

Faith in Action

Resisting the God of War

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As a practising Christian, I have been involved in one way or another for many years in challenging the arms industry and the arms trade. For the last 8 years or so my work has been focused on the growing use of armed drones.

Like most people, I can remember very well where I was when a hijacked aircraft hit the Twin Towers and the Pentagon 16 years ago. About 1,000 of us were taking part in a protest outside the DSEI arms fair in Docklands. Many events were cancelled in the days and week following that awful attack: sporting events, cultural events, and political events. The arms fair, however, continued. More arms deals were made and more contracts signed even in the light of that awful mass killing.

And while the fact that a major global arms fair was taking place in the UK at the very same time as that awful act of terrorism was something of a coincidence, there are, I think, real connections here. Connections between our proliferation of weaponry through the arms trade- between our real insistence (despite all evidence to the contrary) that world security is best served by an ever increasing ability to inflict death and destruction on others- and that desperate, awful, self-destructive act of mass violence.

In contrast to that belief in arms, there is a belief at the heart of our faith that security and salvation lies not in violence or weaponry, but in following God, and – crucially - being committed to the ways of God. As people of faith we know that life triumphs over death and that love triumphs over hate. But we also know that is not the way of the world.

At roughly the same time that Jesus and the early Christians were urging people to love their enemies (Matt 5:44-45) and extolling the virtues of, what we would now call nonviolent peacemaking (Matt 5: 4-12), Roman military commander Flavius Vegetius Renatus wrote ‘If you want peace, prepare for war’. While one philosophy hailed armed might as a means of security, the other suggested that real peace and security lives in the practice of love and justice.

And that stark difference between those opposing philosophies exists as much for us today as it did at the beginning of

Christianity. In fact, it goes back goes right back to the very beginning of the Judeo-Christian faith, to the Exodus. The Hebrew scriptures speak of God telling Moses to stand firm and not to be afraid as the massed chariots and horses (the key and frightening weapons technology of the time) descend on the escaping slaves. And whether by drowning in the Red (reed) Sea, or chariots wheels being clogged up by river reeds, the people are indeed saved.

Linked with the Exodus is the Sinai covenant and the Decalogue (Ten Commandments). At the core of these crucial covenants is the understanding that God offers protection, security and salvation to his people if they are faithful to him and commit themselves fully to his ways. God will be with people - people will have security - if they act justly and equitably in the personal, social, political and economic sphere. Security and ethical behaviour - acting justly – go hand-in-hand. In others words, international security comes not through force of arms but through justice.

By tackling the root causes of injustice around the world, like the situation of Palestine for example, we can address some of the real drivers of insecurity in the world. Instead of pouring billions into developing more lethal ways to kill each other, we need to be using those resources to address global inequality. Perhaps most importantly of all, we need to be educating our fellow citizens to understand that our national and personal security depends not on selfishness, self-interest or “protecting our national interest”, but on the welfare and security of all. Common security through the common good.

Sadly, time and again, Christians collaborate with the Roman ‘might is right’ ideology and accept that violence will save us. In the weeks, months and years since 9/11, the response of the international community has not been to isolate those who use horrific violence against the innocent, or to reflect on why people would be so desperate and alienated as to engage in such action, or to address underlying inequality and injustice as one of the root causes. Rather, the response has been to re-commit to military security and to invest heavily in the new technology of war – particularly armed drones.

So 16 years after that horrific attack, many campaigners - Christians, people of other faiths and of none - will once again

attend the DSEI arms fair this September to advocate and witness to a different way. We will say that we need to stop putting our faith, trust and salvation in the gods of war and violence, and instead commit ourselves instead to the way of justice that will bring real security. Will you join us?

Chris is the founder of Drone Wars UK and a long-time peace campaigner.