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THE DEATH OF JESUS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

EDITED BY

G. VAN BELLE



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JESUS' NON-VIOLENCE AT HIS ARREST

THE SYNOPTICS AND JOHN'S GOSPEL COMPARED

I. INTRODUCTION

Usually contemplation on Jesus' death in the Gospels focuses on the meaning of his death after the event, in the post-easter situation. Jesus' death is interpreted by the Gospels (and later Christian thought) as bringing about salvation, although the way in which this salvation is brought about may be differently interpreted (expiation, ransom, sacrifice, reversal of roles)¹. However, it is not only the past fact of his death that has meaning for the evangelists, but also his behaviour and attitude while he was facing death. The announcements of the passion (of which Luke's Gospel has six) serves to create the impression that Jesus faced his death in view of its outcome. The evangelists, as it were, projected their interpretation of his death into the mind of the narrated pre-Easter Jesus. The question arises whether there remains something in the Gospel narration of Jesus facing his death as a human being, experiencing an existential crisis. The Gethsemane scene of the synoptic Gospels, when Jesus prayed that the cup may surpass him, suggests that this should be answered in the affirmative. However, John's Gospel does not have this 'existential account'².

Similarly, the critical point of his arrest is bound to reveal his attitude and behaviour vis-à-vis the question of defending himself and the use of violence. His non-resistance, however, cannot only be explained in terms of the theological meaning of his death (this aspect does exist), but also in terms of his *ethical attitude* towards the question of the infliction of violence when one is unjustifiably attacked, and his own teaching of love for the enemy (again not directly taught in John's Gospel of the 'ingroup'). Seen thus, his behaviour at his arrest serves as a test case as to whether his reaction correlates with his words, whether he would love his enemies and do good to those who persecuted him. In order to scruti-

1. The greatest difference seems to be between Luke's Gospel and the 'Jewish' ones. For Luke salvation consists in the exultation of the lowly and the reversal of roles, and not in expiation or sacrifice.

2. John 18,1 merely states that they went to the garden across the Kidron valley, to set the scene for the arrest to take place. In all probability John's view of Jesus did not allow him to portray such a human and agonising Jesus (cf also Jesus words on the cross ['It is finished'] vis-à-vis Mark's).

nise John's view on Jesus' non-resistance, a synoptic comparison between the versions of the four canonical Gospels serves to put John's view into sharper relief³.

II. SYNOPSIS

Matthew 26,47-56

(47) While he was still speaking, **Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.** (48) Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him.' (49) And he came up to Jesus at once and said, 'Hail Master.' And he kissed him. (50) Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why are you here?' **Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.** (51) **And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear.** (52) **Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.** (53) **Do you think that I cannot appeal to my father, and he will at once send me more**

Mark 14,43-52

(43) And immediately, while he was still speaking, **Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, and the scribes and the elders.** (44) Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him and lead him away under guard.' (45) And when he came, he went up to him at once and said, 'Master!' And he kissed him. (46) **And they laid hands on him and seized him** (47) **But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.** (48) And Jesus said to them, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?' (49) Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. **But let the scriptures be fulfilled.** (50) And they all forsook him, and fled. (51) And a

Luke 22,47-53

[(35) And he said to them, 'When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' They said, 'Nothing.' (36) He said to them, 'But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. (37) For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, "And he was reckoned with transgressors", for what is written about me has its fulfillment' (38) And they said, 'Look, Lord, here are two swords.' And he said to them, 'It is enough.'](47) While he was still speaking, **there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them,** and he drew near to Jesus to kiss him. (48) But Jesus said to him, 'Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?' (49) And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said,

John 18,1-12

(1) When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples across the Kidron valley, where there was a garden, and he and his disciples entered (2) Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with his disciples. (3) So Judas took a detachment of soldiers, and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. (4) Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' (5) They answered him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. (6) When he said to them, 'I am he', they drew back and fell to the ground. (7) Again he asked them, 'Whom do you seek?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' (8) Jesus

3. The question of literary dependence (which appears to be non-existent in the narration of his story) will only secondarily be considered.

than twelve legions of angels? (54) But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?' (55) At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me?' Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. (56) But all this has taken place, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.

young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, (52) but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

'Lord, shall we strike with the sword?' (50) And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. (51) But Jesus said, 'No more of this! (*eate heos toutou*). And he touched his ear and healed them. (52) Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who came out against him, 'Have you come out against a robber, with swords and clubs?' (53) When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness. (54) Then they took him...

answered, 'I told you that I am he; so if you seek me, let these men go.' (9) This was to fulfill the word which he has spoken, 'Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one.' (Jn 6,39; 17,12). (10) Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's slave and cut off his right ear. And the name of the slave was Machos. (11) Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup which the father has given me?' (12) So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him...

III. JOHN 18,1-12 AND MARK 14,43-52 COMPARED

Whereas it was relatively easy for John to avoid the portrayal of Jesus' existential crisis in the Gethsemane scene and replacing it with the 'victorious' farewell prayers⁴, the D-day of his arrest is a historical fact which he could not avoid. However, John does not give a historically reliable account of the incident but an interpreted one which reflects his theology. Within the framework of his theology, his portrayal of Jesus' 'non-violent resistance' is of particular significance.

There are basic *similarities*⁵ between John's and Mark's report on Jesus' arrest, but the differences account for each evangelist's theological stance. The similarities are the following:

(1) According to both accounts the 'enemy' about to arrest Jesus, consists of an *armed* group of men, lead by Judas.

4. In John 12,27 (not in the context of Gethsemane) Jesus mentions that his soul is troubled but it is immediately 'rectified' by him stating the purpose of his coming. Said S. Schulz (*Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972, p. 225): "Von Jesu Gebetskampf und dem unverständlichen Schlaf der Jünger (so Mk 14:13-42) is keine Rede mehr".

5. The comparisons made below will not be done in minute detail, but focuses on aspects relevant to the issue of violence.

(2) In both accounts a bystander draws a sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's slave.

(3) Both accounts mention that Jesus is arrested.

(4) Both accounts mention that Jesus *allows* his arrest.

(5) In both accounts the disciples leave the scene.

Differences between the accounts are the following:

(1) According to John a contingent of Roman soldiers (σπεῖρα⁶) was also involved together with the Jews. Since a σπεῖρα usually consisted of at least 200 men, it is communicated that a large group of people arrested Jesus. It also suggests a military operation. According to Mark it was only armed Jews.

(2) According to John, Jesus knew beforehand what would happen, he is in *control* of what happens, whereas according to Mark, Jesus' reaction to Judas' kiss and his reference to his teaching in the temple, suggest he responded to events as they occurred.

(3) Being in total control (cf. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 1971), the Johannine Jesus had the power to let his captors retreat (after his ἐγὼ εἶμι-pronouncements they fell to the ground). This enhances Jesus' choice not to act violently since he had the power to defend himself.

(4) According to Mark, Jesus' disciples deserted him and fled (even the young man who still followed for a while) whereas according to John, Jesus succeeded in letting the disciples go free. In the end he is the only one arrested. This may suggest that Jesus' 'pacifism' applies to himself and that he does not expect of his followers that they should be victims in the process.

(5) According to Mark one of the bystanders (not necessarily a disciple) reacted violently by cutting off the ear of the high priest's slave. According to John it is the leader of the disciples, Peter. The fact that there is an attempt by Peter (as representative of Jesus' followers) to react violently, makes the question of violent resistance *by Jesus' followers* a pertinent issue in the passage.

(6) According to John, Peter is admonished by Jesus not to act violently, and to put his sword back in its sheath. Mark's Jesus has no such command to the person who reacted violently. John's Gospel therefore seems to stress the idea of non-violence.

(7) According to Mark, Jesus reproached his attackers, but in an editorial note Mark explains it with a reference to the fulfillment of the scrip-

6. A *speira* could consist of a group between 200 and 600 men. Cf. SCHULZ, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (n. 4), p. 225.

... John has no reproach from Jesus. Jesus accepts his fate by referring to the cup which he has to drink (an allusion to Mark 14,36). From the comparison it emerges that in John's version Jesus' non-violent attitude is emphasised by the fact that he refrains from violence from a position of power. He explicitly demands that his followers not defend him. It is an open question whether his pacifism only applies for this particular instance of his arrest, or whether a general rule for his followers is implied. Since Peter's name is explicitly mentioned, the latter view is not to be excluded.

IV. JOHN 18,1-12 AND MATTHEW 26,47-56 COMPARED

For his version of Jesus' arrest, Matthew's Gospel is in all probability dependent on Mark's version although there are also differences between them. If compared to John's Gospel, Matthew and John have the same resemblances that exist between Mark and John.

(1) As in Mark, the armed enemy that would arrest Jesus only consists of Jews.

(2) The bystander that cuts off the ear of the high priest's slave is (contra Mark) interpreted to be one of those with Jesus (εἷς τῶν μετὰ Ἰησοῦ). Although Matthew does not explicitly state that it is a disciple, the impression is nevertheless created and the way is paved for John to interpret it to be Peter.

(3) Matthew and Mark report the actual arrest in almost the same words (before the attempt to defend Jesus), whereas in John the actual arrest (by the Roman σπειρα and Jews) is reported at the end, just before Jesus is led away (actually as part of the next passage).

(4) According to Matthew, Jesus also allows his arrest. In Mark, this is communicated through the reference that the scripture should be fulfilled, whereas in Matthew and John it is communicated through Jesus' admonishing the defender as well as the statement that the scriptures (twice in Matthew) should be fulfilled or that Jesus had to drink the cup destined to him by his father (cf. John).

(5) The Matthean disciples left Jesus like those of Mark: they deserted him and fled, whereas in John the impression is created that they are released after Jesus' threat.

(6) An interesting resemblance between Matthew and John is that (although it is not communicated in the same words) Matthew also creates the impression that Jesus could have defended himself if he so wished (by appealing to his father for twelve legions of angels). As in John's

Gospel, the Matthean Jesus therefore makes a conscious decision to refrain from violence from a position of control and power, thereby reinforcing the idea of non-violence.

(7) Further enhancing the idea of non-violence, Matthew adds a *logion* of Jesus which only he transmits: πάντες γὰρ οἱ λαβόντες μάχαιραν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀπολοῦνται ('for all who take the sword will perish by the sword'). Although not to Peter (as in John), Jesus also addresses this *logion* to his followers. Since the *logion* is based on an observation that occurs universally (and therefore not limited to the situation of Jesus' arrest, the impression is strongly created that the idea of non-violence should become part of his followers' philosophy and ethical behaviour.

(8) Like Mark (and contra John) Jesus also asks his attackers why they attack him. In Mark his question is more an impulsive reaction, whereas in Matthew the question comes after his admonishing of his defender (not in Mark) and as a formal address to the crowd (26,55). The Matthean Jesus also states more emphatically *why* this happens.

After our comparison between Matthew and John (and Mark) one can conclude that both Matthew and John reflect a development that enhances the idea of non-violence. Although communicated differently, Jesus consciously chooses non-violence from a position of control and instructs his followers (contra Mark) not to defend him. Because Peter (as representative and leader of the church) is being addressed in John and since Jesus utters the *sword logion* in Matthew, both Gospels (perhaps more so Matthew) create the impression that Jesus advocates a universal principle for his followers to comply.

V. JOHN 18,1-12 AND LUKE 22,47-53 COMPARED

The Lukan account differs (although probably based on Mark) from all the others. It should also be understood together with the passage on the two swords (Lk 22,35-38) which Luke alone transmits.

By transmitting the passage on the two swords, Luke prepares the scene for the arrest and actually makes the use of violence an issue. The passage on the two swords actually challenges the reader (as it did many exegetes over the centuries) by being vague and obscure. This proposes the question why Jesus would allow or even command his disciples to carry a sword if he rebukes them later during his arrest. The passages, therefore, have to be interpreted together. After our comparison between John and Luke's version of the arrest, we will therefore return to Luke 22,35-38.

(1) That the crowd who came to arrest Jesus was *armed Jews* is not immediately stated but can be deduced from Jesus' later reproach (Lk 22,52). Luke mentions it later because he wants to make it clear that they (and not the crowd in general) are addressed. No Romans are involved (as in John).

(2) Through the question *Lord, shall we strike with the sword?*, Luke emphasises (even more than Matthew and John) that the attempt at his defense was done by a disciple (in John the leader, Peter). The insertion of this question (cf. the similar one in Luke 9,54-55) indicates clearly that the *question about the use of violence* was prominent in Luke's (and probably third generation Christians') mind. Although Luke does not use the same words as Matthew and John (to put back the sword), his denunciation of the use of the sword is unambiguous and emphatic (ἐἴτε ἕως τοῦτο, = 'allow it until this' = 'no more of this' = stop it). Moreover it is further underscored by Jesus' healing of the high priest slave's (right, as in John!) ear⁷. The difference between Jesus' action and that of his followers is borne out by their different *words and actions*: The disciples *contemplate violence*, Jesus says *no*, they *use violence*, Jesus *heals* the wound. Luke could hardly have stated his case more emphatically.

(3) As in John's version Luke reports the actual arrest (almost as an afterthought and as part of the next passage) at the end of the passage (Lk 22,54). This may be because John and Luke's ideology (theology) predominates their reports. Although differently communicated, the Lukan version also communicates that Jesus is in *control*. In John's version his control lies in his power (ἐγὼ εἰμι, and staggering of the enemy), and in Luke through his words and merciful deed of healing. In both instances the idea to refrain from violence is enhanced.

(4) It is significant that the Lukan Jesus' yielding to his arrest is not motivated by the fact that the scripture is to be fulfilled⁸ (as in the other two synoptics, and implied in John). It happens because of the enemies' hour and the power of darkness (quite the opposite than God's 'scriptural' purpose). This again enhances the conscious 'pacifism' of Luke's Gospel. Although the enemies' attack is devilish and totally unjust, Jesus refrains from and rebukes violence through an act of love (healing of the slave). His non-violence therefore seems not to be an exception to the rule, but a principle in itself. John's reference to the drinking of the cup is closer to Luke's thought, but for Luke the cup is not from the father (cf. Luke 22,42 τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον).

7. The rebuke and healing corresponds with the rebuke and (although text critically questionable) saying in Lk 9,55-66 where the enemy was the Samaritans.

8. This is even more significant since Luke is not against the idea of the fulfillment of scripture as such (cf. Lk 22,37).

(5) Like John, Luke does not state that the disciples deserted Jesus and fled. John's Jesus' disciples are released, whereas Luke states nothing with regard to this. As it emerges from the rest of their Gospels, both Luke and John had a more sympathetic image of the disciples than Mark.

(6) Luke also retains the reproach to the Jews for attacking him (not in John), but does not answer the question by referring to the fulfillment of scripture, but to the power of darkness (cf. above).

If we return to the difficult *Sondergut* passage of Luke 22,35-38, some issues become clear in view of Luke's description of Jesus' arrest. Corresponding to the question ('Shall we strike with the sword') the passage as a whole discusses that very same question in advance. And since the clear answer to the question is contained in the narration of the arrest, there is no way that the passage on the two swords can be interpreted to mean that the Lukan Jesus advocated the use of the sword (even for defensive purposes). In fact, Jesus' command that they should buy swords highlights the issue even more. But even the problem of such a command from a 'pacifistic' Jesus seems to be answered by the Lukan Jesus, directly after his command to buy a sword: it should happen in fulfillment of scripture that he was reckoned with the transgressors (cf. Is 53,12), as it happened when he was in the company of his armed disciples during the scene of his arrest. In an ironic way the passage of the two swords therefore underscores Jesus' renunciation of the sword. The disciples, however, did not understand it, since they naively presented Jesus with two swords, and used them during his arrest. The Gute Nachricht Bible is therefore correct in translating the ἱκανὸν ἔστιν (= enough of this) of verse 38 with 'Ihr versteht mich nicht' (You do not understand me).

Similar to Luke, John also has another passage related to the non-violence portrayed in the scene of his arrest. In John 18,36 (which resembles Mt 26,53) Jesus says to Pilate that it is because his kingdom does not belong to this world that his followers did not fight to keep him from being handed over to the Jewish authorities. John hereby explicitly states Jesus' non-violent stance and (although quite different from Luke's Gospel) attempts to explain why Jesus did not react violently.

It can be concluded that every Gospel portrays Jesus' attitude to violence in its own unique way. Luke's Gospel and that of John seem to emphasise Jesus' non-violent attitude the most, thereby revealing a 'mysterious resemblance'⁹ which cannot be explained in terms of liter-

9. Cf. in both Gospels the references to 'right ear', the uncertainty whether Judas kissed Jesus and the absence of the tradition that the disciples deserted (cf. E. SCHWEIZER, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982, p. 229).

any dependence. However, the attitude correlates with motifs elsewhere in the two Gospels, for instance Jesus' attitude towards the Samaritans (Jn 4,1-42; 8,49).

John's Gospel does not transmit the command to love the enemy, but like Luke's Gospel it portrays a positive attitude to the classical enemies of the Jews of Jesus' day, the Samaritans. This fact corresponds with Jesus' stance of non-violence towards the enemy in both Gospels during his arrest.

VI. TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN PACIFISM IN A (POST) MODERN WORLD?

Is there any relevance of Jesus' stance for today's world? The question cannot but be a rhetorical one in view of the fact that there are military conflicts in about thirty countries on the globe at this very moment. The American invasion of Iraq and the debate it elicited also indicates that the issue of the use of violence for whatever purpose is very much on people's minds.

In a challenging new book published this year by Deepak Chopra, *Peace is the Way: Bringing War and Violence to an End*, Chopra argues that the human race has now reached a stage in history when it is possible to eradicate war and violence. This is his second book touching on this theme after September 11, 2001 and it is clear that Chopra was very much influenced by that event. Quoting Mahatma Gandhi, (*There is no way to peace, peace is the way*)¹⁰ he argues that peace is possible if the principles of peace are applied and when certain myths which usually function in people's thinking on war and violence are dispelled.

Chopra is a non-traditionalist religious writer, drawing on the traditions of various religions. Even Jesus is quoted¹¹, but not much system-

10. It is quite ironic that Mahatma Gandhi, who was a traditional Hindu, made extensive use of the New Testament (and especially Jesus' teaching) in his reflections on non-violent resistance.

11. My personal view (cf. E.H. SCHEFFLER, *Politics in Ancient Israel*, Pretoria, Biblia, 2001) as far as the *historical Jesus* is concerned is that he followed a political attitude of 'proactive intervention' through verbal criticism combined with acts of love and service, which can be typified as an *activist pacifism having the power to pacify* political enmity that relied on arms and violence. In the context of his day he thus provided a fifth alternative among the Jewish groups in Palestine. Subscribing to the *religious sincerity* of the Pharisees (from which group he probably originally came), he differed from their legalism and exclusive nationalism. While Jesus shared the Sadducees' *involvement in this world*, he rejected their aristocratic obsession with power and government. While he subscribed to the *mutual sharing of possessions* among the Essenes, he differed from their attitude of withdrawal and asceticism. Like the Zealots he *rejected oppressive government*, but he rejected their policy of armed resistance, intimidation and violence. In summary, he was an *activistic non-violent peacemaker*, religiously sincere, non-legalistic, inclusive, universalistic, non-power-seeking, non-ascetic, lover of this world, an *anargistic critic of oppressive power*.

atic thought is devoted to Jesus' thoughts or the various views on war and violence within Christianity¹². The question arises: is it possible that war and violence on this earth can end before the world comes to an end, or will the traditional Christian (actually universal) view prevail that war and violence will always be with us on this side of the grave as part of the imperfect reality in which we live? Furthermore, if Chopra proves to be right and war and violence become something of the past, will Christianity have any credibility left? Why does it appear as if traditional Christian theology, ethics and religion seem to loose ground all over the world (except in charismatic circles), whereas the books of people like Chopra are sold in the millions and are read by a wide range of people (ranking from traditional theists to agnostics)?

As far as our theme is concerned, we should keep in mind that after the first three centuries when Christians were pacifists and did not partake in military service, the situation changed dramatically under Constantine in the fourth century when the cross became a symbol for justifying war and conquering heathen nations (*in hoc signo*). This had the advantage of making Christianity a universal religion but the price which was paid was the blood-trail which Christianity left through its history up to this very day. Apart from the 12th century crusades, one can in terms of recent history refer to the churches co-operation with Hitler during the second world war, Bonhoeffer's intention to stop Hitler by violent means, recent Christian liberation movements in Latin-America and Africa, and America's justification of the Iraqi war.

During the Reformation the mainline churches of the Reformation (Lutheran, Calvinistic and Anglican) did not challenge the Roman Catholic church's view on the question of war and violence, with the result that even today it seems to be the general opinion in Christian circles that although war is despicable, it can in certain circumstances of injustice be justified as a defensive act (cf. H. Thielicke, *Ethik des Politischen*, 1958, pp. 557-583). Of course there were some minority Baptist movements during the Reformation that assumed a stance of Christian pacifism (for example the Mennonites), but they never made

12. Chopra makes the following challenging remark: "The Buddha and the Prince of Peace could not have spoken out more strongly against violence, yet their beliefs have been distorted into a cause for bloodshed at the hands of their followers" (D. CHOPRA, *Peace is the Way: Bringing War and Violence to an End*, London, Rider, 2005, p. 3). Cf. also the remark by G. Fohrer, famous German Old Testament scholar turned Jew: "Christianity grew out of Judaism, but in the centuries that followed it developed into Judaism's bitter opponent, which – despite its message of reconciliation and liberation – brought ineffable misery upon Jews" (*Geschichte Israels: Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, 3. Aufl., Heidelberg, Quelle, 1982; my English translation).

an impact on main-line Christian thinking and had no influence in the wars that have been waged since the Reformation. Neither have later post-reformation ecclesiastical movements like the *Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints* or the *Jehovah's Witnesses*. Moreover, one can even assert that the perceived sectarianism and naivety of these movements on a variety of issues actually caused their stance on violence not to be taken seriously.

Imagine the loss of life, physical suffering and immense sorrow by next of kin mutually inflicted by Christians during the world wars of the 20th century. In spite of their complicity, they all most certainly believed in Jesus' expiatory and vicarious salvific death in view of eternal life. Such a noble spiritual belief is however to be questioned if it does not have the *diesseitige* power to transform the attitudes of hatred and hostility between people on this side of the grave.

Whether or not one can motivate a Christian pacifism by referring to Jesus' non-resistance during his arrest cannot be objectively determined. It is a judgment call: like faith in the salvific meaning of his death, it is a choice by the Gospel writers or the reader of the Gospels. In postmodernism one seems to be forced to concede that a choice for pacifism is a reasonable and viable one and does not do violence to the meaning of the biblical text. In fact I am of the opinion that Christianity (especially with the contemporary criticism it endures from the Islamic faith) finds itself challenged and compelled to rethink its position on war and violence. If not, the church and Christianity will make itself irrelevant (by losing the moral high ground) in the (post) modern world where the conviction continues to grow that war and violence is not unavoidable but nearing its end if human beings so wish.

Eben SCHEFFLER

Department of Old Testament
University of South Africa
Pretoria 0003
South Africa