

A Kairos Moment in the History of War

The Evolution of State Sponsored Violence
Daniel C. Maguire

War, by definition, is state sponsored violence. Violence is the destruction (or threat of destruction) of people, animals, and our natural environment. When states choose such destruction as policy, an enormous burden of proof falls upon the destroyers. They must show that the slaughter and mayhem on which they are embarking will do more good than harm. Obviously, nothing is moral that does more harm than good. How can such a burden of proof be met? I join those who argue that it can never be met, except in the form of collective international police action as envisioned in the United Nations Charter. We may be at a moment in history where this civilizing insight can at last penetrate the human brain.

Given the violent proclivities of humans, the counter-violence of police action may at times be needed. Police, within a nation, do not employ preventive or preemptive violence. They do not raid neighborhoods that might be a future threat to others. And when police do act violently it is: a) as a last resort, b) exercised in a context of legal restraints, c) imposed and monitored by a vigilant community. Because of these three preconditions—last resort, context of law, community monitoring—every act of police violence is examined afterwards to see if it was necessary. This puts violence, even official violence, on the defensive. This is precisely the model put in place by the United Nations for international conflicts, and current circumstances scream out for its re-enfranchisement.

Nations, such as the United States, have preferred vigilante warring and have frustrated the United Nations and its charter. This is a sad irony since U.S. scholars and diplomats were among the principal shapers of this policing paradigm for justifying war.

Richard Falk writes: “World War II ended with the historic understanding that recourse to war between states could no longer be treated as a matter of national discretion, but must be regulated to the extent possible through rules administered by international institutions. The basic legal framework was embodied in the UN Charter, a multilateral treaty largely crafted by American diplomats and legal advisers. Its essential feature was to entrust the Security Council with administering a prohibition of recourse to international force (Article 2, Section 4) by states except in circumstances of self-defense, which itself was restricted to responses to a prior ‘armed attack’ (Article 51), and only then until the Security Council had the chance to review the claim.”^[1]

Collective, multi-nation action, coordinated by the United Nations, could also address internal problems of nations when crimes against humanity are ongoing, as in Darfur and Zimbabwe at this writing. Articles 43 and 45 of the UN Charter provide for this, though there has been little political will to employ this. This use of the UN, when properly organized and activated, would also act as a deterrent and would buttress resolutions of the Security Council just as the presence of a well organized police force deters crime within a nation.^[2] It has at times been successfully used, though the international will to do this, and to pay for it, has been weak. The creation of the United Nations was a heroic effort of the human race at a time when recurrent twentieth-century blood baths and Hitler’s vigilante war chastened our minds, if but for a moment.

The United Nations Charter Born Again?

Opportunity comes in many forms, most of them surprising. The warring presidency of George W. Bush

may have actually made the point better than any pacifist argument that war is self-defeating, and therefore really quite dumb—and getting dumber all the time as the nature of munitions makes warring ever more counterproductive.

In a demonic irony, George W. Bush may have unwittingly shaken some sense into this battered world, a world long drunk on the myths of war. By barbarously violating the United Nations Charter to which his country is committed by treaty, by the knee-jerk rush to war, by discarding the tools of diplomacy and negotiation and the guidance of law, and placing his reliance on kill-power and torture, Mr. Bush has taught that war does not deliver what it promises. He has shown that war is a loser no matter who is declared a winner, and that war (outside the policing paradigm) is a compulsive liar that promises what it cannot deliver.

Ironically too, George W. Bush, this avowedly conservative teacher, has shown that war is not a conservative thing to do. It hurts business, wastes natural resources on which the economy is wholly dependent, and makes a lot of people who cannot fight us militarily find ways to weaken us in the newly interdependent global market. It inspires hate, and hate is bad for business. There are better ways of getting what we want. Even conservatives must wince when a Chinese official says to the United States: “You invade countries rich in oil or close to oil; we simply buy the oil. It’s cheaper and no one gets hurt.” Conservatives must see the wisdom of Mikhail Gorbachev who, while still in power in the Soviet Union, said that the new battlefield is the marketplace and not the killing fields of war. One would think that business leaders who worship the market would have tumbled onto that insight themselves.

Economic interdependence is making war passé in many contexts, as for example in the European Union. The European countries will not be invading one another anymore. Organized economic interdependence precludes that. Also, of the world’s one hundred largest economies, fifty are now corporations, not including banking and financial institutions.^[3] This presents huge dangers as these hard-to-regulate behemoths pursue their consuming passions for profit and growth, but it also changes the dynamics of war-making. “When corporations rule the world,” to borrow the title of David Korten’s book, there is a new situation that begs for binding international agreements to protect our natural environment, workers, and the poor. Declaring war on various nations will not address the problems this situation presents, and that is the bright underside of this epochal shift of power on planet earth.

Staying with Teacher Bush a bit longer, he has shown that “superpower” military status is no match for the multiple other forms of power that can, like David, befuddle and defeat Goliath. Lacking war experience himself, Mr. Bush missed the fact that war is a mutant. It keeps reinventing itself. Part of the dumbness of war that history keeps illustrating is that warriors don’t notice when war has changed. As Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit paleontologist, said, nothing is intelligible outside its history. Let us take a quick look at some history that Mr. Bush would have done well to have learned at Yale.

Going back to the fourteenth century we find that the Europeans had pretty much ritualized the standard operating procedure for organized slaughter, that is, war. Soldiers showed up on a field, dressed in their proper colors (so you could tell friend from foe). Then they had at one another until one side prevailed or until both sides collapsed and those left standing went home to spin the event as best they could.

Then in 1346, things changed, or rather one side changed the ritual. The French nobles arrived for battle at Crécy bedecked in their normal fashion. The British, however, had come upon the longbow and realized that they did not need fancy knights to use it. They trained peasant longbowmen and mowed the French down from a safe distance.

One would think that such an onslaught would focus the mind of some French military geniuses, but no. Ten years later at Poitiers, “as if in a state of collective psychological denial,” as Barbara Ehrenreich puts it, they once again rode to their deaths in a hail of arrows.^[4] Worse yet, they still didn’t get it, and in 1415

they did the same stupid thing at Agincourt. It was then that it began to dawn on the French that this five hundred-year protocol of charging knights was no longer operative. It was then it seems that they turned to a girl, Joan of Arc, to guide the hapless men to more effective modes of fighting.

Now back to Teacher Bush. History has repeated itself. Move from Crécy, Poitiers and Agincourt to Iraq in 2003 and what do we see? We see American forces arriving dressed and equipped for World War II. But, alas, there was no Nazi army awaiting them, dressed in appropriate uniforms and using similar weapons. But there we were, like the French at Crécy, carefully uniformed and easily identifiable targets. The noise of our military equipment could be heard from half a mile away.

We had tried this old-time warfare in the jungles of Vietnam and finally had to scramble out in defeat. Still, our leaders, like the medieval nobles of France, would give it another try in the Middle East. What we were missing is that the enemy now swims invisibly in the sea of the populace, surfacing at will, and deciding which of our cumbersome machines would next be blasted to smithereens. The Iraqi people who did not enjoy being invaded did enjoy an unmatched trinity of strategic advantages: invisibility, versatility, and patience. War had changed. The slow attrition of guerrilla warfare commenced.

Adding to the dumbness here is the fact that in the Revolutionary War, the Americans took lessons from the Indians and adopted guerrilla tactics. As one New Englander wrote in 1677, "In our first war with the Indians, God pleased to show us the vanity of our military skill, in managing our arms after the European mode. Now we are glad to learn the skulking way of war."^[5] The "skulking way of war" is precisely what we faced in Iraq and "the vanity of our military skill" is again revealed. We had forgotten the lessons learned in early America.

War changes constantly from charging knights in bright armor to longbowmen with their arrows, from uniformed soldiers in armored planes and vehicles to guerrilla war. Such changes show that the mode of war is an artificial construct of human imagination. We make up different ways of doing it. This should raise questions. Why not have a duel between the two leaders of the countries involved and agree to abide by the result? Is that any sillier than having armies of coerced citizens from the lower economic classes out slaughtering one another while gouging and wrecking the rest of nature?

We may be at a moment of disenchantment. We may, like an addict, have "hit bottom" when the pain of withdrawal is perceived as less painful than continued "use" of war. The wisdom of the United Nations Charter may be ripe for rebirth. The United Nations is as indispensable as it is in need of reform. The shape of the Security Council and the veto power allocated in terms of the realities of the 1940s should be revisited immediately to enhance the credibility of this institution. Resistance to the United Nations comes from tribalism (now called nationalism) that finds collective responses to collective problems on a very small planet repulsive. There is no more time for such anachronistic thinking.

The End of War As We Have Known It?

The Greeks had two words for time: *chronos*, the measured time found on the watch on our wrists, and *kairos*, the moment of ripeness when many disparate factors coalesce and opportunity is born. Bible scholar Geoffrey Wood compared *kairos* to a log jam. Logs moving down a river will sometimes jam into a temporary solidity. Until the waters disengage them, you can walk or even ride across those interlocking logs. Those logs came from all kinds of faraway and different places, but for now they unite and present an opportunity. For many reasons, not just the lessons taught by the recent zany and brutal American foreign policy, many logs are coming together, and we can cross this river to a better place.

The TINA myth (there is no alternative) is as deadening as a bullet in the brain.^[6] That there is no alternative to war has been dunned into our consciousness. It has been said that war is inevitable, so

woven into the fabric of our being that it always was and always will be. History lends support to such gloom. Humans have been at peace for only eight percent of the past 3,400 years of recorded history.^[7] Some scholars conclude pessimistically that wars are largely random catastrophes whose specific time and location we cannot predict but whose recurrence we must expect just as we expect earthquakes and hurricanes. This fatalism leads a writer in *American Scientist* to see the nations of the world as banging “against one another with no more plan or principle than molecules in an overheated gas.”^[8] George Santayana said that only death will free us from wars, and the Gospel warns of “wars and rumors of wars,” noting glumly that “such things are bound to happen” (Matt. 24:6).

Such things are not bound to happen. Military power, even “superpower” military power, is being embarrassed, and examples of successful nonviolent modes of resistance are multiplying. Alternatives to military slaughter are being tested and proved.

With all the bravado of the schoolyard bully flouting his bulging biceps, America has boasted and relied on its “superpower” status, its “nuclear supremacy.” That “supremacy” meant nothing in Vietnam, Iraq, or Afghanistan. September 11, 2001, proved that a handful of men with nothing more than box cutters and penknives as weapons could destroy the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, symbols of American economic and military strength. This signaled the end of nation-versus-nation warfare as in World War II. As Karen Armstrong says, “It was an attack against the United States, but it was a warning to all of us in the First World.”^[9] It made us aware of “a new nakedness and a raw [and new] vulnerability.” If our policies inspire hatred around the world, and they do (see *Why Do People Hate America?* by Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies), the angry of the world have the means to get at us.^[10] The National Security Strategy of the United States in 2002 admitted that America is now threatened less by conquering states than by failing ones, “less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few.” A recent estimate by information warfare specialists at the Pentagon reveals how vulnerable developed nations are. The study estimated that a well prepared attack by fewer than thirty computer whizzes with a budget of less than ten million dollars, “could bring the United States to its knees, shutting down everything from electric power grids to air traffic control centers.”^[11]

There is no way we can adequately protect our 1,000 harbor channels, our 3700 passenger and cargo terminals, the seven million cargo containers moving in and out of our ports. Factories and refineries are exposed and waiting, as are all our fish farms and mega-farms, our chemical plants and nuclear energy facilities. To penetrate any of this is to penetrate us and they are all penetrable. The idea of protected borders has become obsolete. A single rifle in the hands of two men could change life for 22 days in the nation’s capital and in Virginia in 2002. Mere hundreds of trained and motivated persons could paralyze our nation, with catastrophic effect on all commerce.

Atomic devices that fit in a suitcase and can be easily hidden in huge cargo containers, are now technically feasible. Building complex missile defense systems are as useless and out of date as the Maginot Line. Angering nations by our aggressive policies motivates those with access to small atomic weapons to use them and—*your attention please!*—we should anticipate their use in the United States if present trends continue. An article in the *New York Times* on June 12, 2007 says: “The probability of a nuclear weapon one day going off in an American city cannot be calculated, but it is larger than it was five years ago.”^[12]

The only modern defense is good relations. We do not fear the nuclear weapons of France, India, or Israel, because we have developed non-hostile relations with these countries. That is done by consulting their interests and making the necessary accommodations. As war has become so potentially suicidal, nations prefer not to engage in it. That’s why the “cold war” stayed cold. The “love thy enemies” of the Bible can be translated with utmost realism into “understand thy enemies,” and then it becomes the most essential tool of modern statecraft. The capitally important book edited by Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Ten*

Practices for Abolishing War, is a major text in the neglected science of peacemaking. The so called “just war theory” has become common currency in international discourse. I have argued in my book *The Horrors We Bless: Rethinking the Just War Legacy* that this very theory, regularly misused to justify war, actually shows that all America’s recent wars are immoral.^[14] Unjust wars are, by definition, nothing more than organized murder.

People of biblical faith, long beguiled by the God of War, have betrayed the breakthrough of their own religious tradition. Abraham Heschel states the dramatic fact that the Israelites “were the first [people] in history to regard a nation’s reliance upon force as evil.”^[15] They tried violence and found it does not work; it bites back at you. As the Christian Paul put it, “If you go on fighting one another, tooth and nail, all you can expect is mutual destruction” (Gal. 5:14). So the Bible did an about-face and went on to blast military power. The biblical concept of God changed from “The Lord is a warrior” (Exod. 15:3-8) to God is “the Lord of peace” (Judg. 6:24) and the covenant is the “covenant of peace” (Isa. 54:10).

The ancient world cynically declared what seemed to be the natural law of social evolution: *si vis pacem, para bellum* (if you want peace, prepare for war). In this desperate view, in the tough world we live in, war is the only way to peace. As theologian Tobias Winright says, we prefer the law of force to the force of law. The biblical writers entered a major dissent to this logic. They say: *si vis pacem, para pacem* If you want peace you have to prepare it and build it. “Seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14). It doesn’t just happen. It has to be built, like a city, brick by brick. But most importantly, peace has to be seen as possible. The illusory “security through arms” heresy has to be broken.

The Israelites were practical people. They knew the meaning of power but they discovered and pioneered the idea that violent power blows back at you. They knew that this lesson they had learned was “a hard sell” and so they drummed this message home with passionate urgency.

“Neither by force of arms nor by brute strength” would the people be saved (Zech. 4:6). “Not by might shall a man prevail” (1 Sam. 2:9). Military power will be discredited. “The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might” (Mic. 7:16). “Some take pride in chariots, and some in horses, but our pride is in the name of the Lord our God” (Ps. 20:7). “Their course is evil and their might is not right” (Jer. 23:10). The song of the military (usually translated as ruthless) will be silenced (Isaiah 25:5), and fortified cities will become heaps of ruin (25:2). Reflecting Israel’s history, the prime weapons of oppressive royalty, horses and chariots, are despised (see Exod. 14:9, 23; Deut. 20:1; 2 Sam. 15:1; 1 King 18:5; 22:4; 2 Kings 3:7; 18:23; 23:11). As Walter Brueggemann puts it, “Horses and chariots are a threat to the social experiment which is Israel. ... Yahweh is the sworn enemy of such modes of power.”^[16] God ordered Joshua to disarm. “Hamstring their horses and burn their chariots” (Josh. 11:6).

“There is no peace for the wicked” (Isa. 57:21). Inversely, if you do not have peace, it is your fault. You took the wrong approach. “Because you have trusted in your chariots, in the number of your warriors, the tumult of war shall arise against your people and all your fortresses shall be razed” (Hos. 10:13-14). For leaders to ask their people to trust arms for deliverance is “wickedness” and “treachery” (Hos. 10:13). Arms beget fear, not peace. You cannot build “Zion in bloodshed” (Mic.3:10). Therefore, “I will break bow and sword and weapon of war and sweep them off the earth, so that all living creatures may lie down without fear” (Hos. 2:18). Notice, the distrust of arms is seen as a norm for “all living creatures,” not just for Israel. War delivers peace to no one. It’s counterproductive. There is no “war to end all wars”; only peace ends war, and you have to work at peace, not just pray for it. You have to substitute justice-work for violence.

Justice as the Biblical Alternative to War

The Israelites did not just criticize the “security through arms” illusion; they offered an alternative. Peace

can only be the fruit of justice, justice for all people, not just for those in your tribe or nation. That is what the brilliant Isaiah said: only justice “shall yield peace” (Isa. 32:17), a text that all by itself deserves a Nobel Peace Prize. The goal of justice in Israel was the elimination of poverty. “There shall be no poor among you” (Deut. 15:4). “The poverty of the poor is their ruin,” says Proverbs 10:15, and their poverty is also our undoing. You cannot build a peaceful society upon a base of poverty. That is unjust and it destroys peace. This was the biblical insight, an insight that is eternally true. Nothing coming out of the modern schools of economics rivals its brilliance. It is from the seed of justice, not from bloodshed, that peace will grow. If only “people of faith” could put aside their petty squabbles and unite around this epochal biblical insight!

The Jesus movement continued the biblical protest against “kill power” as the path to security. “How blessed are the peacemakers; God shall call them his children” (Matt 5:9). The Bible was not being naive. Jesus and the prophets of Israel were realists. Their insight into the weakness of the sword is born out even today. Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela showed the power of nonviolent resistance. Almost bloodlessly, dictators such as Ferdinand Marcos and at least seven Latin American despots have been driven out. As Walter Wink writes, “in 1989-90 alone fourteen nations underwent nonviolent revolutions.”^[17] The freeing of Eastern Europe from Soviet totalitarian control was not achieved by invading armies. Gene Sharp lists 198 different types of successful nonviolent actions that are on the historical record, but neglected by historians and journalists who prefer to report on the flash of war.^[18] “Britain’s Indian colony of three hundred million people was liberated nonviolently at a cost of about eight thousand lives. ... France’s Algerian colony of about ten million was liberated by violence, but it cost almost one million lives.”^[19] Do the math.

The new facts of life and the wisdom of the prophets are joining hands in this *kairos* moment. St. Paul rivaled the cynicism of the Chicago School of Economics when he wrote to the Philippians, “All people seek what is in their own interest and not the interests of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 2:21). He did have a point. Self interest stirs the most flaccid will. And right now, self interest can be invoked to point the United States away from the militaristic economy of death that is bleeding our own national well-being and undermining our safety and that of the world.

Thanks to the more than 40,000 lobbyists who hover around Washington, D.C. like bees over a flower bed, and thanks to the flow of campaign money from military contractors into our national political emporium, the United States is starving itself by spending more than 30 million dollars an hour, 10 thousand dollars a second on military nonsense. One little example illustrates the madness—the USS Kitty Hawk, the main ship of a carrier task force. This ship is like a nuclear-powered floating city. It is almost three football fields long, as tall as a 20-story building, and it houses over 5,000 crew, pilots, and mechanics as well as 70 sleek and lethal aircraft. It is never lonely; keeping it company are a mighty Aegis cruiser, frigates, and destroyers, two hunter-killer submarines, as well as supply vessels.

Impressive? Yes, but embarrassing. Clyde Prestowitz notes that “the United States has thirteen of these carrier battle groups. No other country has even one.”^[20] A bit like having the best football team in the world and no opponents. And this is just one example of military waste in the great big bloated Offense Budget. For the price of a few of these carriers we could extend Medicare to include full medical coverage for all Americans, as other civilized countries do. We could blow up every inferior school building and build an up-to-date facility that is worthy of our children, while doubling the salaries of elementary and high school teachers. We could end world hunger and thirst and thus win friends worldwide, the best protection imaginable from terror attacks. Of the 22 richest nations in the world, we are first in wealth and last in generosity. In 1997, “in absolute terms if we exclude U.S. aid to Israel and Egypt, the United States—with 265 million people—spent less on development assistance than Denmark, a nation of five million.”^[21]

Nations that do not export death, who prize and develop the humane art of diplomacy and negotiation, who respond generously to the needs of others, and who do not offend the legitimate interests of other nations,

do not fear terrorism. It's just that simple. Isn't it a matter of self interest to be less hated? President Bush said after 9/11 that terrorists target us because they hate our freedoms. Osama Bin Laden, in a taped message, replied that Sweden has freedom, too, and they are not and will not be a target of Al Qaeda threats.

There is yet another case where self interest would blend with virtue. The effects of the economic theory and policy (called variously neoliberalism, conservatism, and neoconservatism) is to shift wealth from the bottom to the top, and this is operating worldwide. The United Nations Development Report, 1992, said that 82.7 percent of all world income goes to the richest 20 percent of people worldwide, with the rest divided among the remaining 80 percent. The poorest fifth receive 1.4 percent of total world income. As economist Felix Rohatyn says: "Strong growth in the poorer parts of the world will be needed to sustain enough growth in the West to maintain adequate levels of employment and to enable Western governments to deal with their pressing social problems."^[22] No customers, no sales. Elementary it would seem! "The poverty of the poor is their ruin," says the book of Proverbs (10:15). But their poverty is our ruin also since poverty breeds the kind of violence that the "well-caloried and well-salaried" like to call "terrorism."

An Empire in Decline

The United States is an empire. Given our ubiquitous military bases and financial outreach, we can say the sun never sets on the American Empire. However, the sun is setting on this empire as it does on all empires. The Roman Empire, in a simpler time, lasted 300 years. The British Empire and the Soviet empire lasted less than fifty years. As the American empire unravels, scholars debate whether the undoing began in 1964 or as recently as 2001, but there is no denying that the unraveling is on. China, which produces 90 percent of all the goods sold at Wal-Mart, is on its way to being the largest economy in the world by mid century, as we continue to bankrupt ourselves through military waste. It is predicted that soon "there will be a profoundly altered United States: economically weaker and technically less competent, with an impotent currency, rampant corruption, and distant memories of superpower glory."^[23]

The almighty dollar has faded as anyone exchanging dollars for euros knows. From World War II to the mid-1970s, people could expect to be better off than their parents. That is no longer true. Arrogance ill befits a nation in decline. Militarism is not what such a nation needs. Becoming a friendlier and humbler nation is in the national interest as our long joy ride winds down.

In 1992, Colin Powell, while Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the United States should be "the bully on the block."^[24] That ignoble ambition died in the wreckage of Iraq. It's an ambition that is neither feasible nor smart. Intelligently perceived self-interest could tilt our bellicose nation onto the path of peace.

Recovering the Renewable Moral Energies of the Bible

Theology has the power to crucify Jesus again and again, and it has used that power repeatedly. Why would I, a theologian, say such a thing? The facts of history compel me. Jesus is obviously at the center of Christian theology. There are three aspects of Jesus that merit theological attention: his being, his doing, and his teaching. Early on, the stress fell on his being to the neglect of his doing and teaching.

As Joerg Rieger points out in his important book *Christ and Empire*, "Our images of Jesus Christ have developed in the context of empire. Jesus was born under the rule of the Roman Emperor Augustus, lived under the auspices of the Roman Empire, and was executed by a common means of punishment for political rebels in unruly provinces: the cross."^[25] Jesus did not die to save us from our sins, as an

implicitly sadistic “atonement theology” would have it, as though God required the human sacrifice of his son to placate him for the sins of others.^[26] Jesus was a rebel, a nonviolent rebel, and was killed by Rome in the manner used for rebels against the empire. Resistance to injustice and solidarity with victims were the heart and soul of his doing and teaching. Atonement theology misses that point.

We see that same loss in two other theological missteps, the stripping of the title “Lord” of its revolutionary moral import and the influence of emperors on the Christological theology of the Council of Nicaea. “Lord” occurs over 700 times in the New Testament. It was a title the Caesars had decided to claim for themselves. Applying it to Jesus was revolutionary, even treasonous, since it competed in kind and in power with the lordship of the emperors. Proclaiming it led to the death of martyrs. It was, to borrow a term from Pinchas Lapide, “theopolitical dynamite.” And then theology robbed the title of its moral clout. It came to mean, as professor Rieger puts it, that “commitment to Jesus as Lord is required for ‘salvation’ (a term that invariably seems to mean ‘going to heaven’).” Wanting to go to heaven would not have gotten you or Jesus into trouble with the Roman Empire.

Theology has put the stress in Jesus’ lordship on Jesus’ being to the neglect of what the term originally taught about resistance to unjust political and economic power. Ellen Meiksins Wood says that the influential Saint Augustine furthered this moral denuding of the lordship of Jesus. In Augustine’s hands, she says, “Christianity became not a politically rebellious sect,” but a “‘universal’ spiritual doctrine that sought salvation in another realm and ‘rendered unto Caesar’ his unchallenged temporal authority.”^[27] From this followed the Christian underwriting of many of Caesar’s wars, a defection that continues with many Christians right into the present tense.

How surprised the Jesus executed by the Roman Empire would have been to know that the emperors of that same empire would take it onto themselves to define his meaning in history. The crucial councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon were financed and presided over by Roman emperors. If there is one word on which the history of Christianity depends, that one word is *homoousios*. Applied to Jesus it means he is of one being, consubstantial to his heavenly Father. The word was proposed to the council by Emperor Constantine. “Constantine not only called the council but also funded the travel and expenses of the bishops, determined the agenda, and chaired the meetings.”^[28] Now when a violent ruler like Constantine takes that much interest in a council, it is not cynical to suggest that piety was not his prime motive. And Constantine had his way with the Christians. The council locked in on the *being* of Jesus, thus overshadowing his *doing* and his *teaching*. Search the Nicene Creed. You will find no hint of Jesus’ “Blessed are the poor,” or his “Woe to you rich,” or his “Blessed are the peacemakers.” One does not see the thoughts of Jesus’ mother, Mary, who spoke of God as one who puts to rout the “arrogant of heart and mind” and who has “brought down monarchs from their thrones, [while] the humble have been lifted high, ... the hungry satisfied with good things, the rich sent empty away” (Luke 2:46-55). None of that. No monarch need tremble before the Jesus of Nicaea.

Jesus’ grandly proclaimed divine status had the effect of removing him from the mission that got him killed, all of this by posting him in the unthreatening remoteness of heavenly glory. The sellout in this period of history was disastrous. As his divinity was proclaimed, Jesus was Constantinianized and Constantinian power was aggrandized. As Jaroslav Pelikan points out, it was assumed that “Christ the King had elected to exercise his sovereignty over the world through the emperor.”^[29] Constantine was later to be seen as a saint, “equal to the Apostles.”^[30] He was the pontifex maximus, the bridge between heaven and earth, the high priest (a title later borrowed by popes.)

Imperial favor was a heady wine that sent theologians reeling. Christianity had moved from persecution to preferment and theology crumbled. The sword had become a friend and no one was about to beat it into a plowshare.

In this insidious metamorphosis, the cross became a symbol of military conquest. *In hoc signo vinces*, “In this sign you shall conquer,” was Constantine’s reinterpretation of Jesus’ death. Cross and sword were wed. Christian nations grabbed it to symbolize their wars. The Iron Cross in Germany, the Victoria Cross in Britain, the St. George Cross in Russia, and the Cross of the League of Honor in France.^[31] Western Christianity succumbed to the fever of violence, all in the name of Jesus. Rita Nakashima Brock writes: “Killing in the name of Christ became a holy act, preached by bishops, supported by taxes, celebrated by poets and artists, institutionalized as penance, enacted by ritual, legalized by canon law, and legitimated by theologians.”^[32] Imperial embrace is poisonous.

The Faithful Remnant of Truth

Hopeless? Not at all. The revolutionary base remains. Bad theology and a terrible blood-soaked history do not obliterate the peacemaking vision birthed in biblical times. Even what Joerg Rieger calls “the subversive potential of the creeds” survives, including the Nicene Creed over which Constantine presided. If Jesus is *homoousios*, of one being with God, then so is his lifestyle and his “solidarity with the outcasts of his time” and his challenges to “the religious and political establishments” that inflicted war and poverty on the people of this good earth.^[33] Jesus, and we with him, are once again “a stumbling block” (1 Cor. 1:23) to the destroyers of peace.

I have criticized the Nicene Creed and other creedal formulae as lacking in the moral power of the Bible. To support my criticism, my book *A Moral Creed for All Christians* goes back to the Bible. In the book I search out the fire that lit the hearts of the prophets, a fire that is missing in many of the classical creeds. The editors suggested that I summarize the book in a creedal formula that could have liturgical use. I dare to dream that both liberals and conservatives who take Jesus and the Bible seriously could resonate with its biblically-based wisdom, its challenge, and its promise.

A Christian Moral Creed

We believe in the Reign of God, a God who loves us “with an everlasting love” (Jer.31:3). We believe that we are called to join God in creating a world in which oppression gives way to justice, a world where “justice and mercy kiss” (Ps. 85:10), a world that will be like a “new heaven and a new earth” (Isa. 65:17), a world where “they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain (Isa. 65:25), and we believe it can be done.

We believe that wholehearted biblical justice is the hallmark of the reign of God, a justice that sees the ending of poverty and its evils as the prime moral challenge and mission for Christian peoples. We believe that we are called to be “good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18), that making the interests of the poor our interests is the only holiness.

We believe in prophecy and that we are to be prophets, the social conscience of our society, specialists in the art of cherishing the earth and its peoples, joining with the prophetic movements of all the world’s religions.

We believe that peace can be achieved by justice (Isa. 32:17), not by the horrors of war, a peace in which the hostile barriers between “Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female” are dissolved, for we “are all one person” in the sight of God (Gal. 3:28).

We believe that our God is a “God of Truth” (Ps. 31: 5), that we are missionaries of truth in a world awash with self-serving lies where “truth stumbles in the market-place and honesty is kept out of court, so truth is lost to sight” (Isa. 59:14).

We believe that we are “emancipated” and called to freedom (Rom. 6:18) and that freedom is a virtue only when it is married to justice and compassion.

We believe in hope, that “what we shall be has not yet been disclosed” (1 John 3:2), that the plan of the “God of hope” (Rom. 15:13) for us has not yet been realized. Hope drives us to dream and work for a better world where the cries of the oppressed are no longer heard and where tears are wiped from sorrowing eyes.

We believe that “the whole law is summed up in love” (Rom.13:10), that “God is love” (1 John 4:16), and that loving like God whose “goodness knows no bound” (Matt. 5:48) is our mandate and model. That commits us to loving our enemies and persecutors for “only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest” (Matt. 5:45). We believe that love is the solvent that can end all enmity.

We believe that joy is our destiny, that the appropriate response to the promises of the Reign of God is “sheer joy” (Matt. 13:44), and where joy is not present because of poverty or prejudice, our work is not done.

All of this we believe and to all of this we commit ourselves. Amen.

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 3. David Korten, “Sustainability and the Global Economy,” in Harold Coward and Daniel C. Maguire, *Visions of a New Earth: Religious Perspectives on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 39. See also Daniel C. Maguire, *Sacred Energies: When the World’s Religions Sit Down to Talk about the Future of Human Life and the Plight of This Planet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).
 4. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War* (New York: An Owl Book: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 177-78.
 5. Quoted in Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 74.
 6. On Margaret Thatcher’s use of this principle, see Joerg Rieger, *Christ & Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 10.
 7. Chris Hedges, *What Every Person Should Know About War* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 1.
 8. L. F. Richardson, *Statistics of Deadly Quarrels* (Pacific Grove, California: The Boxwood Press, 1960). Quoted in Vaclav Smil, “The Next 50 Years: Fatal Discontinuities,” *Population and Development Review* 31:2 (June 2005), 225. B. Hayes, “Statistics of Deadly Quarrels,” *American Scientist* 90 (2002), 15.
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29. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 54.
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