

Glen H. Stassen: A Baptist Contribution to Conflict Resolution

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Abstract: This article focuses on the approach to conflict resolution defended by Baptist theologian Glen H. Stassen. It first offers an overview of this important Baptist figure through his life story, which shows how his interest in peacemaking was formed under specific circumstances. Then attention is paid to Stassen's engagement with the Bible and the foundation for his views on conflict resolution in the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. There follows an analysis and evaluation of the efficacy of Stassen's approach, where it is claimed that this approach can be applied in concrete situations. However the approach cannot be absolutized, given the complicated nature of conflicts, such as in particular the one happening in Ukraine.

Keywords: Glen H. Stassen; Jimmy Carter; Just Peacemaking Theory; War in Ukraine (2022–).

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Introduction

In this paper I analyze the approach to conflict resolution proposed by the Baptist theologian Glen Harold Stassen (1936–2014), a founding representative of the “just peacemaking” approach. In particular I try to see if the theory he defended can be practical for the situation of war in Ukraine, and offer any solution to this conflict. I intend to show that on the one hand this theory gives practical tools for the resolution of situations of war, whilst on the other hand it cannot be absolutized, since achieving peace is a rather complex task, depending on many factors which cannot so easily be controlled or influenced in order to achieve a positive result.

The article begins with a biography of Stassen, moving on to show the biblical foundation of his views on peacemaking and the efficacy of Stassen's suggestions for conflict resolution. The first part will introduce Glen Stassen to the reader, who may be unfamiliar with him, and helps to show the circumstances which shaped Stassen's attitude to war and peace. The second part shows which Biblical materials influenced Stassen's vision on peacemaking and how he interpreted them. Finally, the third part analyzes

and evaluates Stassen's vision in order to see if it can achieve any success in real life and in particular in solving conflicts such as that in Ukraine.

Biography

Glen H. Stassen, whom his friend, the Christian social ethicist David Gushee described as "arguably the leading Baptist peace theorist-activist of the twentieth century,"¹ was born in 1936 in Minnesota, a few years before the outbreak of the Second World War. As the war started, his father, Harold Edward Stassen (1907–2001), who was Governor of Minnesota, decided to join the US Navy. Consequently Stassen grew up with the emotional stress related to the possibility of losing his father, a reality shared by many people in that time. There was indeed even a period when his father was reported to have been killed. In addition, the news about the use of a nuclear bomb in Hiroshima had an indelible and frightening effect on the child.² Later, when Stassen went to the University of Virginia to study nuclear physics, he came to understand even better the destructive abilities of nuclear power.³

A few more words are in order about Glen Stassen's father, especially given the influence he had on his son. After returning home safely from the war, he became actively involved once more in the political arena, having an impact beyond the USA. He was among those who contributed to the founding of the United Nations. He strove for peace, democracy, economic justice, civil and human rights. The goals that the father pursued in his life as a political figure then became the son's task to bring to realization during his life.⁴ In the context of his father's influence, Glen Stassen recalled his father's words

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- 1 David Gushee, "Glen Harold Stassen (1936–): Baptist Peacemaker in a Conflict World," in *Twentieth-Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 244.
 - 2 Michael L. Westmoreland-White, "Glen Harold Stassen (1936–): Follower of a Thick Jesus," in *Ethics as if Jesus Mattered: Essays in Honor of Glen H. Stassen* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 7–8.
 - 3 Glen Stassen, *The Journey into Peacemaking* (Memphis: Brotherhood Commission, 1983), 6–7.
 - 4 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 8. For more on Stassen's father and his relation to the United Nations, see Tim Brady, "Harold Stassen and the Birth of the United Nations," in *Minnesota Alumni* (Spring 2018), <https://www.minnesotaalumni.org/stories/harold-stassen-and-the-birth-of-the-united-nations> (accessed 24. 1. 2025).

in relation to war: "Glen, war is so horrible that we have to do all we can to prevent World War III and atomic war."⁵

In terms of Stassen's Christian formation, he experienced his personal conversion to God as an eleven-year-old child in a Minnesota Baptist church.⁶ In the church, under the guidance of its pastor, John Wobig, Stassen learnt to live life "not as a passive listener – but as an active witnesser."⁷ His Christian formation occurred in the context of contacts with different church traditions and even with non-Christian faiths. Some of them he found close to him and some figures from those traditions influenced him. In particular in his emphasis on peace and a negative appraisal of the use of violence for conflict resolution, he was influenced by the pacifist stream. Already in childhood, when he had visited a Quaker school, he was impressed by one of their teachers who opposed participation in the war and instead carried out scientific work for his country.⁸

An important influence on him from his own Baptist tradition was Martin Luther King who used "nonviolent direct action" in reaching those goals which could not be brought to realization without confrontation.⁹ When Stassen thought about the Baptist tradition and its contribution to peacemaking, and describing some Baptist figures in the category of "saints," he could claim Martin Luther King as "the chief of those saints."¹⁰

In addition we can mention his interest in the Anabaptist tradition. Here he was influenced by John Howard Yoder, with whom he became friends.¹¹ In one of his analyses of Anabaptists, he defends their attitude to war: "Refusal to participate in killing enemies, however, does not mean withdrawal from practical service in the world, be it the production of musical and artistic culture or participation in economic activity or public service."¹² This argument

5 Glen Harold Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 200.

6 Gushee, "Baptist Peacemaker in a Conflict World," 245.

7 Glen Stassen, *Journey into Peacemaking*, 6.

8 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 9–11, 13, 15.

9 Glen Stassen, "How Incarnational Discipleship Led to Just Peacemaking," in *Baptistic Theologies* 4:2 (2012), 90–91.

10 Glen H. Stassen, "Baptists as Peacemakers," in *The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 187.

11 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 13.

12 Stassen, "Baptists as Peacemakers," 190.

was based on Yoder's contribution to *Authentic Transformation*,¹³ which he co-authored with Stassen and D. M. Yeager.¹⁴ Stassen shared with Yoder his insights and found support for his just peacemaking theory, which emphasised the efficacy of nonviolent action, something in which Yoder also believed.¹⁵

In terms of his academic life, Stassen received his PhD in 1967 from Duke University,¹⁶ one of the top universities in the United States, where his interests were in history of theology, ethics, political and social theory. He also carried out post-doctoral work at Harvard, focusing on peacemaking and foreign policy.¹⁷ He taught, among other institutions, at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary. The first he joined in 1976, teaching ethics for twenty years, before joining Fuller in 1996, where he continued to teach in the field of ethics.¹⁸ He retired in March 2014 and died one month later.¹⁹ Among other activities, he supervised some 29 PhD students to completion of their doctorates. One of his books, *Kingdom Ethics*²⁰ has been translated into several languages and has sold around 30,000 copies.²¹

Stassen did a lot for the development of just peacemaking theory, which he actively promoted. As Orthodox scholar Perry T. Hamalis notes, this theory became "best known" thanks to Stassen.²² One of the features that led

13 Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996).

14 Stassen, "Baptists as Peacemakers," 190 (see footnote no. 14 in the book).

15 Glen H. Stassen, "Introduction: Jesus Is No Sectarian: John H. Yoder's Christological Peacemaking Ethic," in *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 22, 24. As always now when reference is made to Yoder, his behaviour, of which there is no indication that Stassen was aware, especially his abusive treatment of women for most of his academic career; perhaps calls into question the practice of what he wrote, even if some of the ideas retain relevance.

16 Jiyong Lee and Laura Rector, "Glen Stassen: Incarnational Disciple of Jesus," in *A Journal of Christian Ethics Today* 22:4 (2014), 5 [Aggregate Issue 95], https://christianethicstoday.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CET_Issue_095.pdf (19. 12. 2024).

17 Westmoreland-White, "Follower of a Thick Jesus," 10–12.

18 Ibid., 13, 15.

19 Laura Rector, "Glen Stassen: Friend, Scholar, Activist," in *A Journal of Christian Ethics Today* 22:4 (2014), 3 [Aggregate Issue 95]. Accessed at https://christianethicstoday.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CET_Issue_095.pdf (19. 12. 2024).

20 Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2003).

21 Rector, "Glen Stassen: Friend, Scholar, Activist," 3.

22 Perry T. Hamalis, "Just Peacemaking and Christian Realism: Possibilities for Moving beyond the Impasse in Orthodox Christian War Ethics," in *Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 340.

him to this position was the concept of “transforming initiatives,” discussed already in a small book *The Journey into Peacemaking*.²³ A more extended and focused discussion on these initiatives is found in *Just Peacemaking*.²⁴ Stassen himself considered this book as an important step in the process of development of just peacemaking theory, leading to *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War*,²⁵ a collaboration between 23 scholars, edited by Stassen, who also wrote one of the chapters and co-authored another.

The book was later reissued as *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*,²⁶ with contributions from a further seven scholars.²⁷ Just peacemaking theory is usually discussed in the context of two other theories, pacifism and just war. These are seen as stuck within a debate on “legalistic absolutes,” while the new theory tries to point to the importance of practical “peacemaking action” that should be taken to prevent the conflict.²⁸ Showing the weakness of the other theories, just peacemaking theory does not try to replace them, but to cooperate with them. Therefore there are pacifist and just war followers among those who support just peacemaking theory. Not all conflicts will be stopped and people will still need guidance from these two other theories in terms of the possibility of killing the enemy.²⁹

Stassen was not just a theoretician, but someone who tried himself to put the theory into practice. So, for example, he participated in the work of the committee of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. In particular he was involved in the preparation of a “successful strategy for the removal of medium-range nuclear missiles from Europe.”³⁰ Jiyong Lee and Laura Rector, speaking about this aspect of Stassen’s life, use the category of “activism.”³¹

23 Glen Stassen, *The Journey into Peacemaking* (Memphis, TN: Brotherhood Commission, 1983).

24 Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).

25 Glen Stassen (ed.), *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998).

26 Glen Stassen (ed.), *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008).

27 Ibid., 9.

28 Glen H. Stassen, “Introduction: Jesus Is No Sectarian,” 24.

29 Pamela Brubaker et al., “Just Peacemaking as the New Ethics for Peace and War,” in *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm*, 9.

30 Westmoreland-White, “Follower of a Thick Jesus,” 13–14.

31 Lee and Rector, “Glen Stassen: Incarnational Disciple of Jesus,” 6.

Another example of Stassen's attempts to practice theory relates to an interesting episode when he participated in a discussion with the President of Iran.³² He asked him if there was any possibility of reaching agreement between the USA and Iran based on which there would be an expectation of no threat from Iran in relation to Israel, if Iran could have confidence in no threat from the USA.³³

Stassen died at the age of 78, leaving a remarkable record behind. Paul Vitello characterized him in *The New York Times* as a person "who helped define the social-justice wing of the evangelical movement in the 1980s and played a role in advancing nuclear disarmament talks toward the end of the Cold War."³⁴ And, for his students, Stassen was a person who tried to live as an "incarnational disciple of Jesus," as one "who showed that theological ethics can be incarnated into our lives."³⁵

The Biblical Basis of Stassen's Views on Peacemaking

In this section I will examine Glen Stassen's engagement with the Bible in relation to the theme of peacemaking. This examination will show how Stassen's interpretation of specific Biblical materials shaped his position. Just peacemaking theory proposes ten practices to try to prevent conflicts:

Peacemaking Initiatives

1. Support nonviolent direct action.
2. Take independent initiatives to reduce threat.
3. Use cooperative conflict resolution.

³² Ibid.

³³ Laurie Goodstein, "Ahmadinejad Meets Clerics, and Decibels Drop a Notch," in *The New York Times* (Sept. 27, 2007), <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/27/world/middleeast/27clerics.html> (20. 12. 2024).

³⁴ Paul Vitello, "Glen Stassen, Theologian, Dies at 78; Championed Nuclear Disarmament," in *The New York Times* (May 7, 2014), <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/08/us/glen-stassen-theologian-who-champion-nuclear-disarmament-dies-at-78.html> (10. 9. 2024).

³⁵ Lee and Rector, "Glen Stassen: Incarnational Disciple of Jesus," 5–6. To see Stassen's thoughts on incarnational discipleship, look at his "By Their Fruits You Will Know Them: Incarnational Discipleship Stands the Test," in *Baptistic Theologies* 4:2 (2012), 7ff. Cf. also, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* which Michael Willett-Newheart describes as Stassen's "magnum opus." Michael Willett Newheart, "Stassen on the Mount: The Ethicist as Exegete," in *Ethics as if Jesus Mattered: Essays in Honor of Glen H. Stassen* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2014), 22.

4. Acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustice and seek repentance and forgiveness.

Justice

5. Advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty.
6. Foster just and sustainable economic development.

Love and Community

7. Work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system.
8. Strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights.
9. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade.
10. Encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and other voluntary associations.³⁶

Stassen saw these ten practices as rooted in Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. The practices from the first group are connected with the passages from the Gospel of Matthew in this way: the first two steps depend on Mt 5:38–43; the third step is based on Mt 5:21–26 and the fourth on Mt 7:1–5. The second group is built on Mt 6:19–33, while the third returns to Mt 5:38–43 (in addition reference is made to Mt 26:51–52 for the ninth practice and 5:1–2 in addition to 7:28–29 for the tenth).³⁷

From Stassen's perspective the teachings proclaimed in the Sermon can be presented as having "a triadic structure" in contrast to the more common "dyadic structure." In an article defending this thesis, he noted fourteen such triads.³⁸ Speaking about this article, Michael Willett Newheart says that it was where Stassen first presented his exegetical analysis, to which at least some experts in the field responded positively.³⁹ One, Willard M. Swartley, speaking about Stassen's treatment of the structure of different parts of the

36 Glen H. Stassen, "Resource Section on Just Peacemaking Theory," in *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23:1 (2003), 69–70.

37 Glen Harold Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus*, 198, 212–13. The connection of practices with passages can be found also in Stassen's article, "How Incarnational Discipleship Led to Just Peacemaking," 102.

38 Glen H. Stassen, "The Fourteen Triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21–7:12)," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122/2 (2003), 267–308.

39 Michael Willett Newheart, "Stassen on the Mount," 21–22, 28–29.

Sermon on the Mount, says that “His structural analysis is impressive and persuasive...”⁴⁰

Stassen noted that many people prefer to look at the teachings of the Sermon dyadically, and thus speak about the presence of antitheses. As an example, the Old Testament teaching prohibits killing humans, but in contrast Christ gives his teaching/call not even to be angry.⁴¹ Thus Jesus’s calls are seen “as high ideals, hard teachings, impossible demands.”⁴² On the one hand people can “praise them for being so idealistic,” but on the other hand they do not see how they can be fulfilled in normal life and as a result “adopt another ethic that comes from somewhere else.” Therefore the better approach in Stassen’s view is to see the triadic structure in Jesus’s teachings in the Sermon where the emphasis is on transforming initiatives.⁴³ I have already mentioned these initiatives in the first section as a foundation for Stassen’s development of just peacemaking theory.

In this section I will concentrate further on the third practice, which suggests that those interested in just peacemaking “Use cooperative conflict resolution.” According to those involved in development of just peacemaking theory, this practice should be seen as one that “emphasizes active coworking by parties in conflict.”⁴⁴ As this article starts to examine if Stassen’s suggestions concerning the way to reach peace can be practical and helpful to the war situation in Ukraine, the third practice seems the most relevant at the moment. The negotiations are considered as the best solution to this war by the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump.⁴⁵

40 Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in the New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 65.

41 Glen H. Stassen, “The Fourteen Triads,” 267–68.

42 Ibid., 269.

43 Glen H. Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 133.

44 Steven Brion-Meisels et al., “Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution,” in *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*, New Edition (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 71.

45 As some examples from Ukraine, see Liliana Oleniak, “US President’s Future Advisor: Trump Wants to Bring Ukraine and Russia to Negotiations,” in *RBC-Ukraine* (November 14, 2024), <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/us-president-s-future-advisor-trump-wants-1731576004.html> (accessed 30. 12. 2024); Dmytro Basmat, “War Will Be ‘Resolved in Next Few Months,’ Trump’s Ukraine Peace Envoy Believes, Plans to ‘Listen’ Ahead of Peace Talks,” in *The Kyiv Independent* (December 13, 2024), <https://kyivindependent.com/war-will-be-resolved-in-next-few-months-trumps-ukraine-peace-envoy-believes-open-to-listen-ahead-of-peace-talks/> (accessed 30. 12. 2024). Abroad: Rigels Lenja,

This has been happening at a time when this might have some possible traction in Ukraine itself. A poll from the end of 2024 indicated a significant inclination among Ukrainians (52%) to negotiate with Russia, even if it would mean the loss of some territories.⁴⁶ In particular the supporters for the negotiation can be found even among military personnel.⁴⁷

As to the passage that is connected with the third practice, namely Mt. 5:21–26, the one dealing with anger already mentioned, its triadic structure divides the verses in the following way: 1. v. 21; 2. v. 22; 3. vv. 23–26. The headings for the parts of this division are: 1. “Traditional Righteousness”; 2. “Vicious Cycle”; 3. “Transforming Initiative.”⁴⁸

The logic for Stassen to abandon seeing a dyadic structure or antithesis in the text is strengthened by the Greek text. As Stassen says when we look at this text we can see that formally the teachings about killing or anger (vv. 21–22) are not formed grammatically as imperatives. The prohibition of killing is formally phrased as a verb in the future indicative,⁴⁹ though it definitely plays the role of command. This prohibition is seen as traditional teaching. Jesus’s condemnation of anger is formed as a participle in the text. It is seen as a counterpoint to the traditional teaching (antithesis). The real grammatical imperatives are in verses 23–26.⁵⁰ This part, which Stassen calls the “climax,”⁵¹ speaks about five imperatives which Matthew used in his Gospel. Stassen translated them from Greek as: “leave,” “go,” “be reconciled,”

“Can Trump Broker Peace in Ukraine? History May Hold the Answers,” in *Social Europe* (December 9, 2024), <https://www.socialeurope.eu/can-trump-broker-peace-in-ukraine-history-may-hold-the-answers> (accessed 30. 12. 2024); Sean Monaghan, “Can Trump Persuade Putin to Make Peace in Ukraine?”, in *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (January 29, 2025), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-trump-persuade-putin-make-peace-ukraine> (accessed 14. 6. 2025).

46 Benedict Vigers, “Half of Ukrainians Want Quick, Negotiated End to War,” in *Gallup* (November 19, 2024), <https://news.gallup.com/poll/653495/half-ukrainians-quick-negotiated-end-war.aspx> (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

47 Ben Hall et al., “Ukraine Faces Its Darkest Hour,” in *Financial Times* (October 1, 2024), <https://www.ft.com/content/2bb20587-9680-40f0-ac2d-5e7312486c75> (accessed 3. 10. 2024).

48 Glen H. Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 135.

49 See this noted, for example, in Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 189.

50 Stassen, “The Fourteen Triads,” 272, 275.

51 Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 68.

“offer” and “make friends.” In the dyadic structure this part is seen as simply offering illustrations related to the prohibition of anger and other similar acts. However from Stassen’s perspective it does not make sense even to see the passage as illustrating something. For example, we see no illustration of anger. Therefore the section with imperatives should be separated and regarded as the most important element in a triadic structure. It would be illogical for a reader to follow the dyadic structure.⁵²

In interpreting vv. 21–26, Stassen speaks about Jesus who first starts from a “traditional teaching” on the prohibition of killing (v. 21). Then he continues and goes deeper into the problem of human existence, turning to the issue of anger (v. 22). Here Jesus’s goal is not to condemn anger in itself, for he himself became angry from time to time (cf. Mt. 21:12–17). To become angry is natural for humans. Jesus’s goal is to give “a diagnosis” of a dangerous condition (described through the image of a cycle in which we can be captured), in which “being angry” is a condition which can lead then to further negative acts.⁵³ The biblical text (v. 22) warns us against “murder,” “insult,”⁵⁴ calling someone “fool.” The end for someone who commits such acts will be judgment.

But this can be avoided, as demonstrated in vv. 23–26. Stassen sees verse 22 as Jesus’s comment about human “illness,” while verses 23–26 are his words on “treatment.”⁵⁵ If there is a tension between you and another person who can be either from your church community (vv. 23–24) or from outside (in particular the Romans; vv. 25–26), you should go to that person and try⁵⁶ to reach peace with them. This is exactly the model of behaviour we find through observation of Christ’s first followers. The Romans were invaders for them and it might be expected that those followers would seek

52 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 134–35.

53 Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 64–65.

54 Concerning the translation of the Greek word *ᾠκίστα*, there are a number of suggestions. For example, “stupid,” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 201; 1st option: “idiot,” 2nd option: “blockhead,” Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 116; 1st option: “empty-headed,” 2nd option: “worthless,” Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2014), 57.

55 Stassen, “The Fourteen Triads,” 270, 272–73.

56 Sometimes others can be more successful in bringing peace in relations between conflicting sides. Stassen refers in this connection to Matthew 18:15–17. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 69–70.

to “knife Roman soldiers,” but they applied a different approach, practicing love to enemies and “Rome eventually became mostly Christian.”⁵⁷

At the same time it can be noted that Stassen’s vision of someone trying to speak to the opponent about peaceful resolution is not about being completely soft in order to reach peace. Stassen says: “Jesus doesn’t only talk sweetness and light, but often confronts and calls to repentance, in direct line with the prophets of Israel.”⁵⁸ For Stassen, the right model of confrontation with evil/injustice can be seen in the figure of Martin Luther King Jr.,⁵⁹ whom, as noted above, Stassen valued highly. King was a figure Stassen described as one who “drew on a tradition of nonviolent resistance.”⁶⁰

When Stassen looks at Matthew 5:21–26 he also sees its message as a contribution to better understanding the story about Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:3–7.⁶¹ It is possible that Jesus had this story in mind in the verses from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew.⁶² The story in Genesis tells us that Cain was upset with his brother, whose offering to God was accepted, whilst his was not. God called Cain to deal with his negative emotions. In Matthew we hear in some sense the strategy of how to act in such a situation. Cain had to go to his brother in order to reach reconciliation. Stassen even imagined that it could lead to Abel helping his brother to become more successful in farming. Cain’s step towards reconciliation with his brother would give him “an alternative to staying stuck in the powerlessness of being angry and trying to farm without knowing how.”⁶³ Also the emphasis on peacemaking from Matthew directs us to see in the story about Cain and Abel God’s example of one trying to reach reconciliation with Cain, breaking relations with Abel as well as with his Creator.⁶⁴

57 Glen H. Stassen, “An Introduction to Part Two: Just Peacemaking as the New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War,” in *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and Twenty-First-Century Discipleship* (Eugene, Oregon: PICKWICK Publications, 2013), 141.

58 Stassen, “How Incarnational Discipleship Led to Just Peacemaking,” 93.

59 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 170.

60 Stassen, “Baptists as Peacemakers,” 187.

61 Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 66–67.

62 Glen H. Stassen, “Incarnational Discipleship Restores a Realistic Understanding of Sin,” in *Baptist Theologies* 4:2 (2012), 22. Cf. R. T. France, who speaks of a possible connection of this passage with the story from Genesis: “The wording of this pericope may carry a deliberate echo of the story of Cain [...] who, because he was angry [...] murdered his brother [...]” R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 199 (n. 76).

63 Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, 66–67.

64 Stassen, “Incarnational Discipleship Restores a Realistic Understanding of Sin,” 22.

Stassen notes four of God's attempts/initiatives to push Cain to reconciliation, expecting his transformation in relationship with God. First, God drew Cain's attention to his anger in relation to his brother, pushing him to look for peaceful resolution; second, after Cain killed Abel, God tried to push him to reconciliation with God himself, helping him to understand his sin and repent (the idea of confronting). This intention is presented in the question "Where is Abel your brother?". Third, God continued with a more direct question "What have you done?", at the same time hoping again for Cain's repentance or turn to God; and fourth, God took the initiative to show his care for Cain, protecting him from possible danger coming from others (Gen. 4:15). Thus we see all these merciful initiatives from God, but as for Cain we do not see him "in abject remorse for his terrible crime." Sadly his decision was "not to struggle with the resentment in his heart." Cain turned from God and chose life without his presence.⁶⁵

Efficacy of Stassen's suggestions for conflict resolution

In this section I will ask if Stassen's approach to conflict resolution (with especial focus on the third practice mentioned above) can be practically effective. In particular as we think about the situation in Ukraine which is at war with Russia, we are interested to see the solutions which can be proven as working for conflicts/tensions between different countries.

In regard to the efficacy of Stassen's vision on conflict resolution, I will look at his reference to the former USA President Jimmy Carter (1924–2024) and his achievements in the field of peacemaking. Carter was, among other things, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.⁶⁶ He belonged to the same church tradition as Stassen, being a part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.⁶⁷ Reacting to his death, the Baptist World Alliance described him as

⁶⁵ Ibid., 23–24.

⁶⁶ D. Jason Berggren, "I had a Different Way of Governing: the Evangelical Presidential Style of Jimmy Carter and His Mission for Middle East Peace," in *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1624 (2007), 271, <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/1624> (accessed 9. 1. 2025).

⁶⁷ Brian Kaylor, "What Kind of Baptist Was Jimmy Carter?," in *Word&Way* (January 8, 2025), <https://wordandway.org/2025/01/08/what-kind-of-baptist-was-jimmy-carter/> (accessed 9. 1. 2025).

a “seasoned Baptist lay leader,” noting “his remarkable work for justice and peace around the world.”⁶⁸

We know from D. Jason Berggren’s analysis that during his government Carter tried to build the foreign policy of his country on the teachings from the Sermon on the Mount.⁶⁹ We remember that the Sermon was the foundation for Stassen’s vision on peacemaking. Carter can be described as a supporter of the just war tradition.⁷⁰ At the same time he approached very critically the need to use weapons. His vision was that not all wars can be described as just, even if they are proposed as such. He suggested seeing war as “*a last resort, with all non-violent options exhausted*.”⁷¹ Carole Cadwalladr describes Carter as being “proud of” the fact that the USA under his leadership did not participate in any war “legal or illegal,” finding other ways to solve the tensions in relations with other countries.⁷²

When Stassen speaks about Jimmy Carter in the context of cooperative conflict resolution, one of Carter’s successes that he mentions relates to the tensions between Egypt and Israel.⁷³ This led to the Camp David Accords that were reached when Carter was president of the USA.⁷⁴ This agreement is seen as an authoritative source for all discussions related to Middle East negotiations⁷⁵ and has been called “one of the great diplomatic triumphs of the 20th century.”⁷⁶ According to William B. Quandt, the Camp David

68 Baptist World Alliance, “Baptist World Alliance Mourns the Death of Jimmy Carter: Global Baptists Honor His Life and Legacy,” (December 29, 2024), <https://baptistworld.org/news/bwa-mourns-jimmy-carter/> (accessed 9. 1. 2025).

69 Berggren, “I had a Different Way of Governing,” 270–71.

70 Ibid., 300.

71 Jimmy Carter, *A Call to Action: Woman, Religion, Violence, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 53–54.

72 Carole Cadwalladr, “Jimmy Carter: ‘We Never Dropped a Bomb. We Never Fired a Bullet. We Never Went to War,’” in *The Guardian* (September 11, 2011), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/sep/11/president-jimmy-carter-interview> (accessed 23. 1. 2025). The piece can be also found republished in *Conversations with Jimmy Carter*, edited by Tom Head (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023), 127–38, at 133.

73 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 171.

74 Jesse Greenspan, “How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt” (November 1, 2023), in *History*, <https://www.history.com/news/jimmy-carter-camp-david-accords-egypt-israel> (accessed 30. 9. 2024).

75 Anthony Dobbs, *Jimmy Carter: 99 Remarkable Tales From 99 Extraordinary Years* (Columbia: no publisher, 2023), 39.

76 Terry Gross, “13 Days Of High Emotion That Led To The Egypt-Israel Peace: Interview with Lawrence Wright,” in *NPR* (September 16, 2014), <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/348731640?ft=nrml&%3Bf=348727793> (accessed 17. 1. 2025).

Accords have their supporters and opponents, but they all “recognize the importance of what happened at Camp David.”⁷⁷ In relation to the impact the agreements had on Egypt and Israel in particular, Jesse Greenspan says: “Since then, Israel and Egypt have not once come to blows, even as tensions between them remain high.”⁷⁸

In terms of Carter’s involvement in the negotiation between Egypt and Israel, we can see Stassen’s suggestion based on Matthew 18:15–17 at work. The USA represented by Jimmy Carter played a third-party role, helping to bring peace in relations between Egypt and Israel. The task of enabling negotiations between Egypt and Israel was not an easy one for Carter, whom Imad K. Harb calls “the father of Arab-Israeli normalization.”⁷⁹ The two countries had long been enemies. Several military conflicts had happened between them after the modern country of Israel was formed in 1948, one of which was the War of Attrition (1969–1970).⁸⁰ During this period Egypt tried to regain the territory that it had lost as part of the Arab coalition that fought with Israel during Six-Day War in 1967. The war claimed the lives of thousands.⁸¹ And even in the process of negotiation the situation was complicated by reaction from other Arabs to Egypt’s openness to peaceful resolution with their enemy Israel. Thus, Israel experienced a terrorist attack from Lebanon (also known as the Coastal Road Massacre), which caused it to retaliate.⁸²

77 William B. Quandt, “Camp David and Peacemaking in the Middle East,” in *Political Science Quarterly* 101:3 (1986), 357.

78 Greenspan, “How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt.”

79 Imad K Harb, “Jimmy Carter: The Father of Arab-Israeli Normalization,” in *Al Jazeera* (December 30, 2024), <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/12/30/jimmy-carter-the-father-of-arab-israeli-normalisation> (accessed 17. 1. 2025).

80 Greenspan, “How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt.”

81 David Rodman, *Combined Arms Warfare in Israeli Military History: From the War of Independence to Operation Protective Edge* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2019), 19, 35; Ahmed S. Khalidi, “The War of Attrition,” in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3:1 (1973), 60–61; *War of Attrition (1969–1970)* (October 10, 2008), <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3611617,00.html> (accessed 20. 1. 2025).

82 Greenspan, “How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt”; Michael Omer-Man, “This Week in History: Israel’s Deadliest Terror Attack,” in *The Jerusalem Post* (March 11, 2011), <https://www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/This-Week-in-History-Israels-deadliest-terror-attack> (accessed 20. 1. 2025).

As to the elements which made success achievable, Jesse Greenspan notes that the leaders of Egypt and Israel were both in a position of dependence on the USA. They were interested in development of friendly relations with the USA as each expected to get support for their financial and military sectors.⁸³ In particular, the Egyptian turn to the USA happened in the context of broken connections with the Soviet Union.⁸⁴ Another element was Carter's approach to develop friendly and trust-based relations with the leaders of both sides, not least through talks about faith/religion which Carter saw as "the healing source." It worked quite successfully with the President of Egypt Anwar Sadat, who Carter described as his "closest personal friend" or "beloved friend."⁸⁵ In general, in relations with the leaders of other nations Carter believed it would be right to apply as criteria for success in developing such relations not military or economic power, but truth and honesty.⁸⁶ At the same time, where it was necessary, Carter could confront the other party, speaking from a position of power. Anthony Dobbs speaks about the episode, told by Jimmy Carter, when the leader of Egypt, Sadat, "froze at the seriousness of his tone and voice" at a time when Sadat was ready to refuse to negotiate further.⁸⁷

Success came in the end and Carter could say: "Let history record that deep and ancient antagonism can be settled without bloodshed and without staggering waste of precious lives."⁸⁸ This can be taken as a statement on the effectiveness or worthiness of negotiations, especially if one values the lives that can be saved from death.

The negotiation was obviously a compromise and its results cannot be seen as ideal. Positively, Egypt regained the Sinai Peninsula, while Israel got in return the normalization of relations with one of the Arab countries. Negatively, the President of Egypt paid a costly personal price for the negotiations with Israel, seen by many Muslims as an improper step. He was killed

83 Greenspan, "How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt."

84 Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 11.

85 D. Jason Berggren, "Sadat, and Begin: Using Evangelical-Style Presidential Diplomacy in the Middle East," in *Journal of Church and State* 56:4 (2014), 732–56, at 732, 734, 743–44.

86 Berggren, "I had a Different Way of Governing," 10–11.

87 Dobbs, *Jimmy Carter: 99 Remarkable Tales*, 38.

88 Greenspan, "How Jimmy Carter Brokered a Hard-Won Peace Deal Between Israel and Egypt."

by some of those displeased at his decision that went against a perceived Arab opposition to Israel. In addition there remained unresolved tensions (also discussed by Egypt and Israel) related to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Israeli territories in that moment shared both by Jews and Palestinians. There was expectation that Israel would stop the growth of its settlements in those areas, but it refused to do so.⁸⁹

In regard to conflict situations, positive developments towards peaceful solutions, according to Stassen, depend on governments deciding to be open for negotiations and for meetings with their enemies. Next the governments should “develop imaginative solutions that show they understand their adversary’s perspectives and needs.”⁹⁰ It can be noted in relation to this last element that, when it comes to conflict resolution, there needs to be the expectation that in the case of negotiation the two parties will be able to speak equally and not only the one which can be seen more precisely as victim in a particular situation. The first step is to hear all voices and only then to pass judgment. It would be good also to find space for recognition of mutual sinfulness and responsibility for the conflict.⁹¹ The idea of mutual sinfulness in relation to conflicts is strongly emphasized in Miroslav Volf’s book *Exclusion and Embrace*, in particular in the section on “Contrived Innocence.”⁹² Volf considers it in the context of his claim that “the perpetrators are guilty; they are guilty by definition.”⁹³

In terms of the discussion around Ukraine and Russia, we can note that Fox News aired an interview with the USA President who, in addition to Russian guilt, pointed to the Ukrainian President Zelenskyy’s guilt for not preventing this war. From President Trump’s perspective it was necessary for Zelenskyy to have put an emphasis on negotiation from the beginning, not letting the war start with the result of many deaths on both sides.⁹⁴ In general as Alan Geyer and Donald W. Shriver note in relation to nations

89 Ibid. For Arab reaction to the Israeli settlements approach that is seen in the context of Israel’s “expansion and colonization,” see Joseph Algazy, “Israeli Settlement Policy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,” in *Arab Studies Quarterly* 7:2/3 (1985) 62–73.

90 Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 171.

91 Steven Brion-Meisels et al., “Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution,” 72–73.

92 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 79–85.

93 Ibid, 80.

94 Fox News, Trump Says Zelenskyy Is “No Angel” (January 23, 2025), <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6367602293112> (accessed 23. 1. 2025).

and their possible repentance, it is quite difficult for nations to think of the possibility of accepting any mistakes on their own side. To accept wrongness is seen as impermissible, showing their weakness before others, and thus something to be avoided.⁹⁵

Each party in a conflict is free to choose to forego any attempt to negotiate for peace. This can be caused, for example, by the role of national elites who may see their nation in the position of “superiority” (either moral or military) in relation to others with whom there is nothing to talk about. Talks are unwelcome as they can also show one’s own wrongs, destroying one’s own spotless self-image. Thus the goals are left to be reached by force in relation to others.⁹⁶ Stassen saw such an approach as unproductive. He shows the contrast between two USA Presidents, George W. Bush and Jimmy Carter and the results they achieved in solving international tensions, in particular with North Korea. George W. Bush was President of the USA at that time.⁹⁷ As for Carter, he acted during President Clinton’s government.⁹⁸

In the case of North Korea, Carter opened negotiations with its leadership and stopped the North Korean nuclear program. As for Bush, he decided to act by power through breaking the North Korean access to oil. Consequently, North Korea doubled down on its development of a nuclear program.⁹⁹ Christine Ahn saw a similar approach to Bush’s in the government of President Biden, contrasting it again to Carter’s. Ahn is not persuaded by the USA authorities’ logic in which North Korea should show first the steps to denuclearization and only then would peace negotiations be possible. Presumably North Korea looks at this differently and no less logically, expecting first to get solid guarantees of its security. At the same time it will

95 Alan Geyer and Donald W. Shriver, “Acknowledge Responsibility for Conflict and Injustice and Seek Repentance and Forgiveness,” in *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*, 99.

96 Brion-Meisels et al., “Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution,” 90–91.

97 Stassen, “An Introduction to Part Two,” 141.

98 Dobbs, *Jimmy Carter: 99 Remarkable Tales*, 68. It is interesting to note in relation to this negotiation that Carter’s involvement was asked for by North Korea. The then USA leadership was quite strict on North Korea and Carter “had a hard time getting permission” from it for playing a role of “third-party mediation.” Jimmy Carter and Shirin Sinnar, “Unorthodox Approach: Conflict Resolution in a Changing World: An Interview with Jimmy Carter,” in *Harvard International Review* 18:3 (1996), 58–59, at 58. This article can also be found in Head (ed.), *Conversations with Jimmy Carter*, 95–101, at 95–96.

99 Stassen, “An Introduction to Part Two,” 141.

be necessary for Americans to be patient, giving North Korea time to check these guarantees in real life.¹⁰⁰

In relation to Biden's approach in comparison to Carter's Ahn says: "the Biden administration should take the lessons from his predecessor, Jimmy Carter, who made the most progress with North Korea to finally end the Korean War and usher in a new era of peace."¹⁰¹ Obviously not everybody was pleased with Carter's approach to negotiation in which he tried to be neutral. Some called Carter "an appeaser" instead of a peacemaker,¹⁰² someone who "cozied up to tyrants,"¹⁰³ showing "moral indifference."¹⁰⁴ Carter refused to accept such rebukes, saying that he would continue to follow moral principles and his opponents knew it. But such meetings were a good way for moving from tensions to reconciliation/peace.¹⁰⁵ Looking at Carter's approach, Douglas Brinkley describes it as "results"-oriented, which for him was the most important and therefore he can be seen as a person "more interested in healing and forgiveness than retribution and bloodshed."¹⁰⁶

It can, then, be concluded that the strategy proposed by just peacemaking certainly has the potential to achieve positive results and it would not be illogical to see the approach of negotiations applied in relation to the war in Ukraine. This is a possible option, especially in the context of Donald Trump's government, which places more emphasis on negotiations and on the necessity to save people's lives. Here however it is important to note that to declare that one stands for moral values and sincerely believes in them and on the other hand following moral standards in one's life are very different things. Therefore the President of the USA will have to prove the wrongness of the claims about "immoral Trump" or as someone with "dark talents ... seen before in dictators throughout history."¹⁰⁷

100 Christine Ahn, "When Jimmy Carter Went to North Korea" (Feb. 22, 2023), in *Responsible Statecraft*, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/02/22/when-jimmy-carter-went-to-north-korea/> (accessed 28. 9. 2024).

101 Ibid.

102 Douglas Brinkley, "Jimmy Carter's Modest Quest for Global Peace," in *Foreign Affairs* 74:6 (1995), 96.

103 Brion-Meisels et al., "Use Cooperative Conflict Resolution," 86.

104 Shirin Sinnar, "Unorthodox Approach: Conflict Resolution in a Changing World: An Interview with Jimmy Carter," 59; 97 in *Conversations with Jimmy Carter*.

105 Ibid.

106 Brinkley, "Jimmy Carter's Modest Quest for Global Peace," 96.

107 Jim Simon, "Opinion: 10 of the nastiest cons Donald Trump has tried to pull on America," in *The Columbus Dispatch* (October 23, 2024), <https://www.dispatch.com/story>

Moreover at least some of his actions in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war call into question his morality. We hear about the USA policy “to put pressure on the victim, Ukraine, rather than the aggressor, Russia”.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, on the one hand it might be understandable to see the USA attempts to omit the usage of sanctions against Russia in order not to worsen the relations with this country. On the other hand it can be heard from Trump’s circle that “additional sanctions against Russia would hinder business opportunities and the president wants to maximize economic opportunities for Americans”.¹⁰⁹ This sounds quite mercantile and it is definitely far from the argument about the need to save people’s lives in war; it is more about fostering one’s own economic benefits.

As for the leader of Russia, Vladimir Putin, after Trump became the USA President he started to assert his interest in negotiation, while blaming the Ukrainian President for being against this. At the same time it was relatively clear that his expectation was simply to bring about Ukrainian capitulation.¹¹⁰ The Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was not sure about joining such a negotiation, at least without, for example, expectation for a “just” step from Russia to restore the borders to the state of 2022 and having “security guarantees” from world leaders that Russia would not come back again. Zelenskyy also thought that Putin was not serious about peaceful negotiation.¹¹¹ In Zelenskyy’s eyes Putin’s plan was in particular simply to “manipulate the President of the United States of America’s desire to achieve peace.”¹¹² Zelen-

/opinion/columns/guest/2024/10/23/donald-trump-10-most-destructive-immoral-cons-election/75736792007/ (accessed 24. 5. 2025).

108 David E. Sanger et al., “Trump’s New Position on the War in Ukraine: Not My Problem”, in *The New York Times* (May 20, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/20/us/politics/trump-ukraine-russia.html> (accessed 13. 6. 2025).

109 Ibid.

110 Piotr Sauer, “Putin ‘Ready for Negotiations’ with Trump on Ukraine War,” in *The Guardian* (January 24, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/24/vladimir-putin-ready-for-negotiations-donald-trump-ukraine-war-russia> (accessed 24. 1. 2025).

111 Bloomberg Podcasts, *Ukraine Needs US, China Assistance for Peace: Volodymyr Zelenskyy Full Interview* (January 23, 2025), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3ISFxDZcM> (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

112 The President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Vluchannja “Shahediv” u Budynky v Brovarah ta Glevasi – Tse Drony, Jaki Vyrobleni Vzhe v Rosiji – Zvervennja Prezydenta [The Hits from Shaheds in Houses Located in Brovary and Hlevakha – These Are Drones That Are Already Produced in Russia – the President’s Communication] (accessed 24. 1. 2025), <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vluchannya-shahediv-u-budynki-v-brovarah-ta-glevasi-ce-droni-95701> (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

skyy's reservations concerning negotiations were understandable, especially if attention was paid to predictions that it would probably cost Ukraine all the occupied territories.¹¹³

Nevertheless, in a few months the negotiations between the two countries started again after all. That has been happening in the time in which this article was at the final stage of preparation for publication. The first of these new talks took place in 2025 on May 16. It showed to Ukraine that actually Russian side demanded the whole territories of three regions (Donetsk in the east of Ukraine, Zaporizhzhia in the south-east and Kherson in the south), which at the time Russian troops had only been able to occupy partially. In addition, the Russian President Putin refused to meet with President Zelenskyy and the latter accused Putin again of having no real desire to stop the war.¹¹⁴ The second round of talks then took place on 2 June 2025.¹¹⁵

In general Russia and Ukraine meantime are focusing on military development, attempting to show their strength¹¹⁶ and primarily concerned in

113 NV, More European Partners of Ukraine Lean Toward "Land for Peace" Talks Following Trump's Win (November 13, 2024), <https://english.nv.ua/nation/more-european-partners-of-ukraine-lean-toward-land-for-peace-talks-following-trump-s-win-50466225.html> (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

114 Marek Menkiszak and Tadeusz Iwanski, "Sham Dialogue: the Istanbul Talks Between Ukraine and Russia," in *The Centre for Eastern Studies* (May 19, 2025), <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-05-19/sham-dialogue-istanbul-talks-between-ukraine-and-russia> (accessed 25. 5. 2025).

115 Marta Vashchuk and Michael Shank, "Why Ukraine peace talks are failing," in *Al Jazeera* (June 12, 2024), <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2025/6/12/why-ukraine-peace-talks-are-failing> (accessed 13. 6. 2025).

116 On Ukraine: Ukrainian National News, "Zelensky Announced New Agreements for Investments in Ukrainian Weapons Production" (May 27, 2025), <https://unn.ua/en/news/zelensky-announced-new-agreements-for-investments-in-ukrainian-weapons-production> (accessed 13. 6. 2025); Kateryna Kuzmuk and Lorenzo Scarazzato, "The Transformation of Ukraine's Arms Industry Amid War with Russia", in *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute* (February 21, 2025), <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2025/transformation-ukraines-arms-industry-amid-war-russia> (accessed 13. 6. 2025); in particular the attention is paid to to the Ukrainian President's vision that negotiation for just peace can be reached only through strength growing with more weapons, see Konstantin Katyshev, "Zelenskyy Prokomentuvav Vidhid ZSU z Vugledaru" [Zelenskyy Commented on the Withdrawal of the Ukrainian Armed Forces from Vugledar], in *Korespondent*, <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/4720887-zelenskyi-prokomentuvav-vidkhid-zsu-z-vuhledaru> (accessed 3. 12. 2024). As for Russia, see Andrew Osborn, "Putin Orders Russian Army to Become Second Largest After China's at 1.5 Million-Strong," in *Reuters* (September 16, 2024), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-orders-russian-army-grow-by-180000>

not appearing to be weak. The two parties are far from showing compassion to each other, producing what Marta Vashchuk and Michael Shank call “tit-for-tat escalations” which threaten to get “even further out of control.”¹¹⁷ In such a situation it is quite difficult to expect any imaginable talk between the two sides of the conflict where they are ready to speak about their own possible sinfulness or mistakes in relation to this war. In the context of just peacemaking strategy, with such tendencies at work, it is quite difficult to hope for effective reconciliation. However this does not nullify the interest in negotiations, in particular from the side of Ukraine. There are definitely voices in Ukraine emphasizing the necessity of negotiations from Ukraine as we saw in the second section.

One such voice, from the military field, expressed in this readiness “his concern that his son – also a soldier – could spend much of his life fighting and that his grandson might one day inherit an endless conflict.”¹¹⁸ Certainly these people are likely to be far from seeing Ukraine as needing to repent for something that could lead to war. Their approach can be simply a pragmatic step to take in order to stop the war. As for the people who can admit sinfulness on the Ukrainian side, they can be found in Ukraine too (for example, in the Evangelical churches),¹¹⁹ but this group is not seen for now as an active player pushing for negotiations.

When it comes to the problem-solving ability of negotiations, it needs to be admitted that it is better not to absolutize its efficacy, nor that of the figures involved. There was place for negotiations during the conflict between Russian and Ukraine before the full war started in 2022 and even at the beginning of war. So, for example, there were the Minsk agreements in 2014 and 2015, which nevertheless did not prevent full-scale war.¹²⁰ No

-soldiers-become-15-million-strong-2024-09-16/ (accessed 24. 1. 2025); or Kateryna Stepanenko et al., “Russian Force Generation and Technological Adaptations,” in *The Institute for the Study of War* (June 11, 2025), <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounders/russian-force-generation-and-technological-adaptations-update-june-11-2025> (accessed 13. 6. 2025).

117 Vashchuk and Shank, “Why Ukraine peace talks are failing.”

118 Hall et al., “Ukraine Faces Its Darkest Hour.”

119 Oleksandr Kalyna, “Chomu Bog Dopustyv Vjnu v Ukrajinu?” [Why God Allowed War in Ukraine?], in *Tserkva “Dim Evangelija”* [“House of Gospel” Church] (n. d.), <https://baptist.vn.ua/blog/1259-chomu-v-ukraini-viina> (accessed 25. 1. 2025).

120 Lidia Powirska, “Through the Ashes of the Minsk Agreements,” in *Epicentre* (May 18, 2022), <https://epicenter.wcfia.harvard.edu/blog/through-ashes-minsk-agreements> (accessed 26. 1. 2025).

results were achieved during negotiations in 2022, though the sides seemed very close to agreement.¹²¹ In relation to the Minsk agreements, it is worth noting that even Jimmy Carter tried to assist in those negotiations, suggesting, for example, to the USA President Obama not to pour oil on flames through sending weapons to Ukraine.¹²² However it is difficult to find that something significant was achieved through Carter's assistance in solving this conflict, which culminated in the war that broke out in 2022. In addition neither have the new talks between Ukraine and Russian in 2025, mentioned above, brought any peace.

In the end future negotiations between Ukraine and Russia could even lead to unfair or unjust compromise, especially for the more suffering Ukrainian side. But maybe in this case success could be measured in terms of saving human lives in the face of ongoing conflict with a bigger power. David Gushee, reflecting on Stassen's possible reaction to such an end, argued that he would have stayed on the side of those deciding to sign such an agreement.¹²³ And we remember that Stassen valued justice greatly, but would probably give priority to saving human lives.

Obviously not all may believe in negotiations with Russia. There is certainly room to assume that Russia may be interested in destroying Ukraine as a nation¹²⁴ and that any compromises in this case would serve more as a temporary interruption before war resumes with Russia trying to accomplish its primary goal. However, maybe this is exactly what should be precluded again through putting more efforts in peaceful dialogues. And the conversations should be more than simply representing an "arithmetical approach" as Vashchuk and Shank note in relation to the most recent talks between Ukraine and Russia, at least at the time of writing in summer 2025. In this case we have sides coming in order to "add a concession here, subtract a demand

121 Anton Troianovski et al., "Ukraine-Russia Peace Is as Elusive as Ever: But in 2022 They Were Talking," in *The New York Times* (June 15, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/06/15/world/europe/ukraine-russia-ceasefire-deal.html> (accessed 27. 1. 2025).

122 Daniel Schearf, "Carter Pleased with Russia's Embrace of Minsk Agreement," in VOA (April 30, 2015), <https://www.voanews.com/a/carter-pleased-with-russia-embrace-of-minsk-agreement/2743389.html> (accessed 26. 1. 2025).

123 David Gushee, personal email to the author, 14 November 2024.

124 Robert Person, "Why Ukraine Shouldn't Negotiate with Putin," in *The Journal of Democracy* 36:1 (January 2025), <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/why-ukraine-shouldnt-negotiate-with-putin/> (accessed 15. 6. 2025).

there. Each side calculates whether the outcome adds up in its favour.”¹²⁵ From their perspective there should be place for talks about “trauma, identity, loss” or “justice, accountability and healing.”¹²⁶ It would also be excellent to find a place for a conversation on the topic of religion, given the fact that both countries profess Christianity for the most part. Here it is possible to recall the words of President Carter, cited earlier in this section, on religion as a “healing resource” for such purposes. Perhaps there was meanwhile an opportunity to think about universal sinfulness and crying over one’s own part in the spread of pain in this world.

Eventually the future will show if additional negotiations will be able to produce a positive outcome. Only then will it be possible to make further evaluation of the efficacy of negotiations as tools for bringing peace in such situation as in Ukraine.

Conclusion

In this article I have paid attention to Glen Stassen’s vision of how to go about solving conflicts, which served as the focus of his activity. We saw that he discovered the foundation for his vision in the Sermon on the Mount and in a specific way of interpreting the passages from it. Stassen spoke of the triadic structure in which the emphasis is made on the third part. This part gives the solution to different conflicts, speaking about the necessity to look for peaceful reconciliation.

In terms of the efficacy of Stassen’s vision in real life, we saw that history remembers very successful cases with emphasis on such reconciliations. In particular for Stassen the inspiring ones were found in the life and activity of another Baptist, the former American President Jimmy Carter. As for the situation in Ukraine theoretically negotiation as a tool could be productive, but time will show if such a tool will work for the situation in Ukraine. At least the emphasis on the necessity of negotiations as the best solution are constantly made after the new USA President Donald Trump came to government and became involved as a third-party in this conflict. Already even the first talks started in 2025 between two sides of war in Ukraine due to the

¹²⁵ Vashchuk and Shank, “Why Ukraine peace talks are failing.”

¹²⁶ Ibid.

USA emphasis and we will see if there will be any result from negotiations to end the conflict in Ukraine.

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