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WAR AND THE CHRISTIAN

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By D. B. Knox

The Protestant Faith

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Anzac Day makes us all ask ourselves the question "were those who fought and those who died in the wars which our country has been involved in this century, wrong? Would it have been better not to have gone to war at all? Because, after all, war is so drastic, death is so permanent, the sense of bereavement and loss is so real and poignant. If there had been no war 30 years ago the men then killed would still be alive, in all likelihood, sisters would still have their brothers, wives their husbands, children their fathers. Was it worthwhile, was it right to jeopardise one's life, not knowing the outcome, whether it was life or death? There are a lot of people in our community today who are saying that no-one ever wins a war, all war is futile and therefore all who engage in it are wrong-headed. Is this so?

I was talking to a group of young people in my home on Anzac eve and some were urging this point of view, very persuasively, but then I remembered that had the last war not been won we would not have been able to sit together in my study discussing these things lest one of us were to act as an informer for the authorities. At that moment the front door bell rang. In Hitler's Germany (which might have become Hitler's Australia) it could well have been a visit from the secret police calling to take someone to a concentration camp or perhaps to the gas chambers. These things happened 30 years ago. It is stupid to say no-one wins a war. We would have known how wrong this sentiment is had we lost the war. The South Vietnamese will know how wrong such a sentiment is if they lose the present conflict.

The rights and wrongs of war is a question about the maintenance of right and fair relations between nations. Defensive war, such as the wars

in which Australia engaged this century, are fought to repel governments wishing to impose their will on other people living at peace beside them. War is justified when it is undertaken to protect right relationships, in other words, when it is defending righteousness. Righteousness is the thing to be sought, which means right relationships between people, everybody is treated in a way which is due to them.

The most important thing in life is right relationships, relationships with God, relationships with one another. Only when you have right relationships between everybody is it possible to live at peace with your neighbour, to live in friendship and fellowship. And so the chief thing to aim at in all our actions is righteousness. For example, we must never use our power or position to wrong our neighbour or "to put a fast one over", or to take him down. We must always be in right relationships with him. Fairness, rendering to everybody what is due to them, this is the basis of life. The old-fashioned word for this is righteousness, and it is this which ought to direct our actions, namely, to give to everyone what is due to them, always. This is the basis of a free society. It is sometimes said these days that love ought to be the principle of our conduct, but this is not so. Love motivates our actions; we should be well-disposed towards all, desiring their good and promoting it. But love does not tell us what is the right action to do, it is our own sense of righteousness (which is in effect a judgment) which shows us what is the right and true relationship in each situation and it is this judgment which should direct us as to what our action should be.

Our love for others will not only motivate us to action, but will also help us to be unbiased and fair in our judgment of what is right. In this way love is essential, but it must be holy love, for a love which does not differentiate between what is right and what is wrong is little else than sentimentality. Or it may simply be a disguise for a reluctance to undertake the painful or the troublesome thing. It may merely be an excuse for shrinking from pain, or the unwillingness to face the possibility of bereavement or even loss of one's own life. Love is not a guide to action. Love motivates but the guide for action is righteousness, that is, the discernment of what is right and fair.

We always have an obligation to do the right thing in the circumstances we find ourselves in. This used to be called duty, though it's not a word used very much these days. Yet it remains true that duty is the basis of life.

We need to recover a passion for righteousness, for right relations, and we should be equally quick to react towards any diminution of true and just and fair relationships between men, and indeed we may have a duty to involve ourselves in effort to prevent these right relationships deteriorating under the threat of tyranny or dictatorship. In other words, we may be called upon to engage in some form of resistance, such as war, on a national scale; or vigorous protest and action within the nation itself.

It must be remembered that we do not have control over the details of our own lives. Events are happening to us all the time. People are coming into our lives quite unsought on our part, and their needs may involve us in action to maintain right relationships not only between ourselves and them but also between them and others.

In other words, we may have to act on their behalf. These things do not happen to us haphazardly, God is in control of the details of our life and He has promised that He will not let us be overwhelmed with trials beyond our strength (I Cor. 10:16). When Joseph was sold into Egypt by his brothers he recognised that it was God who sent him there, but his duty to maintain right relationships with those in Potiphar's family where he was a slave meant that he had to be willing to be falsely accused and thrown into prison, perhaps for life. Yet God was with him, even in prison.

Acting rightly in the circumstances of life towards all the people with whom we come into contact (being in right relationships with them, in other words) will mean that we may have to give up projects, at least for the time being, on which our heart is set. We do not shape the details of our life and we must be willing to follow where righteousness and duty indicate. The doing of what is right or neglecting to do it in the relationships which we find ourselves involved in is a serious matter. In the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25, Jesus taught that our eternal destiny, whether heaven or hell, is determined by our reactions and relationships with those whom we come across in life. In Matt. 7, Jesus said there are two ways of living, the narrow way that leads to life and the broad way that leads to destruction. God takes right and wrong relationships very seriously indeed. His love for the world motivated Him to give His Son to live but it was God's knowledge of what was just and right to re-establish relationship between sinners and himself which led to the method of the atonement in which Christ became sin for us. Love motivated God's action - He so loved the world, but a sense of righteousness directed Him - He gave His Son to die for us. Jesus did what was right in the circum-

stances, and as a consequence the events brought Him into the position where He was crucified. But His perfectly righteous life, always doing what was right by others in each circumstance led Him through death to His triumph and crown of glory at God's right hand. And through His life of righteousness we also may receive eternal life. The matter is very serious - we are either perishing, or else through faith in Christ inheriting eternal life. Jesus did the right thing in the events of life. Humanly speaking, who was to tell that one of his companions would betray him or that Pilate would be too weak a character to do the right thing by Him? These are illustrations of wrong relationships between men, but in it all Jesus did what was right in His relationships with others.

We as individuals or as a nation are to do the same. If the world situation becomes such that another country needs our help to resist someone acting wrongly towards it then if we are in a position to help we have an obligation to help. We must use our judgment as to the practicality of the possibility, and of the seriousness of the threat in comparison to the possibility of our help. But if there is a need which we can in fact meet, whether as an individual or as a nation, we have a duty to meet it. We didn't choose the circumstances which face us with this duty, but God chose them; and we must act rightly in them with our faith in God, knowing that our serving Him, that is, doing what is right, will not be in vain.

Righteousness, maintaining and establishing right relationships with other people and between the nations, is what we are called upon to do following the example of our Saviour, and in the end we will receive with Him the crown of life.

Right relationships - that is the thing to aim at in everything, and chiefly, right relationship with God. We must begin by acknowledging our sin and asking for His forgiveness, then by taking Jesus as our Lord in reality and not merely in words. This is the true relationship with God and it will last throughout eternity.

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