

# The Biblical and Social-Ethical Grounds for a Theology of Peacemaking in Resolving Violent Conflicts

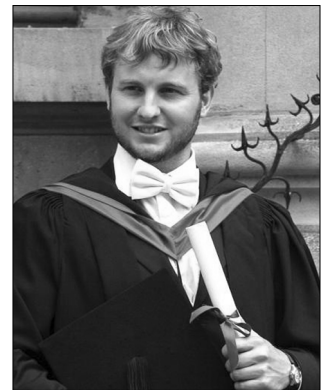
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## INTRODUCTION

**T**he question concerning when or whether it is permissible to engage in armed combat is one of the enduring issues of Christian ethics. In this article I will argue that, from a radical Christian perspective, realism, pacifism and just war theory all fail to penetrate to the heart of the issue about the morality of war, and that each of these approaches fails to provide valid theological or social ethical grounds for a theology of peacemaking. Glen H. Stassen argues that the first question we ask when we reason ethically about war and peace, should not be ‘can such and such a war be justified on theological or social ethical grounds?’, but, ‘what steps should we be taking to prevent war and what practices make for peace?’<sup>[1]</sup> The Christian and the secular moralist come to these questions with certain common convictions (e.g. the inherent value of human life, the need to preserve peaceful relationships among peoples, etc.) upon which a certain moral consensus can be built. However, although the secular social ethicist will judge the normative value of practices by how effectively they deliver peace, this is not, I will argue, the primary concern of the ethicist guided by Christian convictions, who is bound to judge practices by the sole criteria of how faithfully they correspond to the teachings of Jesus, regardless of their effectiveness in bringing about peace. For Jesus’ followers, obedience, as John Howard Yoder pointed out,

<sup>[1]</sup> G. Stassen and D. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 174.



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is more important than effectiveness.<sup>[2]</sup> This article thus begins with an acceptance of the fact that the social ethical grounds and the biblical grounds will never correspond entirely in providing justification for a theology of peacemaking. Nevertheless there remains a sufficient convictional base of common concern to render possible a constructive dialogue between Christian biblical ethics and secular ethical discourse and for Christian witness to the secular perspectives.<sup>[3]</sup> The extent to which such a dialogue can lead to a theology of peacemaking in resolving violent conflict will be addressed in what follows.

As a way out of the traditional impasse between the advocates of just war, realism and pacifism, I will draw on the ideas of Stassen and James Wm McClendon, Jr. In a previous work I explored the ways in which Stassen's transforming initiatives and McClendon's 'baptist vision' cohered to provide a workable paradigm for understanding the moral relevance of the Sermon in the Mount as a realistic resource for discipleship.<sup>[4]</sup> The political responsibility of discipleship is an important issue that follows logically from this study.<sup>[5]</sup> The difference is that, whereas in that work I explored the issue of spiritual formation and discipleship, the present article will examine the political responsibilities of discipleship in regard to Christian thinking about peacemaking. By bringing Stassen and McClendon into conversation with each other, I hope again to construct a third position which builds a synthesis of the positive insights of their perspectives. Stassen's emphasis on normative practices of peacemaking can be supplemented by McClendon's 'baptist vision', which provides the necessary theological justification of just peacemaking theory. On these grounds I will argue that a theology of peacemaking is indeed justified on social ethical as well as biblical grounds, but I will also maintain that the debate is highly complex and that it engages its participants at the deepest level of their moral convictions.<sup>[6]</sup>

## I. The Failure of Realism, Pacifism and Just War Theory to Establish a Workable Basis for a Theology of Peacemaking in Resolving Violent Conflicts

The debate concerning Christian participation in armed conflict, as McClendon has rightly pointed out, is not a matter of rational, clear thinking versus

<sup>[2]</sup> Yoder, 'Peace Without Eschatology' (1954), in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 147.

<sup>[3]</sup> John Howard Yoder offered a mapping of forms of witness in regard to different Christian traditions in his important work *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1977).

<sup>[4]</sup> Joshua T. Searle, 'The Sermon on the Mount: a Realistic Resource for Christian Discipleship and Spiritual Formation?', in *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 9 (January, 2009), 38-50.

<sup>[5]</sup> See also John Howard Yoder, *Discipleship*

*as Political Responsibility*, trans. T. J. Geddert (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 2003).

<sup>[6]</sup> Another legitimate way to approach the question of whether a theology of peacemaking can be justified on biblical or social ethical grounds would be to conduct a detailed exegetical analysis of specific biblical texts which refer to issues of war and peace. Readers in search of such an approach may wish to consult William Swartley's challenging and lucid work, entitled, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Piece in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

irrationality and irresponsibility.<sup>[7]</sup> Each approach to ethical thinking about war constitutes a distinctive tradition of moral discourse that applies its own ethical criteria to judge whether it is right or wrong to engage in violent conflict. The origins of political realism, as a means of addressing (or evading) the moral issues raised by war, can be traced back to the works of Thucydides. The political thought of Machiavelli and Hobbes has also been associated with realism. Leading twentieth-century representatives of this tradition include Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger.<sup>[8]</sup> Realism maintains that it is impossible to judge international affairs and matters of war and peace by applying moral criteria, for these activities are seen to ‘lie beyond (or beneath) moral judgement.’<sup>[9]</sup> Thus, since from the realist perspective, it is ‘wrong or impossible to think morally about war’<sup>[10]</sup>, any attempt to ground a theology of peacemaking in social ethical or biblical principles is fundamentally misconceived.

Detailed scholarly refutations of realism have already been written and it is not my aim to rehearse the arguments in detail. It is important, nevertheless, to point out some basic flaws in realist reasoning.<sup>[11]</sup> The most fundamental fallacy in realist thinking is the failure to see that states, like people, are ‘free ... to act on the basis of moral commitments and conceptions of justice.’<sup>[12]</sup> To claim that war is merely a product of the interplay between the conflicting interests of states seems unhelpfully fatalistic, and in the nuclear age in which we now live, positively dangerous. Despite the inevitable ‘fact of sin’ and the ‘sinful character of man’<sup>[13]</sup>, such negative assessments of human nature must not become an excuse for casually accepting the Hobbesian depiction of human beings in a ‘state of nature’ as a normative or even accurate characterisation of human nature. Nor would it be logical to posit that this negative depiction (even if true) impels us necessarily to accept war and international anarchy as the default conditions of global politics. As Michael Walzer, a leading critic of realism, has argued, war is ‘a human action, purposive and premeditated, for whose effects someone is responsible.’<sup>[14]</sup>

Just war theory, which dates back at least as far as Augustine<sup>[15]</sup>, was established on a systematic theological basis in the writings of the sixteenth-century Salamanca school of political jurisprudence.<sup>[16]</sup> It has been revived in

[7] McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 313.

[8] B. Orend, *Michael Walzer on War and Justice* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), 61.

[9] M. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 3.

[10] John Howard Yoder, *When War is Unjust* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1996), 1.

[11] See, Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 3-20.

[12] Orend, *Walzer*, 63.

[13] R. Niebuhr in, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*, edited by R. McAfee Brown (New Haven:

Yale University Press, 1986), 102-103.

[14] Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 15.

[15] Yoder claims that the rudiments of a theory of just war can be found in the writings of Augustine’s earlier contemporary, Ambrose. See Yoder, *When War is Unjust*, 1.

[16] A leading representative of this school was Francisco de Vitoria (c. 1492-1546). James Turner Johnson argues that Vitoria’s writings contain ‘the first clear and complete statement of what has come to be conceived as the classic requirements of the doctrine of just war.’ See Johnson, ‘Morality and Force in Statecraft’, in *Love and Society: Essays in honour of Paul*

contemporary discourse, notably by the social ethicist, Michael Walzer and the theologian, Oliver O'Donovan.<sup>[17]</sup> A proper critical appraisal of the respective merits of just war theory (and of realism and pacifism) must understand it as an attempt to hold together the ideals of peace, love and justice in a sustainable equilibrium that corresponds with the ideals of social justice and moral responsibility.<sup>[18]</sup> The degree to which one ideal is emphasised or takes precedence over another will depend upon the moral convictions of the person concerned and those of his or her community, which, in the case of theological justification, determines one's interpretation of the biblical text.<sup>[19]</sup> Whereas pacifists are inclined by their convictions to place peace above justice in the moral hierarchy, just war theorists are apt to do the opposite or to claim that justice is somehow ethically antecedent to peace or love. The most common charge that just war theorists and realists bring against pacifism is that pacifists are guilty of moral irresponsibility in refusing to defend justice.<sup>[20]</sup> They have thus been accused of 'Pilatism' in attempting to 'wash their hands' of responsibility in order to maintain their moral purity.<sup>[21]</sup> Just war theorists hold that justice is the overriding concern of God and that in some cases the imperative of justice overrides even that of peace or love. Thus some Christian ethicists argue that justice is the *precondition* of peace. Jerram Barrs states that, 'peace cannot come unless there is justice' and that there are 'far more prayers for justice in the Bible than there are prayers for peace', which, it is argued, provides theological grounds for the Christian's right to engage in violent conflict in the name of restoring justice.<sup>[22]</sup> Augustine maintained that it is sometimes necessary to resort to violence, and even to kill, in order to preserve the lives of the innocent, provided that the act of killing proceeds from a motive of love.<sup>[23]</sup> The preoccupation with the restoration of justice, which has been a characteristic tenet of just war thinking since the time of Augustine, has continued to the present day. Thus O'Donovan, who has recently offered a highly nuanced defence of just war theory in the wake of the tensions leading up to the war in Iraq, has argued that this tradition of moral reasoning is essentially concerned with establishing 'a proposal for doing justice in the theatre of war.'<sup>[24]</sup>

*Ramsey*, edited by J. Johnson and D. Smith (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), 95.

<sup>[17]</sup> O'Donovan, *The Just War Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Notably, O'Donovan's position led to his supporting the disastrous American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. His most lucid critic on this point was the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams.

<sup>[18]</sup> I am indebted to Parush Parushev for this insight.

<sup>[19]</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 21-24.

<sup>[20]</sup> The classic statement of this position can be found in Reinhold Niebuhr's pamphlet, 'Why the Christian Church Is Not Pacifist'.

See, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr*, 102-119.

<sup>[21]</sup> A. Weaver, 'Unjust Lies, Just Wars? A Christian Pacifist Conversation with Augustine', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 21 (2001), 51.

<sup>[22]</sup> J. Barrs, 'The Just War Revisited', in *Readings in Christian Ethics: Volume 2: Issues and Applications*, edited by D. Clark and R. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids: Barker Books, 1996), 504.

<sup>[23]</sup> P. Weithman, 'Augustine's Political Philosophy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, edited by E. Stump and N. Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 247.

<sup>[24]</sup> O'Donovan, *Just War*, vii.

Given their overriding concern for justice, it seems ironic that many just war theorists fail to do justice to the goal for which they purport to be aiming, namely, to avoid violent conflict. Lisa Cahill has argued that both just war theory and pacifism ‘arise out of a common concern to avoid violence.’<sup>[25]</sup> This, however, is not entirely accurate. Just war theory is more concerned with *containing* or *limiting* violence than with *avoiding* it. Ever since Clausewitz, theorists have understood that war is the realm of absolutes and that it is impossible to attempt to contain war; ‘moderate violence’, it is argued, is misleading as well as self-contradictory statement because organised violence leads to an inexorable escalation of death and destruction. Therefore some pacifist writers have argued that the conception of just war is an oxymoron.<sup>[26]</sup>

Despite their different approaches to war, many pacifists and just war theorists are concerned essentially with the same question: ‘can war be justified from a social ethical or theological point of view?’ The absolute pacifist answers, ‘No, never’,<sup>[27]</sup> whereas the just war theorist answers, ‘Sometimes, provided that conditions a, b and c are met and that means x, y and z are used.’ A more helpful approach would be one which begins with a more constructive question, not about how or why war can or cannot be morally or theologically justified, but about what kind of practices will be conducive to the abolition of war. It might also be asked: ‘what practices are consistent with both the moral vision of the New Testament and the convictions of the faith community that arise from this vision?’<sup>[28]</sup> This is the basic question of just peacemaking, which alongside McClendon’s baptist vision, will be the focus of Part II.

## II. Stassen’s ‘Transforming Initiatives’ and McClendon’s ‘baptist vision’ as Grounds for a Workable Theology of Peacemaking

The question of what kind of practices lead to peace lies at the heart of just peacemaking initiative established by Stassen and a team of scholars, public officials and policy makers, drawn from a broad spectrum of people of Chris-

<sup>[25]</sup> Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 1

<sup>[26]</sup> T. Erdel, ‘Is Just War Still an Oxymoron?’, *Criswell Theological Review*, 2 (2007), 53-76.

<sup>[27]</sup> Much of the scholarship has tended to emphasise the multiplicity of convictions within pacifism, as, for example Yoder has done in his *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1971). Notwithstanding considerable diversity, all pacifists share the base conviction that war is morally wrong, even though they argue this point on different theological or social ethical grounds. It is, for instance, perfectly possible for one to be an atheist or

agnostic and still be a pacifist by conviction, as the example of Bertrand Russell clearly demonstrates.

<sup>[28]</sup> The phrase, ‘moral vision of the New Testament’ is the name of an influential book by Richard Hays: *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996). In pages 317-346, Hays applies his vision to the issue of peace and war and concludes that ‘from Matthew to Revelation we find a consistent witness against violence and a calling to the community to follow the example of Jesus in accepting suffering rather than inflicting it’ (332). Hays offers a stimulating discussion which presents a convincing case for a theology of just peacemaking.

tian and non-faith convictions.<sup>[29]</sup> Stassen is concerned with the question of how to construct a theory of peacemaking that could be accepted by all ‘people of goodwill’ regardless of their religious convictions.<sup>[30]</sup> Stassen’s proposal, I will argue, contains the rudiments of a workable theory of peacemaking. What it lacks, however, is a sustainable theological basis. I will argue that this is where McClendon’s notion of the “baptist vision” can be used to supply this essential missing piece in Stassen’s theory.

Stassen compares the debate between just war theory and pacifism to ‘two persons drifting rapidly toward a waterfall, arguing whether to protest against the fall or to justify taking part in the catastrophe.’ He suggests that we need, ‘a third person in the boat who asks early about initiatives to head for the shore while there is still time.’<sup>[31]</sup> Stassen’s new paradigm provides a helpful and timely way out of the circular, ineffectual debate between realism, just war theory and pacifism. Although just peacemaking proceeds from the assumption that conflict resolution is a common concern of all humans, regardless of their faith or non-faith convictions, Stassen has made considerable use of Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, which he describes as the *locus classicus* of Christian peacemaking theory.<sup>[32]</sup> Jesus’ teaching, argues Stassen, is arranged into ‘fourteen triads’, each of which contains a teaching on (1) traditional righteousness; (2) a vicious cycle; and (3) a transforming initiative.<sup>[33]</sup> From his analysis of the Greek text, Stassen points out that the imperative verbs are to be found mainly in the third part of Jesus’ triads, the transforming initiatives.<sup>[34]</sup> These transforming initiatives, he argues, are normative practices of Christian discipleship which lead to individual and social transformation. Applying the notion of normative practices to the sphere of international politics, Stassen formulates ten practices of just peacemaking that aim to abolish war.<sup>[35]</sup> These practices are not ‘high ideals’, but rather ‘realistic ... practices that are empirically demonstrating their effectiveness in preventing war.’<sup>[36]</sup> They are similar to Jesus transforming initiatives in that they are ‘authoritative and practical.’<sup>[37]</sup> The practices

<sup>[29]</sup> Glen Stassen (ed.), *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998).

<sup>[30]</sup> ‘We purposely fashioned the wording of the ten practices of just peacemaking’, writes Stassen, ‘so that they could be adopted by persons of many faiths or no official faith.’ See, Stassen (ed.), *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices*, 5.

<sup>[31]</sup> Stassen, ‘The Unity, Realism and Obligatoriness of Just Peacemaking Theory’, *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23 (2003), 177-178.

<sup>[32]</sup> Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1999), 36.

<sup>[33]</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Fol-*

*lowing Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 135; Stassen, ‘The fourteen triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-7:12)’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003), 267-308.

<sup>[34]</sup> Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives*, 43.

<sup>[35]</sup> These practices, which are arranged under three headings, ‘Peacemaking Initiatives’, ‘Justice’ and ‘Love and Community’ are listed and expounded in the book which Stassen edited, *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*.

<sup>[36]</sup> Stassen, ‘Unity, Realism and Obligatoriness...’, 171.

<sup>[37]</sup> Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives*, 36.

are dynamic and interdependent initiatives that promote peaceful outcomes in situations and conflict. Emphasising the reciprocity of each of the ten practices, Stassen argues with Michael Westmoreland-White that these practices ‘support and need each other. Together, working in synergy, the ten practices can achieve greater justice and prevent many wars.’<sup>[38]</sup> Stassen’s justification for the normative ethical value for these practices of just peacemaking is that they can be empirically demonstrated to be effective in resolving violent conflicts. The practices of just peacemaking, he argues, are ‘historically situated, concretely observable, they work together for peace and they are therefore ethically normative or obligatory.’<sup>[39]</sup>

Whilst the effectiveness of these practices may provide sufficient social ethical grounds for a workable theory of just peacemaking based on these practices, effectiveness *per se*, no matter how empirically demonstrable, does not provide adequate grounds on which to construct a theology of Christian peacemaking. Seeking to provide theological impetus to Stassen’s conception of just peacemaking, Lisa Cahill has already proposed that ‘a more explicit theological reference to sin ... could strengthen his [Stassen’s] proposal.’<sup>[40]</sup> The danger of such an approach, however, is that it inclines towards the realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, whose Augustinian emphasis on the ubiquity of human sin, as McClendon points out, undermines ‘the efficacy of the Holy Spirit to make people Christlike’ and neglects the power of the Resurrection ‘in favour of an exclusive emphasis on the Cross.’<sup>[41]</sup> Cahill argues that just peacemaking theory should contain the practice of ‘forceful intervention for social change in the interests of the vulnerable.’<sup>[42]</sup> The insertion of such a practice would undermine the distinctiveness of just peacemaking theory by aligning it with the central tenets of just war theory with its emphasis on restorative violence in the name of upholding justice.

Cahill is right to point out that just peacemaking, if it is to provide a basis for a general theology of peacemaking, must be clearer about the theological convictions which confer normative value on its practices. Her theological emphasis, however, is misplaced. The theological emphasis of just peacemaking theory should not be on the concept of *sin* but on *eschatology*.<sup>[43]</sup> Following Yoder, McClendon rightly insists that for Christians, ‘questions about lasting peace can never be separated from eschatology’ and that ‘eschatology and our attitude to peacemaking are two sides of a single coin.’<sup>[44]</sup> The practices of just peacemaking are normative, not primarily because they

<sup>[38]</sup> G. Stassen and M. Westmoreland-White, ‘Defining Violence and Nonviolence’, in *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 30.

<sup>[39]</sup> Stassen, ‘Unity, Realism and Obligatoriness...’, 175.

<sup>[40]</sup> L. Cahill, ‘Just Peacemaking: Theory, Practice, and Prospects’, *Journal of the Society of*

*Christian Ethics*, 23 (2003), 196.

<sup>[41]</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 319.

<sup>[42]</sup> Cahill, ‘Just Peacemaking’, 201.

<sup>[43]</sup> See Yoder, ‘Peace Without Eschatology’, in which the author argued that Christian peacemaking theory could not be separated from biblical eschatology.

<sup>[44]</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 317.

can be empirically shown to prevent war, but because they are consistent with the peaceable convictions that are formed through the narrative vision of the kingdom of God as set out by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>[45]</sup> The practices of just peacemaking are normative from the standpoint of moral theology because they correspond with what McClendon calls ‘the character of the expected realm’, which is to consist in ‘a new order of interactive love – God’s love to people and people’s love one to another, even to enemies... as exemplified by Jesus himself.’<sup>[46]</sup> For the practices of just peacemaking theory to have a normative claim on the lives of Jesus’ contemporary followers they must be seen to correspond with the moral force of the ‘realistic narrative’<sup>[47]</sup> of the ‘drama of the reign of God.’<sup>[48]</sup> McClendon’s baptist vision, which maintains ‘a shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological community’<sup>[49]</sup>, reminds us that ‘the church now is the primitive church; we are Jesus’ followers; the commands are addressed directly to us.’<sup>[50]</sup> We today find ourselves as participants in the same story and inspired by the same kingdom vision that shaped the convictions of Jesus’ first disciples. The story of Jesus and his first disciples ‘is still the story that shapes our lives today.’<sup>[51]</sup> It follows that our identity with the disciples of Jesus’ day arises out of a common narrative which leads to the formation of shared convictions, those ‘gusty beliefs that I live out’<sup>[52]</sup> and which are ‘intimately related to our perception of ultimate reality.’<sup>[53]</sup>

Such a convictional understanding of morality offers a way out of the un-availing propositional approach to the Scriptures, which looks for individual verses in order to substantiate a certain presupposition regarding Christian participation in armed conflict.<sup>[54]</sup> The futility of trying to argue either

[45] *Ibid.*, 309.

[46] J. McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Volume II: Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 67.

[47] H. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

[48] Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 47.

[49] McClendon, *Ethics*, 30. McClendon deliberately uses the lower case ‘b’ in baptist, rather than the upper case ‘B’ in order to emphasise that this vision is not restricted to a specific “Baptist” denomination, but encompasses a whole range of expressions of the church that are associated with the tradition of the Radical Reformation. (*Ethics*, 26-34).

[50] *Ibid.*, 32.

[51] Parushev, ‘Walking in the Dawn of the Light’, 109.

[52] McClendon, *Ethics*, 22.

[53] P. R. Parushev, ‘Convictions and the Shape of Moral Reasoning’, in *Ethical Thinking at*

*the Crossroads of European Reasoning*, edited by P. R. Parushev, O. Creanga and B. Brock (Prague: IBTS, 2007), 41.

[54] A crude example of this can be found in the writings of the German army general, Friedrich von Bernhardi’s militant polemic in *Germany and the Next War* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, 2006). Writing just before the outbreak of war, Bernhardi wrote, that Christianity ‘tells us to love our individual enemies, but does not remove the conception of enmity. Christ Himself said: “I am not come to send peace on earth, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). His teaching can never be adduced as an argument against the universal law of struggle. There never was a religion which was more combative than Christianity. Combat, moral combat, is its very essence’ (*Ibid.*, 33). Richard Hays argues that those who use such texts (as Matthew 10:34) to justify Christian militarism, ‘commit an act of extraordinary hermeneutical violence against the text’ (*Moral Vision*, 333).



for or against a theology of peacemaking through a propositional analysis of New Testament texts isolated from their narrative setting has been proved by decades of fruitless debate. When the New Testament is read as a ‘many-sided narrative of his [Jesus’] incarnate life’, however, a line of descent can be traced between Jesus’ first disciples and the disciples of today.<sup>[55]</sup> The disciples may have changed but the vision of the kingdom of God remains the same. This argument is consistent with Parush Parushev’s observation that ‘one is guided by his or her vision of construing the world according to their best inspirations: in Christian terms, by their anastatic (or eschatological) convictions.’<sup>[56]</sup> Stassen’s just peacemaking theory, despite great practical merits, draws a too simplistic trajectory from the kingdom vision of Jesus to contemporary practices of peaceful transformation.

Stassen’s proposal could be strengthened by the kind of approach of theologians such as McClendon and Parushev, who explore the dynamic interaction between the kingdom vision, moral convictions and contemporary practices of Christian discipleship. Instead of extrapolating a list of normative practices directly from the vision of the New Testament, a more theologically viable approach would be to examine how the moral force of the narrative of Jesus’ kingdom vision shapes the convictional subsets of Jesus’ followers today, and then to use these convictions as a means of determining which practices correspond most closely with the vision of life in the kingdom of God. This is the approach of McClendon and his students. The notion that the convictional subset of a faith community is the main phenomenological centre of Christian theological reflection is one of the great insights bequeathed to us by McClendon. Likewise Stassen’s emphasis on the transforming practices of Jesus as means for peaceful resolution of conflict is one of his great contributions to the contemporary debate over the ethics of war and peace. Rarely, however, have McClendon’s insights regarding the role of convictions in determining the shape of the moral life of the faith community been compared with Stassen’s insights regarding the normative value of transforming practices,<sup>[57]</sup> and non-one (to my knowledge, at least) has considered at any length how a constructive synthesis of the key insights of these key theologians could be used to construct a sustainable theology of peacemaking.

My argument is that the synthesis of Stassen’s notion of transforming initiatives as means to bring about peaceful resolution to situations of conflict and McClendon’s ‘baptist vision’ of convictions arising from a narrative understanding of the moral force of the kingdom of God provides a constructive third perspective that draws on the strengths of both positions. What is lacking in one approach is supplied by the other. Whereas Stassen’s emphasis on the normative value of individual practices often undermines the

<sup>[55]</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 303.

<sup>[56]</sup> Parushev, ‘Convictions’, 50.

<sup>[57]</sup> Parushev comments on the ‘remarkably complementary development in the thoughts

of two distinct moral theologians: James Wm. McClendon, Jr., and Glen Harold Stassen. Both are widely published and read but rarely compared.’ (*Walking in the Dawn of the Light*, 110).

role of the kingdom vision in shaping convictions that govern moral issues of peace and violence, McClendon has a tendency to focus on the vision at the expense of giving sufficient justification for the normative value of individual practices. This is evident in McClendon's treatment of pacifism in the final pages of the main text of *Ethics*. After considering the question of whether Jesus was a pacifist, McClendon concludes that Jesus 'evoked and guided a program of nonviolent action that transformed human conduct for its participants.'<sup>[58]</sup> There is, however, no attempt to explain explicitly what kind of practices are associated with such a program or why such practices are normatively binding for today's disciples. Conversely, Stassen goes to great lengths to define and elaborate certain specific contextual practices of conflict resolution, which, he argues, yield empirically demonstrable results. For Stassen, however, the normative justification ends there; there is no attempt to explain *why* the practices of just peacemaking are normative on theological grounds. McClendon's baptist vision supplies this deficiency by providing a 'theological centre'<sup>[59]</sup> for just peacemaking Theory. Taken in isolation, therefore, neither Stassen nor McClendon can provide adequate grounds for a theology of peacemaking. On the other hand, an integrated perspective, which combines the insights of Stassen and McClendon, can provide a theoretical basis necessary in order to construct a theology of peacemaking that will be of use in resolving violent conflicts.

## CONCLUSION

The literary theorist Frank Kermode has argued that the end of a story helps to create concord between its component parts.<sup>[60]</sup> The Oxford theologian, Paul Fiddes, commenting on Kermode's argument, notes that, 'the sense that the story is working towards an ending turns mere *chronos* (the 'tick-tock' of the clock) into moments of *kairos*, points of time filled with the significance of being part of a larger fulfilment.'<sup>[61]</sup> McClendon teaches us the important theological notion that as active participants in the biblical narrative, today's faith communities have an indispensable role to play in working towards this 'larger fulfilment.' The practices of just peacemaking are thus infused with eschatological significance. The narrative vision of the kingdom of God inspires the present day faith community with the hope engendered by expectation of the final fulfilment and consolidation of God's reign through the judging of the nations and the coming of Christ. The eschatological urgency of peacemaking also gives meaning and significance to the ongoing efforts to find peaceful resolutions to situations of violent

<sup>[58]</sup> McClendon, *Ethics*, 309.

<sup>[59]</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>[60]</sup> F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 1968).

<sup>[61]</sup> P. Fiddes, *The Promised End: Eschatology in Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 2000), 9.

conflict. By taking Jesus seriously as a prophetic voice for radical moral living, theologians such as Stassen and McClendon have done a great service to Jesus' present-day followers. Stassen's proposal for establishing peace through the ten practices of just peacemaking possesses considerable merit. Taken in isolation, however, his proposal does not furnish the faith community with sufficient theological resources with which to construct a robust theology of peacemaking. Through his baptist vision and his analysis of the peaceable convictional subsets of the faith community, McClendon has presented a narrative vision of the kingdom of God and an overall theological normative account of just peacemaking, which supplies what is lacking in Stassen's analysis.

Many questions of great moral magnitude arise from this synthesis of the insights of Stassen and McClendon into the ethics of war and peace. The limitations of time and space have precluded any attempt to establish exactly how this formula could be applied to specific situations of violent conflict among groups with vastly different religious convictions. This, however, may prove to be an important and interesting focus for further research. Another important research question concerns the relationship between the narrative integrity of the biblical text and the peaceable convictions of the faith community. This relationship, I would argue, lies at the heart of the theological debate over the morality of war and peace. If in future the theological debate could be carried on along these lines, it is likely that the faith community could become much better informed about precisely what the New Testament has to say about whether or not war can ever be justified.

One of the main tasks imposed on the applied theologian is to awaken the faith community to a consciousness of the convictions that underpin its approach to moral issues.<sup>[62]</sup> These convictions, if they are correctly formed, are shaped by the moral vision expressed through the narrative of the New Testament. Owing to the complex nature of the 'many-sided narrative' of the vision of the kingdom of God, it would be impossible to limit the Christian convictions concerning the morality of war and peace to a conceptual definition or even a 'moral stance.' Nevertheless the synthesis of Stassen's just peacemaking practices and McClendon's baptist vision provides, in my view, an adequate ground for a vigorous theology of peacemaking. The issue of exactly how this proposal could be applied to specific situations of violent conflict is a question to be addressed in further research on the theological and social ethical validity of a theology of peacemaking.

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<sup>[62]</sup> McClendon points out that 'it may take me a long time to discover my own convictions' because they are 'less readily expressed' than mere opinions '... but when I do, I have discovered ... myself' (*Ethics*, 22).

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