

# THE WARRIOR GOD AND THE PRINCE OF PEACE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON WAR AND PEACE

Paul Kalluveettil\*

## 00. Introduction

"As a consuming fire Yahweh shall destroy them and He shall bring them down before your face." (Dt. 9:3)

"Yahweh shall fight for you" (Dt. 1:30)

"Yahweh is a man of war" (Ex. 15:3)

"You must not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword" (Mt. 10:34)

"With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns.... He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood.... Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations... He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." (Rev. 19:11-15)

The above cited OT and NT texts seem to advocate armed conflict in which lethal violence is used to coerce one to do the other's will. We find in them military terminology and, violence and aggression seem to have been attributed to God. Hence the basic question which is very relevant in the contemporary scene, especially in Indian context is this: Does the Biblical religion foster war? Are Yahweh, the God of the OT, and Jesus, the founder of Christianity, deities of violence and aggression? Does Christianity join in the club of fanatic and fundamentalist religions who sow the seed of hatred and division in the Indian society? Many non-Christians try to interpret the Christian scriptures in this way. Even some Christians are at a loss in understanding and explaining the Biblical texts on aggression and warfare. Hence the issue is so vital for the continuing existence of the Christian community in India.

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\*Dr. Paul Kalluveettil is professor of Old Testament and Theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. He has published several important works on biblical themes.

## 1.0 DIVINE WARFARE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### 1.1 Terminology and General observations

The most frequent terms used for battle and war are *lhm* (verb) and *milhama* (noun) in the Hebrew Bible. Approximately the noun occurs 320 times mainly in those texts that recount wars or make extensive thematic use of war as a means of divine intervention in history.<sup>1</sup> The more extensive texts are found in the narratives of conquest (Num. 31:14, 21, 27, 28, 49; 36:6, 20; Jos 4:13; 6:3; 8:1,3,11,14; 10:7,24; 11:19f.) According to Sir. 46: 3, Joshua was conducting the wars of Yahweh.

In the Book of Chronicles we find a peculiar ideology of war. War is from God, in which numerous adversaries are slain. It is said that God himself goes to battle. Levites, the Temple ministers, are put in charge of the spoils of war (I Chr. 5:18-20, 22; 7: 4, 11, 40; 12:1, 9, 20, 34, 36-39; 14: 15; 26: 27).

In all these texts battle and war are associated with Yahweh, his character and his actions. The expression "Yahweh's wars" occurs in many texts such as I Sam.18:17; 25:28. There is a mention of "Book of the Wars of Yahweh", Num. 21: 14. Yahweh is a "Man of war" (Ex. 15: 3; Is 42:13), a mighty hero in battle (Ps 24: 8; Jg 5: 23; Is 42: 13). Yahweh alone fights for Israel (Jos 10: 42). He himself prepares the people for battle (Zec.10: 3-5). He bestows victory (Prov. 21:31). He instructs in the art of war and provides the strengths for it (2 Sam. 22: 35, 40; Ps. 144: 1; Is. 22:6). The Lord provides help in war (I Sam 14: 23). He is said to go along into battle (I Chr. 14: 15).

### 1.2 Basic Texts: History of Origins

The image of the Divine Warrior dominates the oldest Israelite poetry. It remains a frequent characterization of Yahweh throughout the Biblical period.<sup>2</sup> In the pre-monarchic era the concept occurs in a group of archaic poems which describe divine activity primarily in terms of war: Ex.15, Dt. 33, Jg. 5, Hab. 3 (cf. Gen. 49, Ps. 68). These are hymns of

<sup>1</sup>H.D. Preuss in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament vol. VIII* . Eerdmans ; Grand Rapids, 1997, pp. 334 - 345

<sup>2</sup>T. Hiebert, "Warrior, Divine" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. VI, pp. 876-880.

victory recording Israel's early military successes. In them Yahweh is described fighting alongside the people. He is presented as a determinative factor in the victory. Explicit military vocabulary is used. Thus we read in Ex. 15: 3-4: "Yahweh is a warrior, Yahweh is his name, Pharaoh's chariots and army, he cast into the sea". Very often the people use to carry the Ark of the Covenant into the battlefield (Num. 10: 35-36; Jos. 6; 1 Sam. 4-7) in order that Yahweh may give them victory over their enemies.

During the period of monarchy the concept of the Divine Warrior was not done away with. Indeed, the notion of divine warfare became a major theme whereby the religious ideology of the tribal period was used to promote the monarchy. We find three types of literature where the concept of Divine Warrior is widely used.

In a category of Psalms composed to honour the rule of God and the Davidic King on Mount Zion, there occurs the imagery of the Divine Warrior: Ps 2, 18, 24, 46, 48, 76, 89, 97, 132, 144. The poets depict Yahweh as the warrior who vanquishes primordial chaos and becomes king in the universe. The Lord rules on Zion and ensures the defeat of any natural or historical evil, which may threaten the security, and well being of Israel. Some Psalms (e.g., Ps 18:8-16; 89:6-14; 74:12-17) present a vivid picture of the primordial conflict which took place before the creation. In all these Psalms the concept of the Divine Warrior serves to promote the royal institutions at Jerusalem. Yahweh comes to dwell at Mt. Zion, i.e. at Jerusalem (Ps. 46, 48, 76; cf. Dt. 33:2; Jg 5:4; Hab 3:3-7). The Davidic king becomes the human representative of the Divine Warrior (Ps. 2; 89:9,25). This connection between the Divine Warrior and the Davidic king in Jerusalem was brought out in order to get divine legitimization to the monarchic institution.

The Deuteronomistic History is (which comprises of the books from Deuteronomy to 2 Kings) another type of literature which highlights the warfare of God. In this history the older traditions about divine warfare in poetry (Dt. 33; Jos 10:12-13; Jg 5), narrative (1 Sam. 2:4-6) and legislation (Dt. 20) are preserved. According to this history, Israel owes her military successes to the fighting of the Divine Warrior (Dt. 7:16-26; Jos 6; 2 Sam 5:17-25).

The third type of literature comes from the circles of the prophets.<sup>3</sup> They in general championed the tribal concept of God as a warrior. According to them Yahweh was involving in military engagements. Because of his active participation the inimical nations were destroyed. For the prophets Yahweh was the king of the Universe who executed his will through the practice of warfare (Is. 6; Mic 1,2-4; Zep 1:14-18; Joel 2:1-11). The God of the Bible was for them the deity of justice, and He mercilessly defeated the human institutions, which promoted oppression and exploitation. In Amos we find a series of oracles against the neighbours of Israel who had violated the social justice (Am 1:3-2:3). The Prophet dares to turn against his own country itself. The Divine Warrior will not tolerate the corruption in the society of Israel. He would attack her as judgement for her social evils. Thus we have a series of oracles against Israel (Am 2, 9; Hos 9) and Judah (Mic 1; Is 5; Jer 9). An interesting phenomenon occurs here. Yahweh joins with the armies of Assyria or Babylon and fights against his own people who have violated the basic concept of justice.

Even after the post-monarchic era, when Israel as a nation was destroyed and the people lost their political independence, the concept of Yahweh's warrior was preserved and developed primarily in a new literary genre, which is known as the apocalyptic vision<sup>4</sup>. There Yahweh enters into conflict with chaotic, cosmic forces. The setting of this divine combat shifts from the primordial chaotic forces to the future, in which the powers of chaos and death will be absolutely annihilated. The universe will be reconstituted as the new heaven and the new earth. This cosmic event inaugurates a new era. We find in the book of Daniel such apocalyptic visions<sup>5</sup>. This book was composed in response to the Seleucid repression of the Jewish religion in the middle of the second century BCE. Chapters 7-12 contain visions about the fall of four earthly kingdoms culminating in the destruction of that of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

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<sup>3</sup>D.L. Christenson, *Transformations of the War Oracle in OT Prophecy*, Missoula, 1975

<sup>4</sup>P.D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, Philadelphia, 1975

<sup>5</sup>J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel*, Missoula, 1977

### **1.3 Theology of God the Warrior**

#### **1.3.1. Basic Perspectives**

The concept of God the Warrior is not unique to Israel. It was wide spread in the ancient Near East. Historical records from Mesopotamia to Egypt attest to it. The religious texts from Canaan eulogize the warfare of Baal. The Divine Warrior imagery in OT is borrowed from these cultures. The famous Canaanite myth recounts a battle between the storm god Baal and the sea Yamm, a deity symbolizing cosmic powers of chaos and death. In the Babylonian myth *Enuma Elis*, there is a battle motif between Murduk, the storm God and Tiamat, the goddess of chaos and disorder. After defeating Tiamat, Murduk established the natural orders in the world.<sup>6</sup>

In these myths the God of order is described as Divine Warrior.<sup>7</sup> The people of Israel, who had settled down in Canaan, were very much attracted to the Canaanite battle myth and Baal cult. The Baal religion, which was a nature religion, had an existential appeal to them. Yahweh was the God of history, had no image, and his cult was not rooted in the day to day life of the common man. Israel could not resist the temptation to appropriate fertility cult practised in Canaan. The faith of Israel was in its primitive stage. At this juncture it was necessary to present Yahweh as a warrior God who was superior to Baal. This could make him a beloved hero in eyes of the primitive people in whose life battles occupied an important position. It could provide them matter to boast and to be proud of in the presence of the Canaanite inhabitants.

The Biblical God entered into human history and identified himself with the fate of the oppressed and marginalized people of Israel. He revealed himself in anthropomorphic language and images. Thus he took upon himself the limitations of space and time. Yahweh became a contextualized God who assumed different moods and attitudes according to the needs and demands of the situation. He would appear as a God who is angry, jealous, complaining, accusing, threatening, punishing, saving

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<sup>6</sup>A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, Chicago, 1974

<sup>7</sup>P.D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, Cambridge, 1973; M. C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior*, Scottsdale, 1980.

and even repenting. This language is of course metaphoric, and not to be taken literally. This can be applied in our case. The concept of warrior God is pictorial. Yahweh is depicted as waging war, annihilating the enemies of Israel and so on.

The God of Bible accepts warfare as a human reality. Of course he does not subscribe to it. But he knows human limitations and evil inclinations. Thus he deigns to be called as a warrior God. The people of Israel attributed their own warfare to Yahweh. They thought that Yahweh was fighting on their behalf. In their poetry and archaic literature they have engaged themselves in describing the military feats of Yahweh in flying colours. Most of these texts were used in liturgy where they sang the praises of their God of liberation. This action provided them courage and confidence to face the challenging situations in which their existence was threatened. Thus we may say that most of the Divine Warrior texts had a cultic setting.

### 1.3.2. Illustrations

Now we study in detail some important texts in the OT which contain military vocabulary and aggressive language.

#### 1.3.2.1. *The Victory Song of the Sea: Ex. 15: 1-18*

This is known as the song of Moses after Israel walked on the dry land in the midst of the sea and the pursuing Egyptian army was drowned in the sea.<sup>8</sup> This song is clearly liturgical, and was used from ancient times of Israel in their cultic worship of the feats of Yahweh.<sup>9</sup> The victory over the Egyptians is fully attributed to Yahweh, the warrior God. This song is written down in the Caananite background of the myth of Baal.<sup>10</sup> In the Caananite myth there was a fight between Baal, the deity of life and fertility, and Yaam, the God of chaos which was symbolised by sea. The warrior Baal fought a vigorous battle and the result is narrated as follows:

<sup>8</sup>C. Houtman, *Exodus*, Vol. II, Kampen 1996, pp.221-320; W.H.C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18 (AB)*, New York, 1998, pp.508-572.

<sup>9</sup>Norbet Lohfink, *The Christian Meaning of the Old Testament*, Milwaukee, 1968 pp 67- 86

<sup>10</sup>F.M. Cross, *Caananite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cambridge, 1973, pp 112-144

"Yaam fell, He sank to earth, His joints trembled, His frame collapsed, Baal destroyed, Drank Yaam, He finished off Yaam".

At the end of the onslaught of Yaam a temple was built for Baal, and he was proclaimed king of gods.

We find in the Song of the Sea analogous expressions. Sea is depicted as personification of Yaam, and Yahweh appears in the place of the warrior Baal.

There is another version of the Caananite myth in which Mot (death), the ruler of the underworld threatens the life of Baal. At the end of the story Mot is defeated by the consort of Baal. We may find traces of this version in Ex. 15, where the sea stands for death. At first it wanted to consume Israel, the people of Yahweh. But the warrior God of Israel defeats that chaotic force. He himself hurls the Egyptian horses, chariots and riders into the sea. At the end of the story Yahweh becomes king, as Baal was crowned king by other gods.

As we have mentioned, Ex. 15 was cultic in origin. It was used at the Passover festival, probably sung by two choirs, one singing the power of Yahweh, while the other narrating his historical action of salvation. The imagery and the military terminology are used as to present Yahweh as the God who is superior to Baal. Some of the verses are worth citing: "Thy right hand, Yahweh, O terrible and mighty, Thy right hand, Yahweh, Shatters the enemy" (v. 6); "At the blast of thy nostrils, The waters piled up. The waves stood up like a wall, The floods congealed in the midst of the sea" (v.8); "Yahweh is king, For ever and ever" (v. 18)

In the poem the divine name of Yahweh is repeated again and again (10 times). He is presented almost in the same imagery of the warrior Baal. He raises aloft his right hand with a club in it, in order to shatter the enemy. A fiery breath streams from his nose. All this is surely metaphorical language. The sea becomes here the mythical symbol of the underworld, of death, of chaos, of evil, and of nothingness. Thus the song gets a perennial relevance. Wherever there is the threatening presence of chaos and evil in the world, Yahweh, the Lord of order, beauty and life comes on the scene. He will defeat and destroy such chaotic forces in whatever realm (whether it is in the physical, moral, political, cultural, financial, spiritual or cultic ambiances). The intervention of Yahweh is for

the liberation of the marginalized, oppressed and exploited people. Of course, the God of Bible does not use physical force or military equipment.

At the last part of the poem the images of war are replaced by images of peace. Yahweh leads the former slaves into the Promised Land and becomes their king. While in the Caananite myth, Baal is made king of gods, Yahweh himself assumes the kingship of his helpless creatures. To conclude, Ex. 15 does not promote aggression and warfare. It does not even refer to the historical incident. According to the scholars, the escape of the Hebrew slaves did not happen in the miraculous way as it is depicted in Ex. 15.

### *1.3.2.2. Psalm 24 and the Warrior King*

This Psalm is an antiphonal liturgy used in the autumn festival. According to scholars vv. 7-10 of this Psalm had its origin in the procession of the Ark of the Covenant to the sanctuary at its founding, celebrated annually during the monarchic times.<sup>11</sup> The text abounds in archaic phrases. It seems that in this cultic poem there reflects the re-enactment of the victory of Yahweh in the primordial battle and his enthronement in the divine council, or better, in his newly built cosmic temple.

The archaic poem follows a Caananite pattern. Yaam, the deified sea, claimed kingship among the gods. The council of the gods yielded to the threat of Yaam. They even consented that Baal be taken captive by the aggressor. They were sitting with heads bowed to their knees. Now Baal comes on the scene. He rebukes the divine assembly. He goes forth to war against Yaam. In the cosmogonic battle Baal defeats his enemy. He returns in glory to the divine council and they greeted him to him as their king. The myth describes the divine banquet and rejoicing of the gods.

Ps. 24: 7-10 follows the Caananite pattern with certain modifications in order to fit the Israelite ideology. The introductory verses begin thus:

“The earth is Yahweh’s and its fullness, The world and they who live in it. He has founded it upon seas, and on rivers he has created it.” By this

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<sup>11</sup>F.M. Cross, *Caananite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cambridge, 1973, pp 91-111



introduction the poet asserts the sovereignty of Yahweh, who is not threatened by any rival deity. He is gone forth to battle the evil forces that were militating against his people. Here we find the difference from the Canaanite myth where Baal was fighting for his own survival. Now Yahweh triumphantly returns to his abode.

Ps.24: 7-10 contains mythological elements and images. At his return the circle of gate towers is commanded to "lift up their heads" to receive the divine warrior, the glorious king. This metaphor seems odd at first look. How does a gate lift its head? Where is its head that it may be lifted? In this figure we find personification of the circle of gate towers which, like the council of gods in the Canaanite myth, sat bowed in trepidation. Then comes the shout: "lift up O gates, your heads!" This is almost similar to the shout of Baal: "Lift up, O gods, your heads!". The chaotic forces are defeated. Hence there is no need to drop their heads onto their knees in fear and despair. Thus Ps.24 depicts Yahweh as the new Baal. The imagery is not to be taken literally. The OT adapts the existing images and terminology of the Canaanites among whom they were living.

### *1.3.2.3. The Problem of Aggression in the Conquest Narratives*

The story of the conquest of Palestine is depicted in OT as a military operation. Yahweh commands Israel to fight (Jos.10: 40; 6:21; 8:24ff; Jg.1: 17) This poses the ethical problem. The following conclusions can be drawn from the study of the important texts.<sup>12</sup>

The battle narratives in Jos.7: 1-8,29; 10:1-15 and 11:1-15 include the elements of a ruse or surprise attack. One mentions the occurrence of other miracles. Yahweh is recognized as leader of Israel in all the texts. Joshua, the human agent in the work of Yahweh is not so much the warrior as the prophet or mediator. Human fighting is freely acknowledged. Yet the military situation in the conquest was similar to that of crossing the Reed Sea in Ex.14: 1-31. Israel was militarily inferior to the enemy both in terms of social organization and weaponry. Obedience to Yahweh's word and trust in his miracle are alone decisive. He is *the* warrior and leader of Israel. The battle events are set forth in terms of paradigm event at Reed Sea. Yahweh as the warrior God fought for his people by miracles, and not

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<sup>12</sup>P.C Craigie, *The problem of War in the OT*, Grand Rapids, 1978.

by sword or spear. It is interesting to note that Yahweh's warfare was directed not only against Israel's enemies, but also at times against Israel herself. In such cases he turned against Israel not by means of miracle, but through the agency of the armies of her enemies.

#### ***1.3.2.4. Instructions Concerning the Conduct of War in Dt.20: 10-18***

The book of Deuteronomy contains the following sections on war: 7:1-26; 20:1-20; 21:10-14; 23:9-14; 24:5; 25:17-19. Our discussion is limited to 20:10-18 concerning legislation on enemy cities during the conquest period of Palestine.<sup>13</sup> The distant cities are to be offered initially terms of peace. If they accept the terms of treaty, they would open their gates to the Israelites and accept themselves as the vassals of the invaders. In case the inhabitants reject the offer, the Israelites are asked to besiege those cities and execute the males, but spare everything else. In this regulation we find relatively humane approach to military conquest which was practised by all the countries of the ancient past.

The second part of the instructions (vv.16-18) is concerned with the treatment of those cities, which the Israelites had soon to possess as her own. A sterner treatment is proposed. No living thing was to be allowed to survive because of two reasons. If the inhabitants survived, their Canaanite religion might become a temptation for Israel and turn them away from serving Yahweh alone. The second reason is not stated in the text. Through Israel Yahweh was executing his judgment on the Canaanites for their sinfulness (Dt.9: 4). As we have repeatedly stated, we cannot justify war, which is intrinsically evil. But we have to admit that warfare was a common phenomenon in the history of every nation.

#### ***1.3.2.5. Concluding Remarks on Yahweh the Warrior***

To call Yahweh a warrior is to use anthropomorphic language. Human language, by its very nature, is limited. Thus the language with which we articulate the knowledge of God is limited. It may be *true* language about God, but it is *incomplete*. The reality of God is greater than the words used to describe him. Thus the expressions *Yahweh the warrior*, *Lord of Hosts/ Armies* exhibit a limited and less than complete truth about God. Still it is a truth, which has several dimensions:

<sup>13</sup>Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 28-77.

a) God *participates* in human history. Words like *warrior* and *armies* point to the realities of human existence and human history. When these words are used of God they point to his involvement in that existence and history. Yahweh is a warrior, that is, God participates actively in the human institution of warfare.

b) Yahweh has participated in warfare towards the ends of both *judgment* and *redemption*. The judgment of God was affirmed in the Israelite invasion of Canaan. Yahweh was judging the evil of the inhabitants of that land (cf. Lev. 18: 24-29; Gen. 15: 16; 20:11). Destruction of Israel exhibits another act of divine judgment. Here the evil of his own people was judged (2 Kg 24:20). But the act of judgment was intimately tied to the purpose of redemption.

c) God's intervention in the human history of warfare in terms of judgment and redemption points to the truth concerning the *providence of God*. Warfare is a human institution, evil in nature. It is tragically one of the normative expressions of relationship between States and societies. But Yahweh, the Lord of creation and history, participates in and through that evil human institution, for his own ends. In order to achieve the ultimate redemption of human beings, God acts through human beings. He acts in the world as it is.

d) The central and particular form of divine intervention in human history in the OT times was the *election of Israel to be the Kingdom of God*. Yahweh chose a people; he called them to form a State. It was Israel's responsibility, under the divine guidance, to become the Kingdom of God in the midst of the kingdoms of men. The Kingdom of Israel, in God's plan, was intended to achieve the redemption of all humankind. Yahweh, as warrior, became instrumental in the establishment of the first manifestation of the Kingdom of God. In NT times God, in person of Jesus, entered directly into the arena of human history in order to definitely establish the Kingdom of God. Whereas the old Kingdom was established by the *use of violence*, the new Kingdom was inaugurated in the *receipt of violence*. God the warrior becomes the crucified God, the one who receives in himself the full force of human violence. Indeed, this receipt of violence is also an act of conquest, the defeat of evil, its principalities and powers.

## 2.0. DIVINE WARFARE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### 2.1. *Texts and Perspectives*

The Greek noun *strateia* (battle, warfare), together with its related forms, occurs 45 times in the NT. Another term *polemos* (war) appears 16 times and the verb *polemeo* 7 times. Often these words are understood figuratively, especially in the Book of Revelation. In two of the 15 references to war in that book, God or God's agent is portrayed as making war (Rev. 2: 16; 19: 11), always by the "word of his mouth".<sup>14</sup>

In the gospel tradition the exorcisms of Jesus are regarded as a victorious combat with the devil and his kingdom. When Jesus speaks in aggressive language (e.g., Mt.10: 34; "... I have not come to bring peace, but a sword") he is not advocating physical violence. Rather, his words are to be understood in a metaphorical sense. Thus the language of Jesus' Kingdom refers to ideological or moral aggression.

Paul profusely uses the military terminology in his letters. He invites the Thessalonians to be "armed with faith and love as breastplate, and hope of salvation for helmet" (I Thes. 5: 8). Here he applies the war terminology to three fundamental aspects of the style of the Christian life. Ephesians 6: 10-20 has an extended listing of battle imagery. Paul freely borrows from Wis. 18: 14-25, and refers to individual pieces of armour and the image of a battle. Here he speaks of the Christian community, which has to be clothed in the armour of God and battling, not against people, but against the structures of evil, which lie behind them.<sup>15</sup>

The most problematic teaching in the NT on war symbolism is the Book of Revelation. According to scholars<sup>16</sup> it is possible to see in the book references to the myths of conflicts found in the OT. The Lamb occupies the central place in the book. The author describes the Lamb's wrath (6:16) which leads it to conquer the symbols of evil (17: 14). An

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<sup>14</sup>A.Y.Collins, "The Political Perspective of the Revelation of John", *JBL* 96 (1977) 241-56; W. Klassen, "Vengeance in the Apocalypse", *CBQ* 28 (1966) 300-11.

<sup>15</sup>H. von Campenhausen *Tradition and Life in the Early Church*, London, 1968.

<sup>16</sup>G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, New York, 1966.

important factor we have to note is that the Lamb is never described as being engaged in warring activity. In 19: 11-21 the author uses the imagery of Word and Sword together. Still war terminology abounds in the text: "rider on a horse" (19: 11, 19, 21); "armies of heaven" (19: 14, 19); "the sharp sword that smites the nations" (19: 15; 1: 16) and the marshalling of the "kings of the earth and their armies to do battle with the Rider upon the horse and his army" (19:19). Here the reference is to eschatological war. The Lamb has become the Word and he uses the Word coming out of his mouth to overcome the enemy (19:15). In 19: 21 the instrument becomes the sword that comes out the Rider's mouth.

Although the battle motif appears in the NT; it is not to be taken in a literal sense. The language of the Book of Revelation is clearly symbolic. The author tries to speak to his Christian audience who had to undergo persecutions from the political structures, in imageries taken from the battlefield. He tries to encourage them to continue their spiritual fight against the evil power structures of that time. Although some of the sayings of Jesus have a warfare overtone, he does not promote aggression and armed opposition.<sup>17</sup>One may call him Messianic Warrior. But this title is to be understood in a metaphorical or spiritual sense. Jesus was the Warrior God who has undergone in his own person aggression and violence. He becomes the crucified Messiah, who challenged and rejected the world's ideology of violence.

### **3.0. PEACE: THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES**

#### **3.1. Basic Texts**

"He will judge between many peoples, an arbiter among great and distant nations. They will hammer their swords into mattocks, and their spears into pruning – knives. Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will never again be trained for war. Each man will sit under his own vine or his own fig tree, with none to cause alarm. The Lord of Hosts has spoken" (Mic. 4:3-4).

"For to us a child is born, a son is given to us, and the sovereign authority rests upon his shoulder, and he is named Wonderful and Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the

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<sup>17</sup>J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Grant Rapids, 1979.

throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this”(Is 9: 6-7).

“The wolf and lamb will feed together and lion will eat straw like the ox, and as for the serpent, its food will be dust. Neither hurt nor harm will be done in all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (Is.65:25).

“ Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth for people whom he favours” (Lk 2; 14).

“ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest and banish your fears” (Jn 14:27).

“ And let peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body” (Col 3: 15).

Our explanations and reflections on the Biblical texts which speak of peace, are given below in a summary form.

### 3.2. *Perspectives on Peace in the OT*

The Hebrew term *shalom* does not simply mean lack of enmity. The Akkadian root *salamu* denotes “to be hale, whole, complete”.<sup>18</sup> The Hebrew word indicates the same meaning of wholeness, well being. It refers to every sphere of human life. Thus it can signify wholeness in physical, intellectual, moral, psychological, spiritual, social, cultural and cultic spheres. The English word ‘peace’ cannot comprehend all these ideas. Perhaps the better word to denote *shalom* may be the Sanskrit term *kalyan/mangala*. The Bible depicts God as *mangalarupan*, from whose whole person emanates the well being.

In Yahweh there is no division or duality (*dvaitabhava*). There is only one *bhava*, *raga*, *nada*, *thala* and *laya* in him. In the true sense he is the embodiment of *shalom*. Yahweh wanted to make his creatures to participate in his *shalom*. In his vision they should form a single family, he being the head of the household. Human beings were meant to be the

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<sup>18</sup>J. P. Healey, “Peace”, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. V, pp. 206-207.

crown of creation, who have to lead all other creatures to a life of divine *shalom*.

Division, enmity and aggression resulted from sin which thwarted the divine plan of creation. All these evil realities were brought into the world by human beings. As we read in Gen. 3, the sin caused fragmentation of relationship between human beings, between them and the animal kingdom, between Adam and the earth.

The history of the Bible attests to God's continuous attempt to re-establish the primeval harmony of creation, and the reign of *shalom* in the universe. Unfortunately the divine endeavours did not meet with success. Still Yahweh continued his attempts, especially through the prophets. These spokespersons of God foretold about the advent of a golden age in which the life of paradise will be re-established. The above cited texts, (Mic. 4:3-4; Is 9: 6-7; Is 65: 25) speak of a new creation in which the *shalom* of God reigns on earth.

### 3.2.1. The *Shalom* Vision of Mic. 4: 3-4

This is one of the best known text in the OT which stands for the end of warfare among the nations and the beginning of an era of untroubled peace for every human being<sup>19</sup>. One can achieve this peace only through the work of Yahweh. His reign on earth will inaugurate an imperial peace that transforms the conditions of life for nations and individuals. Yahweh sits as royal judge on his sacred mount. He executes *dharma* in the whole earth. The nations bring their disputes to him, and yield to his righteous judgement. The court of Yahweh will replace the battlefields of the world as a place to settle the hostilities and conflicts among the nations. Warfare will be no longer needed. It will fade away. Weapons will be converted to tools of agriculture. People will use the scarce and valuable materials of the earth to cultivate life instead of crafting death. God's *shalom* will reign on earth. Every peasant farmer will be freed from the demands and threats of the military states. He can live on his property and enjoy the fruit of his labour undisturbed. This imagery was well known in the ancient world, which stands for *atmasaksatkara* and *iswarasaksatkara*.

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<sup>19</sup>H.Utzschneider, *Michas Reise in die Zeit*, Stuttgart, 1999, pp.152-164

### 3.2.2. The Prince of Peace in Is 9:6-7

The prophet envisages a golden age or *ramarajya* where the people live as the members of God's family<sup>20</sup>. They enjoy equal rights and privileges. Justice and righteousness will reign during the rule of Messiah. He will radically alter the existing disparities, injustices and evils such as oppression and exploitation of the marginalized from the society. The prophet is announcing the birth of this Prince of Peace. During his reign there will be harmony, peace and welfare throughout the country. His authority will never be threatened, and he will rule for eternity. This text gives articulation to the dream of Yahweh at the creation of the cosmos. According to the interpretation of the Christian scholars, this vision was realized in Jesus Christ.

### 3.2.3. The Cosmic Community of Is 65:25

The prophet depicts in flying colours the dawn of the eschatological era of salvation in the whole cosmos<sup>21</sup>. There will be no more weeping or wailing on earth. There will not be premature death. According to the OT thinking, long life was considered as sign of the divine blessing. Thus the text speaks of hundred years as the minimum life span of every person. Human beings live in harmony and accord among themselves, as if they were the brothers and sisters of the divine household. *Shalom* will reign also among the animals. No wild animal will kill other creatures. Both wolf and lamb shall feed together.

### 3.3. Perspectives on Peace in the NT

The concept of *shalom* found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ who is called *shalom* itself (Eph. 2:14). The most frequent Greek term for peace, *eirene*, occurs about 100 times in the NT.<sup>22</sup> It is most often used as a greeting of encounter (Jn. 20: 19, 21, 26) or as a departing salutation (Mk. 5: 34). In the letters it has clearly become a formula, joined with the word, 'grace' (Rom. 1:7; 1Cor. 1:3; 2Cor. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1Thes. 1:1; 2Thes. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Phl. 3; 1Pet. 1:2; 2Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4) and 'mercy'

<sup>20</sup>Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, Minneapolis, 1991, pp.384-410.

<sup>21</sup>Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, London, 1978, pp. 406-411.

<sup>22</sup>W. Klassen, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. V, pp. 207-212.



(1Tim. 1:2; 2Tim. 1:2; 2Jn. 3; Jude 2). The word occurs at the beginning of the letters, sometimes at the end, and occasionally at both.

The word *eirene* is found in the mouth of Jesus. He dismisses the women healed of her hemorrhage (Mk. 5:34; Lk. 8: 48), as well as the sinful women who bathed his feet with her tears (Lk. 7:50) with the words, "go in peace". Peace is the parting gift of Jesus (Jn 14:27). The risen Christ greeted his disciples with "Peace be with you" (Jn. 20:19, 21, 26). Jesus asked his early disciples to share the salt of friendship (Mk. 9:50) which meant that they eat together and by doing so keep the fellowship intact. He gave to his disciples a self-designation, "child of peace" (Lk. 10: 6). It was the Jewish custom of that time to designate person in accordance with their behaviour. His disciples' behaviour should entitle them to be called by others as children of peace. They have to serve as peace makers (Mt. 5:9), which is one of the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus himself is described as "having made peace" (Eph. 2:15) through the blood on his cross (Col. 1:20).

### 3.3.1. Peace in Angelic Hymn, Lk. 2:14

At the birth of Jesus the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth for people whom he favours" (Lk. 2:14). This hymn encapsulates the very purpose of the incarnation of the Son of God. Through his coming to earth, God gets his glory, and the human beings attain their *shalom*. Christ has taken upon himself human miseries, sufferings, frustrations and pains. Thereby these earth-bound realities are elevated to the heavenly sphere. They become salvific; cross assumes the face of crown; suffering becomes the synonym of glory. This is the good news of the incarnation.

The hymn promises *shalom* to those who find the favour of God. Those who become worthy of the gift of well being and welfare (*mangala/kalyana*) are defined by this phrase. The good news of the birth of the saviour is announced to the shepherds. They are the symbol of the poor, ignorant, despised and the marginalized of the society. Such people have no future. There exists nobody to defend their cause or vindicate their rights. We may call them *agathis* who have no support (*gati*) except in God. Hence they put their whole trust in Yahweh and eagerly wait for his intervention on their behalf. These are the people who win the favour of

God. It is to them the good news of *shalom* is proclaimed. Thus the rich, the powerful, the authorities, the learned are not included in the list of the saved ones. By taking human form and being born in a manger as the poorest of the poor, the Son of God has become a perfect *agathi*. This made him the beloved son of God in whom God is well pleased (Mk. 1: 11). He himself has become the perfect *shalom* of God. He demands from every one who wants to follow him the attitude of *agathi*. In other words, the Church, which is the community of Christ, is supposed to be the fellowship of *agathis* who are nothing in themselves as well as who have nothing for themselves. Only such people can become peace makers and proclaimers of *shalom*.

#### 4. Conclusion

Bible has a definite message for the modern world which is invaded by the fundamentalistic and fanatic ideologies of division, enmities, intolerance and hatred. It challenges us with the vision of the God of *shalom* who has created us as beings and children of *shalom*. We are destined to live as brothers and sisters of God's household, emanating the fragrance of *shalom* everywhere. Such a task demands from us a self-emptying process (cf. Phil. 2: 6-8). Only true *agathis* can enjoy authentic *shalom*, as well as proclaim it to others, so that a new heaven and new earth may be created here.