



## Beyond Pacifism

Seven Theses on Christian Nonviolence

Eberhard Arnold

*Can it ever be a Christian's duty to kill? For Plough's founding editor Eberhard Arnold, who wrote the following selections in Germany between 1920 and 1935, this question goes to the core of the meaning of Christianity, and of human life.*

### I. In the name of Jesus, no one can shed human blood.

**In the name of Jesus Christ**, we can die, but not kill. This is where the gospel leads us. If we really want to follow Christ, we must live as he lived and died.

*Speaking to those advocating class war leading to state communism:* Again and again in the life of a nation, and in the class struggle for existence, pent-up tensions and conflicts erupt in violent outbursts. These outbursts reveal exploitation and oppression and the savage instincts of covetous passion. People respond in different ways to this violence: some try to uphold law and order by murderous means, while others feel called to fight for social justice with the oppressed.

As Christians, however, we must look further ahead. Christ witnessed to life, to the unfolding of love, to the unity of all members in one body. He revealed to us the heart of his father, who lets his sun shine on the wicked as well as the good. He commissioned us to serve life and to build it up, not to tear it down or destroy it.

Thus, we believe in a future of love and constructive fellowship – in the peace of God's kingdom. And our faith in this kingdom is much more than any wishful longing for the future. Rather, it is a firm belief that God will give us his heart and Spirit now, on this earth. As the hidden, living seed of the future, the church has been entrusted with the Spirit of this coming kingdom. Her present character must therefore show now the same peace and joy and justice that she will embody in the future.

For this reason, we must speak up in protest against every instance of bloodshed and violence, no matter what its origin. Our witness and will for peace, for love at any cost, even our own lives, has never been more necessary. Those who tell us that the questions of nonviolence and conscientious objection are no longer relevant are wrong. Just now, these questions are more relevant than ever. But answering them requires courage and perseverance in love. Jesus knew he would never conquer the spirit of the world with violence, but only by love. This is why he overcame the temptation to seize power over the kingdoms of the earth, and why he speaks of those who are strong in love – the peacemakers – as those who will inherit the land and possess the earth. This attitude was represented and proclaimed strongly by the first Christians, who felt that war and the military profession were irreconcilable with their calling. It is regrettable that serious-minded Christians today do not have the same clear witness.

We acknowledge the existence of evil and sin, but we know it will not triumph. We believe in God and the rebirth of humankind. And our faith is not faith in progress, in the inevitable ascent to greater perfection, but faith in the Spirit of Christ – faith in the rebirth of individuals and in the fellowship of the church. This faith sees war and revolution as necessary judgment on a depraved and degenerate world. Faith expects everything from God, and it does not shy away from the collision of spiritual forces. Rather, it longs for confrontation, because the end must come – and after it, a completely new world.

**No one who has heard** the clear call of Jesus' Spirit can resort to violence for protection. Jesus abandoned every privilege and every defence. He took the lowliest path. And that is his challenge to us: to follow him on the same way that he went, never departing from it either to the left or to the right (1 Pet. 2:21–23). Do you really think you can go a different way from Jesus on such decisive points as property and violence and yet claim to be his disciple?

### II. Thus there can be no Christian state.

**The sword of the Holy Spirit** given to the church is totally different in every respect from the sword of governmental authority. God gave the temporal sword, the sword of his wrath, into the hands of unbelievers. The church must make no use of it. The church must be ruled by the one Spirit of Christ alone.

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God withdrew his Holy Spirit from the unbelievers because they would not obey him. Instead, he gave them the sword of wrath, that is, temporal government with its military power. But Christ himself is the king of the Spirit, whose servants cannot wield any sword but that of the Spirit.

**Still, we cannot go** to a police officer or a soldier and say, "Lay down your weapons right now, and go the way of love and discipleship of Christ." We have no right to do that. We can do it only when the Spirit speaks a living word to our hearts: "The decisive moment has come for this man to be told." Then we will speak to him, and at the same moment God will tell him. What we tell him must agree with what God says in his heart at the same time.

**In the time of the Reformation** in the early sixteenth century, our brothers the first Anabaptists protested by the thousands against all bloodshed. This powerful movement of the brothers was decidedly realistic. For they never believed that world peace, a universal spring-time, was imminent. On the contrary, they believed that the day of judgment was at hand. They expected that the Peasants' War would be a mighty warning from God to the government.

To be aware that the world will always use the sword is realistic. But that realism must be combined with the certainty that Jesus stands free of all bloodshed; he can never be an executioner. He who is executed on the cross can never execute anyone. He whose body is pierced can never pierce or wreck bodies. He never kills; he himself is killed. He never crucifies; he himself is crucified. The brothers say that Jesus' love is the love of the executed one for his murderers, the one who himself can never be a murderer or executioner.

No government can exist without using force. It is impossible to imagine a state that does not use police or military force. In short, there is no government that does not kill. There is no government that does not compromise with capitalism, mammonism, and injustice.

When Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's," he was talking about money ([Luke 20:25](#)). He called money something alien, something he had nothing to do with. Give this alien stuff to the emperor; they belong together, mammon and Caesar. Let the money go where it belongs but give to God what belongs to God. That is what these words mean. Your soul and your body belong not to Caesar but to God and the church. Let your mammon go to the emperor. Your life belongs to God!



## CLOTHING COLLECTION

Thursday 13 May

12.00-14.00

**Clothes will be collected at the Church**

**Clothing**

**Shoes**

**Toys**

**Books**

**Household Articles**

**All Very Welcome**

This is an important part of the excellent work being done by our Parish SVP Branch in very challenging times

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I leave you finally a responsibility to our young people. The world around us really belongs to youth, for youth will take over its future management. Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world. They must not be discouraged from aspiring toward greatness, for they are to be the leaders of tomorrow. Nor must they forget that the masses of our people are still underprivileged, ill-housed, impoverished, and victimized by discrimination. We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends.

Source: *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World, Essays and Selected Documents*

**IN MEMORIAM**

**11am, Pauline Nealon**