

JUST WAR, PACIFISM, AND PEACEMAKING

JUST WAR THEORY

One of my favorite things about being a member of the Unitarian Universalists is the people and different philosophies strewn throughout the history of our church. It should be disturbing how many opposite views our past has supported but it is not disturbing so much as interesting in how we get to where we are. For instance we remember the debate leaders had over abolition of slavery. One side insisted on completely ridding our country of the shame of slavery while the other side thought we should ease into granting people freedom, we should compromise. But what seems so clear to us now caused confusion when the issue was in existence. Disagreement over the concept of a Just War and the concept of Pacifism is another one of those issues. Here again the clarity is blurred at best and nonexistent in the extreme.

Let's start with a summary of the Just War Theory, based on information from *God's War* by Christopher Tyerman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

In the 4th century BCE, Aristotle declared that war should never be an end unto itself, but was legitimate when waged as a form of self defense, to secure an empire, or to enslave non-Hellenistic people. The Romans seemed to have taken the "secure an empire" deal to a whole new level by enshrining the notion of war for the sake of a peaceful, prosperous and secure state into Roman Law and hence the concept of "just war" developed.

The concept of a just war being religious in nature was not a concept until early Christians their own theological understanding of war. Some adapted the divine right of war from the Judiac tradition. Their scriptures tell stories

of Israelites going to battle with God on their side. But some Christian theologians who did not agree that there was a morality of war, interpreted the battles in these scriptures to be allegorical in nature and favored a more pacifist ideal.

As we all can imagine, this idea of a just war being divinely sanctioned really took off as the Christianity movement grew. It was an easy mix for the politically motivated to use divine right to push their influence and their quest for power. They justified it with the suggestion that the intent of conflict was to establish a Christian peace. This was the ancestry of the Crusades and the Inquisition which carried the just war concept to the horrid extremes we are now familiar with and still shocked by. Onward Christian Soldiers was not just a hymn, it was the actuality.

Just war theory has been heavily debated across all of Christianity. It was reexamined after World War Two in the awesome and terrifying shadow of the Holocaust. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr put it in these words of support for a just war:

It has since become quite apparent that tyranny would have conquered the world if the material resources of civilization had not been organized and harnessed so that force could be met by superior force.

PACIFISM

Now we turn to the Christianity that influenced pacifism. Grounded in a belief that the Christian struggle is spiritual, not physical and a view of Christ as the Prince of Peace, Christian pacifism is an integral part of the Quaker, Moravian, Mennonite, Amish and other faiths.

Here is where we find some of our heroes of the Unitarians and Universalists playing major roles in the development of pacifist theory. Unitarian Minister Noah Worcester wrote the pamphlet “A Solemn Review of the Custom of War” in 1814, which was the first significant work of American pacifism. Universalist Adin Ballou converted to Christian pacifism in 1838 and founded Hopedale Community in 1840, a pacifist society. Henry David Thoreau (yes! THE Thoreau!) was strongly opposed to the 1848 Mexican-American War and advocated nonviolent civil disobedience. Many Unitarian abolitionists joined William Lloyd Garrison in founding the New England Non-Resistance Society. This Society’s founding document is a strongly worded denial of any involvement in war:

We register our testimony, not only against all wars, whether offensive or defensive, but all preparation for war; against every naval ship, every arsenal, every fortification; against the militia system and a standing army; against all monuments commemorative of victory over a fallen foe, all trophies won in battle, all celebrations in honor of military or naval exploits,; against all appropriations for the defense of a nation by force and arms, on the part of any legislative body; against every edict of government requiring of its subjects military service.

As controversial conditions are not crystal clear, nor easily committed to nor free from compromise, we can often find ourselves not as sure or as conflicted as we thought on these subjects. Next week we will continue on this subject as we examine the debate between Unitarian minister John Haynes Holmes and former president of the U.S. William Howard Taft during World War I. We will also explore theories of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding currently being developed by Unitarian Universalist ethicist Sharon Welch and theologian Paul Rasor.