“Blessed Are The Peacemakers”
An Examination of the Peacemaking Legacy of Charles Haddon Spurgeon

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Dubbed “the greatest of the Victorian preachers” by British evangelical historian David Bebbington, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was without a doubt one of the most influential and widely-read religious leaders in Great Britain during the nineteenth century.¹ Over 100 years after his death, Spurgeon remains immensely popular among both Baptists and Calvinists especially in the United States. Many books and articles have been written to assess the theological contributions of Charles Spurgeon. The overwhelming majority of these publications have focused almost exclusively on his soteriology and evangelistic fervor. Not surprisingly, Spurgeon’s biographers, most of which are conservative evangelicals from America, have largely neglected his aversion to war and legacy as an advocate and activist for peace. As a thoroughgoing Baptist peacemaker whose commitment to peacemaking was rooted in his desire to imitate Christ, Spurgeon was an aggressive and loud proponent of what is now referred to as negative peace and positive peace. Thus, this paper will examine that largely neglected peacemaking legacy by emphasizing Spurgeon’s strong opposition to war, imperialism, slavery, and drunkenness. Spurgeon's individualistic approach to improving society by providing much needed assistance and relief to the destitute and downtrodden will also be considered. Given the strong predilection among contemporary American evangelicals toward finding peace via military means, an examination of Spurgeon's perspective is illuminating.

**Charles Spurgeon: A Biographical Overview**

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born on June 19, 1834 in Essex, England to John and Eliza Spurgeon. John Spurgeon pastored several small independent congregations in towns near London. Charles Spurgeon’s grandfather was also a minister. James Spurgeon, who raised Charles until the age of six, was a popular preacher who served an independent congregation in

Stambourne for over fifty years. Charles followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather when he preached his first sermon in 1850 at the age of sixteen. Shortly thereafter, young Charles was named the pastor of a small Baptist congregation in Cambridgeshire.

Still a teenager, Spurgeon accepted the call to pastor the historic New Park Street Chapel in London in April, 1854. Previous pastors of New Park Street included notable Particular Baptists such as Benjamin Keach, John Gill and John Rippon. With his immense oratorical gifts, Spurgeon helped transform a congregation with only two-hundred weekly worshippers into the largest Protestant church in the world. Spurgeon’s New Park Street Chapel would eventually claim over 14,000 members. Six months into his tenure at New Park Street Chapel, Spurgeon was preaching to thousands first at London’s famous Exeter Hall and later at Surrey Gardens Music Hall. New Park Street Chapel moved into its newly constructed facility known as the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861 where Spurgeon preached to over 6,000 men, women, and children each Sunday for nearly thirty years.

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During his successful ministry at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Spurgeon attained celebrity status in London, especially among the working class. The Metropolitan Tabernacle was a popular tourist attraction on Sunday mornings. British elites, including Prime Minister William Gladstone, the Earl of Shaftesbury and reportedly Queen Victoria, dropped by to hear Spurgeon preach. At least 3,800 different Spurgeon sermons were published during his life. Each week many newspapers across Europe and the United States carried Spurgeon’s sermon from the previous week. It has been estimated that over 100 million copies of his sermons were sold by the time of his death in 1892. Spurgeon’s monthly magazine titled *The Sword and the Trowel* had a greater circulation than any denominational periodical on either side of the Atlantic Ocean during the nineteenth century.

Referred to by Prime Minister William Gladstone as “The Last of the Puritans,” Spurgeon, like many of his fellow Evangelical Nonconformists in Victorian England, was a committed Calvinist whose preaching focused primarily on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Spurgeon once noted that he “always considered with Luther and Calvin that the sum and substance of the gospel lies in that word substitution – Christ standing in the stead of man.”

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7 Ibid., 223-224.

8 Drummond, “Charles Haddon Spurgeon,” 268-273. Queen Victoria reportedly made an appearance at the Metropolitan Tabernacle while wearing a disguise.


10 Meredith, 5-6.

11 Ibid., 267

Spurgeon’s passion for evangelism or “soul-winning” led him to declare, “I fear I am not a very good Calvinist because I pray that the Lord will save all of the elect and then elect some more.”

In addition to being a committed Calvinist, Spurgeon was a devoted Baptist. According to historian Greg Wills, Spurgeon’s Baptist identity grew out of his commitment to individual regeneration. Spurgeon adamantly insisted that Scripture required churches to admit to membership only those individuals who gave credible evidence of regeneration. Spurgeon considered believer’s baptism by immersion to be a prerequisite to church membership. Spurgeon also stressed the importance of church discipline in order to protect the purity of both doctrine and practice. He stated, “If we know that members are living in gross sin and do not deal with them either by way of censure or excommunication, in accordance with the teaching of Chris and his apostles, we become accomplices in their sin.”

Spurgeon preached that cooperation among Christians who practiced the immersion of professing believers promoted regeneration. Though the Metropolitan Tabernacle functioned as a mini-denomination, Spurgeon was active in denominational life through organizations such as the London Baptist Association and the larger Baptist Union. Towards the end of his life, Spurgeon became convinced that modernism or what he called “New Theology” undermined regeneration. This conviction led to the most serious controversy surrounding English Baptists in the nineteenth century dubbed the Down Grade Controversy. This prolonged dispute between Spurgeon and leaders of the Baptist Union resulted in Spurgeon’s withdrawal from the Union.

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13 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted in Estep, 6. There were some churches that would not have Spurgeon in their pulpit because his Calvinism was not “high” enough. See Drummond, “Charles Haddon Spurgeon,” 273.


15 Ibid., 70.

16 Ibid., 69-74.
and the Union’s vote of censure against Spurgeon. The Down Grade Controversy ended with
Spurgeon’s death in 1892.  

**Positive Peace and Negative Peace: A Brief Introduction**

In the interdisciplinary social scientific field known as peace studies, the terms “positive
peace” and “negative peace” are two popular concepts in the study of peace and peacemaking.
Historically, peace scholars have focused on the concept of negative peace. Negative peace is
defined as simply the absence of violence and war between individuals, groups and governments.
Proponents of negative peace stress opposition to armed conflict and advocate on behalf of the
prevention or reduction of war. They also regularly emphasize the horrors of war by examining
the conditions of war and the effects of violent conflict.

Twenty-first century peace scholars have generally devoted more attention to the concept
of positive peace which offers a more extended and optimistic definition of peace. Positive
peace has been defined by peace studies founder Johan Galtung as “not merely an absence of
direct violence (negative peace) but also the absence of structural violence.” Galtung defines
structural violence as “indirect violence” which includes poverty, hunger, and discrimination.
Positive peace then involves the elimination of the root causes of war, violence and injustice.

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17 Estep, 13-14. See also Dennis M. Swanson, “The Down Grade Controversy and Evangelical Boundaries:
See also H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman
& Holman, 1987), 302-304. This controversy was ignited by a series of articles in Spurgeon’s magazine, *The Sword
and the Trowel*, which declared that the Baptist Union was theologically on the downgrade. These controversial
articles were published without byline though Spurgeon’s friend Robert Schindler was the author. In later articles,
Spurgeon himself charged that higher criticism and evolutionary thought had made inroads into the Baptist Union.
He accused British Baptist pastors of holding “Socinian views of Christ” and “Universalist views of salvation.”
Spurgeon lamented, “A new religion has been initiated, which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese.” Baptist
Union leaders demanded that Spurgeon name names and document these claims. Spurgeon refused. The Baptist
Union ultimately refused to give in to Spurgeon’s demand that the organization adopt a conservative doctrinal
statement. Consequently, Spurgeon withdrew from the Baptist Union in 1887. Surprisingly, very few churches
followed Spurgeon’s lead. For more on the Down Grade Controversy, see Michael Nicholls, “The Downgrade

Thus, the quest for positive peace, according to Galtung and other peace scholars, is the quest for social justice. Positive peace is the presence of social justice.\textsuperscript{19} According to one peace scholar, “The value of the positive peace paradigm is its vision of bringing about peace rather than resolving conflicts through political mechanisms.”\textsuperscript{20}

Baptist theologian Paul Dekar has rooted his understanding of the concept of “positive peace” in a quote from fellow Baptist peacemaker Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Preaching a sermon titled “When Peace Becomes Obnoxious” from the pulpit of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church on March 18, 1956, King declared that peace “is not merely the absence of some negative force—war, tension, confusion, but it is the presence of some positive force—justice, goodwill, the power of the kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{21} For over forty years as a Baptist minister, Charles Spurgeon consistently championed both negative peace and positive peace.

**Charles Spurgeon: Proponent of Negative Peace**

The life and ministry of Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) coincided with the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Known appropriately as the Victorian era, this period oversaw the huge expansion of the British Empire. Great Britain’s aggressive imperial policies during the nineteenth century globalized the empire extending its reach deep into India, Africa, and Southeast Asia. By 1914, the British Empire included a quarter of the total population of the

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world and an estimated one-fifth of the world’s landmass. Great Britain was involved in over 150 armed conflicts during the nineteenth century. Nearly 100 of these armed conflicts occurred during Spurgeon’s lifetime. In fact, Great Britain was at war each and every year that Spurgeon was alive.23

Just days before Spurgeon was called to pastor London’s New Park Street Chapel, Great Britain and its allies, France and Turkey, declared war on Russia on March 28, 1854. The Crimean War was the first war on European soil in nearly forty years. It was also the first European conflict to be reported on daily in newspapers and extensively documented in photographs.24

Spurgeon opposed the Crimean War as he did every other war which occurred during his lifetime.25 He questioned the benefit of the Crimean War in a sermon delivered on August 19, 1855. Spurgeon announced, “There is a war in the Crimea. We have had some great disasters at Sevastopol, and we are turning over the papers and saying, ‘Whatever is God doing here?’ What did he do in the last war? What was the benefit of it?”26 Several weeks later, British and Allied forces captured the city of Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula after a year-long siege. As a

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result, the Russians suffered thousands of casualties. When news of Russian retreat at
Sevastopol reached London there was much rejoicing and celebration. Spurgeon, however,
was outraged. In a sermon titled “Storming the Battlements,” he declared:

Could our eyes once behold the storming of a city, the sacking of a town, the pillage of
the soldiery, the barbarous deeds of fury, when the blood is up and long delay has
madden their souls; could we see the fields saturated with blood, and soaked with gore;
could we spend one hour amongst the corpses and the dying; or if we could only let the
din of battle, and the noise of the guns reach our ears, we should not so much rejoice, if
we had anything of fellow feeling for others as well as for ourselves. The death of an
enemy is to me a cause of regret as well as the death of a friend. Are not all my brethren?
And doth not Jesus tell me so? Are we not all made of one flesh? And hath not God
"made of one blood all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth?" Let us, then, when
we hear of slaughtered enemies, and of thousands that have fallen, cease to rejoice in
their death. It would betray a spirit utterly inconsistent with the Christian religion, more
akin to Mohamedanism, or to the fierce doctrines of Buddha, but not in the least to be
brought into compatibility with the truths of the gospel of the glorious God.

Spurgeon continued to voice his opposition to war even after the Crimean War ended in
1856. Cognizant that British forces were still engaged in bloody armed conflicts abroad, most
notably in China (Second Opium War, 1856-1860), Spurgeon reminded his congregation in 1858
that “there are districts of the earth where the ground is yet red with blood…War has ravaged
whole districts; even in these late times the dogs of war are not yet muzzled.” Spurgeon
lamented that the British people were generally not fazed by the violent conflicts involving the
imperialist British Empire in distant lands such as China and Persia. Spurgeon chided his fellow
Brits for not thoroughly appreciating the seriousness of war. Describing war as a “most fearful
scourge,” Spurgeon argued that “The thought of slain bodies and of murdered men must always

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28 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Storming the Battlements,” September 16, 1855,
29 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Cry of The Heathen,” April 25, 1858,
harrow up the soul; but because we hear of these things in the distance, there are few Englishmen who can truly enter into their horrors….But distance takes away the horror, and we therefore speak of war with too much levity, and even read of it with an interest not sufficiently linked with pain.”30

Spurgeon was a fervid critic of British foreign policy during this “Age of Imperialism.”
That the British government supported and defended the opium trade appalled him. Describing this support as “the right to poison the Chinese,” Spurgeon proclaimed, “We send out missionaries to the heathen Chinese, while acting more heathenly than he does! Was ever inconsistency more glaring?”31 He was also outspoken against Prime Minister Gladstone’s imperial policy concerning Egypt. Expressing his conviction that each nation had the right to be free from foreign domination, Spurgeon asked:

What have we to do in the Soudan? Being there, what is to be done? Might not a withdrawal from it involve a sea of bloodshed greater than that which seems imminent if we remain? Who knows what is best in so perplexing a case? The evil lay in our first interference, and the sooner we quit the place the better if honourable engagements permit. Peace is our duty.32

Spurgeon warned his congregation not to confuse the progress of a supposedly “Christian nation” like Great Britain with the progress of Christianity. He concluded that the imperial policies of the British Empire “far from being advantageous to the Gospel…hath been hostile to it.”33


32 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted in Meredith, 85.

While Spurgeon frequently lamented the evils of war and violence, he often preached on the blessings of peace. Spurgeon preached a sermon in late 1855 to explain that God is a God of peace. According to Spurgeon, “[God] is the God of peace, for he is the restorer of it; though wars have broken out through sin. He is the God of peace, because he preserves peace when it is made…Whenever I see peace in the world, I ascribe it to God, and if it is continued, I shall always believe it is because God interferes to prevent war.”34 Later in his ministry, Spurgeon described peace as “a jewel of so rare a price that he only hath valued it aright who has sold all that he hath to buy it.”35 A “peacemaker,” according to Spurgeon, is a Christian who “loves peace” and understands that “Christianity does not require him to forego his citizenship, but to use and to improve it for Christ’s glory.”36

Spurgeon believed that the “spirit of war is at the extremely opposite point to the spirit of the gospel.”37 Consequently, he insisted that gospel could put an end to war. In a sermon titled “The Cry of the Heathen,” Spurgeon declared that “The gospel of Jesus Christ the crucified one, shall yet hush the clarion of war, and break the battle-bow in sunder.”38 Spurgeon’s sermon just three days later again emphasized the importance of the gospel in peacemaking. Spurgeon rhetorically asked his congregation, “And do we not believe, that when the gospel is fully

38 Spurgeon, “The Cry of the Heathen.”
preached and has its day, wars must cease to the end of the earth?”

Over a decade later, Spurgeon was still stressing this theme in sermons. He explicated, “If the gospel spreads, if God converts Egypt and converts Assyria, then Egypt will not desire war with Asia, nor Assyria with Egypt, but they shall be one Christ Jesus the Lord.” Consequently, Spurgeon hoped that the day would come “when war shall be regarded as the most atrocious of crimes – when for a Christian to take part in it shall be regarded as a most heinous offence!” The year before his death in 1892, Spurgeon again accentuated the primacy of the gospel in peacemaking. He declared, “Let the Christian element spread, and it will be a power to bless mankind. It shall, in proportion as it spreads, put down evil, and foster good.”

Although a strong proponent of negative peace, Spurgeon was not a pacifist. Spurgeon acknowledged that war might be justified under certain circumstances. He explained, “The genius of the Christian religion is altogether contrary to everything like strife of any kind, much more to the deadly clash of arms. Yet, it may be possible that occasions may arise in which war itself might become hallowed.” However, Spurgeon never elaborated on what specifically constituted a “hallowed” war. Careful to emphasize that he was “no apologist for war,”

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41 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted in Dekar, 43.

42 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Jesus – ‘All Blessing and All Blest’,” February 1, 1891, http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2187.htm (accessed October 6, 2009). It should be noted that Spurgeon himself had experienced the horrors of war. During the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871), Spurgeon visited with French prisoners of war, the Prussian army and hospitalized soldiers from both sides. In addition to offering “spiritual help” and “sharing the Gospel” with these soldiers, Spurgeon helped care for the soldiers’ physical injuries (bandage wounds, etc.).

Spurgeon did suggest that perhaps the English Civil War (1641-1651) qualified as a “hallowed” war:

I may almost venture to say that the war against the tyrant, Charles I, was a consecrated fight. The people of God had been hunted like partridges upon the mountains, in the reigns of Elizabeth, and James, and Charles. At last their lion-like spirits turned at bay, and their enemies driven back before their gallant fury; Cromwell, the Christian hero, mounted his charger, and bade his saintly warriors, with the sword in one hand and the Bible in the other, fight for England’s liberty.44

Spurgeon came close to supporting the Union in the American Civil War. However, he did not trust the motivations of the Union’s leaders. Three months after Confederate troops attacked Fort Sumter in South Carolina to start the Civil War, Spurgeon asserted:

If I could believe that there were in America a sincere desire on the part of the Northerners to set free every slave, I would say, “God speed their swords and bless their arms.” If I could believe that the chain would be broken, and that it was their intent to do it,-- if I did not fear that they will yet compromise and make terms with the bloodhound’s master, and let him still hold his blood-stained property in the souls and bodies of men, I would say that that might be, if war ever could be, a consecrated war.45

Nonetheless, despite his belief that war might be justified under certain circumstances, Spurgeon could not bring himself to support any of the armed conflicts waged by the British Empire during his lifetime.

Charles Spurgeon: Proponent of Positive Peace

Social Christianity

The Victorian Era witnessed a huge growth in the population of Great Britain. During the nineteenth century, the population in England nearly quadrupled from 8.9 million in 1801 to 32.5 million in 1901. The population of London, the home of Spurgeon’s ministry, also

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.
skyrocketed from 1.1 million to 6.6 million. This immense population increase was accompanied by rapid urbanization prompted by the Industrial Revolution. The British people and immigrants flocked to urban areas in search of employment. While some accumulated great amounts of wealth during the Victorian Era, many in Great Britain struggled just to survive. Poverty was widespread in Victorian Britain. The Victorian Era was undoubtedly characterized by low wages, high levels of unemployment, overcrowded cities, poor sanitary conditions, crime and homelessness.

Charles Spurgeon was very much aware of the social ills that plagued Victorian society. Unlike many of his evangelical brethren, he was not apathetic to the pressing social concerns of the nineteenth century. Historian Albert Meredith noted that Spurgeon “played a vital role in the philanthropical endeavors of the nineteenth century.” As an evangelist, Spurgeon’s sermons were primarily concerned with salvation and the redemptive nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, Spurgeon understood this redemptive Gospel to carry with it social implications. Spurgeon preached that because of God’s love for His children, true children of God must show love to others. Christian ethicist David Nelson Duke has argued that Spurgeon “understood social concern as the proper imitation of Christ.” According to Spurgeon, “The chief business of one whom God has called is that he should live as the elect of God.”

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47 Ibid., 36-38.

48 Meredith, 156.


the “elect of God” were commanded by God to show social concern by being the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” In a book written for young Christians, Spurgeon admonished the younger generation to “always be the helper of everything which promotes the health and welfare of the people.” He continued,

Christ was not only the bread from Heaven, but the Giver of the bread of life to the poor and needy. He fed thousands of the fainting with the loaves and fishes. If all other hands to be fast closed, the hand of the Christian man should be always open to relieve human necessity. Being a man, the believer is brother to all men – rich and poor, sick and healthy – and he should seek their good in every possible way, aiming still at the highest good – namely, the saving of their souls.

For Spurgeon, the salvation of the individual was indeed the ultimate end goal.

It can not be said that Charles Spurgeon did not practice what he preached in terms of social concern. He led the Metropolitan Tabernacle to sponsor numerous societies and missions whose purpose was to relieve suffering in Victorian England. Spurgeon also established and funded orphanages, almshouses, a college to train the poor to be Christian ministers, a book distribution society for London’s working class and an evening school for illiterate laborers. He also raised money for hospitals, campaigned for the abolition of slavery in America, supported the temperance movement, extension of voting rights, public education and was a champion for religious liberty. Spurgeon supported these social justice or positive peace efforts solely because of his desire to imitate Christ. In his autobiography, Spurgeon declared, “Whenever topics which touch upon the rights of men, righteousness, peace, and so on come in my way, I endeavor to speak as emphatically as I can on the right side. It is part of my religion to desire


53 Duke, 47. See also Meredith, 161-162, 8-9.
justice and freedom for all.” Spurgeon continued to emphasize the social duties and obligations of Christians from the pulpit of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. In a sermon on social concern preached towards the end of his ministry, he once again encouraged his congregation to always “Be on the side of peace and of justice; be on the side of everything that is according to the mind of God, and according to the law of love.”

It must be pointed out, however, that Spurgeon promoted an individualistic approach towards positive peace. Spurgeon’s social Christianity was not the more progressive reformist social gospel championed by fellow English Baptist John Clifford. Although as a young minister Spurgeon did on occasion speak out against class divisions in England which he compared with the caste system in India, Spurgeon spent little time advocating for radical reforms that would restructure society. Instead, Spurgeon was convinced that society could only be improved when the individuals which comprise that society were improved. Thus, Spurgeon’s social Christianity was focused almost exclusively on the individual rather than the collective community.

Spurgeon was not implacably opposed to society-wide reform efforts. When reform proposals were defeated, Spurgeon would emphasize his individualistic approach as the only possible way to cure social ills and improve society. Yet, when reform proposals were passed by Parliament, Spurgeon was delighted and full of hope for the future. In fact, Spurgeon even

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57 Meredith, 162-163.
supported a complex reform proposal put forth by William Booth of the Salvation Army. ⁵⁸

Although a fair-weathered friend of structural reform efforts, Spurgeon was a consistent
champion of an individualistic approach towards positive peace that focused on the necessity of
individual Christian charity and the importance of individual regeneration. ⁵⁹

Politics

Spurgeon’s Christocentric commitment to peace and justice (i.e., his desire to imitate a
Christlike character) led him to be involved in British politics. He reasoned that because God is
sovereign over every sphere of life (including politics) it is the responsibility of each and every
Christian to participate in the political process and advocate on behalf of “godly” policies.

Spurgeon exclaimed,

I long for the day when the precepts of the Christian religion shall be the rule among all
classes of men in all transactions. I often hear it said, ‘Do not bring religion into
politics.’ This is precisely where it ought to be brought, and set there in the face of all
men as on a candlestick. I would have the Cabinet and Members of Parliament do the
work of the nation as before the Lord, and I would have the nation, either in making war
or peace, consider the matter by the light of righteousness. We are to deal with other
nations about this or that upon the principles of the New Testament. ⁶⁰

As an advocate for positive peace, Spurgeon found an ally in the Gladstone-led Liberal
Party. According to ethicist David Nelson Duke, Spurgeon understood the Liberal Party “to be
most in keeping with the New Testament principle of equality.” ⁶¹ Recognized as the leader of
the Evangelical Nonconformists, Spurgeon was not without political influence. ⁶² The
Evangelical Nonconformist vote was essential to the electoral success of the Liberal Party and

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⁵⁹ Duke, 54-55.

⁶⁰ Spurgeon, “The Candle.”

⁶¹ Duke, 52-53.

⁶² “Spurgeon and Gladstone,” The Baptist Quarterly 20, no. 3 (July 1963): 63-64.
Spurgeon helped deliver the evangelical vote for the Liberal Party in the general elections of 1880 and 1886.\textsuperscript{63} Due to his peace convictions, Spurgeon involved himself in the General Election of 1880. Spurgeon was particularly disgusted with British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli’s aggressive imperialist foreign policy in Afghanistan, the Balkans and South Africa. Spurgeon spoke out against Disraeli and the Conservative Party in his sermons and monthly magazine, \textit{The Sword and the Trowel}. He even took part in grassroots politics by distributing pro-Liberal Party leaflets (voter guides) to Londoners.\textsuperscript{64} After the 1880 election, one political observer in London described Spurgeon as “the greatest single influence in South London in favour of Liberalism, upon whose every word, thousands and thousands hang, as if it were the very bread of life.”\textsuperscript{65}

\textit{Education}

Education was a central element in Spurgeon’s individualistic approach towards positive peace. Spurgeon was convinced that society as a whole would not progress or improve until individuals received the benefits of a well-rounded education. At the age of twenty-two, Spurgeon formed a college for poor, uneducated aspiring ministers. Spurgeon’s College as it came to be called offered free-tuition to each student. Courses were offered on a wide variety of subjects including the Bible, theology, church history, philosophy, ethics, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, English literature, mathematics, chemistry, zoology, geology and botany. In the college’s early years, Spurgeon paid all of the bills with money earned from the sale of his sermons. After denouncing slavery, the sale of Spurgeon’s sermons plummeted and Spurgeon was forced to start

\textsuperscript{63} Briggs, “The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century,” 40-42.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{65} Meredith, 66-67. It should also be noted that the two Liberal Party candidates from the Southwark region both were re-elected and both candidates were endorsed by Spurgeon prior to the 1880 election.
making appeals to the readers of *The Sword and the Trowel* for financial support.\(^6^6\) He was certain that society could be improved and peace achieved if the ministers to the working masses were properly educated. If well-trained and well-educated, Spurgeon believed that these ministers would effectively promote the necessity of individual regeneration and preach on the obligations of regenerate individuals to not ignore the social implications of the Gospel and actively “love thy neighbor as thyself.”\(^6^7\)

Spurgeon’s passion for education inspired him to open an Evening School in 1862 for adults who were either illiterate or lacking a basic education. Like Spurgeon’s College, tuition was free at the Evening School. According to historian Albert Meredith, the British government used Spurgeon’s Evening School as a model for their night schools for the working class in the twentieth century.\(^6^8\) Another educational ministry established by Spurgeon was the Colportage Association. This association distributed religious literature in order to counteract literature that promoted immorality.\(^6^9\)

Until 1870, Victorian Britain had no system of national education unlike other Western nations. Only those from the middle and upper classes were able to afford an advanced education. Viewing education as the “mainstay of order,” Spurgeon was a vocal proponent of a

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\(^{66}\) Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers*, 405-411. The Metropolitan Tabernacle also chipped in by taking up a weekly special offering for the college.

\(^{67}\) Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Love Thy Neighbor,” August 9, 1857, http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0145.htm (accessed October 9, 2009). In this sermon, Spurgeon preached “Thou art bound to love thy neighbour, then do not neglect him….See where thy neighbours are in need; do not wait to be told of it, but find it out thyself and give them some help….Christian, your religion claims your love – Christ loved you before you loved him. He loved you when there was nothing good in you….Now Christian, your religion claims from you, that you should love as your Master loved. How can you imitate him unless you love too?….It is a gross contradiction to the spirit of your religion, and if you love not your neighbor, I see not how you can be a true follower of the Lord Jesus.”

\(^{68}\) Meredith, 114-115.

state-supported public education system. He maintained that the Education Act of 1870 would
greatly improve society, especially the impoverished working class.\textsuperscript{70} Spurgeon campaigned for
a public education system in his magazine, \textit{The Sword and the Trowel}. In an editorial titled “Can
Nothing More be Done for the Young?,” Spurgeon wrote:

\begin{quote}
Education of a secular sort has been too long withheld by the bickering of rival sects; the
country is now in such a humor that it will have no more of such unenlightened bigotry,
but will insist upon it, that every child shall be taught to read and write. Since the
Sectarian system has in England most evidently failed to reach the needs of millions, a
purely secular system will be established.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

Though Spurgeon’s goal of an inclusive public education system was realized, he lost the battle
for an “undenominational” approach to moral instruction in the schools supported by the state.\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{Temperance and Slavery}

The abuse of alcohol had a crippling effect on the working class in Victorian Britain. For
most of his adult life, Spurgeon was not a teetotaler. He admitted to enjoying beer and wine with
his meals. However, Spurgeon did recognize the devastating effects of alcohol abuse.
Consequently, he allowed the Metropolitan Tabernacle to be used as a meeting place for various
temperance societies. Eventually, Spurgeon became one of the loudest supporters of temperance
in Victorian Britain. In doing so, Spurgeon pledged to abstain from all beverage alcohol.

\textsuperscript{70} Michael Nicholls, “Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Educationalist: Part 1 – General Educational Concerns,”
31, no. 8 (October 1986): 387-388. The Education Act of 1870 created an inclusive nationalized system of
elementary education for children under the age of twelve.

\textsuperscript{71} Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Can Nothing More be Done for the Young?,” \textit{The Sword and the Trowel}

\textsuperscript{72} Nicholls, 386-388. Spurgeon originally held that religion should be absent from the curriculum used in
the state-sponsored schools. However, Spurgeon later joined many evangelicals in their outrage over divorcing
religion from education. Consequently, Spurgeon began to advocate that moral instruction should be limited to the
reading of the Bible. He was against the use of creeds and catechisms in the classroom. This non-denominational or
“undenominational” approach did not prevail and Parliament chose to fund Anglican schools where creeds and
catechisms were a component of moral instruction.
Spurgeon’s advocacy on behalf of temperance is yet another example of how he sought to achieve positive peace by improving society individual-by-individual.\(^{73}\)

As a champion of positive peace, Spurgeon was also outspoken against the oppressive institution of slavery. When Spurgeon began his ministry in London, slavery had been abolished in Britain for several decades. However, with the Civil War being fought across the Atlantic Ocean, Spurgeon had more than a few words to say about slavery and those Christians who justified slavery. In one blistering attack against slavery, he exclaimed:

Some American divines seem to regard it, indeed, with wonderful complacency. They have so accustomed themselves to wrap it up in soft phrases that they lose sight of its real character. They call it a “peculiar institution” until they forget in what its peculiarity consists. It is indeed, a peculiar institution, just as the Devil is a peculiar angel, and hell is a peculiarly hot place. For my part, I hold such miserable tampering with sin in abhorrence, and can hold no communion of any sort with those who are guilty of it.\(^{74}\)

One year before the start of the American Civil War, Spurgeon issued one of his sharpest denunciations of slavery:

Men have tried hard to make the Bible support this sum of all villainies, but slavery, the thing which defiles the Great Republic such slavery is quote unknown to the Word of God… I have known men quote texts as excuses for being damned, and I do not wonder that men can find Scripture to justify them in buying and selling the souls of men.\(^{75}\)

According to Baptist historian William Estep, Spurgeon was strongly encouraged to tone down his anti-slavery rhetoric. He was warned that his sermons would no longer circulate in America. However, Spurgeon refused and suffered greatly. As previously mentioned, the sale of Spurgeon’s sermons plummeted as the South comprised a large portion of his readers.\(^{76}\)


\(^{76}\) Estep, 11-12
Other Positive Peace Ministries

During the 1870s and 1880s, Spurgeon’s Metropolitan Tabernacle served as the center of evangelical social activism in Victorian Britain. Different societies would regularly meet at the Metropolitan Tabernacle to discuss political issues and strategize on how best to improve society. Spurgeon also led the Metropolitan Tabernacle to sponsor nearly two-dozen different social ministries. Throughout his ministry, Spurgeon devoted much of his time, energy and personal funds to creating and maintaining almshouses. These almshouses provided care to poverty-stricken elderly women. Other ministries organized by Spurgeon include a fund for the poor, a benevolent society which made and supplied clothes for the poor, a society that provided aid to poor pregnant women in London, a society that furnished clothes for poor pastors and a mission for the blind.77

Prior to the Education Act of 1870, Spurgeon and the Metropolitan Tabernacle helped fund different “ragged schools” which provided free education to hundreds of needy working class children in Victorian Britain. Spurgeon’s ministry to the poor children of London also included support for the Stockwell Orphanage. Established in 1866, the Stockwell Orphanage accommodated over 200 boys. Fourteen years later, Spurgeon helped form a similar orphanage for girls.78 In a sermon preceding a special offering for the “needy ones in Lancashire,” Spurgeon reminded his congregation that “poverty is no fault of their own….It is utterly unavoidable; and here, therefore, is the right place for benevolence to display itself.”79 Clearly,

77 Drummond, Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers, 430-439.

78 Ibid., 420-430.

peace and justice for the poor and downtrodden was central to Spurgeon’s ministry of redemption.

Conclusion

During his nearly forty-year ministry at London's Metropolitan Tabernacle, Charles Haddon Spurgeon embodied an individualistic approach towards peacemaking which combined a passion for soul-winning and a deep concern for the welfare of others with a desire to imitate the peace and love of Jesus Christ. Unlike some of his fellow evangelicals, Spurgeon understood the redemptive nature of the Gospel carried with it duties and obligations owed to individuals in British society. Time and time again, Spurgeon directed his congregation to be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" to their neighbors. He took seriously these biblical obligations and practiced what he preached. Consequently, Spurgeon established and personally funded orphanages, almshouses, an evening school for illiterate adults, and a college to train poor pastors. He also led his 14,000-member strong Metropolitan Tabernacle to sponsor over two-dozen social ministries. Spurgeon rightly recognized the devastation caused to individuals and society at large by the abuse of alcohol. Thus, he became a leader in the movement for temperance. When he was told to tone down his anti-slavery rhetoric or face financial repercussions, Spurgeon did not acquiesce. While the sale of his sermons abroad plummeted, Spurgeon continued to speak out against the horrors of slavery. For these reasons, Spurgeon can correctly be judged as a proponent of positive peace. Clearly, Spurgeon was actively committed to bringing about real peace through the betterment of society, individual-by-individual.

As a proponent of negative peace yet not a pacifist, Spurgeon consistently opposed each and every war fought during his lifetime. Harshly critical of the imperialism that characterized British foreign policy during the Victorian era, Spurgeon often declared that the spirit of war was
incompatible with the spirit of the gospel. He longed for the day when war would be regarded as "the most atrocious of crimes." British Christians who served as cheerleaders for war thoroughly disgusted Spurgeon. He was deeply bothered by the lack of appreciation for the seriousness of war shown by many in Britain. In addition to deploiring the evils of war and violence, Spurgeon championed the blessings of peace. Emphasizing the primacy of the gospel in peacemaking, Spurgeon argued that war would be defeated and peace would prevail with the regeneration of individuals.

Without a doubt, Spurgeon’s individualistic approach towards positive peace was limiting. A social Christianity that sought to improve society individual-by-individual could not adequately meet the needs of the poor who suffered greatly thanks to an immense population increase which was accompanied by the rapid urbanization of the Industrial Revolution. More substantive societal and structural reforms were surely needed as other Baptists such as John Clifford recognized. While Spurgeon was not opposed to radical reforms, he was far from convinced that any reform scheme could cure the ills of British society. He did, however, applaud reform efforts which proved to be successful.

It is perhaps the irony of history that conservative evangelicals, especially of the Calvinist and revivalistic varieties, still turn to Spurgeon as one of the princes of their preaching. These American evangelicals most likely will not cease to read the evangelistic sermons of Spurgeon or begin to read him with an analytical eye. If they did, they would find that Spurgeon’s words on war, peace and other social concerns strongly question the glib equation of militarism and evangelicalism that is so prevalent today in conservative evangelical orthodoxy.

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80 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, quoted in Dekar, 43.
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Primary Materials


Secondary Materials


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