diabolical (literally) and aggressive war, on the part of the Allies, and the elite behind them. Many Christians got involved in that evil, that that killed upwards of 60 million people and set the seeds for a multitude of future problems, on a false premise that it was defensive. I am engaged in writing a paper on the lies of WWII at this time. Christians who thought that they had killed for a righteous and defensive cause were fooled, and thus committed sin.

What surprised me, as I grew in my faith and understanding of Christianity, was to find a minority of Christian teachers that made an apology for violence in self-defence and who supported a holy war. This is despite the examples of history where Christians ended up killing other Christians² (often Christians with a better testimony) on the basis of this apologetic. In fact I once read a defence by a Reformed scholar who insisted that the command to, 'turn the other cheek' was in order for the victim of a slap to adopt a physical stance to draw his sword. In my view this is overcoming a small evil with a greater evil.

¹ Jn 15:13, 'Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.'

² For example: the USA saw the biggest loss of life in their Civil War, as both sides were American. What was tragic was that this resulted in Christians killing other Christians, sometimes members of their own family. Even in a righteous war this cannot be right. However, it was not a righteous war but was manipulated by banking elites for a prior agenda (which was not ending slavery).

However, I believe that a majority of ordinary Christians would also maintain a pacifist position and some churches made it an article of faith; such as: Anabaptists, Amish, Mennonites, Grace Brethren, 7th Day Adventists and Quakers.

The questions

So, what is the truth of this matter? Does God allow New Covenant believers to act violently in self-defence? Is there such a thing as a just war? What are the issues involved?

Now these questions are rarely debated properly and there are few books or papers exposing the issues properly. Many systematic theologies even ignore the questions altogether. It is time that I wrote about this.

As I said, there are few decent resources on this subject and most of them adopt the common evangelical position of supporting a just war and necessary violence. The commonly available are these:

- Dabney, Robert L [1820-1898]; *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, (1975) p401-404. Noted historic American Presbyterian theologian. His subject headings are: ‘Capital punishment and defensive war etc. not forbidden. Arguments – magistrate slays by delegated authority. Self defence lawful. Capital punishment in Scripture. Defensive war lawful. Duelling murder.’
- Dagg, J. L. [1794-1884]; *A Practical View of Christian Ethics* (Sprinkle Publications, (2006); reprint of 1859 edition titled *The Elements of Moral Science*), p309-319. A noted historic American Baptist theologian and pastor.
- Douglas, JD [ed.]; *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Zondervan, (1978). Article ‘Pacifism’ by John Dever, explains the history of pacifism.
- Henry, Carl FH [ed.]; *Baker’s Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Baker, (1973). 20th Century American academic and writer. Several articles, such as: ‘Pacifism’ by James D Douglas; ‘Murder’ by Vernon Grounds; ‘Peace and War’ by William Buehler; ‘Crime’ by William Willoughby; ‘Just War criteria’ by Arthur F Holmes; ‘Homicide’ by Robert Farnell III; ‘Violence’ by Douglas Miller; ‘Self-defence by A Skevington Wood.
- Henry, Carl FH [ed.]; *Christian Personal Ethics*, Eerdmans, (1971). Pacifism gets three mentions.
- Jackson, Samuel M. [ed.]; *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge*, Baker, (1964), ‘Self-defence’, by Karl Burger; vol. X, p343-4.
- Kutilek, Doug; *Christian Pacifism and Non-Resistance? or, Does the Believer Have the Right of Physical Self-Defence?* A short article in an on-line journal (‘As I see it’). Modern American Baptist.
- McClintock, John, and Strong, James [eds.]; *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Baker, (1971), vol. IX, p517-8.
- Yoder, John Howard [1927-]; *The Politics of Jesus*, Eerdmans, (1987). American theologian from a Mennonite background. Unusually, Yoder adopts the pacifist position.

Theological and historical background

Definitions

Pacifism

The dictionary definition is: ‘The belief that war and violence are unjustifiable and that all disputes should be settled by peaceful means’ [New Oxford Dict.].

Theologians tend to differentiate between:

Absolute pacifism

All war and personal violence are morally indefensible. This view is held by some Christian denominations and sects, Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism and Hinduism. It is also the basis of some modern protest movements.

Relative pacifism

This only condemns certain types of war.

Just war

An argument used to support the use of the armed forces of a nation in self-defence against an aggressor.

History

Throughout church history there have always been pacifists, though these were in a minority.

As long ago as the Church Fathers there were pacifists, such as: Hippolytus, Tertullian, or Lactantius. Indeed, pacifism was very common in the early church, if not the majority position and continued this way until Constantine.

Clement of Alexandria, however, saw no reason for Roman soldiers to resign; even though they were exposed to idolatry and paganism as well as being compelled to kill (sometimes innocent) people. Ambrose rebuked Emperor Theodosius for atrocities at Thessalonika, but did not formulate an apologetic for pacifism.³

The first philosophical apologetic for the just war was written by the Roman statesman Cicero.⁴ Cicero averred that war was just when it was enacted by an ideal state with righteous laws, in self-defence and after all negotiations and diplomacy had failed. It must never be for conquest or power. It should only involve legal soldiers and POWs must be spared.⁵

Sadly, Augustine, while accepting that war was evil and no war was fully just, taught that war was justifiable as a last resort. Thus Roman Catholic theology has always taught that absolute pacifism was irreconcilable with traditional Catholic doctrine. Augustine criticised Cicero by explaining that there is no ideal society with righteous laws due to total depravity in man.

Thomas Aquinas affirmed the necessity of a just war,⁶ but emphasised that it must be righteous and according to natural (God's) law (as if that is possible in human society). The intention must be to secure peace.

Later philosophers accepted the idea of a just war with popular consent, such as John Locke,⁷ since there was not (then) an international authority to whom appeal might be made. The idea of international law (based on natural laws) was initially developed by

³ Tertullian, 'On the military crown' XI; Origen, 'Contra Celsus', VIII 73-75; Ambrose, 'Letter', li.

⁴ Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106–43 BC), Roman statesman, orator, and writer. As an orator and writer Cicero established a model for Latin prose; his surviving works include speeches, treatises on rhetoric, philosophical works, and letters. A supporter of Pompey against Julius Caesar, in the Philippics (43 BC) he attacked Mark Antony, who had him put to death. Oxford Ency.

⁵ 'De Republica', iii, 22-29; 'De Officiis', i, 11-12.

⁶ 'Summa Theologica', ii, 2, a, 40.

⁷ 'Of Civil Government', ii, 3, 16-18.

Hugo Grotius, laying the foundation for the United Nations.⁸ In reality, all such bodies are equally corrupt because they are human. The UN has sponsored many evil conflicts and failed to stop or penalise atrocities of member states, notably Israel, the USA, Russia, the UK and others.

It is noteworthy that since we have had international bodies claiming international authority of law (such as the League of Nations) and have had multiple discussions on the idea of a just war and the protection on civilians, the rise of technology has meant that we have had 100 years where more civilians died in wars than any other century in human history. Man has achieved nothing. It shocks me that Christians can support government policy of nuclear deterrents that, were they to be used, would kill hundreds of thousands instantly and millions more slowly.

Augustine's position was largely accepted by the Reformers who accepted a necessary war in self-defence or to right an injustice. Luther and Calvin accepted the necessary war while Zwingli died on the battlefield (as a chaplain carrying a banner). War was the lesser evil to bring about peace. It was the radical reformers that were pacifists, the Anabaptists, followed by the Waldenses.

Later in history, minority groups, such as the Quakers, held the banner of pacifism, followed by Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians. It is odd that evangelicals were more ready to support war and violence than sects.

One tragic consequence of supporting a just war is the constant preaching refrain that, '*God is on our side*'. The later fall-out of such wars usually prove that this was not the case at all and a country was manipulated into war on false pretences for political aims. This must ruin the preacher's credibility forever; but it also damages the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in the people.

Lists

A list of pacifist Christian movements

- Anabaptists.
- Waldenses.
- Society of Friends (Quakers).
- Christadelphians.
- Jehovah's Witnesses.
- Mennonites.
- Amish.
- Grace Brethren (a Calvinist offshoot of the Brethren).
- The Brethren Church (a Pietist offshoot of the Church of the Brethren).
- Church of the Brethren (a Pietist revivalist movement beginning in Germany, persecuted by the Lutherans).
- Brethren in Christ (a Wesleyan sect originating in Pennsylvania).
- 7th Day Adventists.
- The Catholic Worker movement of Dorothy Day.
- Sojourners Magazine (left-wing Christianity group led by Jim Wallis).

⁸ 'The law of war and peace', Bobbs-Merrill, (1962).

A list of pacifist non-Christian movements

- Buddhism.
- Confucianism.
- Hinduism.
- Jainism.
- Sikhs are supposed to pacifist in principle but often are not and are required to carry a dagger.
- While many modern protest movements call for an end to wars, they often feel obliged to use physical violence in demonstrations.

A list of some pacifist church leaders

Early Church

- Tatian.
- Origen.
- Aristides.
- Hippolytus.
- Tertullian.
- Lactantius.
- Arnobius.
- Gregory of Nyssa.

Pre-Reformation church

- Robert Lefevre.

Post Reformation church

- Peter Waldo (Waldenses).
- Menno Simons (Mennonites).

Modern church

- DL Moody.
- CH Spurgeon.
- D Bonhoeffer.
- Leonard Ravenhill.
- Martin Luther King Jnr.
- John Howard Yoder.

Christian pacifists that U-turned after WWII or earlier

- Reinhold Niebuhr.
- Assemblies of God Pentecostals.
- Church of God Pentecostals.
- Mormons (about 1850).
- Worldwide Church of God (pacifist under Herbert W Armstrong but not after his death).
- The US Restorationist Movement (Campbellites) as led by David Lipscomb, abandoned by the modern movement.

Famous secular pacifists

- Gandhi.
- The Dalai Lama.
- Bertrand Russell.
- CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) campaigners.
- Aung San Suu Kyi.
- Leo Tolstoy.

The Old Covenant

It is a big mistake to go to the Old Covenant to establish a basis for righteous violence. That age has passed and the dispensation is cancelled. I trust that this issue is understood by my readers and doesn't need qualifying here.

Not only was violence allowed before the cross, God commanded war and killing for various reasons, such as the fulness of sin amongst the Canaanite tribes that required judgment. In this case war was not only demanded, but so was genocide. Even psalmists could glory in smashing babies to pieces,⁹ or mixing the praise of God with executing vengeance on the nations and killing God's enemies with the sword.¹⁰ Such behaviour is not now acceptable for the New Covenant believer.

You can only make an apologetic for defensive violence based on OT texts if you also bring back slaughtering bulls and goats in a temple with a sacerdotal priesthood under a theocracy.

Furthermore, we must understand the Biblical principle of progressive revelation. Truth is only gradually explained from the beginning until the final revelation in Jesus Christ. Thus the Old Covenant is incomplete without the truth that Christ brings to any subject. The Old Covenant is the shadow but Christ is the reality. Thus texts in the OT can be illustrative but do not have final authority; they are incomplete without Christ.

Then we must add the apostolic didactics. The apostolic revelation was the final words of Christ in expounding the truth that he revealed while on earth, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who was sent to explain Christ's words from heaven. Only apostolic revelation contains the fulness of any doctrine.

So, this means that using the Mosaic Law, such as 'an eye for an eye', is pointless. That must be interpreted spiritually in light of the New Covenant. If you take such ethics literally, then you have to also kill your children for rebellion and execute a woman for adultery by your own hands.

So, we are left with the New Testament (the explanation of the New Covenant), and apostolic didactics for our source of information on this subject. However, we can draw lessons from OT texts, but not apply them literally.

⁹ Ps 137:9, 'Happy the one who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock!'

¹⁰ Ps 149:6-9, 'Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment - This honour have all His saints. Praise the LORD!'

The reasons given to support defensive violence

We as followers of Jesus are to be peaceable individuals, not easily provoked, not inclined to personally revenging wrongs. However, we have the right to defend with appropriate and necessary means ourselves, our property and persons, against evil doers. [Doug Kutilek]

These are the sort of arguments used to defend violence.

Old Covenant precedents

- Self-defence: The precedent to be able to defend one's home, including by lethal force (Ex 22:2).
- Retribution: Ex 21:22-25, Lev 24:19-21 and Deut 19:21 speak of the '*Lex talionis*' (law of retribution), which permits retaliation when authorised judicially and not individually. Its intention was restrictive rather than permissive (eye for an eye, not two eyes for one eye). When quoting Ex 21:22-25 (Matt 5:38-42; Lk 6:29-30) Jesus does not reject it, but clarifies it (I dispute this later). He allows for retribution but does not require it; even to the point of ignoring it altogether. This does not imply that we are to ignore every type of injury, and never defend ourselves.

NT precedents

- Jesus' statement, 'All who take the sword will perish by the sword', (Matt 26:52) is not a universal truth but regards those use violence to ruthlessly impose their will on others (e.g. violent robbers).
- Romans 13:4 can infer national defence.
- John the Baptist (Lk 3:14) did not condemn the military service (which involved killing) as evil but counselled soldiers to act righteously.
- Nowhere does the NT denounce national military forces as inherently evil.
- Cornelius, (Acts 10), is not told to abandon his military status as being in conflict with Christian ethics.
- If Jesus' words '[do] not resist an evil person' (Matt 5:39) mean that we should never defend ourselves with physical force then, by implication, we should not lock houses or cars, or conceal a bank ATM password or use anti-virus software and firewalls. If one may legitimately 'resist' evil in matters of property, how much more may one resist evil when threatened in one's life?

What is noteworthy is that there is no clear didactic passage in the NT that actually condones physical violence of any kind, self-defence or otherwise (with the exception of the state's punishment of evil-doers).

In support of pacifism

In contrast, there are multiple texts that forbid violence.

Condemnation of violence

Violence is everywhere condemned.

You shall not murder. Ex 20:13 [The 6th commandment.]

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, '*It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites*'. 2 Sam 21:1

The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. Ps 5:6

The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Ps 11:6

You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; bloodthirsty and deceitful men. Ps 55:23

Let evil hunt the violent man to overthrow *him*. Ps 140:11

These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil. Prov 6:16-18

Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here'. Jn 18:36

Violence must be confronted by love

I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. Matt 5:44

Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. Lk 6:20

I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. Lk 6:27-28

Love your enemies, do good. Lk 6:35

Overcome evil with good. Rm 12:21

Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Cor 13:4-7

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone. 1 Thess 5:15

Non-resistance to evil

Old Testament moral precepts

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I *am* the LORD. Lev 19:18

Do not say, 'I will recompense evil'; wait for the LORD, and He will save you. Prov 20:22

Do not say, 'I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work'. Prov 24:29

It is surely from these that the apostles drew their aphorism to not return evil for evil.

The command of Jesus

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'. I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. Matt 5:38-39

But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. Lk 6:27-29

OBJECTION

Matthew 5:38 is a partial quote by Jesus of Exodus 21:22-25 (see also Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21), which is called the "*lex talionis*" or, "law of retaliation." That law was given by God, not to *promote* or command taking revenge for injuries suffered as some might suppose, but to *strictly limit it* (rather than inflicting the injury of two eyes for one, two teeth for one, etc. or an even greater number).¹¹

This is irrelevant. Jesus is not upholding the law of retaliation but cancelling it. 'Moses said, BUT I say...'. Jesus could not be plainer, 'I tell you not to resist an evil person'. Moses allowed an equal retaliation (eye for an eye) but Jesus forbids any physical retaliation.

Jesus rebuked Peter for using violence to defend him.

And suddenly, one of those *who were* with Jesus stretched out *his* hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword'. Matt 26:51-52

The word of the apostles

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay', says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head'. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Rm 12:17-21

Why do you not rather accept wrong? 1 Cor 6:7

The just; he does not resist you [the rich oppressor]. Jm 5:6

For consider Him [Jesus] who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. Heb 12:3-4

We could multiply such passages. From these it is crystal clear that we are not allowed to respond to evil with evil, which includes killing or attacking physically. The Romans 12 passage alone is convincing – feed your enemy, do no evil, do not act with wrath, leave vengeance to the Lord etc. The true believer does not resist evil. He can flee from it, but he does not react in kind with violence.

Kutilek qualifies Paul's statement, '*Paul speaks to the matter of taking revenge in Romans 12:17-21. Verse 18 exhorting us to be at peace with all men has the significant qualifier, "as much as it depends on you."*'. In other words, if it were just up to you, don't fight; however, if you are attacked you may respond with violence in self-defence. However, Paul gives no such command and explicitly demands no vengeance, no wrath and no evil; in fact he commands that we do good to our enemies.

The example of Jesus

The suffering servant

I gave My back to those who struck *Me*, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting. Isa 50:6

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. Isa 53:7

¹¹ Doug Kutilek.

Jesus came as a completely different kind of Messiah than people expected, or even wanted. His kingship is undisputed, but it is based upon suffering to aid mankind.

This sets the tone for all of Jesus' disciples. Suffering is a necessary consequence of being a disciple of Jesus (Jn 16:2, 33; Acts 14:22). There is no call for violence; even in self-defence.

The triumphal entry (Matt 21:2-9)

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem was riding upon a donkey rather than a war-horse. This choice of symbolic gesture is very important and ran counter to what was expected of the Messiah. The Jews expected another king in the vein of the warmongering David who would rid them of their enemies. But David's blood-shedding actions prohibited him from building the temple; only a man of peace can do that. Thus Jesus came as a man of peace to build the church.

Being struck

And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, 'Do You answer the high priest like that?' Jesus answered him, 'If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?' Jn 18:22-23

When He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously. 1 Pt 2:23

Jesus set the example of meeting violence with patience rather than retaliation in real life situations. We thus have an example of pacifism in the life of Jesus and no example of violent self-defence.

Commanding his disciples not to defend him

Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here'. Jn 18:36

Jesus did not expect violent aid from his supporters. If disciples did not fight to save Jesus, then they cannot be allowed to act violently for lesser mortals.

Not attacking or despising his crucifiers

They crucified Him ... Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'. And they divided His garments and cast lots. Lk 23:33-34

This is the supreme example. Jesus was treated with violence and torture but did not call down legions of angels to help him wipe out those who nailed him to a cross, but forgave them and prayed for their souls.

Conclusion

The believer is commanded to live exactly like Jesus lived. This demands absolute pacifism.

The need to overcome evil with good, not bad

Repay no one evil for evil. Rm 12:17

See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone. 1 Thess 5:15

Not returning evil for evil. 1 Pt 3:9

Someone attacking you with force is certainly evil, but retaliating with force is equally evil. Since we are told to return evil with good, it can never be right to react with violence.

Command to be a peacemaker

Blessed *are* the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matt 5:9

The meek shall inherit the earth. Ps 37:11

Blessed *are* the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Matt 5:5

Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Matt 5:7

You cannot be a peacemaker if you act violently in self-defence.

The sinfulness of murder

Life is a divine gift. Only God has self-existent life and he shares the gift of life with those he creates. Life is bestowed upon men by God in order that we should praise him, glorify him and obey his commands. Life is a stewardship, which only God can give and only God can terminate. Life is, therefore, to be treated with reverence since it belongs to God.

Consequently, all killing is a huge sin, unless it has been specifically allowed by God in his law. Similarly, all those who damage a life by ill-treatment offend the Creator who owns that life and bring condemnation upon themselves.

Even those who accept violence in self-defence admit that only necessary force should be used. Any prior intent to kill, in self-defence, is murder. Thus Thomas Aquinas, '*It is therefore, wrong for a man to intend to kill another as a means to defend himself*'.¹²

Since only God can give life and owns all life, then to damage a life or to take a life is an act directly against God himself. Unless a Christian had really searched out this issue properly, and had come to the conclusion that God is calling him to be violent in certain circumstances, (which I claim do not exist), could they deny pacifism. Since few Christians have really searched this out, any violent act against another human being (which actually includes psychological and emotional damage) is prohibited.

The Christian warfare is not fleshly

We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.
Eph 6:12

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 1 Pt 5:8-9

We are specifically told that our enemies are spiritual (demonic) and our warfare is spiritual. We are not told that our warfare is partly spiritual and partly of the flesh; it is all spiritual.

If our enemies are spiritual, and our warfare is to be conducted spiritually, by prayer, faith, truth and righteousness, then there can be no place for physical violence against perceived human adversaries.

¹² Quoted by Paul Ramsey, 'War and the Christian Conscience', Duke University, (1961), p51.

It is noteworthy that many supposed Christian apologists for violent self-defence have demonstrated their lack of understanding about the nature of spiritual warfare (such as deception).

The theological reasons for pacifism

A new creation

One has to get completely outside the thinking and framework of this world in dealing with this issue.

The testimony of the believer is that he is a new creature, a spiritual being. He is someone whose life has been transformed by God and in whom the whole Trinity dwells. The Christian is a person who now exists in Christ, who sets his mind on things above and lives on the basis of heavenly commands. He is not a part of the world anymore; indeed the world is dead to him.

Therefore, such basic issues as getting angry with someone, acting in vengeance, retaliating to evil attacks (verbal and physical), acting with violence and so forth, are far beneath the believer.

It ought to be understood and axiomatic that Christians are pacifists and do not retaliate.

Living in the sovereignty of God

A second reason for pacifism is living in the sovereignty of God.

True believers not only believe in the sovereignty of God in an academic way, but they should daily live their lives out in faith that God is in complete control; even when things go bad for them. God is sovereign in our lives and leads us in the way that he chooses.

Thus the believer need not fear about the worry of attack and the option of violent self-defence. If such an attack comes (and it has many times in church history), the believer must rest in the sovereignty of God and wait for his salvation.

Do not say, 'I will recompense evil'; wait for the LORD, and He will save you. Prov 20:22

Clear, objective commands

If we only had one command, then that is enough; When Jesus said, 'I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you', (Matt 5:44), then that puts paid to any idea of acting in violence, whether provoked or not.

The one social exception - secular government

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to *execute* wrath on him who practices evil. Rm 13:1-4

Killing authorised by the state is not an individual matter; it is something performed by rulers on behalf of the corporate citizenship under the delegated authority of God.¹³ It is an enactment the Moral Law by the authorities in the place of God. This is entirely different to a pacifist individual conscience.

Evildoers in a community are rebellious to God, first and foremost. This is forgotten today. In fact today, rulers legislate rebellion to God and wonder why the country is in a mess.

When a ruler, or ruling government, passes judgment upon an evildoer they do so on God's behalf. Thus, in extreme cases, they are obliged to execute the wicked as delegate authorities under God.

In the Old Covenant execution was called for on condemned criminals (Gen 9:6; Num 31:7-8, 35:31). It also allowed for killing an assailant who broke into someone's house at night (Ex 22:2); the victim standing in for law enforcement because the guilt was eminently provable.¹⁴

Any person involved in a legal execution has no responsibility as an individual. He is the delegated executioner appointed by the rulers and carries out his task under God and for the good of all. Thus we see that the death penalty for extreme sins are Biblical.

So, it is possible to be a pacifist but also to support the death penalty and to exonerate the necessary executioner acting on God's behalf.

A just war?

Many argue that since rulers have the delegated authority to kill on behalf of the state, it is just an extension for the state to justify war; at least in certain circumstances.

This is a fallacy. It is one thing that God allows the ruler to act on his behalf punishing evildoers in a closed society; it is quite something else to wage war, with the ever-present collateral damage of civilian deaths, to say nothing of dubious causes.

Thus many religious people claim that WWII was a just war conducted in self-defence. In fact, this is a blatant lie and the history is riddled with the propaganda of the victors. A global war was entirely avoidable and Hitler never sought it; neither did he plan to invade Britain. Indeed, he made repeated overtures to broker peace, which Churchill flatly refused, following a prior elite and selfish political agenda. England then became involved with repeated war atrocities, such as first initiating carpet bombing of civilian and even hospital cities which killed millions of innocent men, women and children in horrific ways, injured many more, and made even more homeless. Without further comment on this evil war, the point here is that Christians who justified it as a just war were fooled into supporting terrible war crimes. Even worse is that some Christians were caught up in killing innocent people.

¹³ 1 Pt 2:13-14; 'Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.'

¹⁴ When cases that warrant the death penalty are not proved of a certainty, then the death sentence must be commuted. Britain failed to do this many times and executed innocent people (such as James Hanratty). In the case of someone breaking into a person's house and being killed in self-defence, there is no doubt of the evildoer's guilt; he is in the house at night.

I doubt if there has ever been a just war since wars are started by people and all men are depraved.

Some people claim that wars to regain lost territory are just cause. But is the regaining of this territory worth the loss of many thousands of lives? This is to say nothing of the fact that many started such a war, lost many people, and then lost the war. The cost of thousands of lives was for nothing.¹⁵

All wars necessarily involve civilian casualties; destruction of agriculture that has knock-on effects for years; many people suffering life-changing injuries; children orphaned; destruction of wildlife; atrocities, massacres, psychological effects that last decades; economic devastation and debt; and so on. In addition wars often make many folk lose their faith in God or even their desire for a lawful society.

Wars are evil. A 'just-war' is an oxymoron.

The one family exception - parental discipline

This matter needs no detailed exposition as it must surely be understood by all Christians, despite being against the flavour of modern times.

The principle is that as God chastises his children (us),¹⁶ thus we must also chastise our children when necessary.

A rod *is* for the back of him who is devoid of understanding. Prov 10:13

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly. Prov 13:24

Foolishness *is* bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him. Prov 22:15

Do not withhold correction from a child, for *if* you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell. Prov 23:13-14

The rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left *to himself* brings shame to his mother. Prov 29:15

[Aside: is this not taking the Old Covenant literally? This is a case where the OT reaffirms pre-existent Moral Law. This is the universal understanding of Moral Law that is evidenced in the OT historical narrative and didactic teaching before the giving of the law to Moses. The Ten Commandments were merely a formal restatement of God's Moral Law known to the patriarchs and known in the conscience of all men. We do not need the Mosaic Law to know that killing is wrong, that stealing is wrong, that idolatry is wrong etc. Likewise, it is a requirement of Moral Law to chastise rebellious children to ensure a moral upbringing.]

Now, the reality is that if we bring our children up properly the necessity of physical discipline ought to be rare. Indeed, most children, trained properly, will not need any corporeal punishment at all.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. Prov 22:6

However, there are some children, even in Christian families, that are just rebellious in nature and need correction. In addition, these days, when kids get to a certain age they

¹⁵ For example the Second Schleswig War between Denmark and Germany.

¹⁶ 1 Cor 11:32; Heb 12:5-11.

have been programmed by public schools, and the media that surrounds them, or worse they get in bad company, and can suddenly become very troublesome in their early teens. This also may need appropriate discipline, which would usually be grounding or loss of privileges. But what do you do when a teenager is so rebellious that your commands are just ignored?

The Biblical position is that a rebellious child, who refuses to obey his parents, must receive corporeal punishment.

This has nothing to do with pacifism.

Specific questions

What about Jesus' violent actions in cleansing the temple?

Firstly, we have to understand that this is a unique situation that can never apply to men today. Jesus was acting on behalf of his Father to judge and condemn those who had despoiled God's sanctuary. It was a divine act of judgment and not a reaction to a human provocation of Jesus.

Secondly, it does not appear that Jesus actually physically damaged any single individual. The improvised 'whip of cords' was chiefly used to drive out animals, 'When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen', (Jn 2:15). Indeed, he seems to have commanded the sellers to leave rather than whipped them (Jn 2:16; Matt 21:12). 'Cast out' (KJV) or 'Drove out' (NKJV) in Matt 21:12 and Mk 11:15 can literally mean 'command to leave'.

There is no precedent here for Christians to act violently to others.

Why, then, does the NT not condemn military service, including converts in the Roman army?

Many things were not condemned in the period of the Gospel settling in. The time covered in the Gospels - Acts was a time of transition until the New Covenant had fully settled in local churches. Indeed, even the matter of local churches and local elders was not established until Acts 11. At the beginning of Acts the apostles used lots to make an important decision, but never did so again when they better understood the indwelling Spirit's guidance.

Thus we hear that priests were converted but do not hear of them being told to stop being a priest of the Old Covenant. Indeed, it would take time to sort such things out as the livelihood many people in extended families would be at risk if they resigned. A similar thing would affect Cornelius and others. It would take time to sort such matters out.

Despite this, in general, the early church avoided military service.

If one may legitimately 'resist' evil in matters of property, how much more may one resist evil when threatened in one's life?

Personal security, such as concealing a password or locking your house, is rational behaviour. It is not resisting evil (no act has yet occurred) but being prepared and acting in wisdom. It would be sin to encourage a thief by making stealing easy for him. This has nothing to do with responding with violence in self-defence.

Are we just fodder for violent men?

The first things to be borne in mind are the doctrines of God's sovereignty and providence. Our life is to be lived in faith that God is in control of the direction of our life and brings us into circumstances of his choosing. Such faith in God's providence dispels all fear that we could simply be fodder for attacks.

The second matter is to give calm assent to accept persecution if that is God's will for us. Those who endured the fiery storm of Roman imperial persecution gave us testimony after testimony of courage in the face of opposition, or even an awful death. God enables his people to face violence if they are called to it. God gives grace in time of need (Heb 4:16).

But we are not automatically called to be fodder for violence. We must not ignore the fact that, in his will, God promises to defend us personally; he is our salvation and way of escape (Ps 71:2). There are multiple promises that God will defend us. We can pray for divine defence in difficult circumstances and expect it (as long as the situation is not due to our foolishness).

The Old Testament Israelites had example after example of God fighting on their behalf and defeating a superior enemy without any help from them. This was not an eschatological spiritual salvation but an immediate deliverance in physical terms against a material enemy.

The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace. Ex 14:14

The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be still. RSV

The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. Deut 28:7

For example, the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, or the Midianites in the time of Gideon, or the defeat of multiple tribes in the time of Jehoshaphat by praise (2 Chron 20:1-29) or the deliverance of Hezekiah from the King of Assyria, Sennacherib (2 Chron 32:1-23) or the misdirection of the Syrians by Elisha (2 Kg 6:11ff).

Alexander Peden, the great Scottish evangelist and prophet, was delivered from capture and death by British troops multiple times by the power of God; often by the gift of prescient knowledge. Many missionaries knew miraculous deliverances from death and violence, such as John G Paton in the South Seas.

We must follow our calling in the Lord. Just as some missionaries were killed on the beach as they got off their boats, others were preserved and ministered for decades. In the same way James the apostle was killed very early on (Acts 12:1-2) but his brother John outlived all the other apostles. What is important is to do our own job.

Being a Christian pacifist does not automatically mean that you are going to be beaten up.

What about local persecution?

There are Christians in certain areas of the world where there is outright persecution; many have been killed. In such cases the individual believer must consider and make up his mind what to do. It may be that he feels he should remain and trust God for the outcome. However, Jesus did give us permission to flee from persecution. On many occasions fleeing Christians have led to new social orders elsewhere, such as the Pilgrim Fathers that fled English royal persecution and set up new territories in America. In fact, Jesus' own parents fled Palestine to Egypt when he was only days old.

When they [angels] had brought them outside, that he said, 'Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed'. Gen 19:17

A prudent *man* foresees evil and hides himself. Prov 22:3

When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. Matt 10:23

Let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains. Matt 24:16

Let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains. Mk 13:14

Then let those who are in Judaea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. Lk 21:21

So, being a pacifist does not mean that you have to lay down and die for no point. If God calls you to martyrdom, that is one thing, but if God tells you to flee so that you may do good somewhere else, you can escape persecution.

Common sense

What is most important in your walk is to determine everyday to be in the new man, to walk in the Spirit and to be dependent upon God for all things. If you walk carefully, you need not fear about being a victim of violence.

However, if you walk carelessly and put yourself in compromised positions, then you should not be surprised that there is the possibility of violent attack. If you are committing sin, or caring nothing about doing God's will, then there is no guarantee of your safety or of deliverance. There is no blessing in the old nature.

For example, if you go to church on Sunday but go out nightclubbing and drinking to excess on Friday and Saturday night, there is every chance you will one day get into a fight.

However, many of us have sought to follow God and, even though we have been in some potential dangers that were not our fault, God has kept us safe thus far after many decades in Christ. Being a Christian pacifist does not mean that you will be an automatic victim.

What about defending the undefended?

Dabney raises the hypothetical case of coming across an aggressor threatening the life of a defenceless person with no access to any lawful protection. He reasons that since one person is about to die, it would be righteous to kill the aggressor and set the innocent person free; or for the innocent person to take the life of the aggressor.

There is so much wrong with this argument that it is hard to know where to start.

- Firstly, we do not set moral precedents by hypothetical illustrations.
- Dabney gives absolutely no NT Biblical support for this case scenario. The only support he claims is from the Old Covenant and those directions have been cancelled.
- Furthermore, it completely contradicts the commands of Jesus and the apostles.
- It ignores the command to be passive in the face of suffering.
- It ignores the fact that men should not interfere and take the law into their own hands in a just society.
- It ignores the possibility of restraining the aggressor.
- It makes man the arbiter of events that are unknown. What if the apparent aggressor was reacting to something evil performed by the 'innocent' victim prior to this event,

such as murdering his family? Who is the innocent person and who is the aggressor then?

The whole illustration is foolish in establishing a defence of violence. The underlying factor that God is sovereign over our lives and is leading us into each step we take is completely ignored. If God leads us into such distressing and confusing circumstances, he promises to give us the way of escape. The man of faith believes this.

Conclusion

I trust that it is clear that the arguments of those who contend for valid violence are mistaken. The arguments just simply do not stack up and are irrelevancies. Furthermore there are no clear Scriptures for them to use as an apologetic but there are many that support pacifism.

In the past many of those Christians who made a case for righteous violence were people that had served in the army, or fought in a war, who had acted in rebellion to a king and so on. What they did was to start with their prior agenda and then sought to cobble together some kind of Biblical support for it, often in convoluted ways. This is shoddy. For Dabney (whom I greatly respect) to call pacifists, 'fanatics' and 'infidels' is a gross overreaction.¹⁷

The Bible is very clear. Without any equivocation we can say that we are not permitted to act violently, even in self-defence.

I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. Matt 5:38-39

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
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¹⁷ Systematic Theology, p401. Dabney had been a chaplain in the Confederate Army in 1861 and then became an officer in 1862 under General Stonewall Jackson. After the war he was embittered and vigorously opposed reunion with northern Presbyterians.