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5. Jesus and Peace

PAUL N. ANDERSON

It is a great irony of history that the cross, symbol of the ultimate triumph of peaceful means to peaceful ends, has been used as a standard in battle. Through the centuries soldiers espousing Christianity have fought bravely in war, claiming Jesus' cause or begging his help, but perhaps not following his example or furthering his kingdom. It is also ironic that differing views of Jesus' teachings on peace and their implications for his followers have been a cause of division within the church. Even in his own time people were confused about the nature of Jesus' mission. Some perceived him as the leader of a nationalistic revolt, intending to overthrow the Romans by any means. Others saw him as a prophet in the tradition of Moses and Elijah, and they interpreted his works as miraculous signs, prefiguring the exaltation of Israel. Using recent biblical scholarship, this essay seeks to clarify Jesus' teachings on peace and their implications for those who desire to follow his way.

For more than two centuries scholars have tried to discover what the "real Jesus" said and did, compared to ways his followers represented his life and teachings. This quest for the historical Jesus began with a question posed by the Hamburg scholar Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768): "What sort of purpose did Jesus himself see in his teaching and deeds?" Reimarus's answer produced great upheaval. He claimed

1. Charles H. Talbert, ed., and Ralph S. Fraser, tr., Reimarus: Fragments (Lives
that Jesus must be viewed in the company of other first-century messianic figures who strove for the exaltation of Israel and the overthrow of the Romans. After Jesus’ death, Reimarus claimed, Jesus’ followers spiritualized his mission to prevent the death of the movement he began. Implicitly, it was during this reinterpretation that teachings on peace were added and attributed to Jesus. Though Reimarus did not address the peace question directly, the question persists: What was the character of Jesus’ mission, and what did he teach about peace?2

Jesus and the First-Century Prophets

When one compares Jesus with other first-century prophetic figures in Palestine, one sees some interesting parallels, but even more significant differences. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus mentions five first-century prophets and messianic figures; Jesus stands in striking contrast to four of them. For instance, around 6 C.E., Judas the Galilean declared that paying taxes to Caesar was idolatrous and called for a tax revolt as an expression of loyalty to God.3 Jesus, however, taught people to “give ... to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21).4 While other messiahs advocated armed re-


4. All Scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.
sistance to occupying forces, bolstered by appeals to God and country, Jesus taught his disciples to turn the other cheek when slapped and to carry a Roman soldier's pack an extra mile (Matt. 5:38-42). This posture differed radically from what Josephus calls the "fourth philosophy" of Judaism, that of Judas's followers, and even more from the approach of the Zealots and the Sicarii ("dagger men") who came in Judas's wake. According to these revolutionaries, the righteous had a religious obligation to rid the land of foreign occupiers and their aristocratic Jewish supporters. Jesus, on the other hand, did not model the liberation he proclaimed on Caleb and Joshua's conquest of Canaan or on King Cyrus's freeing of the Jews from exile in Babylon. Instead he came as the suffering servant. Like the Israel portrayed in Isaiah 40-55, his wounds would paradoxically become the source of healing and salvation.

Josephus also mentions three first-century false prophets, whose ministries differed significantly from that of Jesus. In 35 C.E., a Samaritan leader gathered hundreds of followers at the foot of Mount Gerizim, on which the Samaritans believed the sacred vessels of Moses were hidden. Their leader planned to ascend the mountain, uncover the vessels, and use them to attain liberation from the Romans. They hoped that these sacred vessels, like ancient Israel's ark of the covenant, would make them invincible and assure Roman defeat. Pilate caught wind of the uprising and put it down with such force that he was called to Rome to answer for the carnage. In contrast, Jesus taught that God's power is not confined to Mount Gerizim or to Jerusalem (John 4:21-25) but is present with all who worship in spirit and in truth. Furthermore, Jesus' kingship could not be characterized by military might; his power is the power of truth (John 18:36-37).

5. See the section of this chapter below on "Jesus' Third Way." The connection between Judas and the Sicarii is not entirely clear, as the Sicarii did not coalesce into a definite group until the 50s and 60s of the first century C.E. Richard A. Horsley and John S. Hanson, in *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus* (New Voices in Biblical Studies, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), have convincingly reversed the tendency to group these three types (Fourth Philosophy, Sicarii, Zealots) together in a single movement. According to Horsley and Hanson, Judean peasants probably all resented Roman occupation, but they did not organize themselves into a Zealot movement proper until the Roman oppression of the mid-60s resulted in a series of fight-or-flight responses (190-243). In any case, Jesus' teaching clearly ran counter to much of the conventional religious nationalism of his time.
Unlike Theudas, who sought (ca. 45 C.E.) to reenact the miraculous entry into the promised land by leading a band of followers across the Jordan, Jesus commanded Peter to put away his sword (John 18:11). “My kingdom is not from this world,” says the Johannine Jesus. “If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting. . . . But as it is, my kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36). The implication is not that Jesus’ followers may not fight (a matter of permission), but that they cannot fight. A righteous cause cannot be furthered by violent means. Theudas told his followers that at his command the waters would part and that they would cross the river unscathed. In this reenactment of the exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan, the Roman governor Fadus understood that the Romans were to play the role of the thwarted Egyptians and the conquered Canaanites. He sent troops to make a surprise attack, and then paraded Theudas’s decapitated head around Jerusalem as a disincentive to further displays of nationalistic zeal.6

By contrast, the sea-crossing narratives in the Gospels portray Jesus’ love for his disciples. They are not sensationalistic demonstrations but acts of saving concern for those in need. And after the feeding of the five thousand in John 6:1-15, the crowd wants to sweep Jesus away and make him their king, their new Moses, but Jesus flees their plans for his future and departs to the wilderness.7 However Jesus understood his ministry, he did not cater to popular aspirations. He perceived his mission in spiritual more than political terms, and this is probably why he commanded the healed, exorcised, and confessing believers to tell no one

6. Horsley and Hanson, Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs, 164-67. Luke, in Acts 5:36, dates Theudas’s revolt about a decade earlier than Josephus. According to Luke, Gamaliel advised that the Sanhedrin allow the Jesus movement to fail on its own (as had the movements of Judas and Theudas), or to succeed if it was of God. Here Luke’s source seems to be differentiating the Christian movement from other prophetic movements of the time.

7. The earliest manuscripts read fugei (fled, as a fugitive). Later manuscripts soften the verb to anechoresen (departed). Richard A. Horsley is correct in Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) that the Zealots can no longer be used as a foil against which to display a pacifistic Jesus. But one must still consider seriously Jesus’ teachings on peace, which stand in remarkable contrast to conventional ways of understanding redemption (in political and economic terms). Although Jesus was like contemporary leaders in seeking to build local community and solidarity, all four Gospels portray him as struggling against conventional notions of how that should be carried out.
about him. His kingdom was not intended to be primarily political, though it clearly had political implications. Its origin and essential character were of a different kind.

Another figure offers a similar contrast to Jesus. A man whom Josephus and Luke call simply “the Egyptian” gathered a band of about four thousand followers on the Mount of Olives around 55 C.E. and proclaimed that at his command the walls of Jerusalem would fall and God would deliver the Romans into their hands. Felix sent soldiers and put a bloody end to this attempt to reenact Joshua’s conquest of Jericho. The leader escaped, and the rumor that he would reappear is echoed in the Roman soldier’s question to Paul: “Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” (Acts 21:38).

In contrast, Jesus saw Jerusalem as suffering not primarily under the bondage of the Romans, but under the poor stewardship of its religious leaders. Like the irresponsible shepherds of Ezekiel 34, they had fed themselves and not the flock. Jesus therefore pronounced woes on the Pharisees, corrected the teachings of the scribes and Scripture lawyers, and in another kind of prophetic demonstration cleared the temple of its corrupting elements. He did not place blame for social problems on an external foe but sought to restore Judaism to its original vocation to be blessed and thereby become a source of blessing to the other nations of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3).

A fifth first-century prophet mentioned by Josephus is John the Baptist. John’s paving the way for Jesus’ ministry had two effects. First, Jesus built on the work of the Baptist in formulating his own prophetic ministry. Second, this association fed some popular misconceptions about Jesus’ mission. John came preaching repentance from sin and was especially critical of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 3:7-10). He also spoke pointedly about Herod’s way of life (Mark 6:14-18). Josephus describes Herod’s killing of John as politically motivated. His account

8. It is probable that the “messianic secret,” most prominent in the earliest traditions of both Mark and John, reflects struggles Jesus actually faced when dealing with the tensions between the popular aspirations of the Galilean peasantry and his own sense of mission. Even the Q tradition preserves the memory of these tensions in the temptation narratives (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

9. Hill, in “Jesus and Josephus ‘Messianic Prophets,’” writes of Theudas and the Egyptian: “These two individuals, at least, believed themselves to be involved in the imminent messianic release of the nation” (148).
reports that John was executed because he was articulate and persuasive with the masses, and Herod feared an uprising.\textsuperscript{10} The populace must have believed that the Jewish leaders, and certainly Herod, were carrying out Roman policies among the Jews, and they must have thought Jesus' association with John indicated that he was following in the way of other contemporary nationalistic leaders.

But John was also different from the others. According to Josephus, more than other prophetic figures John followed the authentic tradition of the Hebrew prophets. John challenged those in authority to rectify their affairs and to promote justice and righteousness in the land. He called for renewed concern for the poor and powerless, and people saw him as a true prophet. John's ministry illumines Jesus' proclamation and prophetic mission. The challenge for Jesus must have been to build on John's ministry while avoiding being cast as a popular Messiah proclaiming revolt and political deliverance. The crowd's taunt, "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?" (John 6:30) echoes the devil's words in the temptation narratives (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). But Jesus rejects the extrinsic use of signs and wonders to amass a following; his healing and saving work had intrinsic redemptive worth. Compassion was the motive of that work, and personal wholeness was its goal. While his intention may have paralleled that of his contemporaries, one of its distinguishing marks was his absolute commitment to peaceable means to peaceable goals.

**Jesus' Teachings on Peace**

Those who seek to follow Jesus must come to grips with his teachings on peace.\textsuperscript{11} Unfortunately, Christians have often found it too easy to embrace some of Jesus' teachings without heeding the most central ones. Rationalizations abound: "Jesus' teachings weren't meant for the real world. They aren't practical." Or "The Beatitudes are for the millennium,


after Christ returns. The kingdom ethic is intended for the future." Or again, "Nobody's perfect, and in an imperfect world harsh situations require harsh remedies." These attempts to accommodate force and violence in an otherwise Christian ethic betray a profound misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching about the character of God's reign.

The kingdom of God is spiritual in its domain and compassionate in its character, and the Johannine insight into the implications of this orientation is profound. The reason Jesus' followers do not fight to further his kingdom is that that kingdom is heavenly in its origin and eternal in its scope (John 18:36). Jesus' reign is a reign of truth and cannot be furthered by human force or violent conquest. In fact, its advance is retarded and even set back by violent measures. Against a backdrop of religious nationalism, Jesus taught the radical notion that the God of love and peace expects God's children also to act in loving and peaceful ways. In other words, concern for righteousness is transferred from the domains of nation and law to the arena of human relationships. To love God is to love others as well, and this requires renouncing violence and adopting peaceable means to individual and corporate goals.

12. Hengel's and Edward's concern is to counter the thesis of S. G. F. Brandon (Jesus and the Zealots [Manchester: Manchester University, 1967]) and others, who claim Jesus was an advocate of violent revolution. Hans Küng's assessment (in On Being a Christian) is pointed (187):

We cannot make Jesus a guerrilla fighter, a rebel, a political agitator and revolutionary or turn his message of God's kingdom into a program of politico-social action, unless we distort and reinterpret all the Gospel accounts, make a completely one-sided choice of the sources, irresponsibly and arbitrarily work with isolated texts — whether Jesus' own sayings or community creations — and largely ignore Jesus' message as a whole: in a word, we would have to use a novelist's imagination instead of adopting a historical-critical method.

As we consider Jesus’ teachings, several directives become clear.\(^\text{14}\) Jesus commands his followers (1) to love unconditionally. He reduced the law from ten commandments to two: consuming love of God and compassionate love of neighbor. This teaching is displayed centrally in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 22:37-39; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:27), and John describes Jesus’ “new commandment” as the appeal to love others as Jesus has loved his disciples. By the mark of sacrificial love will Jesus’ followers be recognized (John 13:34-35). This love is authentic; it is not a means to an end or a bargaining chip in a transaction. Jesus’ followers are to care for each other’s needs as though caring for their own. They are to give freely, expecting nothing in return, for that is the character of unconditional love.

Jesus also calls his followers (2) to love even their enemies. The instruction to love one’s enemies shows just how radical Jesus’ teachings were and are. Doing good to those who do good first is common. Tax gatherers and Gentiles lived by that ethic (Matt. 5:46-47). But to respond to wrongdoing with good, to return good for evil, is uncommon. It requires divine enablement, first to understand the concept, and then to put it into action. This is not doormat passivity; it is active, proactive, even activist. Oppression thrives on fight-or-flight intimidation, and to confront it with agapeic love instead of fear or challenge is to subvert its mode of domination. In teaching this approach Jesus shows us the way God works in the world. God’s children, Jesus’ said, must love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Matt. 5:44), for God makes the sun rise and the rain fall on good and evil alike (Matt. 5:45). Knowing this action is counter-conventional, Jesus taught that it was to be standard practice for all his followers. They are to love all God’s children, because God does.

Jesus’ counter-conventional way is further cast into sharp relief by

\(^{14}\) These seven directives are a digest of the early Christian memory of Jesus’ teachings on peace. On the basis of the criterion of dissimilarity (it is unlikely that counter-conventional ideas would have been attributed to Jesus as the sort of thing that of course he would have said), and on the basis of thematic coherence (most of these basic themes are present in all four Gospel traditions), they deserve consideration as concerns close to the heart of Jesus’ actual teachings on discipleship. They are also broadly represented in recent ecclesial statements on peace (see Howard John Loewen’s chapter in this volume). To enhance our focus on the content of these teachings in this section, attention to literary and historical-critical issues will be minimal.
his instruction (3) to renounce the right to revenge and to demonstrate a spirit of exceeding generosity.

You have heard it said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I tell you not to counter-strike an evildoer, but to him who strikes you on the right cheek, turn and face him, offering him the other as well. And to him who wishes to sue you for your tunic, let him have your cloak too. And for the one compelling you to walk with him a mile, accompany him for two. Give liberally to the one requesting it of you, and do not refuse the one wishing to borrow from you. (Matt. 5:38-42, my translation)

Jesus’ audience must have been shocked to hear him countering popular justifications of violence even before they were voiced. “You can’t expect us to let those Romans walk all over us, slap us around, take our possessions, and conscript us into forced labor, can you?” To these objections Jesus declares: “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (Matt. 5:11); “Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you” (Matt. 5:42).

At work here is something more profound than a parental injunction to be nice. At the heart of Jesus’ new ethic lies a radically different sense of the character of ultimate reality. Often in the world’s thinking, reality is considered basically material, to be apprehended by the five senses. What we have must be defended, and what we want must be sought by whatever means necessary. James assessed it this way: “What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don’t they spring from your hedonism, warring within your members? You lust after something you don’t have; you murder and covet but do not obtain it” (Jas. 4:1-2, my translation).15 But in God’s government things are different. To follow Jesus is to invest in the world beyond the here and now. One’s passion becomes to seek truth and to adhere to it. In the light of God’s truth, hoards and self-interest lose their appeal. Things are transient and will fade away, but the way of God’s kingdom abides forever.

Thus, Jesus invites his followers (4) to seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, promising that as one does so one’s needs will be

15. Vernard Eller, War and Peace from Genesis to Revelation, 17ff., uses this passage from James as a central text from which to consider treatments of war and peace in the Old and New Testaments.
truly cared for (Matt. 6:33). Paradoxically, the needs of others are addressed as well. The kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field, or like a pearl of great price, worth selling all one has in order to obtain it (Matt. 13:44-46). The value of the kingdom makes pale the valuables of this world. This is no mere exchange of outward loyalties but the forsaking of all attachment to anything but the reign of God. It also challenges directly all human claims to rule by divine mandate because there is only one source of authority and power, and no human institution or structure has the sole right to speak on God’s behalf. Seeking God’s kingdom first restores a dynamic theocracy, a divine rule, on a personal level. Jesus becomes Lord. When this decisive change is made, all things become new. Priorities are rearranged around human relationships and values. Pride and self-deprecation are replaced by genuine humility, by the ability to see ourselves as God sees us. The need to possess loses its grip in the presence of the one who did not count equality with God something to be grasped but poured himself out, even to the point of dying, for the healing of the world (Phil. 2:5-11).

An effect of this transformation is that we find our needs and the needs of others met in ways beyond our imagining. Much human anxiety orbits around this-worldly affairs: what to eat or wear, where to live, how to get by. But Jesus invites us to release what chokes the joy of living out of us (especially for those of us who live in the materialistic cultures of the developed nations). To seek God’s government first is to release what has its tightest grip on us. Jesus promises that God will take care of our real needs, and sometimes this begins by changing our awareness of those needs. We may think that what we need most is food, shelter, and clothing, but our absolute dependence is on the Ground and Source of our being; our basic need is for God. We become drawn into the ultimate interpersonal relationship. When this happens, we paradoxically become especially sensitized to the material needs of others and become instrumental in their being met. All desire is ultimately a reflection of our deepest need, our need for God. When this need is addressed, the others tend to take care of themselves. We even become active partners with God in meeting the needs of others as well.

The way of the kingdom is also to turn the values of the world upside down. The first will be last and the last will be first (Mark 10:31). This changed valuation of worldly status is one of Jesus’ central teachings, and also one of the most radical. It undercuts a key motive for using violence. Most violence is the result of trying either to acquire or to
defend property, territory, or pride. Knowing that in the end the tables will be turned at the least gives one pause when considering defending one's position or possessions. Jesus commanded the rich man, "Sell what you own and give the money to the poor" (Mark 10:21). The man went away grieving because he was wealthy. His greatest asset was his greatest liability, and so it is with institutions as well as individuals.

Likewise, Jesus instructs his followers to seek the path of service rather than seeking to be served. "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Welcoming a child in Jesus' name, ministering to the poor and dispossessed, and assuming positions of lesser rather than greater status exemplify this posture. But this is not an easy idea to take in. Even in Jesus' day his followers struggled with it. In response to the request of the sons of Zebedee to become his vice-regents, Jesus declared pointedly,

You know that those who are acknowledged as bearing rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and that their great ones act in a tyrannical way. This is not how things stand as regards yourselves. On the contrary, if anyone among you should wish to rank high, he must be your servant; and if he wishes to come first, he must be everyone's slave. Indeed the Son of Man made his appearance not to be served but to serve, offering his very life as a ransom paid on behalf of a multitude of men. (Mark 10:42-45)

This means that to become Jesus' follower one must be willing to embrace the cross. Jesus' mission, set against the backdrop of conventional messianic expectations, anticipated a paradoxical rather than triumphal victory. In contrast to the dagger men following in the wake of Judas the Galilean, who believed that if they succeeded they would win the hearts of leaders and people alike and emerge as national heroes, Jesus taught his disciples that he would be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes (Mark 8:31). And in diametrical opposition to the portrayal of the apocalyptic Son of Man in Enoch's Similitudes, descending from the clouds and defeating all God's enemies in holy warfare, Jesus declared that the Son of Man must suffer and die (Mark 8:31). The disciples' shocked response is telling. Peter took Jesus aside to rebuke him. Even his closest followers were confused about his mis-

sion, and it was not until the resurrection that they understood what he had meant (John 12:16). To follow Jesus is to embrace the cross. Says Jesus, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

To follow Jesus is to be willing to pay the ultimate price. Jesus never promised that following him would be easy, the path of least resistance, safe. He promised the opposite, and this is crucial to understanding the spiritual calling to the way of nonviolence. To be peaceable might not work. The nonviolent do get killed. Yet Jesus calls us not to pragmatic calculations but to radical faithfulness. Early Christians understood the cost of discipleship, and true discipleship is no cheaper today. It still involves a cross.

In the light of these teachings we see more clearly what Jesus means when he calls his followers (7) to be peacemakers. The Beatitudes say that people are truly blessed when they live by the way of the kingdom, not by the ways of the world: the poor (or poor in spirit) will possess the kingdom, the mourners will be comforted, the meek will inherit the earth, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be fully satisfied, the merciful will obtain mercy, the pure in heart will see God, and the peacemakers will be called the children of God (Matt. 5:3-9). Those who live in this way may be persecuted (v. 10) and may meet the fate of the prophets of old (vv. 11, 12). Jesus' followers in every age will be salt for a world grown tasteless and light in a world suffering an eclipse of vision.

Being a peacemaker involves at least two things: a commitment to peaceable responses to otherwise volatile situations and a commitment to working for peace proactively. On the pacifistic side, Jesus commands his followers to put away their swords (John 18:11). On the proactive side, Jesus calls us to be peacemakers, not just nonhostile. This means forgiving others as we have been forgiven (Matt. 18:21-35). It means loving our neighbors as ourselves, and loving with the same quality of love as the one who gave his life for others. To follow Jesus is to be called to become a peacemaker, and to do so is to take Jesus' "third way."

Jesus' Third Way

One of the most provocative treatments of Jesus and peace in recent decades is Walter Wink's description of what he calls Jesus' "third way." Conventional responses to evil, according to Wink, are fight or flight responses. Within such a structure, effective domination depends on insuring either response from the dominated. By keeping the upper hand with force, the dominator can deal expeditiously with attempts by the oppressed to resist. This causes the oppressed to assume a submissive posture, which itself becomes a symbol of the relationship. Eventually, tokens of domination can substitute for the actual use of force, and such symbols remind the subjects of their position. While Jesus' contemporaries inclined toward either violent resistance (fight) or cowering submission (flight), Jesus advocated a radical alternative to both in his teaching recorded in Matthew 5:38-42.

Wink writes in Engaging the Powers that this passage has been wrongly employed as "the basis for systematic training in cowardice" (175), when it actually outlines a radical strategy for nonviolent engagement. First, turning the other cheek must be understood in its cultural context. To have been struck on one's right cheek in that right-handed culture (the left hand was used only for unclean tasks), according to Wink, is to have been given a backhanded slap:

We are dealing here with insult, not a fistfight. The intention is clearly not to injure but to humiliate, to put someone in his or her place. . . . A backhand slap was a way of admonishing inferiors. Masters backhanded slaves; husbands, wives; parents, children; men, women; Romans, Jews. We have here a set of unequal relations, in each of which retaliation outlines these New Testament transforming initiatives for Jesus' followers: (1) Acknowledge your alienation and God's grace realistically; (2) Go, talk, welcome one another, and seek to be reconciled; (3) Do not resist revengefully, but take transforming initiatives; (4) Invest in delivering justice; (5) Love your enemies, affirm their valid interests; (6) Pray for your enemies, persevere in prayer; (7) Do not judge but repent and forgive; (8) Do peacemaking in a church or a group of disciples (53-88).

18. See Walter Wink, Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa: Jesus' Third Way (Philadelphia/Santa Cruz: New Society, 1987), and the third volume of his trilogy, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). Most of the following discussion is drawn from these sources.
would invite retribution. The only normal response would be cowering submission. . . .

Why then does [Jesus] counsel these already humiliated people to turn the other cheek? Because this action robs the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, “Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me.” (176)

Turning the other cheek is therefore far from cowering subservience. In the light of Wink’s analysis, it must be understood as the refusal to allow the tokens of domination to be cashed in. The person who turns the other cheek stands with dignity in the face of intimidation and refuses the role of the humiliated. By being willing to accept the direst consequences the oppressor threatens, one faces him as a peer and in so doing declares one’s liberation from the forces of dehumanization.

Second, to give one’s undergarment to a creditor similarly subverts domination, this time in a juridical setting. Citing Exod. 22:25-27; Deut. 24:10-13, 17; and Amos 2:7-8, Wink points out that “only the poorest of the poor would have nothing but a garment to give as collateral for a loan. Jewish law strictly required its return every evening at sunset” (178). Jesus’ instructions suggest a situation rife with indebtedness and usurious manipulation. According to Wink, heavy indebtedness was “the direct consequence of Roman imperial policy. Emperors had taxed the wealthy so stringently to fund their wars that the rich began seeking nonliquid investments to secure their wealth.” In this system, exorbitant interest “created the economic leverage to pry Galilean peasants loose from their land” (178). Thus Jesus instructed people to respond to the merciless creditor’s confiscation of their outer garment by relinquishing also their inner garment, thereby scandalizing the creditor with their nakedness. Nakedness was taboo in Israel, especially for the beholder, so this action turned the tables on the creditors. In doing so,

the poor man has transcended this attempt to humiliate him. He has risen above the shame. At the same time he has registered a stunning protest against the system that created his debt. He has said in effect, “You want my robe? Here, take everything! Now you’ve got all I have except my body. Is that what you’ll take next? . . .”

The powers that be literally stand upon their dignity. Nothing
depotentiates them faster than deft lampooning. By refusing to be awed by their power, the powerless are emboldened to seize the initiative, even where structural change is not immediately possible. . . Jesus provides here a hint of how to take on the entire system by unmasking its essential cruelty and burlesquing its pretensions to justice. (179)

Third, Jesus' command to go the second mile must also be interpreted in the light of its original setting. It was common practice for Roman soldiers to press local subjects into forced labor, and Jesus' instruction here, as in the previous examples, shows how "the oppressed can recover the initiative and assert their human dignity in a situation that cannot for the time being be changed. The rules are Caesar's, but how one responds to the rules is God's, and Caesar has no power over that" (182).

Again, imagine the shock of those who expected the dominated to cower in grudging subservience, thus reinforcing structures of oppression. Wink believes the case can be made for the view that one mile was set as the legal limit for tolerable exploitation when it came to forcing a subject to carry a soldier's load. Perhaps this restraint functioned to justify an abusive practice for the dominated and the dominator alike. In answering objections to the oppressive system, one could always point to this supposedly merciful restraint. For a Jewish subject to carry a Roman soldier's load two miles, double the legal limit, and to do so cheerfully, must have put the soldier and his system off balance. Says Wink,

From a situation of servile impressment, the oppressed have suddenly seized the initiative. They have taken back the power of choice. The soldier is thrown off balance by being deprived of the predictability of the victim's response. He has never dealt with such a problem before. Now he has been forced into making a decision for which nothing in his previous experience has prepared him. If he has enjoyed feeling superior to the vanquished, he will not enjoy it today. (182)

Finally, Wink argues that these instructions must be read in light of Matt. 5:39a, which is often mistranslated, "Do not resist an evildoer." Wink judges that a more correct interpretation of the text does not negate resistance, but only violent resistance; what Jesus forbids is "to resist violently, to revolt or rebel, to engage in an insurrection" (185). One might also amplify the sentence to read, "But I tell you, do not counter-strike the evildoer; but if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn and face him, offering also the other." The implication is that evil cannot be overcome
by evil means. When one responds violently to violence, evil wins a double victory. First, its essential nature remains unexposed and thereby it pro­longs its life. Second, it succeeds in seducing those with good intentions into its way. History is full of examples of revolutionaries who became what they had originally hated: oppressors. Jesus’ strategy brings true reform and avoids this tragic end. Says Wink,

His way aims at converting the opponent; failing that, it hopes for accommodation, where the opponent is willing to make some changes simply to get the protesters off his back. But if that fails too, nonviolent coercion: the opponent is forced to make a change rather than suffer the loss of power, even though he remains hostile. But Jesus’ way does not employ violent coercion. (192)

The strength of Wink’s interpretation of Jesus’ teachings on nonviolence is that it clearly portrays the third way Jesus instructed his disciples to follow. Jesus advocated neither a fight nor a flight response to domination, but a nonviolent, redemptive engagement of the powers that be. While he did not aspire to be a political leader in the popular sense, his teaching was thoroughly political in its implications. It aimed at nothing short of creating a new earth in which God’s just and loving will would be done as perfectly as in heaven.

But this is precisely where Wink’s helpful work could be misinterpreted. All too easily these insights could lead one to believe that the main import of Jesus’ teaching is instrumental. One could infer that Jesus simply gives us a more effective way to subvert oppressive groups like the Romans.19 This approach misses the intrinsic ethos of his teaching. Matthew 5:42 concludes the classic paragraph on nonviolent engagement by calling us to adopt a spirit of exceeding generosity simply because this is the way of Jesus. Though his followers will experience dehumanizing treatment, Jesus calls them to resist dehumanizing the oppressor, as well as the needy: “Give to everyone who begs from you,” says Jesus,

19. Wink himself would see this as a misinterpretation. He writes, “Jesus did not advocate nonviolence merely as a technique for outwitting the enemy, but as a just means of opposing the enemy in such a way as to hold open the possibility of the enemy’s becoming just as well. Both sides must win. We are summoned to pray for our enemies’ transformation, and to respond to ill-treatment with a love which is not only godly but also, I am convinced, can only be found in God” (Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa, 32-33).
“and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” Evil cannot overcome evil. Only good can expose, disarm, and overcome it.

Problems with Jesus’ Teachings on Peace

Despite the clarity of Jesus’ teachings on peace, they present some problems. One is the fact that some passages from the Gospels may seem to legitimate the use of force. These texts have led some Christians to object to any model of Christian discipleship that relinquishes their right to resort to violence under some circumstances.

One example is the story of Jesus’ clearing of the temple and his overturning of the tables and seats of the money-changers and pigeon sellers (Mark 11:15-19; Matt. 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-22). Some Christians argue that this story justifies occasional use of violence. However, this reading is problematic for several reasons. First, a whip of cords (mentioned in John 2) was probably used for cattle and animals, as when a herder drove animals out of a pen. Nothing in the texts suggests that Jesus struck people. Second, overturning chairs and tables in the temple is entirely in keeping with the tradition of prophetic demonstration. The goal was not to bring change by doing damage but to expose the truth about a corrupt and dehumanizing system. Interpreting these actions as acts of prophetic judgment (rather than as acts of violence) is consistent with the way they are portrayed in the texts themselves. The Synoptic accounts refer to Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11 to explain Jesus’ action as prophetic, while John uses Ps. 69:9. Nothing in this prophetic demonstration legitimizes the use of violent force by Jesus’ followers.

In several places in the Synoptic Gospels Jesus refers to the sword in ways that appear to sanction its use. For example, in Matt. 10:34, Jesus is quoted as saying, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” To examine this statement in isolation may give a skewed notion of Jesus’ intention. Even the verses that follow it, describing enmity between family members, may lead the reader to believe Jesus was advocating violence. Matthew 10:34-39 falls within the larger context of warnings about the hostile reception Jesus’ disciples are about to experience as he sends them out on a healing, exorcising, and preaching mission to the lost sheep of

20. See also Ulrich Mauser’s treatment of this motif in The Gospel of Peace, 36-64.
Israel. Luke represents the Q motif in parallel fashion: “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division” (Luke 12:51). The point is that they should prepare for a cold reception, and that they should remain faithful in their mission regardless of the cost. The pivotal promise is: “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 10:39). This promise connotes the martyr, not the murderer.

Another problematic passage is Luke 22:36, in which Jesus is reported as saying, “And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.” After this his disciples come to him and say, “Lord, look, here are two swords,” to which Jesus answers “It is enough” (v. 38). The meaning of the passage is obscure, and Luke’s source and reason for adding it are matters of debate. Verses 35-38 appear to be a conflation of a commissioning narrative and Jesus’ rebuke to the disciple who severed the ear of the high priest’s servant. Again, the context is one in which Jesus warns of trials to come and the need to prepare for them. If Jesus were advocating use of the sword, why would he assert that two swords would suffice to protect them against Roman legions? Richard McSorley suggests that the exclamation ικανόν ἐστιν is better rendered “Enough of that!” (as in “Stop it!”), rather than “It is enough” (as in “That will do fine, thank you”).21 This rendering is even more persuasive when one views it alongside Jesus’ abrupt statement to the disciple who slices off the ear of the high priest’s servant: “No more of this!” (Luke 22:51). Both commands seem to be saying essentially the same thing in a similar colloquial ways. Despite the obscurity of Luke’s tradition here, corollary passages make Jesus’ instruction clear. Those who think he advocated armed revolt have misunderstood. According to Matthew 26:52, Jesus said, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” The point is not to justify one’s violent response to others’ violent action, but to put a stop to the all-too-human readiness to fight force with force. John also understands the central implication here. According to John 18:11, Jesus told Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?” Although Jesus brings division between his followers and those who reject the gospel message, and

21. New Testament Basis of Peacemaking, 40-41. McSorley’s overall counsel is sound: “The obscurity of the text should be settled by the total gospel context, which is opposed to all murderous violence” (41).
although he warns his followers to prepare for adversity, he nowhere instructs them to use violence. Instead, he consistently commands them to put their swords away.

A final passage that has been used to legitimize the use of violence is Jesus' statement "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). This passage is a clear biblical teaching on the character of sacrificial love. It says nothing about taking the life of another person out of love for one's friends. Being willing to lay down one's life for a friend is commended; being willing to take another's life is not. The way of Jesus is always the way of agape, and it does not accommodate the use of violent force for any reason. Though these passages may seem at first to challenge an absolute nonviolence, none of them legitimates either individual or collective violence.

A second problem with Jesus' teachings on peace is that they are aimed primarily at people with no political clout and so are difficult to incorporate into an ethic for those who are in positions of power and responsibility. How is Jesus' ethic of peace relevant to those responsible for the vulnerable? To pay the price of martyrdom when one is faced with a defend-or-die situation is one thing. It is another thing to allow members of one's family or nation, or even people of other lands, to run the same risk. This course of action is especially problematic for those leaders entrusted with responsibility to care for the needs of their constituent group. When one becomes responsible for others, one's ethical orientation tends to shift from a principled approach to a utilitarian calculation. One must consider what is best for all concerned. And, as far as we know, Jesus did not draw out the implications of his teaching for those in such positions of responsibility. His teachings emphasized the agapeic responsibility of each person, or of the group of his followers. But Jesus did not leave his followers without direction. He promised the presence of his Spirit, to provide them with guidance and to lead them to truth (John 14-16). Often people resort to violence because of fear or frustration, because they cannot foresee the outcome of a perilous situation. To believe in a risen Lord, who teaches that good is not effected by evil means, is to be able to look beyond apparent dilemmas to redemptive possibilities. Even when dilemmas seem unsolvable, the dynamic Spirit of Christ offers more possibilities than do party platforms or church policies. This is the spiritual basis of Christian hope in a fallen world:

I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:25-27)

In discharging their responsibility for the vulnerable, Christian leaders must remember that there are vulnerable people outside leaders’ constituent groups. To believe in the active reign of God is to see through the otherwise unchallenged doctrine of the sovereignty of nations to the power that transcends the state. No human reign is sovereign. And evils rationalized on the basis of national advantage or the immunity of the state must stir the conscience of Christians on whose behalf some of these actions are done. When leaders hear from their constituents that they value truth above group advantage, and when leaders act on the basis of conscience, this approximates the new order in which the will of God is done on earth as in heaven.

A third problem with Jesus’ teachings on peace is that they ultimately call us to act on the basis of principle rather than outcome. This may appear impractical or even unrealistic. Yet many appeals to use violent means to peaceable ends first sketch an obviously undesirable worst-case scenario. Our God-given love for family, friends, God, and country is used deceptively to construct dilemmas that seem to force us to relax principle to save those we love from harm. Sometimes life does require that we make tough choices. But often the powers that be use hypothetical dilemmas to weaken our principled consciences. If one asks, “What would I be willing to do to save loved ones from tragic violation?” one set of answers emerges. Conversely, if one asks, “How much evil would I be willing to commit in the name of good?” one comes up with another set of conclusions. Harsh realities exist, but rarely is creative and peaceable mediation totally

impossible. The deceptive posing of either/or dilemmas helps make violence acceptable.

On the other hand, people of clear Christian commitment have wondered how closely the Christian is bound to Jesus’ teachings on peace, especially when faced with real atrocities, with real victims crying out for military intervention. We do live in a fallen world, and good answers are not easy to come by. The evil perpetrated by Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, and South African apartheid has caused some Christians to wonder whether love of neighbor might sometimes necessitate the use of violent force. Such renowned theologians as Paul Ramsey and Reinhold Niebuhr have advocated approaches to contemporary conflicts that include the option of force.25

But as Richard McSorley and others have pointed out, one cannot come up with a just war theory on the basis of Jesus’ teachings.26 This

25. See William R. Stevenson, Jr., Christian Love and Just War: Moral Paradox and Political Life in St. Augustine and His Modern Interpreters (Macon: Mercer University, 1987). Paul Ramsey, for example, interpreted Augustine’s just war idea to be “love-transformed justice.” “In other words,” writes Stevenson, “the basis for justified warfare lay not in mere self-preservation, nor in natural justice alone, but in a meshing of Christian love and natural justice” (116). Reinhold Niebuhr, on the other hand, traced a long history of Christian justifications for the use of force and identified many cases of institutional domination that are sinful precisely because they pretend to be righteous while using violent force. He therefore adopted a posture of “Christian realism”; he believed that in a fallen world, where power must be answered with power, the Christian should be prepared to use coercion but not with the pretense of being righteous in doing so. There is no escape from guilt in history, according to Niebuhr, and the Christian politician must be willing to strive for the good with no guarantee that morally desirable options are available.

26. McSorley, New Testament Basis of Peacemaking, 81-102. Consider also the provocative essay, “Christians and War,” by Alan Kreider and John H. Yoder (Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], 24-27), which identifies three classic Christian positions on war — holy war, just war, and pacifism — and states that only pacifism is based on the teachings and example of Jesus. Jesus’ teachings and example do not provide warrants for using violent means to seek peaceful ends. Some Christians who have rejected pacifism (e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer) have recognized honestly that to do so involves acting on some other basis. Before attempting to assassinate Hitler, Bonhoeffer resigned his clerical status and was willing to forfeit his eternal destiny. He did not justify his action but cast himself on God’s mercy. Niebuhr was convinced that Christians must sometimes use violence to oppose greater violence, but he believed that to do so was sin nonetheless. These approaches have more integrity than eisegetical attempts to sketch Jesus as the forerunner of the kind of revolutionary who speaks justice through the barrel of a gun.
theory was the work of Augustine and others, using political reasoning and scriptural allusions. McSorley contends that Christians’ willingness to engage in warfare denies the core content of the gospel, especially in the context of nuclear weaponry. It is no accident that the church documents on peace analyzed by Howard J. Loewen earlier in this volume, which range across a spectrum of ecclesial traditions, were produced out of reflection on the massive destructive potential of nuclear weapons developed during the 1970s and 1980s. The sort of moral reasoning that led thoughtful Christians during the first part of this century to move from pacifism to a just war posture may now in the nuclear age be leading thoughtful Christians to move from a just war position toward pacifism.

Virtually all participants in armed conflict perceive their action as justified, either in defending themselves and others against tragic outcomes, or in retaliation for some wrong they have suffered. But a “justified” use of violence in one case often sets the stage for a series of justifications of violence. Conflicts “solved” by force in one generation fester to become the source of later conflicts and even longstanding animosities. Conversely, when mediated solutions are owned by both sides, peace is more stable and enduring. Living by the principle of agapeic concern for all involved may more effectively produce long-term peaceable outcomes than so-called realistic solutions that fall back on violence. Though nonviolence may not always work, history is full of failed attempts to establish lasting peace by using force.

The Way of Discipleship and the Paradox of the Cross

To follow Jesus is to embrace the cross. This is the scandal of discipleship, in New Testament times and now, and it challenges even the best human schemes for security. Truth is often paradoxical; it stands against the conventions of human wisdom, and without divine aid, without revelation, we cannot grasp it.

The paradox of the cross is central to an adequate understanding of Christian pacifism. This paradox is seen in the Hebrew Scriptures, is revealed in the incarnation, and applies to all followers of Christ. The suffering servant of Yahweh is a prototype of Jesus (the “eschatype”), according to New Testament accounts of his ministry. It is unclear whether Jesus himself made this connection, or whether his followers afterward made the association with this figure. In any case, the connec-
tion reflects an insightful interpretation of Israel's history: The suffering of one generation becomes the next generations' means of redemption.27

In the servant psalms of Isaiah 40–55, several features stand out. First, the servant is called “Jaçob” and “Israel” and is referred to in both the singular and the plural; the writer seems to shift back and forth between a particular individual and corporate Israel. Probably both forms should be understood as referring to corporate Israel.28

Second, while Cyrus, “the anointed,” was stirred up from the east by Yahweh (Isa. 41:2), Abraham’s descendants have been chosen and called from the farthest corners of the earth (vv. 8–9) by the Holy One of Israel. The servant will be anointed with Yahweh’s spirit and will bring a just world order without breaking a bruised reed or snuffing out a smoldering wick (Isa. 42:1–7). He [they] will be a light to the Gentiles and the means of the world’s salvation (Isa. 49:1–7). Yahweh can conscript Cyrus into service, though Cyrus does not know Yahweh (Isa. 45:1–5), but in Yahweh’s work through the suffering servant there is a closer harmony between Yahweh’s healing and saving ends and the means used.

Third, paradoxically, the exaltation of the servant will come through suffering. To appreciate the full significance of this promise, consider the humiliation and devastation Judah had experienced in the sixth century B.C.E. Judah had been spared from Sennacherib’s siege more than a century earlier, during Hezekiah’s reform, but they were not spared from Nebuchadnezzar’s armies in 587. Their land was overrun, their wealth plundered, and the ablest of their number taken to Babylon as slaves. The phrase, “we accounted him [our nation] stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4b), reflects long pondering over the problem of theodicy: Why would a just and loving God allow this

27. Eller, War and Peace from Genesis to Revelation, 88-112, interprets the suffering servant of Yahweh as the central biblical type for the way God fights. He calls it “fighting in reverse” and sees its fulfillment in the “victory of Skull Hill.” See also Wink’s fourth chapter in Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa, 47-72, especially 68ff.

28. Although the reference on the surface seems to be to an individual (especially in Isa. 52:13–53:12), it was a common Hebrew practice to refer to a group by using a symbolic name (see, for example, Hos. 11:1-4, where “Ephraim” is used as an endearing name for the ten northern tribes). Nowhere in these servant songs is a name used that lacks a symbolic and corporate reference (e.g., Jacob, Israel), and all that is said of the servant is true of the experience of corporate Israel. Therefore, it seems most coherent to understand the initial referent of the servant of Yahweh to be corporate Israel, though Christians understand this type to be finally fulfilled in Christ.
devastation to happen to God's chosen people? "By oppression and judgment he was [our ancestors were] taken away. And who can speak of his [their] descendants [us]?" (v. 8a; my paraphrase). This lament must have reminded the sixth-century audience of their sense of abandonment in the aftermath of the Babylonian humiliation.

The Jews who now experienced relative comfort and hope, who had survived and even prospered some during the exile, must have felt deeply indebted to their predecessors because of the suffering they had endured. As horrifying as their ordeals had been, through Yahweh's care the suffering of the past had become the source of present blessing. The audience of Isaiah 40–55 must have found comfort in the belief that God had brought them to a place of consolation, not just in spite of but by means of the suffering of earlier generations. They must have pictured the previous generation as a paschal lamb: "He was [our parents and friends were] wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him [them] was the punishment that made us whole, and by his [their] bruises we are healed" (v. 5). According to Isaiah 53, Israel, which had suffered terribly, had been faithful and had thus become the means of blessing. Later Jews perceived their return to Zion as the blessing brought about by the faithfulness in the midst of the suffering of those who had gone before. Through the struggles and faithfulness of one generation, future generations were being blessed.

These insights drawn from the redemption accomplished through the vicarious sufferings of exilic Israel also apply to New Testament understandings of Jesus' mission. The Gospel of Mark with special clarity portrays Jesus as one who understood that his suffering and death would paradoxically bring about the redemption of others. As Judah had

29. One difference in nuance between the singular and plural references to the servant is that when the singular is used, the reference seems to be to Israel's past sufferings. The plural seems to be used in describing a more contemporary situation.

30. This discussion is speculative, but if it understands the origin of the suffering servant motif correctly, then new light is shed on the mission of Jesus and how Jesus' followers perceived that mission. This understanding also has implications for the present discussion on peacemaking in the Scriptures. If the suffering servant is a model for understanding how God wrests redemption from tragedy, we gain new insights for approaching difficult situations today. A violent response to a perceived threat ceases to be our first reaction or even our last resort, and previously unforeseen nonviolent possibilities emerge.
been devastated by Nebuchadnezzar’s aggression, so Jesus’ followers were shocked by his death. Not until the resurrection did their despair give way to recognition: They came to see his suffering as a fulfillment of Scripture and to interpret his death as the means by which he took their suffering on himself. Jesus’ death was not an end but a beginning. Through it came victory over the ultimate foe, death itself. And by raising Jesus, God declared with finality that oppression and violence will not have the last word. The reign of God advances by spiritually binding “the strong man,” the powers and systems of oppression and deception that beleaguer the vulnerable.

Jesus’ followers are called to embody the same approach. The way of discipleship is always the way of the cross, and to follow Jesus is to embrace the cross. Jesus did not promise that peacemakers would be successful, or that they would be spared hardship. To pursue peace is often to increase one’s vulnerability, not to diminish it. Jesus says to Peter, the crowd, and the rest of the disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Some failed to understand Jesus’ teaching on the cross, but some abandoned him precisely because they did understand. The Johannine tradition reports that Jesus’ disciples were scandalized by his teaching, that some of them slid back and refused to travel with him any longer (John 6:51-66). The Christian mission to embrace the cross and so become an agent of reconciliation in the world cannot be accomplished by evil means. As Albert Schweitzer wrote in 1906,

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: “Follow thou me!” and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill in our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fel-

31. Jesus’ “bread” is his flesh given for the life of the world (John 6:51); this is a statement about the cross. He then invites his followers to eat his flesh and drink his blood, an invitation not simply to partake of the Eucharist, but an invitation (which uses graphic eucharistic imagery) to continue to embrace the cross of discipleship. See Paul N. Anderson, The Christology of the Fourth Gospel: Its Unity and Disunity in the Light of John 6 (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2; Tübingen: Mohr, 1994), for a fuller treatment of the Johannine tradition and its audience.
Jesus and Peace

lowship and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.32

Findings

Overwhelming evidence contradicts attempts to connect the historical Jesus with armed revolutionaries. Jesus’ mission was different from that of other first-century prophets and messiahs in its absolute commitment to nonviolent means. All four Gospels portray Jesus as one who struggled against popular hopes that he would overthrow the Romans by force, who was committed to using peaceable means to attain peaceful goals. Jesus’ program was not that of Cyrus, Judas Maccabeus, or the Zealots.

Jesus’ teachings were pervasively pacifistic, and following him entails serious reflection on his central teachings. These include admonitions to love enemies and to seek first God’s reign. In this reign love and truth are supreme. As Ulrich Mauser has written, “It is . . . no exaggeration to say that the entire activity of Jesus, in word and deed, is the making of peace; and that the life of his community is given direction by his blessing on the peacemakers.”33

But Jesus’ ethic is not lofty idealism. His teachings had significant political implications. They provided people living under domination an effective means of nonviolent engagement aimed at laying bare evil systems of oppression and seeking to transform them into a just social order. Jesus taught an alternative to both violent revolution and doormat passivity, a third way which has been misunderstood both by pacifists and by those who would use force. Jesus’ way is an ever-adaptable strategy for confronting the powers that be with the truth, forcing them into a public dilemma that may lead to their embarrassment or to repentance. Redemptive results are not guaranteed, but this third way can be used in any situation with creativity, initiative, hope.

Jesus’ teachings on peace are clear but problematic. He did not give his followers directions about how to respond when those in their care face violent danger. But living by a kingdom ethic involves considering outcomes for all people involved, not just the members of one’s own group. Then violent approaches may give way to creative alterna-

32. Schweitzer closes *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* with these words (403).
tives. While Christians sometimes abandon pacifism out of concern to stop violence, even the effective use of force often eventually becomes the source of more violence.

Following Jesus always involves the cross. A disciple must be more concerned with minding the truth than with avoiding suffering. The suffering servant of Isaiah taught sixth-century (B.C.E.) Jews that God works to bring healing and hope out of the suffering of one generation; Jesus' followers perceive and experience the suffering of Jesus in a similar way. This model suggests that God works most powerfully in the world through such suffering. In our fallen world, there is no tragedy, ill, or injury that does not bear within itself redemptive possibilities. Following Jesus may increase our suffering, but we may be assured that if we are crucified with him we will also be raised with him. This is history's final paradox and the basis of the Christian peacemaker's hope.