

Revenge

It was in the summer of 1945 that our piano was rolled out for the street party. Even at the tender age of 9 years I was able to play sufficiently well to lead the singing of ‘Roll Out The Barrel’, ‘Its a Long Way to Tipperary’ and ‘Knees Up Mother Brown’ with the occasional burst of ‘Sospan Fach’. Our friends and neighbours in Taff Street would never refuse a chance to sing and celebrate on this V.E. day – victory in Europe. The street was decorated with red, white and blue bunting and trestle tables from the Labour Club provided support for sandwiches of spam and corned beef, trifles of various kinds and cakes. All of this in spite of rationing! Germany had surrendered on 26th July. Peace at last. Occasionally I caught sight of women weeping – men don’t cry. My cousin Melvin who played the piano accordion was reported missing so Auntie Ivy wept. My uncle Donald, the youngest of five children in my father’s family died from a strange disease whilst serving in the army in Africa so Mam Eveleigh cried too.

To my amazement the whole celebration was repeated only a fortnight later. The Americans had dropped two nuclear weapons on Japan, one on Hiroshima on August 6th and another on Nagasaki on the 9th. My father said that the bombs were unnecessary. The Japanese were about to surrender anyway. They did so on August 15th.

Marked by mass deaths of civilians, including the Holocaust, the massive use of air power to bomb enemy cities, and the first use of nuclear weapons in combat, it resulted in an estimated 70 million deaths. These made World War II the deadliest conflict in human history.

You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil; but whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matt. 5:38f)

The followers of Jesus are to renounce every personal right. He calls them blessed because they are meek. In his book ‘The Cost of Discipleship’ chapter 12, Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was executed in the concentration camp at Flossenburg on 9th April 1945 because he had been involved in a failed plot to assassinate Hitler, claimed that those who are followers of Jesus of Nazareth have given up their right to retribution. They have taken up the cross to follow him and therefore must suffer as Jesus did. By his willingness to renounce self-defence, the Christian affirms his absolute adherence to Jesus, and his freedom from the tyranny of his own ego. But isn’t this just too idealistic? We live in a fallen world do we not? It is unrealistic to hope that the words and actions of Jesus can be lived out on a national and international stage.

For many centuries theologians have wrestled with the problems of 'Just War' theory. From St. Augustine to St. Thomas Aquinas and even to President Obama, attempts have been made to justify war. Proportionality, the possibility of a good outcome, the protection of non-combatants, are examples of the attempts to set up a set of rules which would make war morally justifiable. However, with the development of Nuclear weapons and Drones, the danger of escalation to uncontrolled violence which may even threaten the continued existence of the planet, is increasingly probable. Perhaps in the end Jesus was not so unreal as many have thought. Recent examples of non-violent action such as the fasting of Ghandi, the refusal of Nelson Mandela to seek revenge after his 27 years in prison, and the example of many peace loving people throughout the world from Buddhists to Quakers have shown that meeting aggression with non-resistance has the power to transform the world.
