War as the Judgment of God

H. Richard Niebuhr

It is a healthy sign that Christians of all groups are giving increasing attention to the question of God's action in this war. For too long a time we have concentrated on human action in international as in other conflicts and the disagreements among us have been at least partly due to this fact. Pacifists have approached war as an action of the lower human self—the angry, hating self—and have tried to respond to it with the action of the ideal, rational self. Coercionists have looked on war as the action of aggressive nations and have summoned men of good will to resist those of ill will.

These human actions are doubtless present in all war but Christian like Jewish interpretation of history centers in the conviction that God is at work in all events and the ethics of these monotheistic communities is determined by the principle that man's action ought always to be response to divine rather than to any finite action. Hence it is a sign of returning health when God rather than the self or the enemy is seen to be the central figure in the great tragedy of war and when the question, "What must I do?" is preceded by the question, "What is God doing?" To attend to God's action is to be on the way to that constructive understanding and constructive human reaction which the prophets initiated and Jesus set forth in its fullness.
WAR AS THE JUDGMENT OF GOD

To see the act of God in war is to stand where Isaiah stood when he discerned that Assyria was the rod of divine anger and where Jesus stood when he saw in the crucifixion not Pilate's or the Jews' activity but that of the Father who gave Pilate the power to crucify and whose will rather than Pilate's or Jesus' was being done.

The consequent action of Isaiah and Jesus was constructive because it was response to divine action rather than to Assyrian or Roman. It was constructive in that it built new community in the midst of tragedy, closed selves and society of egos, fear and hatred, and opened up a productive future in which the tragedy was made the foundation of a new life. Had Isaiah simply attended to what the Assyrian was doing or what the priests and Pilate were doing, it is difficult to see what constructive results could have followed, had they been ever so pacifist or coercionist.

The awareness of Christians that God is acting in the present conflict is still confused and uncertain; hence the reactions are confused. Doubtless much profound searching of soul, mind and Scriptures, much painful intellectual and spiritual labor are required of them, as of the Jews, if they are to learn how to act constructively or, rather, to act as those who are willing instead of unwilling servants of the active God. But something has been gained as a result of the very general recognition that God is judging the nations, the churches and all mankind in this great conflict and crucifixion. The conviction of sin, which the social gospel has brought about, and the old understanding of history, which Marxism has forced Christianity to remember, leave all Christians with a bad conscience in the presence of this struggle and with the recognition that men are reaping what they have sown.

To be sure, there are still parts of the church which think in terms of human rather than of divine judgment. For them the war is an affair of our judgment against the opponents' judgment. Such Christians tend to believe that their judgment on the enemy—both as moral evaluation and as punishment—is really God's judgment and that it is practically unnecessary to inquire what God is doing since they are executing his counsel. Happily these voices are not strong in the church. It must be conceded, of course, that the tempta-

tion to make the self the spokesman and lieutenant of the Eternal is never far from any one of us and that a more severe trial than the one we have experienced so far may lead many more of us to fall into this temptation. Still, it remains a cause for gratitude that the churches in the warring nations—on both sides—have so far not tended to confuse divine and human judgment as much as they did a generation ago. It is further a cause for thankfulness that pacifists and coercionists appear to agree on the primacy of God's judgment and its transcendence over all human judgment.

At one point this agreement in interpretation of the situation is leading to a general agreement in ethical decision. All the Christian groups seem to be resolved to exert all their powers to effect a just peace settlement—a peace which will not be based on the interpretation that only one nation is being judged or that the victors are the judges, but rather on the knowledge that all nations have fallen short of simple justice, not to speak of the glory of God. Hence it is demanded that the peace settlement recognize the necessity of sacrifice on the part of all, the limitation of national sovereignty, the claim of all nations to certain political and economic rights. On this the mind of the churches seems to be unified.

Beyond this point, however, there is no agreement and the continued confusion of the churches appears particularly when the question about present rather than future action is raised. It seems that God's judgment on the nations is not so understood as to require a present response, but only a sort of promise that we will try to be good in the future. One group appears to think that besides the action of God in judgment Christians ought to attend to the bad actions of all men who are making war and respond to the latter by refusal to participate in the conflict. Hence many pacifists desire to share in peace-making as those who stand under the judgment of God but to refrain from all participation in war because men, not God, make war.

A second group regards war as judgment of God but also as a defense of our own country against the enemies not of God so much as of our country. Hence it seeks to make a distinction between the response of the Christian to God and the response of the citizen to the enemy. As Christians, then, men do not make war, but as citizens they defend their country.
A third group makes a distinction between the absolute judgment of God to which all men must respond with penitence and the relative judgments of men to which other relative judgments must be opposed. For those who find themselves in this group the war requires the double response of contrition for common sin and of confident assertion of the relative rightness of democracy in opposition to totalitarianism.

In every case there is a dualism: two actions must be responded to, the action of God and the action of the opponent. To be sure, Christians are accustomed to dualism, for their two-worldly life involves them forevermore in the crisis of time and eternity, of this age and the future one, of the life in the spirit and the life in the body. But the dualism of double response is an intolerable one; it makes us "double-minded men, unstable in all our ways," theists who have two gods, the Father of Jesus Christ and our country, or Him and Democracy, or Him and Peace. Country, Democracy and Peace are surely values of a high order, if they are under God, but as rivals of God they are betrayers of life.

Perhaps further reflection on the nature of divine judgment and the possibilities of consistent human response to it may be of some help in resolving our confusion and helping us toward the achievement of a common Christian mind.

What does it mean to say that this war is a judgment of God on the nations or on all of us? It cannot mean simply that it is the action of a Being who, in primitive human fashion, executes vengeance. Since Hosea's time that interpretation has been rationally impossible. Christians in particular must be convinced by their whole gospel that judgment cannot be separated from redemption, that the harshness of God is not antagonistic to his love but subordinate to it, that divine "penology" is reconstructive and not vindictive in its nature.

The fundamental Christian assumption about divine justice may be stated in another way by saying that it is never merely punishment for sins, as though God were concerned simply to restore the balance between men by making those suffer who have inflicted suffering, but that it is always primarily punishment of sinners who are to be chastened and changed in the character which produced the sinful acts.

Therefore war cannot be interpreted as hell; if it were hell we could not even be aware that God is judging us for we would be without God in war. War as judgment of God is a purgatory, not a hell.

Christians cannot interpret God's action in war as the judgment of vengeance for another and profounder reason: the pain of war does not descend primarily on the unjust but on the innocent. Wars are crucifixions. It is not the mighty, the guides and leaders of nations and churches, who suffer most in them, but the humble, little people who have had little to do with the framing of great policies. Even pacifists in jail have little reason to think of themselves as the martyrs of war when they reflect on all the children, wives and mothers, humble obedient soldiers, peasants on the land, who in the tragedy of war are made an offering for sin.

It is true also in the social sense that the greater burdens of war fall on the relatively innocent and on the weak. The nations which have suffered most in the present conflict are not those who were most responsible for the sins of commission and omission out of which this tragic demonstration of cosmic justice has issued. Czechoslovakia, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece, China, the Philippines—these were not the conspicuous egoists, exploiters, self-satisfied and self-righteous among the countries of the earth.

This is not the place, even were the writer competent as he is not, to develop a social theory and application of the atonement. But, surely, Christians know that the justice of God is not only a redemptive justice in which suffering is used in the service of remaking but it is also vicarious in its method, so that the suffering of innocence is used for the remaking of the guilty. One cannot then speak of God acting in this war as judge of the nations without understanding that it is through the cross of Christ more than through the cross of thieves that he is acting upon mankind.

In the second place, if God is judging mankind in this war, as he is, there can be no contention before him about the relative rightness or wrongness of the various groups involved. When we are in the wrong before God we are absolutely in the wrong and no kind of relative rightness can be made the foundation of an appeal to a higher court. When Isaiah saw that Assyria was the rod of God's anger whereby
Israel was chararded, he also saw that Assyria was wrong before God and that the axe had no right to boast of itself "against him that heweth therewith."

This truth cuts both ways. It means that if a Hitler is seen to be the rod of God's anger he is not thereby justified, relatively or absolutely; for he does not intend what God intends, "but it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off nations not a few." It means, also, that if the United Nations are the instruments of God's judgment on Germany, Italy and Japan, they are not thereby justified, as though their intentions were relatively or absolutely right. God does not act save through finite instruments but none of the instruments can take the place of God even for a moment, either in their own view or in the view of the one who is being "punished." Whether we speak of nations or of movements, we can be as certain in our day as the prophets were in theirs that our thoughts are not his thoughts and our ways are not his ways. Hence response to divine judgment can never mean justification of either the enemy or of the self. Insofar as such justification is introduced the conviction about God's action is abandoned.

A third point about divine judgment which it seems important to recall again in our time, though it ought to be self-evident, is that it is the judgment of the one and universal God and not the judgment of a Lord of the spiritual life, or of a Lord of religious life, or of a Christian Lord over Christian life. As judgment of a redeemer it cannot be interpreted in the light of revelation, reason and experience as that of a redeemer of the spiritual, the religious or the Christian life. The redeemer is the Father of all things who has created men not only in spiritual society but also in domestic, political and economic society. Hence it is impossible to separate response to the judgment of God from politically necessary action as to make religious life an affair of repentance while political action remains essentially unrepenant, self-confident action in the defense of our values.

This is what both these groups seem to do who say that in addition to accepting divine judgment we must on the one hand defend our country and, on the other hand, defend democracy. If we do not reform our war-making as well as our peace-making, our defense of values as well as our aggression, our support of democracy as well as our opposition to totalitarianism, this means that we have excluded some part of life from the reign of God or that we have abandoned monotheism, accepting a double standard and a double deity.

III

The interpretation of God's action in this war as redemptive and vicarious, absolute and unified judgment leads to certain consequences for human action.

The first of these is the abandonment of the habit of passing judgments of our own on ourselves and on our enemies or opponents, whether these be national enemies, church enemies or enemies of our ideas. Instead of asking whether we are right people or wrong people we shall simply inquire what duty we have to perform in view of what we have done amiss and in view of what God is doing. If that duty involves, as I believe it does, resistance to those who are abusing our neighbors, we shall not inquire whether our neighbors are better people than those who are abusing them. In social life our duty frequently requires us to protect neighbors whom we dislike against the injustices of those whom we like and who on the whole seem to us to be better people than their victims are. The same principle applies in the affairs of the society of nations.

If injustice is done to totalitarian countries (as Greece was somewhat totalitarian) or communist countries or the Jewish people, the answer to our question about our duty does not depend on the answer to our question about the relative goodness of the victims and the victimizers. Nor does the answer depend on the reply to our question about our own relative goodness. Duty is duty and no nation has a right to excuse the self from doing the dutiful thing now because of past failures. Response to the judgment of God on men who have failed to do their duty in the past consists in the performance of present duty and not in the passing of new judgments on others because they have failed more sinfully in our view.

A second thing Christians under the judgment of God in war require of themselves, because he requires it of them, is the abandonment of all self-aggrandizement, all self-aggrandizement, all thinking in terms of self as central. The judgment of God in this war appears to be less a judgment on past selfish acts than one on the self-centered character of nations, churches, classes and individual men; as redemptive
it holds the promise of deliverance from this imprisonment in self. It is a judgment on our nation which in its actions, sentiments and omissions has demonstrated its profound preoccupation with its own prosperity, safety and righteousness, so that in its withdrawal from international political responsibilities, in its tariff, monetary and neutrality legislation, it acted always with a single eye to its own interests rather than to those of its neighbors in the commonwealth of nations. It is a judgment on the churches which have indicated in their conduct how great their anxiety was for their own survival, their own righteousness, prestige and power.

It was apparent long ago—the crucifixion of the Jews and China—that the Lord was laying the iniquity of us all on the backs of the innocent. Since this vicarious demonstration of our guilt did not move us we are now to be moved by a vicarious suffering which strikes nearer home. How can we respond to this judgment by persisting in thinking in terms of self, of defense of our country, of our democracy, or of our religion? If we accept God's judgment on our self-centeredness we cannot respond to it by persisting in actions of self-defense and by fighting the war for the sake of protecting our selves or our values instead of for the sake of the innocent who must be delivered from the hands of the aggressor.

To carry on the war under the judgment of God is to carry it on as those who repent of their self-centeredness and who now try to forget about themselves while they concentrate on the deliverance of their neighbors. It is to wage war as those do who will not withdraw when their own interests are no longer apparently imperiled while their weaker neighbors remain in danger, who will not wash their hands of the affair if the peace is not to their liking, but who, on the contrary, accept continuous, never ending responsibility for their neighbors. It is also to wage war in such a way that a decent, just and durable peace can come of it.

If the war is fought with nothing but ideas of defense, of self-defense, or defense of our values, in mind, the peace will be a self-defensive peace, however much inconsistent idealists may seek to reverse the processes of their own and of national thinking at that time. It must be emphasized also that for those who refuse to participate in war either by physical or spiritual action such abstention can be response to divine judgment only if it be part of a total action in which concern for others has been given preeminence over concern for self and its values. If non-participation by individuals or by churches is self-centered, as it often is, it is as destructive in the long run as self-centered participation.

Finally, response to God's action in war is hopeful and trusting response. It never gives up the one whom we must oppose, as though we were too depraved for redemption or for restoration to full rights in the human community. It does not accept the counsel of despair in the midst of fighting, allowing vindictive measures because by "fair fighting" our cause might be lost. It trusts that if we do our duty no evil can befall us in life or in death. The response is hopeful in that it regards the time of judgment as also time of redemption and looks in the midst of tragedy for the emergence of a better order than any which has been realized before. Nothing is regarded as beyond the scope of redemption—not the political life of men, nor the economic, nor the spiritual; neither the crucified brigand nor the crucified righteous one are regarded as forsaken by God and far from Paradise. Even should death come to them hope wraps their broken bodies in fine linen, conserving what it can, preparing on Good Friday for an Easter miracle of divine action.

To recognize God's work in war is to live and act with faith in resurrection. If God were not in the war life would be miserable indeed. It would mean that the cosmos had no concern with justice. But if God were in the war only as judge, man's misery would be only slightly assuaged since before the judge all are worthy of death. To see God in the war as the vicarious sufferer and redeemer, who is afflicted in all the afflictions of his people, is to find hope along with broken-heartedness in the midst of disaster.

These are but general reflections which do not presume to say anyone what his particular duty in response to God's judgment must be. They seek however to describe in what spirit and context Christians in varying vocations and with conflicting political convictions may meet the divine judgment and maintain fellowship with each other.
who turn away with loathing from their own sin and who try
to strike off the shackles they have laid on the victims before
and while they deal with the chains that other evil men have
placed on the sufferers.

Here again is a profound issue. Pacifists and coercionists
alike who can get along without the concept of vicarious
suffering ought to get together; they think alike though they
quarrel about the messianic means whereby to save the world
from evil spirits. But pacifists and coercionists who rest under
the common conviction of their personal and social sin
inspired by the view of the contemporary cross must get
together also. They have a hard, continuous labor before
them, bringing forth the fruits of repentance.

Man, being incurably rational, cannot act without some
theory of the events in which he is participating. This truth is
duly apparent in the case of war. A blaze of unreasoning
emotion may induce men to exchange a few blows but any
long conflict, especially between groups, requires propa-
ganda, which at its worst is an effort to supply a theory that
will fit the emotions and at its best is an attempt to direct and
restrain emotion by understanding of the situation. To be
sure, theories of war in general and of any particular conflict
in which we are engaged are not the only factors which
influence action, but they are nevertheless important ele-
ments in any responsible behavior.

Two main theories of the nature of war are being applied
to our present struggle and are influencing in various ways
the responses of individuals and communities to the situation.
They may be named the amoral and the moral theories. The
former interprets war as a conflict of powers in which victory
with its fruits belongs to the stronger and in which moral
words or phrases are nothing but instruments of power by
means of which emotions are aroused and men are unified.
This view is held both by certain balance-of-power advocates
who demand participation in war, so long as national self-
interest is involved, and by certain pacifists who wash their
hands of war because it makes no moral difference which side
wins in a conflict of pure power.

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MORAL AND AMORAL THEORIES INADEQUATE

The moral view of war, on the other hand, interprets it as an event in a universe in which the laws of retribution hold sway. According to this theory, war begins with a transgression of international, or natural, or human, or divine law and continues in the effort of the law's upholders to bring the offenders to justice. Those who hold this view make a distinction between just war—the act of transgression—and just war—the act of retribution and of defense of order. Again, both participants and non-participants in any particular war may use this theory, their differences being largely due to their estimate of this war as just or unjust.

Both theories are inadequate and misleading, for both fail to account for all the relevant phenomena and must be abandoned at some point in practice, not because emotion is too powerful to submit to their control, but because they appear unreasonable. Since man is a self-interested being and always desires to extend his power, the amoral theory is partly true. But since man is always interested in values beyond the self and desires not only power but also the enjoyment of the good, the amoral theory is wholly inadequate. It forgets that wars are fought by men and that human power cannot be abstracted from human rationality and morality.

Among men, might not only makes right, but the conviction of being right makes might, and it is impossible to reduce such a conviction to an emotional reaction. However much the power realists may regret the fact, it remains true that in war men do not fight simply for their own interests but make great sacrifices for distant values, for their own country, or Poland, or democracy, or the new order, or the Four Freedoms. It may be said that while individuals do this in war, nations always act amorally. But this again is to deal with unreal, wholly abstract beings, since nations and their governments are human, so that the mixture of motives which is discernible in individuals is always present in groups also.

RETRIBUTION FAILS

The moral view of war seems to take into account those elements which the power theory ignores, yet it also remains inadequate and is in some respects more misleading than its rival. Its failure does not necessarily lie at the point in which the power theory is interested, for it may be very much aware of men's love of power and of the necessity for taking this into account in the making of moral judgments. Its inadequacy appears rather in the impossibility of applying the whole scheme of moral judgment and retributive justice to social relations. It has often been observed that a people cannot be indicted, that the question of war-guilt which appears so easily determinable in time of conflict becomes more difficult with longer perspective, that retribution itself is impractical since the community which is to be punished cannot be excluded from the society of nations as an individual can be banished from his community by imprisonment.

The greatest difficulty of all which the moral theory faces is the fact that in war the burden of suffering does not fall on the guilty, even when guilt is relatively determinable, but on the innocent. Retribution for the sins of a Nazi party and a Hitler falls on Russian and German soldiers, on the children of Cologne and Coventry, on the Fins and the French. In order that the moral theory may be used it becomes necessary to convict all the common men, the whole opposing nation of guilt. Even if that were possible the theory does not hold since the suffering for guilt is shared by those who are on the side of "justice." Hence those who hold to the moral theory find themselves unable to follow it in practice. If they declare a present war to be just they must participate in inflicting suffering and death on the "just" with the "unjust"; if they regard a present war as unjust they must stand idly by while the "just" are being made to suffer with the "unjust.

IS WAR CRUCIFIXION?

Since neither theory will do for men who want to act reasonably, on the basis of an intelligible interpretation of the facts of experience, the question arises whether there is not some other pattern than that of the survival of the fittest or that of retributive justice by means of which war may be understood and response to it guided. The question must arise for Christians whether that understanding of the nature of cosmic justice which the crucifixion of Jesus Christ discov-
ered to men must not and may not be applied to war, as it must and may be applied to many personal events that are unintelligible save through the cross. Is war, then, crucifixion?

War is at least very much like the crucifixion. In both events there is a strange intermixture of justice and injustice; on the side alike of those who regard themselves as the upholders of the right and on the side of the vanquished. Three men were crucified on Calvary, all, it appears, on more or less the same charge of insurrection. Two of them were malefactors who actually desired to overturn the established order, whether for patriotic or personal motives; yet they were not alike since one recognized the at least relative justice of his punishment while the other remained unrepentant. The third cross carried one who was innocent of the charge made against him; yet ambiguously so, since he was establishing a kingdom of a strange sort which held unknown dangers for the Roman order and the Jewish law.

Nor were the crucifiers less mixed in their justice and injustice: soldiers who did their duty in obedience to their oath, priests who acted according to their lights—though their life was darkness—a judge who failed in his duty, citizens who were devoted to the maintenance of the sacred values of Jewish culture, a mob overborne by emotion. They knew not what they did. War is like that—apparently indiscriminate in the choice of victims and of victims, whether these be thought of as individuals or as communities.

CROSS REVEALS GOD'S MORAL EARNESTNESS

A second point of resemblance between war and the crucifixion is no less striking. The cross which will not yield to analysis in terms of retributive justice, will not yield either to analysis in terms of brute power. If the alternative before men were simply either that God is just in the sense that he rewards the good and punishes the guilty, or that the world is indifferent to good and evil, then the cross would be the final demonstration of God's injustice or, rather, of his non-existence. If that were the alternative then men would need to conclude that "Whirl is king and hath de-throned Zeus."

But the cross does not encourage moral indifference; it requires men to take their moral decisions with greater rather than less seriousness: it demonstrates the sublime character of real goodness; it is a revelation, though "in a glass darkly," of the intense moral earnestness of a God who will not abandon mankind to self destruction; it confronts us with the tragic consequences of moral failure. It does all this because it is sacrifice—the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ for those whom he loves and God's sacrifice of his best-loved Son for the sake of the just and the unjust. War is like the cross in this respect. In its presence men must abandon their moral cynicism along with other peacetime liberties.

We are mewed in the presence of war to think more rather than less seriously of the importance of our decisions and of the evil and good possibilities of our existence. For war also is not only a great slaughter but a great sacrifice. It is the moving sacrifice of our youth for the sake of that which they love; the sacrifice by parents of their best-loved sons. In the midst of its cruelties, falsehoods and betrayals there appear sublime examples of human courage and devotion and selflessness that uplift us as we see the greatness of man revealed alongside his depravity. An almost infinite capacity for goodness is reflected in the dark glass of sinfulness. Various suffering shows us up dramatically the tragic issue of our wrongdoings and wrong-being in the midst of our human solidarity. War does not make for moral indifference.

THE CROSS IS RELEVANT

The analogy of war and crucifixion suggests that we are dealing with more than analogy. It indicates that the cross is relevant to the understanding of our world and to our social action in ways which neither the sacrificial nor the moral influence theory of its meanings has made evident. Hence it directs Christians to wrestle with the problem of the cross in ways so that new light from it may fall upon the scenes of their present social life as well as upon their personal problems and tragedies. It may well be that the meaning of the cross must become apparent to our time in new situations somewhat as the meaning of the spherical nature of the earth has become apparent in a new way to us in recent years. The knowledge of the fact that we live on a globe has been
a relatively abstract knowledge for hundreds of years. It was found significant for certain purposes, but on the whole men continued to live their daily lives on the practical assumption of the earth's flatness. All the maps translated our spherical relations into relations on a plane, and so we persisted in the thought that Europe lay to the east of us, never to the north, Asia to the west, never to the north or east. What we have known for hundreds of years we now need to learn because the old pattern of the flat earth no longer suffices even for the life of one who never leaves his continent. The existence of this nation, at least, begins to depend on his now taking seriously a known but unappropiated knowledge. Perhaps it is like this with the cross of Christ and war and every social suffering.

What we shall find when we concern ourselves more seriously with the cross and with its meaning for our war cannot be prophesied. There is one point, however, which seems of great importance and to which all efforts to understand war through the cross must give heed. It is the point which Paul made. The crucifixion illuminated many things for him, but in particular it was the revelation of the righteousness of God which was distinct from the righteousness of the law and which, when it became apparent, showed man's righteousness to be as unrighteous as his unrighteousness.

WHAT KIND OF UNIVERSE?

Perhaps we may understand Paul's point like this: The cross of Jesus Christ is the final, convincing demonstration of the fact that the order of the universe is not one of retribution in which goodness is rewarded and evil punished, but rather an order of graciousness wherein, as Jesus had observed, the sun is made to shine on evil and on good and the rain to descend on the just and the unjust. To live in this divine order of graciousness on the basis of the assumption that reward must be merited and evil avenged is to come into conflict with the real order in things. The pattern of retributive justice simply will not work; it is like the effort to translate the global earth into the terms of a plane. To make distinctions between the just and unjust, and to employ for that purpose the standard of good works performed by them, will not work.

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If men are to live at all, as souls or as communities, they must begin with the acceptance not of some standard of judgment—not even the standard of graciousness—but of an act of graciousness to which they respond graciously. The cross is not the demonstration of the fact that man has a wrong standard of judgment, which he must correct or for which he must substitute a right standard of judgment by means of which to assess goodness and sinfulness, but it shows that the whole world to assess and judge the goodness and the evil of self and others, and to reward or punish accordingly, is mistaken.

WAR AND GOD'S GRACIOUSNESS

God's righteousness is his graciousness and his grace is not an addition to his justice; hence man's righteousness does not lie in a new order of judging justice, but in the acceptance of grace and in thankful response to it. The cross does not so much reveal that God judges by other standards than men do, but that he does not judge; it does not demonstrate that men judge by the wrong standards but that their wrongness lies in trying to judge each other, instead of beginning where they can begin—with the acceptance of graciousness and response to it.

If the cross is not only a historical event but a revelation of the order of reality, then war is not only like the cross but must be a demonstration of that same order of God. How it demonstrates the disorderliness of human righteousness and unrighteousness is apparent enough. How it demonstrates the fundamental ungraciousness of both the apparently righteous and the apparently unrighteous is perhaps also clear. But that it should be the hidden demonstration of divine graciousness is hard for us to understand. The cross in ancient history is acceptable to us; the cross in "religious" history, in the history of man's relation to a purely spiritual God, is also acceptable; but the cross in our present history is a stumbling block and a folly which illustrates human sinfulness, but not divine graciousness.

Yet how the divine grace appears in the crucifixion of war may become somewhat clear when the cross of Christ is used to interpret it. Then our attention is directed to the death of
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The guiltless, the gracious, and the suffering of the innocent becomes a call to repentance, to a total revolution of our minds and hearts. And such a call to repentance—not to sorrow but to spiritual revolution—is an act of grace, a great recall from the road to death which we all travel together, the just and the unjust, the victors and the vanquished. Interpreted through the cross of Jesus Christ, the suffering of the innocent is seen not as the suffering of temporal men but of the eternal victim "slain from the foundations of the world." If the Son of God is being crucified in this war along with the malefactors—and he is being crucified on many an obscure hill—then the graciousness of God, the self-giving love, is more manifest here than in all the years of peace.

It will be asked, If these suggestions, these vague gestures in the direction of the interpretation of war as crucifixion, are followed, what will be the result for action? No single answer can be given since the cross does not impose a new law on man. But one thing will be common to all actions which are based on such an understanding of war: there will be in them no effort to establish a righteousness of our own, no excusing of self because one has fallen less short of the glory of God than others; there will be no vengeance in them. They will also share one positive characteristic: they will be performed in hope, in reliance on the continued grace of God in the midst of our ungraciousness.

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The Relation of the Church to the War in the Light of the Christian Faith

The Calhoun Commission (1944)

This report is not a pronouncement in the name of the Christian Church, but a word spoken, we trust, in the faith of the Church, to our fellow Christians, and to all our fellow men. It is a statement of what we have found to be some of our common convictions about the concerns of the Church in a time of global war: its gospel, its relations to individual Christians, Christian groups, the various national communities, and the changing world society, and its consequent duties and opportunities in our day.

The ecumenical judgment of the Protestant and Orthodox Churches concerning modern war was pronounced at Oxford in 1937. It has been reaffirmed innumerable times and we affirm it again as our own. But the theological grounds and implications of that judgment need to be worked out more explicitly than Oxford or any other conference has worked them out. If it be true that war is "a defiance of the righteousness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and His crucified," that fact involves most urgent problems of life and thought for the whole body of Christian citizens. For war is no longer a contest between sovereign princes and professional armies. Wherever modern democratic government has come into being, a decision to engage in war is made in the name of a whole people; and in the conduct of modern war, no matter what the form of the belligerent governments, civilians as well as members of the armed forces are participants. Willingly or unwillingly, every