

War Works? Elective for Synod 2002

*Dr Mark Zirnsak
Justice and International Mission Unit
Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania*

These notes have been edited to remove the instructions for small group activities and notes about audio-visual resources to be used during the presentation. Otherwise, they are Mark's presenters notes and were not prepared for publication.

- Who would oppose violence in all its forms at all times? Who would oppose lethal violence at all times? Who would agree that lethal violence might sometimes be necessary to avoid a greater evil triumphing? I assume we have no one here that sees lethal violence as a way to further the Kingdom of God?
- When in 1209 when crusaders in southern France stormed the city of Béziers, it is reported that a knight asked the papal legate, Abbot Aimery, "How will we know who to kill?" and he is reported to have said "Slay them all – God will recognize his own."

Theological Reflection

- Both pacifism and militarism have found support in religious expression.

Pacifism

- Within the Christians tradition the almost universal commitment to pacifism and non-violence lasted almost three centuries.
- Christians resisted early Roman laws requiring them to renounce their faith and many were executed for this.
- First the first three centuries, Christians almost universally refused to serve in the Roman army. Many were executed for this.
- The early 16th Century saw a re-emergence of Christian pacifism as a way of life during what became known as the Radical Reformation. The Mennonites, Brethren in Christ and Society of Friends (Quakers) developed into the 'Historic Peace Churches'.
- There are a large number of contemporary peace theologies.
- What are the Biblical passages that support a Christian pacifist response?
- Peacemaking is a theme in Matthew 5, Luke 6, and Romans 12.
- Peacemaking as transforming initiatives is at the heart of the Gospel.
- Jesus asks that his followers do not repay evil with evil, but rather to be assertive by the use of surprising initiatives that may transform the enemy's judging and condemning into openness and peace (Matthew 5:39-41).
- On the road to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus made it clear to his disciples that his mission would be accomplished through suffering and death – a nonviolent confrontation with the forces of evil - and that his followers must expect the same (Matthew 16:21-26).
- In the wilderness Jesus is tempted by violence, the 'violence' of coercive power over others, and he successively rejects its various forms: control of material wealth, spiritual power over others and political power (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13).
- Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of peace and free choice – not worldly dominance.
- When the mob came to arrest Jesus in the garden and Peter tried to defend Jesus with his sword, Jesus halted the effort (John 18:10-11) and warned him that "Those who take up the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).
- The narrative culminates with Jesus' non-violent non-cooperation at his trial before both the Jewish and Roman authorities and his execution.

- Such observations point towards Jesus' life and teaching being intrinsically non-violent. Violence perpetrated in the name of Jesus denies his life and teaching.
- To perceive all the enemy's assertions as antagonistic and untrue causes serious distortions of perception and the failure to make use of opportunities to resolve the conflict. We need to demonstrate through deeds our love of enemy to break through their distorted perceptions of distrust.
- For the Christian the objective of any form of protest or resistance to unjust authority should not be to gain power and coerce an enemy. This is not in keeping with Jesus' command to love our enemies and not to seek to be powerful (Mark 9:35, Luke 9:46-48). In our society, it is easy for Christians to assume our task is to acquire power and use it for the furthering of justice and the betterment of the poor – but this is far removed from Jesus. Such a view would see allowing oneself to be crucified as a complete 'nonsense'. Jesus' temptations make it quite clear that he rejected economic and political power as a means of establishing God's new order.

Support for the Christian Concept of Just War

- What passages are used from the New Testament that justify violence?
- Romans 13, Luke 22:35-38, Jesus cleansing the Temple
- The sword in Romans 13:4 is likely to mean the symbol of judicial authority.
- Luke 22:35-38, Jesus instructs his disciples to purchase swords, but when they produce two he says that is enough. How would two swords be enough for 12 disciples travelling in twos?
- Jesus uses violence in cleansing the Temple, but it is non-lethal and we are not told that anyone is hurt by his action.
- Is it possible to reconcile the way God's attitude to lethal violence is portrayed in the Old Testament to the teaching of the New Testament? I do not believe so. I think any attempt to do so makes a mockery of the teaching of Jesus.
- Examples, when the Israelites storm Jericho they believe it is their duty from God to butcher every baby, child, woman and man except the prostitute Rahab and her household (Joshua 6:17-22). They did the same to the city of Ai (Joshua 8:1-29). Similarly, Samuel tells Saul it is God's orders that Saul carry out genocide on the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). In Deuteronomy 21 Israelites are permitted to rape women they take captive in war provided they marry them first.

Just War Theory

- Just war theory has no Biblical basis to its elements. It is based on the premise that war is undesirable but sometimes might be necessary to prevent a greater evil.
- Its elements are:
 - Must have a just cause, not be a matter of retribution;
 - Must be as a last resort;
 - Must be waged by a legitimate authority;
 - Must use proportional means and target only combatants;
 - There must be a reasonable chance of success.

Reality of Armed Conflict

Behaviour in combat

- Let us consider the nature of modern combat, as this affects the training of combatants.

- Consider World War One? What proportion of casualties do you think were inflicted by bombs, artillery shells and grenades, what proportion by bullets and what proportion by bayonets?
- A very influential study of modern combat was conducted by Brigadier-General S.L.A. Marshall who did a first hand study of combat on islands in the Pacific during World War II.
- The most significant of his findings was that no more than about 25% of soldiers would actually use their weapons in combat. On Makin Atoll for example, a US battalion (about 600 men) were subjected to a massed Japanese attack through a night, but only 36 US soldiers used their weapons.
- Marshall reasoned that the main reason for this behaviour is that modern battlefields are largely empty and therefore bewildering. Both the enemy and one's comrades are both actively trying to conceal themselves.
- The importance of Marshall's findings is that it helped to shape modern combat doctrine. Marshall argued that firepower was the main way combatants could communicate their hostile intention to an enemy and so intimidate the enemy into confusion and immobility. The act of firing allowed a side to cease the initiative and to advance.
- Thus many modern armies train their soldiers to spray fire into areas rather than seeking to aim and hit an individual target. For example, French troops are trained to spray fire out to 200m, with marksmanship left to a small number of specially designated troops. All this means that soldiers are not trained and nor do they use firearms in the same way as police. This has huge implications for the global trend of seeing military 'peace-making' interventions as a cure all for conflict situations.
- This reality of behaviour in combat also favours the use of area effect weapons, bombs, shells, grenades and the like.

Internal Barriers to Killing

- The other part of training that we need to consider is that military training must seek to overcome recruits internal barriers to killing other human beings. In Western societies there has been a growing trend away from the acceptability of deliberately and directly killing other people. Look at the decline in the death penalty. However, the role of a soldier is to kill, but the military have the task of ensuring that soldiers only kill when they are given permission to do so. This is by no means an easy task, as we will examine later.
- This is a good point to mention the co-option of Christian language by the military. What is the message we hear on ANZAC Day?
- No greater love has any man than to give his life for his friends.
- What nonsense. No army trains their troops to die. Soldiers are trained to kill and to kill as many of the enemy as possible with the least possible loss to themselves. Yet we have this romantic adoption of Christian language talking of sacrifice for some greater good.

The inevitability of war crimes

- War crimes by all sides in war are almost inevitability. The question is usually the extent. I am going to focus on war crimes by Australian troops and our allies, because I am sure you will be aware of the war crimes of the enemies of Australia and its allies.
- One factor is trying to restrain troops from continuing to kill enemy combatants when those combatants are attempting to surrender or after they are wounded and no longer able to defend themselves.

- The second restraint on soldiers is stopping them from killing non-combatants. In the peace-killing operation in Somalia Pakistani troops opened fire on crowds of unarmed civilians. Several Canadian troops were prosecuted for torturing to death a Somali teenager and the unit they came from was disbanded.
- Stopping soldiers from killing non-combatants becomes much harder in the context of a civil war, guerrilla war or liberation struggle where parts of the civilian population may aid the non-government forces. To soldiers this makes distinguishing legitimate targets more difficult.
- Modern wars kill far greater proportions of civilians than earlier wars. Right?
- Wrong. War has almost always been bad news for civilians. Consider two wars around the turn of the 20th Century. The Boer war killed 7792 British Empire troops in combat and 13,000 through disease. Between 4,000 and 7,000 Boer combatants had been killed. The number of Boer civilians killed, mainly in British-run concentration camps, was 28,000 and 14,000 black Africans also died in the concentration camps. The US conquest of the Philippines between 1899 and 1902 resulted in 4,300 US soldiers being killed in 'the White Man's burden' as it was known at the time with 16,000 to 20,000 Filipino nationalist combatants (mainly Muslims) being killed in combat and a further 200,000 Filipino civilians being killed by disease, famine and other causes all related to the war.
- If you want to go further back things do not get better. In 1798, there was an Irish rebellion against British rule. It was brutally crushed with British troops massacring 50,000 Irish people, mostly civilians.

Geneva Conventions

- The Geneva Conventions and two Additional Protocols to them aim to put restraints on these situations. You cannot kill combatants that are wounded and not fighting back, you cannot kill enemy combatants that are attempting to surrender. You cannot deliberately target civilians, but you are permitted to kill civilians if they get in the way of some military objective and the obtaining of that objective outweighs the number of civilians you kill or of civilian property you destroy.
- The latter point is one where our Unit in Synod has sought to engage the Australian Government. The armed forces of the US and UK argue that electricity systems including power stations, civilian airports, communication systems (radio stations, telephone exchanges, television stations), police stations and civilian government departments are all legitimate military targets. It pays not to work in any of these facilities if the US declares war on you. We have been trying to argue that in most cases the destruction of these objects would result in civilian deaths, suffering and damage to property that outweighs any concrete military advantage gained.
- Even on the former point, things have gotten better than before the Conventions were adopted in 1948, but killing of prisoners still happens. Our Unit has been protesting at the killing of Taliban prisoners of war in Afghanistan through neglect. The US insisted that most Taliban, the majority of whom were reluctant conscripts, be imprisoned despite the fact that the Afghan administration does not have the resources to house them and feed them. The result has been reports of scores of prisoners dying from disease and exposure in overcrowded prisons. The European Union special envoy to Afghanistan, Klaus-Peter Klaiber, is reported to have said one prison in northern Afghanistan that we have raised concerns about looked like Auschwitz. In his words "The people have nothing on their bones anymore. It's unbelievable, unbelievable. There were ghost-like figures just stirring soup. It was awful." So far the Australian Government has rejected our pleas that they seek to intervene in any way.

- Another rule in the Geneva Conventions is that weapons should not cause excessive or superfluous injury. This has proved almost meaningless. As a US Colonel that recently visited Melbourne said at a conference on the Geneva Conventions ‘It is generally agreed there is no limit to the suffering that can be inflicted on enemy combatants’. The only exception has been laser weapons that have the intention of blinding on which there is an effective global ban.

Liberation struggles

- The issue of war crimes only gets worse when we start talking about liberation struggles.
- Break into groups. Pacifist group to consider why war crimes might be worst with a liberation struggle. Those that support armed conflict consider:
 - You are an armed resistance group mounting a liberation struggle against an oppressive regime. You need to set some policies for your forces:
 1. You do not have the resources to house and look after prisoners of war. What are your forces to do with members of the security forces that attempt to surrender? Would you set different policies for members of the security forces that are volunteers and those that are conscripts?
 2. What should your forces do if local villagers refuse to provide your forces with provisions? Your forces do not have money to pay for goods and they do not have time to pay by labour.
 3. What should be done if any civilians are suspected of supplying information to the security forces about your forces placing members of your forces in danger? You do not have the resources to imprison them.
- A Brazilian Bishop, Dom Helder Camera suggested that there was a cycle of violence, in which violence against the forces of oppression results in even greater oppressive violence. Often, once an armed struggle emerges those campaigning for social justice through non-violence means are quickly labelled as supporters of the armed resistance and subjected to death threats, extrajudicial execution and ‘disappearance’.

Military Force Works

- What is Australia’s military budget? \$13.14 billion
- What is the foreign aid budget, out of which non-violent conflict prevention and conflict resolution measures are funded as a very small part? \$1.82 billion
- How many personnel in the Australian Defence Forces? 50,000 regulars and 30,000 reservists
- How many people in Australia’s organisation for non-violent intervention?
- You get the picture. The assumption is that military violence works and that non-violent alternatives will fail.
- In some political circles assessments are made in which they decide in mounting a resistance movement will an armed struggle cost more deaths than a non-violent struggle and which is likely to be deliver the better outcome.

Non-violent alternatives

- Most common scenario I have encountered being put to me as someone who rejects the use of lethal violence is that an insane person has my family at gun-point and is intent on killing them and I have a gun, would I use it to save them?
- Obviously, I find this scenario problematic on a number of grounds.
- To start with, how many people here own a firearm of any type? How is it stored?
- How do I know the person is insane?

- Let us take a more realistic scenario. A person breaks into your house at night and is armed with a gun. What would your response be?
- What would you do if there were no police force to protect you?
- Have the armed struggles in the situations they have read been helpful or harmful to bringing peace with justice in Guatemala and Colombia.
- Why do the oppressors issue death threats? Why not just kill those being threatened outright? Internal barriers to murder. Need for self-justification. If murder were not illegal how many of you would feel happy to murdering someone?
- Military force as global police is not an option for the majority of the world's oppressed people. We will not see military action by UN forces in Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, China (Tibet and the western Muslim province), Turkey (Kurds), Palestine, Sudan, Burma and Uganda.
- Examples of successful non-violent campaigns – India, South Africa (what about the military activities of the ANC? Were they helpful), Poland, civil rights in the US, East Timor (What about the military activities of Fretilin? Were they helpful?), Chile, Argentina.
- Examples of failed non-violent campaigns – Afghanistan, Iraq, China'
- Examples of successful military liberation actions – Ireland, Afghanistan, Japan (WWII), Germany (WWII), Nicaragua, Sri Lanka (64,500 killed, 1.6 million displaced over 19 years of war), Cuba, Vietnam.
- Examples of failed military liberation actions – Guatemala, El Salvador, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo (3 million dead, 2 million internally displaced), Colombia.
- Need to weigh up the cost. Even pragmatically, need to look at the number of people likely to be killed in a non-violent struggle and likelihood of success versus the number of people likely to be killed in an armed struggle versus the likelihood of success.
- A non-violent struggle means addressing injustices as soon as possible to avoid the formation of conflicts. If we are seriously about peace with justice, then we need to be working on preventing and mitigating conflicts with as much energy and time commitment as people who wage conflicts put in. Think how many hours soldiers put in to prepare for and participate in armed conflicts.
- What are the causes of conflict?
- What are the opportunities to intervene to prevent these causes generating armed conflict?
- What are the things that can be done to intervene to prevent a conflict developing?
- Once an armed conflict has started, those involved in non-violent struggle face greater risks if in the place where the conflict is occurring and a much harder job full stop in making a difference to the conflict.
- Suggestions on what can be done to mitigate a conflict and alleviate its affects?
- What are post-conflict issues that need to be addressed?
- What are some of the ways we can tackle post-conflict issues

War on East Timor

- Australia's war on East Timor to take their oil and gas reserves.
- Under the *Timor Sea Treaty* it appears that Australia will gain \$55 billion of oil and natural gas reserves in the Timor Sea that would belong to East Timor if Australia allowed international law to apply.
- Under the treaty, East Timor will get an estimated \$12 billion of the oil and gas reserves.

- The Treaty has been imposed on East Timor at a time when it has a weak bargaining position. Any negotiations on the maritime boundary are likely to take years, while East Timor's economic needs are immediate. East Timor is also conscious of its need to maintain a good relationship with Australia. These factors have made it difficult for East Timor to negotiate from a position based on the principles of international law.
- Monies that East Timor would otherwise be entitled to are being placed into an interest bearing escrow account and will only be paid to East Timor with the entry into force of the *Timor Sea Treaty*. This puts extra pressure on East Timor to accept the *Timor Sea Treaty*.
- Australia has also taken steps to ensure that East Timor will not be able to appeal to any international tribunal to hear any dispute over the oil and natural gas fields in the Timor Sea. Australia has declared that it will no longer submit to the authority of the International Court of Justice on issues of sea boundaries between Australia and any other country. Further, Australia has declared it will no longer accept the compulsory dispute resolution mechanisms of the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982* with regard to Australia's sea boundaries.
- The Australian Government recognised it was able to negotiate from a position of power with regard to the oil and gas fields with East Timor. Appeal to the International Court of Justice may have redressed this power imbalance in the negotiations resulting in a more just and fair outcome for East Timor at Australia's expense.
- East Timor's Chief Minister, Mari Alkatiri, is quoted in the media as having stated that Australia's actions to refuse to accept international tribunals to resolve sea boundary disputes as an "unfriendly act".
- In order to avoid getting into a situation of unsustainable debt, the Government of East Timor has adopted a 'no loans' policy. East Timor's government budget for the coming year is reported to be only US\$77 million. East Timorese non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have stated that revenues from oil and natural gas currently represent East Timor's greatest hope for meeting the East Timorese people's basic needs including economic development, health and education.
- East Timor has desperate development needs. East Timorese non-governmental organisations report that when Indonesian forces withdrew from East Timor in 1999, they destroyed 75% of the country's infrastructure. East Timor has only a 40% literacy rate, a GNP per capita of US\$340, life expectancy of 48 years and an infant mortality rate of 135 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate is reported to be twice that of other countries in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific.
- Australia has reduced its overseas development assistance to East Timor by 12.7% in the 2002-2003 budget, to a mere \$36.0 million.
- Taking East Timorese oil and natural gas reserves will kill East Timorese people through lack of development funds just as surely as a machete or bullet from Indonesian backed-militia, just not as graphically.
- There is a need for Australians to be active in this situation.

Note that on the following page, JAIMU stands for Justice and International Mission Unit (of the UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania)

Causes of Conflict	Conflict Prevention/Resolution	Conflict	Post Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty • Discrimination • Ethnic, religious, national and political differences (power differentials) • Maintenance of privilege 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN Initiatives • Regional initiatives • Local initiatives • Accompaniment groups eg PBI • Stemming the arms trade • Building civil society 	Mitigation Strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Humanitarian Law (IHL) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weapons to be used • Proportionality • Refugees and Internally Displaced People • Relief operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconciliation initiatives • Restoration of infrastructure • Restoration of judicial system • Dealing with war crimes • Disarmament and demobilisation • UXO and landmines • Resettlement
Issues JAIMU is tackling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third World Debt • Sanctions • Interfaith dialogue • Religious and racial tolerance • Anti-racism training • Asylum seekers/refugees 	Issues JAIMU is tackling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arms trade (landmines and cluster bombs) • Building civil society 	Issues JAIMU is tackling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IHL • Refugees 	Issues JAIMU is tackling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UXO and landmines
Current International Examples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pakistan • India • Mexico • Egypt • North Korea – South Korea • Brazil • Haiti • Bangladesh 		Current International Examples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iraq • Palestine • Sri Lanka • Sudan • Burma • Solomon Islands • Colombia • Philippines • Indonesia (Malukus, Aceh, Papua) • Nigeria • Uganda 	Current International Examples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afghanistan • Fiji • Vietnam • East Timor • Guatemala • El Salvador • Argentina • Chile • Nicaragua • Kosovo • Ireland • Bosnia • Bougainville

