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## **Christian War Ethics and the Just War Philosophy**

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This paper is the culmination of an extensive study of war ethics. The conclusions of the study are based upon Biblical research, Church history, and a survey of contemporary clergy. The intent is to identify and answer many of the moral questions that surround a Christian's participation in war and provides a defense for the Just War philosophy. This effort began as a quest to answer personal questions, but I decided to publish the results with hopes that they will be beneficial to others who share in similar questions.

My conclusions arose out of prayer and study as I sought God's wisdom. I offer my insight but would encourage the reader to beseech God as well, the only true source of absolute truth. May God be glorified.

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## Christopher B. Watkins

### INTRODUCTION

“War is a dreadful thing, and I can respect an honest pacifist, though I think he is entirely mistaken. What I cannot understand is this sort of semi-pacifism you get nowadays which gives people the idea that though you have to fight, you ought to do it with a long face and as if you were ashamed of it.”

- C.S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

Issues of war and violence are pivotal questions that everyone embraces at some point in their life. The complexities of the topic challenge the ideals and dreams that most have for their own life as well as the lives of others. Christians are confident in their beliefs of war and violence since they have the benefit of a set of moral standards delivered from God and recorded in a book called the Bible...right? Well, maybe not exactly. Sometimes Christians can even feel a sense of greater conflict with regards to this issue than another person who is not expected to be as caring or forgiving. How does a Christian reconcile love and war? The concept of violence and war does necessitate a response in the context of life and morality. C.S. Lewis (1898-1963 AD), one of the greatest intellectual giants of the twentieth century, had amazing insight into the human character. His quote, shown above, is a great summary of the phenomenon prevalent in the Christian community today. It is a troubling fact that some Christians can make claim to a moral authority, yet at the same time be drowned in insecurity when it comes to issues of war and violence. Life is sacred. Therefore, it is imperative for Christians to come to moral definition in issues of life and death. A melancholy perspective on war is most likely a result of confusion and frustration that has led to an abandonment of the search for truth. It is safe to say that every Christian desires to become secure in their beliefs about war. This study attempts to confront the main issues of war and violence, which should hopefully help lead the Christian to engage their own questions and strengthen their own beliefs.

This study will explore the Christian's moral obligations with regards to war. Once Christians are able to reason about war, then they will be able to stand up for what they believe, thus setting an example for others who struggle with similar questions. So what do Christians believe? What should they believe? How do they interpret the Scriptures that relate to war?

This paper presents a study that attempts to answer these questions. Through this research, God's word is investigated, the writings of the early church fathers are analyzed, and other contemporary published scholars are referenced. As part of this study, survey results of ordained clergy located in the Southeastern Michigan area is presented. Hopefully this analysis will help to solidify the thoughts of those who are burdened with doubt pertaining to issues relating to the sanctity of life and war.

The conclusions of this study are presented along with the supporting logic, reasoning and data utilized in their development. The following points about war and violence are presented. First, Christians should eliminate doubt and seek clarity in their convictions regarding war and violence. Next, data will be presented that suggests that a morally justifiable war exists and is governed by the “Just War Philosophy”. The Just War philosophy contains a set of criteria that can be used to gauge whether a war is just or unjust. As a result, even while a just war exists, war is not the just solution for all conflicts. It is shown that there is both a Biblical basis for this philosophy, as well as a set of logical rationale based upon God's character that upholds this methodology of discerning the morality of war. Finally, the Just War philosophy is shown to be supported as a principle of God's morality by people of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the early church fathers, and the current ordained leadership for today's church [in Southeastern Michigan].

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Harper, 1980) 119.

## THREE VIEWS OF WAR

Although there have been a multitude of views on war, the views within the church can generally be categorized as one of the following platforms: Pacifism, Just War philosophy, and the Crusaders. To be clear the term “crusaders” is used to describe a category of war philosophy, and is not to be mistaken with the medieval wars referred to as the “Crusades”. Adherers to each of the three categories of war can be found in society today, with many different flavors comprising a wide range of ideas and philosophies. A brief generalization of each war philosophy is provided below.

### *Pacifism*

The first of the three platforms is Pacifism, which embodies a variety of thought. In general all Pacifists are opposed to most (or all) war activities. Three predominate forms of Pacifism in the church are “Biblical Nonresistance”, “Christian Pacifism”, and “Passive Resistance”. Biblical Nonresistance, is defined by Herman A. Hoyt, formerly of Grace Theological Seminary, as a belief that gives Christians the moral authority to participate in a war, but only as noncombatants.<sup>2</sup> Christian Pacifism, on the other hand, is defined by Myron S. Augsburger, formerly of Eastern Mennonite College, and is even more restrictive as it does not provide any moral mechanism for Christians to participate in any war in any capacity. According to this philosophy, Christians are to have nothing whatsoever to do with war<sup>2</sup>. The third form of Pacifism, Passive Resistance, encourages for action to be taken in unjust situations, but dictates that the aggression should be in delivered in a non-violent form. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are two high-profile examples of Passive Resistance. The different flavors of Pacifism provide many different reasons for non-participation, but all forms generally fall into these three categories of involvement.

### *Just War Philosophy*

The Just War philosophers differ from the pacifists as they believe that there are times when war is morally justified. The Just War philosophy exemplifies a doctrine that is used to govern moral decisions of war, but yet makes a distinction between the authority of the government and that of individuals. Arthur F. Holmes of Wheaton College describes the Just War philosophy such that Christians may fight in a defensive war as long as their reasons for participating in the war and their actions during the war adhere to the time-proven rules for a moral war. These rules are traditionally known as the *jus ad bellum*, Latin for “The right to initiate war”, and the *jus in bello*, Latin for “The law during war”.<sup>2</sup> According to this philosophy, the *jus ad bellum* must be satisfied in full before a war can be fought on moral grounds. Once the war has begun, all the rules contained within the *jus in bello* govern whether the war remains rooted in justice.

*jus ad bellum* – Latin: “The right to initiate war”<sup>3</sup>

- *Just Cause*: force may be used only to correct a grave, public evil, i.e., aggression or massive violation of the basic rights of whole populations;
- *Legitimate Authority*: only duly constituted public authorities may use deadly force or wage war;
- *Right Intention*: force may be used only in a truly just cause and solely for that purpose;
- *Probability of Success*: arms may not be used in a futile cause or in a case where disproportionate measures are required to achieve success;
- *Proportionality*: the overall destruction expected from the use of force must be outweighed by the good to be achieved;
- *Last Resort*: force may be used only after all peaceful alternatives have been seriously tried and exhausted.

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<sup>2</sup> Clouse, Robert G., et al. War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981)

<sup>3</sup> “The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace: A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of ‘The Challenge of Peace,’ “ Nov. 17, 1993. Copyright 1994, United States Catholic Conference, [http://www.natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm](http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm), July 9, 2003

*jus in bello* – Latin: “The law during war”<sup>4</sup>

- *Noncombatant Immunity*: civilians may not be the object of direct attack, and military personnel must take due care to avoid and minimize indirect harm to civilians;
- *Proportionality*: in the conduct of hostilities, efforts must be made to attain military objectives with no more force than is militarily necessary and to avoid disproportionate collateral damage to civilian life and property;
- *Right Intention*: even in the midst of conflict, the aim of political and military leaders must be peace with justice, so that acts of vengeance and indiscriminate violence, whether by individuals, military units or governments, are forbidden.

While the list provided above is generally accepted by most Christian just war thinkers, there is no single official list of criteria since Just War philosophy is not actually a written law, but rather an interpretation of a moral standard. Under an alternate interpretation many modern ethicists include one more criterion in the *jus ad bellum* called “Comparative Justice”:

Comparative Justice: While there may be rights and wrongs on all sides of a conflict, to override the presumption against the use of force the injustice suffered by one party must significantly outweigh that suffered by the other.<sup>5</sup>

There is a flaw in this criterion in that it assumes a stalemate if an equal amount of injustice is experienced on both sides of a conflict. Consequently both sides are morally obligated to continue living in their injustice. Admittedly, in this fallen world there are imperfections on all sides, but the absence of perfect justice does not necessitate the abandonment of justice. The idea of comparative justice is rooted in the relativistic fallacy that one cannot know where true justice lies. It tries to protect groups from growing warmongers, without regard to whether they inflict injustice upon others. However this protection against “warmongering” remains intact if there is an understanding of justice that is assumed to be based upon a universal truth, thereby allowing the remaining six criteria to form a sound basis for a just war.

It is worth noting that most adherents to the Just War philosophy do not support unjust, evil brutality that can sometimes be found in war. A just war might contain deviant commanders or soldiers that act with wrongful intentions or unjust motives to deliver unjustified brutality, torture or death of the innocent. These deviant actions are of themselves unjust, and the perpetrators will have to answer to God’s judgment. However, their actions do not necessarily deem the entire war unjust. If the war was declared for just reasons, under a just authority, and is intended to be carried out in a just manner, then the war remains a just war, albeit tainted with personal acts of injustice.

Within the framework of Just War ethics, there are two categories for a “war of defense.” The first form is the protection of the government’s own nation. Under just war doctrine, if a nation were to personally come under attack, then a war of national defense would be justified. The second form of just defense is related to the defense of the laws of God. In mainstream media, these types of wars are sometimes referred to as “human interest” wars. For example, if a nation is engaging in the unjust practice of ethnic cleansing, which clearly violates the standards set forth by God for humanity, then another government has the ethical authority to enter the offending nation to defend the laws of God and the victims of the injustice.

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<sup>4</sup> “The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace: A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of ‘The Challenge of Peace,’ “ Nov. 17, 1993. Copyright 1994, United States Catholic Conference, [http://www.natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm](http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm), July 9, 2003

<sup>5</sup> “The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace: A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of ‘The Challenge of Peace,’ “ Nov. 17, 1993. Copyright 1994, United States Catholic Conference, [http://www.natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm](http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm), July 9, 2003

## ***Crusaders***

Like the Just War philosophers, the Crusaders also believe that there are times when a war is morally justified, however the Crusaders are more liberal in their ethical standards. The Crusade platform, sometimes called the “Preventative War”, allows for an array of beliefs, all of which provide liberal license to proactively fight wars under the cover of a moral authority. A crusade not only consists of a defensive war, but also extends its blessings to proactive measures, which wage war to realize a new cause, or to set right a past act. What Crusaders typically call “just punishment”, Just War philosophers categorize as acts of wrongful vengeance.

While acting as president-designate of the Society of Christian Ethics in the United States and Canada, Joseph L. Allen stated that a crusade is typically comprised of the following four characteristics<sup>6</sup>. Number one, Crusaders see a justifiable war as a conflict between forces of good and evil. Crusaders perceive a war as a situation where God supports the crusaders and their cause, while He is opposed to their enemies and the enemies cause. Number two, Crusaders characteristically pursue absolute and unlimited goals. Due to the lack of governing criteria, the goal of war becomes an undefined “victory” for the spirit of a Crusader. Number three, when warfare is viewed as the struggle of forces of good against evil for unlimited, absolute goals, the means of war become unrestrained. Crusaders do not tend to believe in the ethic of proportionality. They may engage in an unrestrained, merciless attack that is not befitting of the crime. They believe that it is more important to ensure that enough force was used to limit future acts of injustice, then to take a risk that the offending nation will commit the crime again. Number four, a crusade approach tends to promote total war. All resources military, civilian, and material of one side are mobilized against the whole society of the other military, civilian, and material. Typically, a total war ignores noncombatant immunity and greatly increases the death toll.

Admittedly the viewpoints vary between different Crusaders, however the abolition of evil in order to further God’s peace tends to be a primary motivator. The “probability of success” is really the only governing criterion. This criterion used by itself is dangerous as it can be used to justify the conquest of lands, peoples, and property. It allows for bullying and the unethical treatment of innocent civilians in the name of “ensuring peace.” The crusaders believe that they are punishing the wicked under a divine moral authority. The Just War philosophers and the Pacifist disagree, and do not believe that the crusaders are working within the bounds of an appropriate moral authority.

## **THREE LEVELS OF WAR AUTHORITY**

Before the full analysis of war ethics can be presented, it is important to setup the context for the three levels of war authority. A point that will be justified later is that God acts as the supreme authority, providing standards for all morality, including war ethics. God then authorizes governments as a secondary authority which are responsible for both the physical execution and restraint of war activities as appropriate. The lowest authoritative level then is that of the individual. An individual is subject to the government’s authority and to God’s authority; the government is subject to God’s authority; and God is the ultimate authoritative figure. As the source of moral authority, all of God’s decisions are by default moral. The distinction between authorities becomes important when analyzing the examples set forth by each level of authority. A lower level of authority does not have the same powers as the higher authority. Just because a government is authorized to take certain war actions, does not mean that an individual has the authority to take the same actions. Likewise, neither the government nor the individual can mimic God’s involvement in war without being extended the proper authority to do so by God. These three levels of authority will be further established as this analysis is developed in more detail in the following sections of this study.

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<sup>6</sup> Allen, Joseph L. WAR: [A Primer for Christians](#) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991) 9-12.

## ANALYSIS OF WAR IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

### *Old Testament*

When looking for God's direction, the Christian should refer to the authority that the Bible provides on the topic of war. It is clear in reading the Old Testament that God has commanded nations into war, most notably the nation of Israel. If God is the ultimate source of moral authority, and God commands a particular war, then by default the war is assumed to be just, and the existence of a just war is then established. This establishment does not presume all future wars to be morally justified, but it does provide insight into God's character that a just war does exist. Too numerous to list in full, some examples in the Old Testament include:

#### God commands Israel to go to war

*"Hear, O Israel, today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory." Deuteronomy 20:3-4 (NIV)*

*However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the LORD your God has commanded you. Deuteronomy 20:16-17 (NIV)*

#### God commands Gideon to go to war

*"But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together." Judges 6:15-16*

#### God commands David to go to war

*Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The LORD answered him, "Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you." 2 Samuel 5:18-19 (NIV)*

#### David sings to the Lord after deliverance from his enemies and Saul

*It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; Psalms 18:32-35 (NIV)*

#### God supports Judah in battle

*The LORD Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle. From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler. Together they will be like mighty men trampling the muddy streets in battle. Because the LORD is with them, they will fight and overthrow the horsemen. Zechariah 10:3b-5 (NIV)*

#### God defends the oppressed, and rids injustice that man may terrify no more

*You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more. Psalm 10:17-18 (NIV)*

#### There is a time for everything, even a time to kill

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build Ecc 3:1-3(NIV)*

In the analysis of the Old Testament, it may become apparent that God does not appear to adhere to the standards of the Just War's *jus in bello* clause. A rather forthright example was provided in Deuteronomy 20:16-17 where God commands Israel to "not leave alive anything that breathes". But remember that the Just War doctrine sets forth the standards for governments and people, not God. The example in Deuteronomy establishes the existence of a just war, but does not provide authority for anyone but God to wage such a war. However the establishment of a war considered just by God is important in understanding the ethics of war.

## ***New Testament***

The Old Testament indicates that certain wars were just, and even states that there is a time to kill, but the New Testament does not address the issue as directly. Irrefutably, the New Testament devotes much time to promoting peace, but do teachings of peace necessarily rule out war in all cases? Not necessarily. There are many questions to be answered when attempting to understand the New Testament. Do teachings of peace allow for the establishment of peace through war? Were war and the act of soldiering forbidden? To better answer these questions, one can look at what Jesus taught about war and violence. In addition, as direct witnesses of Jesus' sovereign authority while he walked the earth, a review is conducted of what the New Testament Christians believed about war. Finally, after Jesus returned to Heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to govern the Church as it grew upon His teaching, the early Church fathers carried on Jesus' relatively recent message. What were the teachings of the early Church fathers?

As we begin the New Testament analysis, what did Jesus have to say about war and violence? Pacifists tend to use the following versus to support their claims, but as explained, they are normally taken out of context.

### Jesus teaches to turn the other cheek

*"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matthew 5:38-39(NIV)*

Some Pacifists point to this verse as proof that Jesus preached the doctrine of nonresistance, thus making all war unethical by Jesus' standards. In fact it is generally credited as the basis for the name of the doctrine of nonresistance. To understand this verse fully, it is important to realize the authoritative context. Jesus was speaking to the individual, not to the authority of the government. For that matter he was not speaking to the authority of parents or policemen either. It should be clear that a parent is not supposed to "turn the other cheek" if their child is rooted in evil disobedience. Parents are given the authority by God to raise their child in the framework of God's laws and to discipline the child if need be. Jesus is not instructing parents to "turn the other cheek", nor is He instructing governments to "turn the other cheek" when confronted with evil injustice. In this passage Jesus is laying out standards for personal Christian behavior, and not for other levels of authority.

To understand more clearly the personal behavior of which Jesus was speaking, the translation of this verse is important. Jesus was referring to the Old Testament Jewish law of retaliation that was the basis for proportional punishment of crimes. This law was upheld within the Jewish courts and was improperly used as a tool of revenge outside of the courts. According to Ralph Earle and Walter W. Wessel, contributors to the Zondervan NASB Study Bible commentary, the word "resist" used in verse 39 is believed to have meant "in a court of law". The original Greek verb **ῥαπίζω (rhapizō)** translated as "strikes" used in verse 39 literally means "slaps you with the back of the hand," in other terms, "an insult." What Jesus was trying to impress upon the people is that they were better off if they did not rely on the court of law to settle disputes. Rather they should aim to settle matters outside of court, even if it means that they humbly endure insult. This point is further highlighted in the context of the chapter if you look earlier at verse 25:

*"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison." Matthew 5:25 (NIV)*

### Jesus rebukes the use of a sword

*"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword." Matthew 26:52 (NIV)*

There are a few issues surrounding this passage. First, this verse is not directed to governments, but to individuals as is evident since Jesus is talking to Simon Peter, an individual. Nor does Jesus state that all battle is condemned. Rather Jesus was speaking to Simon Peter, affirming that he was not acting under the proper authority. When this verse is read in its full context, we find that Simon Peter (as read in John's account – John 18:10) has cut off the ear of a soldier, in an attempt to stop him from arresting Jesus. Jesus rebukes Peter so



that His mission on earth can be fulfilled – the arrest and death on the cross for the atonement of humanity’s sin. This is an example of violence that was not executed under the proper authority. As such it was prohibiting Jesus from completing His work. Jesus’ statement does not rule out violence in all circumstances. In full context Jesus reiterates that He has the authority to declare the use of force using twelve legions of angels, but Simon Peter does not have this authority:

*Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"* Matthew 26:51-54 (NIV)

#### Jesus preaches the beatitude of the peacemaker

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.* Matthew 5:9 (NIV)

Most will agree that peace is always preferred over war, however it is necessary for both sides in a conflict to be peacemakers in order for peace to be possible. Yet using this logic, one can still be a peacemaker when the other party demands a war and leaves the peacemaker with no choice. To this end, Romans 12:8 adds further clarity as to the duty of a peacemaker, “*as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*” (NIV).

The aforementioned verses, while typically used by pacifists, Just War philosophers, and Crusaders alike also point out that Jesus makes further statements that demonstrate that He supported the use of the sword in certain conflicts.

#### Jesus brings a sword to earth, not peace

*"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.* Matthew 10:34 (NIV)

In this verse Jesus is not referring to the literal use of a sword, but rather uses it as a metaphorical symbol portraying the fact that the inevitable result of Jesus’ coming is conflict between believers and unbelievers. True peace will not be attained on earth, but only in Heaven. Even though Jesus is not speaking of an actual sword, why would he use it as an analogy if a sword were considered an instrument of evil?

#### Jesus instructs the disciples to buy a sword

*He said to them, "But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. The disciples said, "See, Lord, here are two swords." "That is enough," he replied.* Luke 22:36,38

This verse occurs in the context of the Last Supper when Jesus is preparing the disciples for the difficult days that were approaching. Jesus would be betrayed and the lives of the disciples would be in danger. In this passage, Jesus is not addressing a government, but a group of individuals. Therefore this verse cannot be used to support a government led war. Nonetheless, in Jesus own words, it appears that self-defense using violent means is justified in certain personal circumstances.

It becomes apparent from studying Jesus’ teachings in the Bible that He never really addressed the authority of the government to wage war. He never spoke for, nor against, such an ethic. However he did address issues on the personal level of violence, which support the use of personal force in circumstances of self-defense. Now that we have studied the teachings that came directly from Jesus Himself, let’s study the words of others in the New Testament who are products of Jesus ministry. As direct witnesses, these people should accurately reflect His whole ministry, including both the written and unwritten words of Jesus. Generally, Pacifists like to point to the apostle Peter:

#### Peter speaks about enduring unjust suffering

*For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.* 1 Peter 2:19-21 (NIV)

The problem for Pacifists is that this verse does not condemn a response of war to end unjust suffering. It is most likely that Pacifists, Just War thinkers, and Crusaders alike would probably commend someone who suffers unjustly. As an example, think about a prisoner of war (POW) that is treated poorly. Without exception if these people are able to return home, they are highly celebrated, and great appreciation is shown. Normally, the POW is overpowered, but if they can overtake their captors, then by all means they should. Peter does not condemn such an action. Rather Peter addresses the commendation of those who endure unjust suffering for doing good. He does not deny the right of the suffering people to end the injustice if they are capable of doing so.

Paul instructs the Romans to live at peace with everyone

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:17-18 (NIV)*

Ironically, this verse is used by both Pacifists and Just War thinkers to support their points. The Pacifists focus on “live at peace with everyone”, which on the outset seems to exclude war. But the Just War thinkers also point out Paul’s qualifier, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you”. What should be pointed out first is the audience- the Roman church, not the Roman government. The Roman government operates under a different war authority than the people of the Roman church. Even so, Just War philosophers cite this verse to support the criterion of “Last Resort”. In personal situations, or in conflicts between nations, a peaceful resolution should be obtained if possible, but conflict cannot always be avoided.

Paul instructs Timothy to endure hardship like a good soldier of Christ

*Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup>No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs--he wants to please his commanding officer. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 (NIV)*

If soldiering were an immoral occupation, then Paul certainly would not have exemplified a soldier as a commendable follower of Christ. The fact that he beckons Timothy to be a good soldier of Christ must mean that there are moral grounds for the act of soldiering and for the duties of war that come with the job.

## **HISTORY OF WAR AND THE POST NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

In the Old Testament, the establishment of a just war is clear. Even though there is more debate about the New Testament message, after a thorough analysis it seems evident that war is not prohibited, and violence may even be encouraged in certain circumstances such as self-defense. To gain more understanding, the writings of the early church fathers can be studied. The early church fathers provide valuable insight since they are products of Jesus’ ministry that were not subject to a discredited theology due to time-fostered memory loss. They lived in the time period that immediately followed Jesus’ death and resurrection. Their testimony should be an accurate indicator of the message that Jesus left behind.

When studying the early church fathers, it becomes evident that there is a distinct change in attitude towards military service and war that is hinged on the point in time when Constantine, a Christian emperor, rose to power in 312 A.D. Although it may seem obvious that a Christian ruler would foster an atmosphere that is more amicable to the church, there are many subtleties that are commonly overlooked when analyzing the period before Constantine and the period following his rise to power. These subtleties shape the background for the time and help to provide context for the church’s viewpoints as spoken by the church fathers. The context of the political climate surrounding the church will be highlighted as we study the evolving perspective of the church fathers on war in the following analysis.

At the start of this analysis, the focus will lie on the time immediately following Jesus ascension into Heaven, the time before Constantine. It is a common and accepted belief that the first century Christians were generally opposed to participation and involvement with the imperial Roman military. Today, many Christians who are opposed to participation in war point to the first century Christians as evidence that Jesus’ followers were Pacifists. The underlying assumption is that Jesus must have taught them to be Pacifist. However this reasoning becomes weak in the light of an examination of the context of the historical facts. Before the time of the Christian emperor, Constantine, Christians were not active in the military because of the role that pagan

religions practiced in the military. In joining the Roman army, the inductee was required to take an oath to the pagan gods of Rome, which included the Emperor. For this reason, Christians did not want to be in the military, and for that matter, the Roman soldiers did not want them. At the time of Jesus, the Roman military was opposed to Christian involvement, as they were suspicious of the group and what their intentions might be. The army was worried that this growing group of people who were rallying around a leader named Jesus could have political plans in mind. They were worried that these plans included overthrowing the current government. It is hard to fault their reasoning since Jesus had been referred to as the “King of the Jews” ever since His birth.

Starting in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Christian involvement in the military steadily grew and peaked during the reign of the Christian Emperor, Constantine. This is especially important because it indicates that the Just War philosophy is not a relatively new concept, nor is it separated from Christ’s direct followers by a vast timeframe. The early Christians of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century are only one or two generations separated from Christ’s life on earth, and thus his world-changing teachings are still relatively fresh. During Constantine’s reign, the soldiers went so far as to garnish their military clothing and equipment with Christian symbols. The Chi-Rho, a symbol representing Christ, was a common Christian symbol that adorned the military’s uniform (see picture 1)<sup>7</sup>. If Jesus had truly taught Pacifism, then is it plausible to believe that his teaching on the subject would have fallen away so quickly that Christians had already forgotten by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century? How could the other teachings of Jesus still be recorded, remembered and lived out 2000 years later, while such an important issue was forgotten in merely 100 years? The more plausible argument is that Christians had to wait to participate in the military until Jesus’ influence on earth had time to permeate its way into the heart of the Roman military that was plagued with pagan practices of worship and idolatry. The notion that Jesus did not preach Pacifism is substantiated by Dr. Darrell Cole, Ph.D., an assistant professor of religion at Drew University, a student of Yale University (masters degree in religion), and Duke University (masters degree in theology). Dr. Cole states “We have very little evidence that any early Church Father (besides Tertullian, who was later declared a heretic) held an unambiguously negative view of war. It simply cannot be demonstrated that the early Christians, in general, viewed either the military or the state as inherently evil, and hence completely off-limits to their participation.”<sup>8</sup>



**Picture 1: Roman Coin - Valentinian I 364-375 A.D.**  
**Although not necessarily a depiction of a**  
**just battle scene, Valentinian is dragging a**  
**captive while holding a labarum with a Chi-Rho,**  
**a symbol of Christ**

### ***Pre-Constantine***

Clement of Rome (30 – 100 A.D.), a student of the Apostle John, and traditionally identified as the third successor of Peter in Rome<sup>9</sup>, provides the earliest non-scriptural reference to war. Clement was born right at the end of Jesus’ bodily ministry on earth. He had a first-hand account of the early church as it built itself upon the teachings of Christ. Clement grew up to become part of the church and in the “First Letter of Clement”, a pastoral epistle written to the Corinthians in 95 A.D., he makes reference to military service. In this passage Clement elevates the act of soldiering as an example for Christian service. It is worth noting that most of the writings of the early Christians never directly addressed war, neither making a direct case for or against participation in wartime activities. Clement is no exception.

<sup>7</sup> This coin belongs to the author’s personal collection of ancient artifacts

<sup>8</sup> Cole, Darrell. *When God Says War is Right* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2003) 8.

<sup>9</sup> A Brief Chronology of Christianity after the First Century, <http://www.bible-truth.org/to-150ad.htm>, August 21, 2003

*"Let us therefore enlist ourselves, brethren, with all earnestness in His faultless ordinances. Let us mark the soldiers that are enlisted under our rulers, how exactly, how readily, how submissively, they execute the orders given them. All are not prefects, nor rulers of thousands, nor rulers of hundreds, nor rulers of fifties, and so forth; but each man in his own rank executeth the orders given by the king and the governors." First Letter of Clement 37.1-4*<sup>10</sup>

Ignatius of Antioch (35-107 A.D.) is believed to have been taught by one or more Jesus' original twelve disciples.<sup>11</sup> Ignatius was arrested and was en route to Rome to be martyred when he wrote letters to six different churches, and one to a fellow brother in Christ, Polycarp. In his letter to the Church in Ephesus, Ignatius mentions war, but focuses his words on peace. In doing so, he does not declare war to be unjust.

*"Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. For when ye come frequently together in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and his "fiery darts"(6) urging to sin fall back ineffectual. For your concord and harmonious faith prove his destruction, and the torment of his assistants. Nothing is better than that peace which is according to Christ, by which all war, both of aerial and terrestrial spirits, is brought to an end." -The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians, Chapter XIII*<sup>12</sup>

Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.) was a Palestinian philosopher converted to Christianity who eventually became a martyr<sup>13</sup>. In his apologies, he wrote about how he and fellow Christians turned away from their war-mongering attitudes. Polycarp speaks of evils that can occur in war, but does not necessarily declare all war evil. In his transformed life, he speaks about *refraining* from war, but not *abstaining*.

*"We who formerly murdered one another now refrain from making war even upon our enemies. (c. 160), ANF 1.176." -Justin Martyr*<sup>14</sup>

*"We who were filled with war, and mutual slaughter, and every wickedness, have each through the whole earth changed our warlike weapons,--our swords into ploughshares, and our spears into implements of tillage." -Justin Martyr*<sup>15</sup>

Athenogoras (2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D.), was a Greek philosopher turned Christian apologist<sup>16</sup>. In his letter entitled "A Plea for the Christians", written about 177 A.D., he makes a statement towards peace that does not mention war directly. In fact it is generally understood that the bloodshed that he is referring to is that of the gladiator combats, which is far removed from the ethics of war.<sup>17</sup>

*"We have learned, not only not to return blow for blow, nor to go to law with those who plunder and rob us, but to those who smite us on one side of the face to offer the other side also"*<sup>18</sup> -Athenagoras

Tertullian (160-220 A.D.) is the first articulate Pacifist in the Christian Church. Tertullian was from Carthage, North Africa, raised as a pagan and turned Christian apologist. Although a Pacifist, what is clear is his motivation for his viewpoint: the idolatrous oath mandated by the pagan army.

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<sup>10</sup> First Letter of Clement 37.1-4, trans. and ed., J. B. Lightfoot,

<http://wesley.nnu.edu/noncanon/fathers/ante-nic/clement/1clement.htm>, August 21, 2003

<sup>11</sup> Robert Nguyen Cramer, War – as viewed by early Christians, as described by 16 leading Christians before 313 A.D., version 3.3.2.1, <http://www.bibletexts.com/terms/war.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>12</sup> Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, Chapter XIII, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers/ANF-01/igna/ig2ephesianslong.html>, 15 September 2003

<sup>13</sup> Robert Nguyen Cramer, War – as viewed by early Christians, as described by 16 leading Christians before 313 A.D., version 3.3.2.1, <http://www.bibletexts.com/terms/war.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>14</sup> Justin Martyr, <http://www.bibletexts.com/terms/war.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>15</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew*, Chapter CX, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers/ANF-01/just/justintrypho.html#Section110>, 15 September 2003

<sup>16</sup> Robert Nguyen Cramer, War – as viewed by early Christians, as described by 16 leading Christians before 313 A.D., version 3.3.2.1, <http://www.bibletexts.com/terms/war.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>17</sup> Swift, Louis J. *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier Inc., 1983) 36.

<sup>18</sup> Athenagoras, *A plea for the Christians by Athenagoras the Athenan: Philosopher and Christian*, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers/ANF-02/ANF-02.pdf>, 15 September 2003

*"To begin with the real ground of the military crown, I think we must first inquire whether warfare is proper at all for Christians. What sense is there in discussing the merely accidental, when that on which it rests is to be condemned? Do we believe it lawful for a human oath to be superadded to one divine, for a man to come under promise to another master after Christ" - Tertullian<sup>19</sup>*

*"In that last section, decision may seem to have been given likewise concerning military service, which is between dignity and power. But now inquiry is made about this point, whether a believer may turn himself unto military service, and whether the military may be admitted unto the faith, even the rank and file, or each inferior grade, to whom there is no necessity for taking part in sacrifices or capital punishments. There is no agreement between the divine and the human sacrament the standard of Christ and the standard of the devil, the camp of light and the camp of darkness. One soul cannot be due to two masters--God and Caesar. And yet Moses carried a rod, and Aaron wore a buckle, and John (Baptist) is girt with leather and Joshua the son of Nun leads a line of march; and the People warred: if it pleases you to sport with the subject. But how will a Christian man war, nay, how will he serve even in peace, without a sword, which the Lord has taken away? For albeit soldiers had come unto John, and had received the formula of their rule; albeit, likewise, a centurion had believed; still the Lord afterward, in disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier. No dress is lawful among us, if assigned to any unlawful action." - Tertullian<sup>20</sup>*

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.) was Tertullian's Greek contemporary. In reading Clement's writings one finds that he stressed peace as preferred over war and that a Christian could live the life of a soldier just as well as any other occupation. Clement does not condemn war, but rather promotes peace. By not asking a Christian in the army to leave its service, he implicitly validates the soldier's career:

*"We do not train women like Amazons to be manly in war, since we wish even the men to be peaceable" -The Teacher I.12.98*

*"Laying hold of what is intimately and peculiarly his own as distinct from other living things, we advise him to outfit himself with godliness as an adequate preparation for his eternal journey. If you are a farmer, we say till the earth, but acknowledge the God of farmers; if you love seafaring, sail on, but remember to call upon the celestial Helmsman. If you were in the army when you were seized by the knowledge of God, obey the Commander who gives just commands. -Exhortation to the Greeks X.100.2*

Of all the early church fathers, Origen (185-254 A.D.), who like Clement was from Alexandria, is known to have made the strongest case for Pacifism. In his book called "Contra Celsum", he responded to the Roman philosopher named Celsus. In particular to this subject, Celsus charged Christians as non-patriotic due to their lack of participation in the country's military effort. In his argument, Celsus compared the social behavior of a human empire to a bee colony in order to derive a moral position for society. He paints a picture of how all bees are born with the conviction to defend their colony to the point of death. Origen attacked this rather weak argument that sets the behaviors of insects as the ultimate standard of morality for humanity. In doing so, he also made a few assertions towards war. Among other points, Origen stated that wars should be fought, but Christians should not participate except by their actions of prayer.

*"And to those enemies of our faith who require us to bear arms for the commonwealth, and to slay men, we can reply: "Do not those who are priests at certain shrines, and those who attend on certain gods, as you account them, keep their hands free from blood, that they may with hands unstained and free from human blood offer the appointed sacrifices to your gods; and even when war is upon you, you never enlist the priests in the army. If that, then, is a laudable custom, how much more so, that while others are engaged in battle, these too should engage as the priests and ministers of God, keeping their hands pure, and wrestling in prayers to God on behalf of those who are fighting in a righteous cause, and for the king who reigns righteously, that whatever is opposed to those who act righteously may be destroyed!" And as we by our prayers vanquish all demons who stir up war, and lead to the violation of oaths, and disturb the peace, we in this way are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them." - Contra Celsum VIII. LXXIII<sup>21</sup>*

Although Origen makes this pacifistic statement, in a later chapter he clarifies it with this argument for a just war, using Celsus's weak bee argument to support the opposing point:

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<sup>19</sup> Tertullian, *The Apology*, Chapter XI, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers/ANF-03/ECF03.ZIP>, 15 September 2003

<sup>20</sup> Tertullian, *The Apology*, Chapter XIX, <http://www.ccel.org/fathers/ANF-03/ECF03.ZIP>, 15 September 2003

<sup>21</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Roberts-Donaldson English Translation, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/origen168.html>, June 12, 2003

*"Perhaps also the so-called wars among the bees convey instruction as to the manner in which wars, if ever there arise a necessity for them, should be waged in a just and orderly way among men."* –*Contra Celsum* IV.LXXXII<sup>22</sup>

## ***Post-Constantine***

There was an interesting change in the Roman Empire when Constantine became emperor in 312 A.D. Being a devout Christian, Constantine setup Christianity as the state religion. As a result the persecution of the Christians ceased, and the pagan practices of the Roman army were eliminated. Before Constantine there was a mutual agreement between the army and the Christian body. The army did not readily invite Christians into the army, and Christians did not particularly want to join the army due to its pagan activities. The morality of war itself was not the central issue in the Christian's decision for non-participation. However, now that the army was regrouped under Constantine, the old reasons for non-involvement were rendered irrelevant and the only issue left to debate was the morality of war. This change is clearly seen in the writings of the Church fathers. The pre-Constantine writings were rather neutral on the topic of war, and tend to discourage participation in the army for a variety of reasons. The post-Constantine writers are much more bold in their assertions and become a greater support of the Christian led army.

Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius (240 – ~325 A.D.) converted to Christianity in 300 A.D. At that time he was relieved from his duties as the Roman teacher of rhetoric at Nicomedia, after which he became a Christian apologist<sup>23</sup>. Lactantius is especially interesting because he lived through Constantine's rise to power and as such, his writings reflect two distinct attitudes about war. His writings are a good example of how Christian's views on military service changed when Constantine reformed the military. Before Constantine became emperor, Lactantius made some very direct pacifist statements, which he later contradicted in post-Constantine writings.

In "Divine Institutes", composed between 304-311 A.D., Lactantius expressed ideas that were clearly rooted in Pacifism. At this point in time Lactantius asserted, without exception, that it was unlawful to put a man to death for any reason, including times of warfare.

*"For when God forbids us to kill, He not only prohibits us from open violence, which is not even allowed by the public laws, but He warns us against the commission of those things which are esteemed lawful among men. Thus it will be neither lawful for a just man to engage in warfare, since his warfare is justice itself, nor to accuse any one of a capital charge, because it makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word, or rather by the sword, since it is the act of putting to death itself which is prohibited. Therefore, with regard to this precept of God, there ought to be no exception at all but that it is always unlawful to put to death a man, whom God willed to be a sacred animal."* –Lactantius *Divine Institutes*<sup>24</sup>

In works written after Constantine's rise, Lactantius changes his tone towards war. In the "Epitome of the Divine Institutes" he stresses that it is important to evaluate the motivation (passion) in fighting in order to decide whether a war is good or evil.

*"For they are not evil of themselves, since God has reasonably implanted them in us; but inasmuch as they are plainly good by nature -- for they are given us for the protection of life -- they become evil by their evil use. And as bravery, if you fight in defense of your country, is a good, if against your country, is an evil, so the passions, if you employ them to good purposes, will be virtues, if to evil uses, they will be called vices."* –Lactantius, *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Roberts-Donaldson English Translation, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/origen164.html>, June 12, 2003

<sup>23</sup> Robert Nguyen Cramer, War – as viewed by early Christians, as described by 16 leading Christians before 313 A.D., version 3.3.2.1, <http://www.bibletexts.com/terms/war.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>24</sup> Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, Chapter 20, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07016.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>25</sup> Lactantius, *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, Chapter 61, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0702.htm>, 15 September 2003



A change has definitely occurred with Lactantius and is seen even more clearly in “On the Death of the Persecutors”. In this writing, Lactantius praises Licinius’ victory over Maximinus in 313 A.D. and describes the conflict as one between Christian and pagan forces. In addition he praises Constantine’s victory of Maxentius in the battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D.

*“The armies thus approaching each other, seemed on the eve of a battle. Then Daia made this vow to Jupiter, that if he obtained victory he would extinguish and utterly efface the name of the Christians. And on the following night an angel of the Lord seemed to stand before Licinius while he was asleep, admonishing him to arise immediately, and with his whole army to put up a prayer to the Supreme God, and assuring him that by so doing he should obtain victory. Licinius fancied that, hearing this, he arose, and that his monitor, who was nigh him, directed how he should pray, and in what words. Awaking from sleep, he sent for one of his secretaries, and dictated these words exactly as he had heard them: “Supreme God, we beseech Thee; Holy God, we beseech Thee; unto Thee we commend all right; unto Thee we commend our safety; unto Thee we commend our empire. By Thee we live, by Thee we are victorious and happy. Supreme Holy God, bear our prayers; to Thee we stretch forth our arms. Hear, Holy Supreme God.”* –Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors*, Chapter XLVI<sup>26</sup>

*“Where now are the surnames of the Jovii and the Herculi, once so glorious and renowned amongst the nations; surnames insolently assumed at first by Diocles and Maximian, and afterwards transferred to their successors? The Lord has blotted them out and erased them from the earth. Let us therefore with exultation celebrate the triumphs of God, and oftentimes with praises make mention of His victory; let us in our prayers, by night and by day, beseech Him to confirm for ever that peace which, after a warfare of ten years, He has bestowed on His own: and do you, above all others, my best beloved Donatus, who so well deserve to be heard, implore the Lord that it would please Him propitiously and mercifully to continue His pity towards His servants, to protect His people from the machinations and assaults of the devil, and to guard the now flourishing churches in perpetual felicity.”* – Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors*, Chapter LII<sup>27</sup>

Yet there is more. Lactantius now supports the God-granted authority of the government [emperor Constantine] to punish wrongdoers and restore justice to the earth. This is found in a passage of the “Divine Institutes” that seems to have been added some time after 321 A.D.

*“But all fictions have now been hushed, most holy Emperor [Constantine], since the time when the great God raised thee up for the restoration of the house of justice, and for the protection of the human race; for while thou rulest the Roman state, we worshippers of God are no more regarded as accursed and impious... It was therefore befitting that, in arranging the condition of the human race, the Deity should make use of thy authority and service. Whom we supplicate with daily prayers, that He may especially guard thee whom He has wished to be the guardian of the world: then that He may inspire thee with a disposition by which thou mayest always continue in the love of the divine name.”* –Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, Chapter 26<sup>28</sup>

Eusebius of Caesarea (260-339 A.D.) also enters the scene during the time of Constantine’s rise to power. He is typically credited as the “Father of Church History” as his works have provided the foundation for our knowledge of the church during the first three centuries.<sup>29</sup> When speaking to ethical standards, he describes a Christian hierarchy of priests and common followers, both of which are saved under Christ’s covenant. In order to avoid temptation and distraction he holds the bishops to a different standard (forbidden to marry, or own possessions, etc.). The lay Christians were held to looser rules of behavior, and were allowed to engage in “fighting for right”, or worded in another translation “fighting in a just war”<sup>30</sup>.

*“Two ways of life were thus given by the law of Christ to His Church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living; it admits not marriage, child-bearing, property nor the possession of wealth, but wholly and permanently separate from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone in its wealth of heavenly love!... And the other more humble, more human, permits men to join in pure nuptials and to produce children, to undertake government, to give orders to soldiers*

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<sup>26</sup> Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors*, Chapter XLVI, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0705.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>27</sup> Lactantius, *On the Death of the Persecutors*, Chapter LII, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0705.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>28</sup> Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, Chapter 26, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07017.htm>, 15 September 2003

<sup>29</sup> Everett Ferguson, “The Problems of Eusebius”, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/2001/004/1.8.html>, June 13, 2003

<sup>30</sup> Cole, Darrell. *When God Says War is Right* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2003) 13.

*fighting for right; it allows them to have minds for farming, for trade, and the other more secular interests as well as for religion...all men, whether Greeks or barbarians, have their part in the coming of salvation, and profit by the teaching of the Gospel.” - Eusebius, Proof of the Gospel, I.8*<sup>31</sup>

Whether or not one agrees with the hierarchical system that he proposes, what is interesting to note is that Eusebius does make one of the first references to such a thing as a “Just War”.

Basil (329-379 A.D.), a follower of Origen, wrote about many issues, but seemed to devote some time to the morality of killing when writing to Amphilochius, a Christian bishop. In the first example, back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the issue of abortion had already become an issue in society. Basil makes reference to abortion as a form of murder, however more important to the topic at hand, in the same letter he distinguishes the difference between killing and murder when speaking to issues of war. His distinction was based upon the concept of fighting for “chastity and true religion”.

*“The woman who purposely destroys her unborn child is guilty of murder.” –Basil, Letter 188.2: To Amphilochius, concerning the Canons.*<sup>32</sup>

*“Homicide in war is not reckoned by our Fathers as homicide; I presume froth their wish to make concession to men fighting on behalf of chastity and true religion.” –Basil, Letter 188.13: To Amphilochius, concerning the Canons.*<sup>33</sup>

The Roman army, which was once considered taboo due to its immoral traditions, was now an acceptable occupation under Constantine’s rule. As Christians were still making an effort to shed their historically rooted, discriminatory view of the army, Basil instructed the church that a soldier could live a moral, Christian life. Basil emphasized that one should not be concerned with the outward appearance of Constantine’s soldiers, which may look similar to the old pagan soldiers, but one should be concerned with the nature of the soul.

*“I have learnt to know one who proves that even in a soldier’s life it is possible to preserve the perfection of love to God, and that we must mark a Christian not by the style of his dress, but by the disposition of his soul.” –Basil, Letter 106: To a soldier*<sup>34</sup>

Ambrose of Milan (339-397 A.D.) enters the scene around the same time as Basil. The “Just War” criteria that we hold today were not codified until Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, however Ambrose is credited as the first to exemplify the principles contained within the “Just War” principles as we call them today. Probably the reason for Ambrose’s keen interest in war morality is that he held a high government office before becoming a bishop, and thus he held a good understanding of the workings of the state.

Ambrose made a case for the “Just War” criterion of “Legitimate authority” in a letter to emperor Valentinian. Ambrose asserted that the military was under the Emperor’s authority, and that the Emperor was held accountable to the authority of God. This is important because it first implies a just use for a military, and second that Christian morality must ultimately govern the military.

*“As all men who live under the Roman sway engage in military service under you, the Emperors and Princes of the world, so too do you yourselves owe service to Almighty God and our holy faith.” –Ambrose, Epistle 17*<sup>35</sup>

Ambrose made a case for “Right Intention” when speaking about the virtue of Charity. In Epistle 29 he wrote “Charity is perfect, it is the fulfilling of the law”<sup>36</sup>. Charity, otherwise known as love, was taught by Jesus and his church as the opposite of selfishness. Charity is the denial of self, for the sake of another’s best interests.

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<sup>31</sup> Eusebius, Proof of the Gospel, W.J. Ferrar translation (1920), [http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/fathers/eusebius\\_de\\_03\\_book1.htm](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/fathers/eusebius_de_03_book1.htm), June 13, 2003

<sup>32</sup> Basil, Letter 188.13: To Amphilochius, concerning the Canons, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202188.htm>, June 13, 2003

<sup>33</sup> Basil, Letter 188.13: To Amphilochius, concerning the Canons, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202188.htm>, June 13, 2003

<sup>34</sup> Basil, Letter 106: To a soldier, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202106.htm>, June 13, 2003

<sup>35</sup> Ambrose, Epistle 17, <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/sym-amb/ambrep17.html>, June 13, 2003

<sup>36</sup> Cole, Darrell. When God Says War is Right (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2003) 20.



As related to war, Ambrose was making the point that actions in war should be fueled by the love for the oppressed and not tainted by personal vengeance or other equally selfish reasons. The topics of love and war mixed together can stir up emotions rather quickly. But don't be confused about what Ambrose was advocating. He was not stating that violent acts are acts of love, but rather motivated by love. He was clarifying that the soldier's motivation should be driven by love for the oppressed, and not hatred for the enemy. Ambrose is credited as the first church father to articulate love as a proper motivation for war.

Finally Ambrose made a case for "*Proportionality*" in a sense when speaking of the virtue of mercy. In the Discourses on Luke 1.77 Ambrose looks to John the Baptist's words found in Luke 3:14 (NASB): "Some soldiers were questioning him, saying, 'And what about us, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages'". In his commentary, Ambrose argued that a soldier's virtue should be that of mercy, not malice or brutality. He believed that it should be at the forefront of the soldier's mind.

Ambrose began forming the basis of thought for the "Just War" doctrine, while Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) is attributed with completing the doctrine, and thus is generally considered the father of the doctrine. Most significantly, Augustine contributed an emphasis on human sin, which spawns the duty for man to use force. Augustine begins using the words "justice" and "injustice" when referring to the decision to wage war.

Augustine did not believe all war was evil. He acknowledges that all war is disliked, and produces objectionable feelings of pain, suffering, and death, but these feelings should not be confused with a religious moral standard. Rather a war should be judged based upon its motivations as to whether they are evil or not.

*"What is the evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars, when they find themselves in such a position as regards the conduct of human affairs, that right conduct requires them to act, or to make others act in this way."* Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, Book XXII.74 <sup>37</sup>

Augustine believed war to be a product of a fallen world, but he did not believe that war was the resultant choice of the lesser evil. Rather it was a natural and just response to sin so that peace may be established. What then separates a sinful soldier from a righteous soldier in war is the inward disposition, in other words, their motivation.

*"If it is supposed that God could not enjoin warfare, because in after times it was said by the Lord Jesus Christ, 'I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but if any one strike thee on the right cheek, turn to him the left also,' the answer is, that what is here required is not a bodily action, but an inward disposition. The sacred seat of virtue is the heart, and such were the hearts of our fathers, the righteous men of old."* Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, Book XXII.76<sup>38</sup>

Although he did not author the *jus ad bellum* as we know it today, in general Augustine makes statements in support of most points contained therein. He is clear when it comes to "Just Cause, "Legitimate Authority", and "Right Intention".

Augustine declares the need for right intention in his *Contra Faustum*, Book XXII.76 quoted earlier. He speaks towards the moral importance of the "inward disposition".

Augustine declares the just basis of war:

*"For it is the injustice of the opposing side that lays on the wise man the duty of waging wars; and this injustice is assuredly to be deplored by a human being, since it is the injustice of human beings, even though no necessity for war should arise from it"*

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<sup>37</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Against Faustus the Manichaen* XXII.74, <http://www.gnosis.org/library/conf2.htm>, July 6, 2003

<sup>38</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Against Faustus the Manichaen* XXII.76, <http://www.gnosis.org/library/conf2.htm>, July 6, 2003

-Ibid., XIX:9, P862<sup>39</sup>

Augustine declares that a proper authority is responsible for proclaiming war:

*A great deal depends on the causes for which men undertake wars, and on the authority they have for doing so; for the natural order which seeks the peace of mankind, ordains that the monarch should have the power of undertaking war if he thinks it advisable, and that the soldiers should perform their military duties in behalf of the peace and safety of the community. Augustine, Contra Faustum, Book XXII.75*<sup>40</sup>

Augustine also addresses the difficult question that is raised by the act of obedience to authority. What if the authority orders unjust commands? If the command is clearly unjust, Augustine promotes obedience to God first, and then to earthly leaders second. However if the justice is unclear in a particular situation, Augustine goes on to say that the soldier should adhere to his duty of obedience to his commander. In this case of the soldier's lack of clarity, even if the command is ultimately unjust, the soldier retains innocence, and the commander is held responsible for the injustice.

*Since, therefore, a righteous man, serving it may be under an ungodly king, may do the duty belonging to his position in the State in fighting by the order of his sovereign,--for in some cases it is plainly the will of God that he should fight, and in others, where this is not so plain, it may be an unrighteous command on the part of the king, while the soldier is innocent, because his position makes obedience a duty. Augustine, Contra Faustum, Book XXII.75*<sup>41</sup>

It can be argued that Augustine's emphasis on "peaceful warring" provides hints towards the *jus ad bellum*'s point of *proportionality* whose aim is to limit violence to a minimum, with peace as the end goal.

*We do not seek peace in order to be at war, but we go to war that we may have peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those whom you war against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace. (Ep. ad Bonif. cxxxix)*

#### The Birth of the Just War Doctrine

By the middle ages, war had become prevalent, and the Christian crusades had been ugly, tainted with injustice. Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274 AD) decided that he would study the morality of war and identify a list of rules that could be used to judge whether a war was just or unjust. Ambrose and Augustine's past analyses were influential in his studies. Although he probably did not coin the terms for the doctrine, he was significant in its formation. The credibility of his analysis is rooted in the fact that Aquinas was a leading authority on theology in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

In his book, *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas outlines three requirements for a war to be just. Although a few extra items are added to the *jus ad bellum* later in history, Aquinas is credited with the official formulation.

*"I answer that, in order for a war to be just, three things are necessary. First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged. For it is not the business of a private individual to declare war, because he can seek for redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior."*<sup>42</sup>

*"Secondly, a just cause is required, namely that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault. Wherefore Augustine says (QQ. in Hept., qu. x, super Jos.): "A just war is wont to be described as one that avenges*

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<sup>39</sup> "Augustine on War", [http://www.gkbenterprises.fsnet.co.uk/papers/augustin.htm#\\_ednref14](http://www.gkbenterprises.fsnet.co.uk/papers/augustin.htm#_ednref14), July 6, 2003

<sup>40</sup> Augustine of Hippo, Against Faustus the Manichaen XXII.74, <http://www.gnosis.org/library/contf2.htm>, July 6, 2003

<sup>41</sup> Augustine of Hippo, Against Faustus the Manichaen XXII.74, <http://www.gnosis.org/library/contf2.htm>, July 6, 2003

<sup>42</sup> The *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas, Second and Revised Edition, 1920, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/304001.htm>, July 6, 2003

*wrongs, when a nation or state has to be punished, for refusing to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects, or to restore what it has seized unjustly."*<sup>43</sup>

*Thirdly, it is necessary that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil. Hence Augustine says (De Verb. Dom. [The words quoted are to be found not in St. Augustine's works, but Can. Apud. Caus. xxiii, qu. 1): "True religion looks upon as peaceful those wars that are waged not for motives of aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and of uplifting the good."*<sup>44</sup>

Aquinas gave us "Legitimate Authority", "Just Cause", and "Right Intention". Augustine's teachings of a peaceful war can be attributed to the rule of "Last Resort". Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) is generally credited with adding the remaining two points to the *jus ad bellum*. Grotius was a theologian, a philosopher, and most famous as the father of international law. He attempted to mix Christianity, humanism, and the theories of natural law. He was not necessarily a saint, but he did concern himself with many issues of morality and did not consider himself at odds with religion or with God. As related to the *jus ad bellum*, in his book "The Rights of War and Peace", he concludes that for a war to be just: "The danger faced by the nation is immediate; The force used is necessary to adequately defend the nation's interests; The use of force is proportionate to the threatened danger."<sup>45</sup> In effect Grotius adds "Probability of Success" and "Proportionality" to the list that is generally agreed upon today.

## **TODAY'S CHURCH LEADERS EXPRESS THEIR 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PERSPECTIVE ON WAR**

In order to capture the viewpoints of the current pastoral leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the principle investigator of this study submitted a survey to over 100 Church leaders located in the Southeastern Michigan area. The survey was limited to members of the clergy, was sent without prior notice, and included a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. The survey was postmarked on 10 March 2003, which was a time when the United States was deciding whether to declare war with Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The level of response to the survey, almost 24%, seemed to be a good response to a mailing. The extraordinary motivation and interest to return the survey was undoubtedly fueled by the then-current national interest in the ethics of a decision to wage war (specifically with Iraq).

The results of the survey are very interesting. The voice of the pastoral leadership in Southeastern Michigan was exceedingly unified. About 75% of the surveyed clergy's answers were in agreement. In fact, for about 1/4 of the questions, 85%-90% of the surveyed pastors were in agreement. Although a variety of views were expressed in the returned surveys, the resounding message was that a majority of contemporary clergy members believed that there is Biblical support for a Just War and that there are moral grounds for a Christian to participate in those wars.

About 1/3 of the pastors who responded to the survey had previously participated in the military in some capacity, or had sons, brothers, or other family members who had served. The other 2/3 did not indicate any connection to any form of military service. Some of the clergy members included commentary along with their survey answers. A few of those comments are listed below (more are listed in Appendix A):

*"I'm convinced that Christians are permitted to take preventative and defensive actions to stop evil. However, my reservations have to do with attitude, which I am equally convinced that God is concerned with in His children. The attitude which says: "God has given me a responsibility to protect my life and the lives and welfare of those entrusted to me, so I may be forced by an evildoer to inflict bodily injury, even death, to faithfully carry out my God-given responsibilities", certainly reflects a proper attitude toward*

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<sup>43</sup> The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas, Second and Revised Edition, 1920, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/304001.htm>, July 6, 2003

<sup>44</sup> The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas, Second and Revised Edition, 1920, Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/304001.htm>, July 6, 2003

<sup>45</sup> Cheyenne Berean Church, [http://cheyenneberean.org/information/just\\_war.htm](http://cheyenneberean.org/information/just_war.htm), July 6, 2003

*God in taking such action. However, the attitude that says: "Nobody had better give the impression that they are going to pose a threat to me or my loved ones, I'm ready to shoot first and sort out the situation later" appears to reflect an attitude of careless regard for upholding the sanctity of life and may be simply hiding behind the defense as a justification for a cavalier, vengeful, aggressive attitude."*

*"I see God giving distinct roles of responsibility and authority to individuals as opposed to nations. He has not given nations the commission to spread the Gospel, but He has to individual Christians as His Church. He has not given the punishment of evildoers and the accountability of society to individuals, but to the powers that He has instituted."*

*"We find ourselves in trouble today because we have already asked God to leave our schools, leave our government, leave our society. How foolish can we be? And now we are to figure out if killing people before they attack us is right or wrong? I believe at this point, we are way behind before we begin. And until we get our hearts clear, we will never have our thoughts clear."*

A very interesting aspect of the survey was the strong response of the clergy. It has been the author's experience that many 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians do not have bold answers when it comes to the ethics of war. However when the pastoral leadership was questioned, the support for Christian participation in war was unified and strong. Presumably the topic of war is absent from many sermons due to the numerous political associations that arise out of such discussions, combined with the desire to keep the church service from becoming a stage for political rallying. It is this author's assertion that Politics are *not* integral to a discourse on war. For the sake of the Church's ethical foundation, it is good to encourage believers to move beyond the limiting factors of political correctness. Not to be misunderstood, the institution of the Church should not get involved in politics that are unrelated to God's moral standard. But the Church should actively participate in each and every ethical matter for which God has provided a command. It should do so without fear of breaking the unofficial law of political correctness, especially when such "law" does not directly apply to the topic at hand.

For more technical details, including a copy of the survey, the survey answers, an analysis of the results, and a list of clergy responses, please refer to appendix A.

## **WAR: A RESPONSE TO PREDOMINATE ARGUMENTS**

After studying the Bible, the post New Testament Church fathers, and the current pastoral leadership of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all conclusions point to the fact that a Just War exists, and that Christians are morally permitted to participate in it. That said, it is acknowledged that everyone is not in agreement, as there are opposing viewpoints present in the Christian community today. The issues of war can, and should be addressed in order to further validate the Just War position. The most common topics are addressed in the following text, with answers that provide clarity and understanding as to how the Just War doctrine is embraced by Biblical principles.

### ***Greatest Commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself***

When a Pharisee asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment in the law he gave a two-part answer:

*"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Matthew 12:36-39 (NIV)*

But can one love their neighbor (which includes one's enemy) as themselves while they engage in a war against them? How can these two ideas be reconciled? C.S. Lewis (1898-1963 AD), one of the greatest intellectual giants of the twentieth century, provides an outstanding commentary on this very subject of loving your neighbor as yourself.

*"Well, how exactly do I love myself? Now that I come to think of it, I have not exactly got a feeling of fondness or affection for myself, and I do not even always enjoy my own society. So apparently 'Love your neighbor' does not mean 'feel fond of him' or 'find him attractive'...Do I think well of myself, think myself a nice chap? Well, I am afraid I sometimes do (and those are, no doubt, my worst moments) but that is not why I love myself. In fact it is the other way around: my self-love makes me think myself nice, but thinking myself nice is not why I love myself. So loving my enemies does not apparently mean thinking them nice either...In my most clear-sighted moments not only do I not think myself a nice man, but I know that I am a very nasty one. I can look at some of the things I have done with horror and loathing. So apparently I am allowed to loathe and hate some of the things my enemies do...as they would say, hate the sin but not the sinner. For a long time I used to think this a silly, straw-splitting distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the man? But years later it occurred to me that there was one man to whom I had been doing this all my life – namely myself.*

*Now a step further. Does loving your enemies mean not punishing him? No, for loving myself does not mean that I ought not to subject myself to punishment – even to death. If you had committed a murder, the right Christian thing to do would be to give yourself up to the police and be hanged. It is therefore, in my opinion, perfectly right for a Christian judge to sentence a man to death, or a Christian soldier to kill an enemy."* C.S. Lewis<sup>46</sup>

As Lewis points out, the idea of loving a neighbor may mean subjecting him to just punishment, which is the "love" motivation for war. In most circumstances, the idea of loving the victims of an unjust enemy is easy to comprehend. Most are quick to provide shelter and food to the oppressed. However, the Biblically-based neighborly love is directed towards the enemy, and is separate from the love that is shown to the enemy's victims. As Lewis points out, this type of love becomes more understandable when one thinks about the nature of their self-love.

## **6<sup>th</sup> Commandment "You shall not murder"**

In Exodus 20, God provides the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel. Based on the character of God, we assume that he intends for these rules to apply to the broad population, not just the Israelis. But what about the sixth command: You shall not murder? How can a war be just while it is reliant upon the deliverance of death?

The answer to the question lies in the distinction between *killing* and *murder*. C.S. Lewis puts it ever so eloquently, "All killing is not murder any more than all sexual intercourse is adultery."<sup>47</sup> If the premise is true that there is a distinction between killing and murder, then it should be possible to substantiate in the Bible text. Indeed this is the case when one studies the translation of the text. The Greek had two words, one for "kill": ἀποκτείνω (apokteinō)<sup>48</sup> and one for "murder": φονεύω (phoneuō)<sup>49</sup>. Just like in the English language, there is a distinction between the words. For example, it is improper to say that someone was *murdered* by accident; rather you would say that they were *killed* by accident in the car wreck. In three accounts, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, when Jesus quotes the sixth commandment, he uses the Greek word for murder - φονεύω (phoneuō)<sup>50</sup>.

*"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' Matthew 5:21 (NASB)*

*"You know the commandments, 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" Mark 10:19 (NASB)*

<sup>46</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1980) 115-120.

<sup>47</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1980) 119.

<sup>48</sup> Meyers, Rick. "Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionary," eSword version 6.5.0. 2002

<sup>49</sup> Meyers, Rick. "Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionary," eSword version 6.5.0. 2002

<sup>50</sup> Meyers, Rick. "Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionary," eSword version 6.5.0. 2002

*"You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" Luke 18:20 (NASB)*

There is also the same distinction in the Old Testament Hebrew between the words “kill” and “murder”. While it is true that the King James Version (KJV) translates the sixth commandment as “Thou shalt not kill”. In line with a more literal word translation, the New International Version (NIV) and the New American Standard Bible (NASB) both translate the commandment as “You shall not murder”. Holding true to the Hebrew text, the NASB and the NIV Bible translations are technically more accurate than the KJV.

To further support the point that not all killing is murder, the Mosaic law, which comprises all of the laws and ceremonial institutions recorded in the last four books of the Pentateuch by Moses (including the ten commandments), can be studied in its full context. In Mosaic law, capital punishment was allowable for at least ten different crimes. Therefore it can be concluded that the sixth commandment must not apply to all forms of killing.<sup>51</sup>

### ***New Testament Soldiers were not asked to leave the army***

If Jesus and the New Testament believers had thought that the soldier’s job was unjust, it follows logically that they would have asked them to leave the army. However there is no evidence of this in the scriptures.

In Luke 3, John the Baptist is preparing the way for Jesus as he preaches about repentance and the forgiveness of sins. In response to John’s message, the crowd asked “What should we do then?”<sup>52</sup> They wanted to know how they should change their lives to prepare themselves for God’s judgment. When the soldiers approached him, John the Baptist did not ask them to leave the army. Rather his answer focused on false accusations.

*Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay." Luke 3:14 (NIV)*

John Calvin (1509-1564), 16<sup>th</sup> century theologian, puts it rather blatantly. As he explains, for a Pacifist the morality of soldiering and prostitution are the same. Both are unjust occupations. However the Pacifist argument falls out when John the Baptist gave advice to soldiers as to how to soldier more justly. Can you imagine John the Baptist giving advice to a prostitute as to how to prostitute more justly? No, therefore logic follows that prostitution is completely immoral, while soldiering can be a profession rooted in morality.<sup>53</sup>

Later when Jesus met a Roman centurion he made no reference for him to leave the army. Instead, Jesus honored him when he proclaimed that he had more faith than anyone else in Israel.

*When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. Matthew 8:5-10 (NIV)*

### ***God-ordained earthly authority***

God has established authority on earth. We are to submit to our earthly authority, which is God’s servant to do good, otherwise we face judgment. God has given the government special authority when it comes to war,

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<sup>51</sup> Clouse, Robert G., et al. War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 122.

<sup>52</sup> Luke 3:10a (NIV)

<sup>53</sup> Cole, Darrell. When God Says War is Right (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2003) 41.

just like God gives parents special authority when it comes to their children. In Romans 13 Paul makes this point very clear:

*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. Romans 13:1-6 (NIV)*

As individuals, our first allegiance is to God and our second allegiance is to the earthly authority that He has instituted over us. With the priorities of allegiance in hand, the problem of clashing authorities can be resolved. If an earthly authority orders a command that is clearly unjust, then God's standards shall override the earthly standards. However if the justice of the earthly command is not clear, then the earthly authority must be obeyed. In agreement with the 4<sup>th</sup> century church father, Augustine, in the case of a soldier's lack of clarity, the soldier lives in innocence even if the command is ultimately unjust. Rather the commander is held responsible for the injustice.<sup>54</sup>

In the Bible, God sets up the authority of the government, but does not provide explicit instructions specifically for the government related to its moral responsibilities. Most Biblical teachings are directed at individuals, the Church of God. So what is the role of government as it relates to war? Through the study of the available Biblical materials relating to governments, and the character of God, the following conclusions can be made:

- God established government as an authority for a nation of people.
  - Romans 13:1b "The authorities that exist have been established by God."
- God has given the government the authority to rule and defend its people.
  - Romans 13:3 "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good."
- God has given the government the authority to wage war in the defense of God's laws for humanity, as broken by other nations (as is the case in some so-called *human interest* wars).
  - Romans 13:4b "He [governing authority] is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."

### ***Dispensationalism: War morality differences in OT and NT***

Dispensationalism is a philosophy that states the two Testaments of the Bible set different moral standards for two different dispensations. According to this philosophy, the Old Testament law is superseded by grace. When attempting to apply dispensationalist philosophy to war ethics, some Christians assert an erred claim that the Old Testament standards of war and violence are replaced by New Testament standards of loving nonresistance.

The problem with this argument is that it tries to explain the apparent differences in war discussions between the Old and New Testaments by grouping the idea of a just war with the other laws of the Old Testament that do not apply to people today, such as the consumption of pork. Based on the perceptible differences between the Testaments it is understandable how people can come to this conclusion, but if one reads the scriptures more carefully the issue becomes clear. The main difference between the Old Testament examples of war and the New Testament teachings is the audience, and that audience's authority for declaring a war. In the Old Testament, many wars were declared under God's direct authority or under the government's authority. In the study of the New Testament, most teachings are directed towards the behavior of individuals, not

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<sup>54</sup> Augustine of Hippo, Against Faustus the Manichaean XXII.74, <http://www.gnosis.org/library/contf2.htm>, July 6, 2003.



governments. Most New Testament principles do not define standards for governments, nor are they meant to be boundaries that God placed upon himself. What is clear is that God commanded war in the Old Testament, and that there are specific times in history when war was deemed to be just. All of these just wars were declared under the proper authority.

### ***Separation of church and state***

There is a substantial group of pacifists that believe morality is different for Christians than for other people of the world. They believe there is a moral distinction between the church and the state. Therefore the earthly government has moral grounds to wage war, but the Christian does not have moral grounds to participate in the war. Heman A. Hoyt, president emeritus of Grace Theological Seminary, embodies this type of non-resistive pacifist. According to Hoyt:

*“The ‘blessed’ people are those to whom Christ directs his Word as set forth in Matthew 5:3-10 and Luke 6:20. The word blessed in the original relates to character, condition, and consciousness within, not to a bestowal of blessing from without...The descriptions brethren and dearly beloved denote the people to whom Paul wrote (Rom. 12:1,19). Peter certainly had Christians in mind when he addressed the ‘dearly beloved’ and insisted that they should behave as ‘strangers and pilgrims’ in the earth (1 Pet. 2:11). It follows then that the Scriptures were not in any sense directed toward unsaved men.” Hoyt<sup>55</sup>*

This philosophy of God’s laws only applying to His believers is errant. God’s laws are meant for all. He has one standard of morality that will be used to measure all people at judgment time. In Romans 2, Paul makes the point clear that God is no respecter of person.

*But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law. Romans 2: 10-12(KJV)*

The theory of two separate kingdoms with their own sets of morality is not mutually exclusive as Hoyt presumes. Rather, the Kingdom of God is all-inclusive, embodying God’s entire creation. Every individual is held to the same moral standard. Every government is held to the same moral standard. This clarified explanation of the two kingdoms is consistent with Thomas Aquinas, 13<sup>th</sup> century church theologian. Aquinas believed (as summarized by Holmes):

*“the eternal law of God embraces the whole creation and that it is manifest in natural law and even human law, as well as being more explicitly revealed in Scripture to the church.” Holmes<sup>56</sup>*

Logic dictates that unbelievers are not likely to follow God’s moral standard, but that does not free them from the consequences of disobedience.

### ***War is not a necessary evil***

There are some people who fall in-between the Pacifists and the Just War thinkers. They believe that Christians should engage in war, but only because it is a lesser evil when compared to the injustice that will be realized if the war is not engaged. This is a flawed form of thinking. The basic premise to the statement is that war is evil, but necessary. But is war in itself evil, or are the underlying motivations for the war responsible for whether the war is just or unjust? As the 4<sup>th</sup> century church father Augustine stated:

*“The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like”.<sup>57</sup>*

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<sup>55</sup> Clouse, Robert G., et al. War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 37.

<sup>56</sup> Clouse, Robert G., et al. War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 70.



Augustine delicately separates a person's distasteful feelings of death from issues of morality. All people will die some day. All deaths are not unjust, even though they all draw out unpleasant feelings. A war should be judged based upon its motivations as to whether they are evil or not. War is a just response to sin so that peace may be established. What then separates a sinful soldier from a righteous soldier in war is their inward disposition, in other words, their motivation.

The Christian should not hold their heads low when they engage in a just war. It is worth repeating the opening quote of C.S. Lewis:

*"War is a dreadful thing, and I can respect an honest pacifist, though I think he is entirely mistaken. What I cannot understand is this sort of semi-pacifism you get nowadays which gives people the idea that though you have to fight, you ought to do it with a long face and as if you were ashamed of it." C.S. Lewis*<sup>57</sup>

The Christian should always do what they believe is right in the sight of God. They should not engage in an activity that they reason to elicit His judgment. The fact that one would engage in war, even amidst unfounded regrets should indicate their primary conviction that is buried deep in their hearts. Even those people who seem to walk the fence on the issue of war will most likely admit that deep down there is such a thing as a just war.

### ***Biblical basis for the Just War philosophy***

The Just War philosophy provides guidelines to be used when declaring war. As specified these guidelines and by Biblical authority, war must be declared by a legitimate government authority. There are some, but not many versus in scripture that directly address the government's moral behavior, especially as related to war. When the authority of government is not in conflict with the authority of the individual, the government is then obligated to adhere to the ideals set forth for individuals. There are many verses in scripture directed toward individuals that do not provide the individual authority to declare war, but do provide ideals for humanity to live by. The government has the authority to declare war, but must still adhere to the ideals for individuals that are not in conflict with the government's authority. To that end, the character of God was studied in the Bible, and the Just War philosophy was created to help governments determine how a war may be justly declared and waged. Many verses directed towards individuals are used as guidelines along with verses that provide the special authority given by God to a nation's government. As a whole, the government can use these criteria as Biblical summary of its moral obligations in war. Although there are many verses that define Christian morality, listed below is at least one verse to support each criterion of the *jus ad bellum* and the *jus in bello*.

*jus ad bellum* – Latin: "The right to initiate war"<sup>59</sup>

- Just Cause:  
*Proverbs 18:5 (NIV) It is not good to be partial to the wicked or to deprive the innocent of justice.*  
*Psalms 45:5-6 (NIV) Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet. Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.*  
*Psalms 103:6 (NIV) The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.*  
*Isaiah 61:8 (NIV) "For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity.*
- Legitimate Authority:  
*Romans 13:1-6 (NIV) Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he*

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<sup>57</sup> Augustine of Hippo, Against Faustus the Manichaean XXII.74, <http://www.gnosis.org/library/contf2.htm>, July 6, 2003

<sup>58</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1980) 119.

<sup>59</sup> "The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace: A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of 'The Challenge of Peace,' " Nov. 17, 1993. Copyright 1994, United States Catholic Conference, [http://www.natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm](http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm), July 9, 2003

*who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.*

- Right Intention:  
*Proverbs 16:2 (NIV) All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD.*
- Probability of Success:  
*Luke 14:31-32 (NIV) "Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? "Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.*
- Proportionality:  
*2 Chronicles 28:9-11 (NIV) "Because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand. But you have slaughtered them in a rage that reaches to heaven. And now you intend to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sins against the LORD your God? Now listen to me! Send back your fellow countrymen you have taken as prisoners, for the LORD's fierce anger rests on you." (reference verses 9-15 for greater context)*
- Last Resort:  
*Romans 12:17-18 (NIV) Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

jus in bello – Latin: “The law during war”<sup>60</sup>

- Noncombatant Immunity:  
*Exodus 23:7 Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.*  
*2 Kings 24:1-4 (NIV) Surely these things happened to Judah according to the LORD's command, in order to remove them from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh and all he had done, including the shedding of innocent blood. For he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD was not willing to forgive.*
- Proportionality:  
*2 Chronicles 28:9-11 (NIV) "Because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand. But you have slaughtered them in a rage that reaches to heaven. And now you intend to make the men and women of Judah and Jerusalem your slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sins against the LORD your God? Now listen to me! Send back your fellow countrymen you have taken as prisoners, for the LORD's fierce anger rests on you." (reference verses 9-15 for greater context)*
- Right Intention:  
*Romans 12:17-18 (NIV) Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS TO THE JUST WAR PHILOSOPHY

### *Strengths and weaknesses of the Pacifist viewpoint*

There are many different forms of Pacifist viewpoints, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. To highlight the differences between the wide variety of thought, compare the Pacifism of non-violent social change which asserts that there is never moral justification to say “I’d rather die than be given into defeat”,

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<sup>60</sup> “The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace: A Reflection of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of ‘The Challenge of Peace,’ “ Nov. 17, 1993. Copyright 1994, United States Catholic Conference, [http://www.natcath.org/NCR\\_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm](http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives/102502/102502j.htm), July 9, 2003

with that of the Pacifism of proclamation which believes that it might be possible to love your neighbor by the use of force: moral, social and physical, but love cannot be expressed through an act of death. Consider the Pacifism of rabbinic monotheism that believes we should just let God be God and not try to take charge of history ourselves by forcing our ideals on others. These viewpoints agree that all military service is inseparable from idolatry. Then there is the political Pacifism of the semantic parenthesis, which believes that tragic sacrifices to keep the peace are still preferable to the mass destruction and hatred between two peoples at war. Or perhaps consider the Pacifism of cultural isolation where a segregated social group accepts their own distinct identity and has no attraction or obligation to the affairs or injustice of others. Finally consider the form of Pacifism that may be most prevalent in America today, the Pacifism of redemptive personalism. This Pacifist believes all forms of violence to be evil and will refuse to partake in any form of it. They are nonviolent in nature and thus will accept any suffering inflicted upon them without a battle. They do not claim that they will solve injustice in the world, but rather they claim their focus is to avoid contributing any further violence.<sup>61</sup>

The different forms of Pacifism are not accentuated in order to confuse the reader, but rather to help breed further understanding for the wide pacifist viewpoint. There are a variety of reasons to claim nonresistance, with a variety of associated strengths and weaknesses, which do not necessarily apply to all forms of Pacifism. This is not the place to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of each form individually, but it is worthwhile to understand that each pacifist comes from a different background and is better understood if approached with this in mind.

The Pacifist viewpoint does bolster some strengths in their moral conviction. Pacifists show great respect for human life, and consist of members who are zealous about standing up for their moral beliefs, even to the humble, unjust end of sacrificing their own lives to an evil perpetrator. That kind of dedication to a moral cause is to be respected. Pacifists are motivated to promote life and strive to avoid death at all costs. Pacifists strive for peace, which is most certainly a characteristic that is ordained by God.

Although pacifists are rooted in good intention, there are weaknesses in their approach. When analyzing Pacifism as a whole, the following conclusions can be made:

- Pacifism does not allow God to work through his people to fix injustice in the world.
- Pacifism does not acknowledge the irresponsible evil in one who stands back and allows injustice to grow and flourish.
- Pacifism ignores the difference between killing and murder.
- Pacifism ignores God's unchanged character as portrayed in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. God is not a pacifist, and does not call his people to be pacifists.
- Pacifism ignores the context in which the early Church avoided participation in the Roman army.
- Nonresistance is self-defeating. Pacifism can only be upheld using force.

God calls us to utilize our mind in discerning morality. It is therefore pertinent to apply general logic and reason in the evaluation of Pacifism. William J. Bennett, co-director of Empower America, provides a great analysis of the routes to Pacifism, the current physiological doctrine that is engrained into society today. This analysis should help put the pacifist viewpoint in context, and thus be better able to identify it and correct its potentially harmful effects. In the American context, think of how life progresses in relation to conflict and violence. First, generations of American children have been raised on the principle that violence is always wrong. Second, children are taught that all differences can be negotiated through dialogue. Third, as they grow up, these same generations who are now businessmen and executives have been trained in principles of conflict

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<sup>61</sup>Yoder, John Howard. Nevertheless: Varieties of Religious Pacifism (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1992)

resolution and anger management. Fourth, generations of American diplomats, salesmen and negotiators in all walks of life have been instructed in the art of getting a “Yes”.

So what is wrong with the American social doctrine? The underlying assumptions are unreasonable and untrue to the reality of war. First the matter in dispute must be negotiable. If there is no room for negotiation, then the physiologically engrained forms of conflict resolution do not apply. Second, the participants on each side of the conflict must be trusted to abide by the settlement. If there is no trust, no matter what the settlement is, neither side will consider the conflict resolved. Finally this doctrine of conflict resolution assumes that both sides are rooted in a common belief system. If two different moral compasses are used to assess a situation, which is generally the case in conflict between nations, then how can anyone expect a common resolution to be agreed upon by all?<sup>62</sup>

In some ways the pacifist viewpoint implores a rather simplified approach that does not appreciate the full nature of conflict. As eloquently spoken by William J. Bennett, “Don’t hit!” is easy advice; “Don’t hit back!” is more fraught with complexity”.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Strengths and weakness of the Crusaders viewpoint***

As is true for the pacifists, the crusaders embody a variety of differing thought. For the sake of this analysis, a general overview of all crusader viewpoints is considered. There are strengths and weaknesses to this approach. Attributed to their strengths, the crusaders are motivated to abolish evil in order to further God’s peace. The crusader acknowledges that a just war exists in God’s moral framework, and that peace cannot be obtained in some situations without the use of force. The crusader does not allow injustice to flourish. Crusaders strive for peace.

Just like the pacifists, the crusaders are rooted in good intention, however there are weaknesses in their approach. In an effort to analyze these weaknesses, the four characteristics of a crusader as presented by Joseph L. Allen will be highlighted.

1. Crusaders see a justifiable war as a conflict between forces of good and forces of evil

God is no respecter of persons. Romans 2:10-12 makes clear that God’s law is for all. God intends to provide for the best interest for everyone. Even if your adversary is blatantly violating God’s laws, to claim that God is working against that person is a dangerous claim that can lead to an attitude lost of charity and love. The sin of the adversary can be hated, but the sinner themselves should be loved. Certainly God provides forgiveness for all so that all may come to know the glory of God.

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17 (NIV)*

2. Crusaders characteristically pursue absolute and unlimited goals.

The goal of a war or conflict should be a specific resolution to remove or limit injustice. An unlimited goal rooted in an attitude of a victorious demonstration is easily tainted with the sins of pride and arrogance. In Psalms, the arrogant man is associated with wickedness; ironically the very thing that a crusader is hunting down may be present in his own heart.

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<sup>62</sup> Bennett, William J. Why We Fight, Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism (New York: Doubleday, 2002) 32.

<sup>63</sup> Bennett, William J. Why We Fight, Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism (New York: Doubleday, 2002) 32.

*In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD. In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. Psalm 10:2-5 (NIV)*

3. When warfare is seen as the struggle of forces of good against evil for unlimited, absolute goals, the means of war are unrestrained.

War should be engaged with self-control. The reaches of war should be proportional and limited to the amount of force necessary to limit the injustice, but no more. The apostle Peter speaks about the need to remain self-controlled. He points out that Satan loves to turn people loose in the sin of a lack of control. In war, a lack of self-control can lead to unimaginable, unwarranted atrocities.

*Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)*

4. A crusade approach tends to promote total war.

Total war ignores non-combatant immunity. All resources, military, civilian, and material are involved in the conflict. The entire community is attacked, including innocent non-combatants. There are numerous examples in the scriptures that speak about the evil entrenched in innocent blood. In one example in 2 Kings, Manasseh's sin of shedding innocent blood in Jerusalem was punished by God through the destruction of Judah.

*During Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. But then he changed his mind and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. The LORD sent Babylonian, <sup>[1]</sup> Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite raiders against him. He sent them to destroy Judah, in accordance with the word of the LORD proclaimed by his servants the prophets. Surely these things happened to Judah according to the LORD's command, in order to remove them from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh and all he had done, including the shedding of innocent blood. For he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD was not willing to forgive. 2 Kings 24:1-4 (NIV)*

## CLOSING REMARKS

In the search for God's morality in war, we have studied the scriptures, the early church fathers, renowned Christian theologians, and the ordained pastoral leadership of today's church. Some of these sources provided direct insight into war morality, while others provided a more passive voice that could only be understood in the context of the individual's life. The common theme that was derived from all sources is that a Just War philosophy is supported by a Christian morality. In this world of sin, God ordains war in certain circumstances as a tool to further the reaches of justice. Although punishment is a tough love to bear, it is the love of God that ultimately delivers justice on earth through the tool of war.

Of utmost importance is the sacredness of human life. Probably more than any other group of people, Christians realize the importance of the life that God has given to each individual. Therefore since issues of life and death are foundational to war, Christians should have strong and clear convictions regarding the matter. Contrary to relativistic thought, Christians believe in an absolute truth that encompasses a moral standard for life. In order to provide a consistent example to other people, it is important to search for God's truth and firmly plant your thoughts and ideals concerning life and death in a solid foundation that can be unabashedly portrayed in full confidence.

War is a dreadful thing, and one should respect the courage of an honest soldier that fights for justice. People who are called to fight for justice ought to do it with their heads held high and diligently perform their duty of upholding justice.

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## **APPENDIX A: SURVEY**

### **2003 Survey of the pastoral leadership in Southeastern Michigan**

## ***Contemporary thought: 2003 Survey of the pastoral leadership in Southeastern Michigan***

In order to capture the insight of today's church leaders, a survey was delivered to over 100 ordained pastors in the southeastern Michigan area eliciting their understanding of the Christian's role in war. Most of the surveys were sent to churches in Washtenaw County, home to the city of Ann Arbor and its surrounding communities. A summary of the survey questions and results are provided as well as a copy of the actual survey, the raw data and some detailed results.

### **Survey Conclusions**

- The surveyed pastoral leadership overwhelmingly shared answers in agreement with each other
  - For the summarized response\* an overwhelming majority answer was agreed to by 75%-90% of the pastors for 9 of the 13 questions.
  - For the summarized response\* the average majority answer was agreed to by 72.5% of the surveyed pastors for all 13 questions.
  - For the full response the average majority answer was agreed to by 53.85% of the surveyed pastors for all 13 questions.
- Question 11: "God judges personal violence different than national violence" drew the largest split in answers for the summarized response\* (38.1% Disagree, 33.3% Agree, 28.6% Neutral)
- The responses to the survey are supportive of the "Just War" philosophy.
  - 76.2% of pastors surveyed agree that there are circumstances when God ordains war
  - 85.7% of pastors surveyed agree that Christians can participate in a preventative war
  - 81.0% of pastors surveyed agree that Christians can participate in a war of defense
  - 90.5% of pastors surveyed agree that Christians can take preventative action in order to stop a personal attack (i.e. rape, murder, torture), even if violence is required
  - 85.7% of pastors surveyed agree that Christians can take defensive action in order to stop a personal attack (i.e. rape, murder, torture), even if violence is required
  - The majority of pastors who gave answer agree that a Christian should be obedient to his/her government when commanded to go to war.
- The response rate for the mailed surveys was 23.9%. This was a good response rate for a cold-mailed survey.
- The response rate for the emailed surveys was 0.0%. Email is an ineffective medium for surveying the pastoral community.

\* A summarized response can be obtained by consolidating the five survey answers into three categories: Agree, Disagree, and Neutral

The survey provided insight into the thoughts and beliefs of the modern-day leadership of the Christian church [of Southeastern Michigan]. An overwhelming majority of the surveyed clergy provided answers that upheld the Just War philosophy. Their voice was extremely unified, as their answers were largely agreeable with each other. The unity in voice was spread across a large variety of Christian denominations in the church, demonstrating that issues surrounding war and violence are irrespective of the denominational splits that are present today.



## Survey Data

Check the box that describes your level of agreement with the following statements:	
<i>Key: SD-Strongly Disagree D-Disagree with reservations N-Neutral A-Agree with reservations SA-Strongly Agree</i>	
Question 1	There are circumstances when God ordains war.
Question 2	God never ordains war; rather he allows it to occur.
Question 3	There are circumstances where Christians should participate in a PREVENTATIVE war action that would prohibit an evil deed from occurring.
Question 4	There are circumstances where Christians should participate in a war of DEFENSE.
Question 5	There are circumstances where Christians should participate in war, but only as a NON-COMBATANT.
Question 6	Christians should NEVER participate in any war in any role (neither combatant, nor non-combatant).
Question 7	Christians are permitted to take PREVENTATIVE action in order to stop an evildoer from attacking themselves, family, or friends (ie. Rape, murder, torture), even if violence is required.
Question 8	Christians are permitted to take DEFENSIVE action in order to defend themselves, family, or friends (ie. Rape, murder, torture), even if violence is required.
Question 9	Christians are not permitted to use violence in the prevention/defense of themselves, family, or friends (ie. Rape, murder, torture), but are permitted to call in someone else to stop the attack using violent means.
Question 10	Christians are not permitted to use violence in the prevention/defense of themselves, family, or friends (ie. Rape, murder, torture), nor are they permitted to call in someone else into violence, therefore the victim must endure the suffering.
Question 11	God judges personal violence differently than national violence.
Question 12	There are circumstances in the Old Testament where God ordained war, however under the New Testament covenant, which we now live, God no longer ordains war under any circumstances.
Question 13	In Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-21 Paul speaks about Christians submitting to their government's authority. According to these verses, a Christian should be obedient to his/her government when commanded to go to war and engage in violence.

Consolidated Survey Responses					
Question	Disagree		Agree		Neutral
1	3	14.3%	16	76.2%	2 9.5%
2	13	61.9%	6	28.6%	2 9.5%
3	3	14.3%	18	85.7%	0 0.0%
4	4	19.0%	17	81.0%	0 0.0%
5	11	52.4%	4	19.0%	6 28.6%
6	16	76.2%	4	19.0%	1 4.8%
7	2	9.5%	19	90.5%	0 0.0%
8	2	9.5%	18	85.7%	1 4.8%
9	18	85.7%	1	4.8%	2 9.5%
10	19	90.5%	0	0.0%	2 9.5%
11	8	38.1%	7	33.3%	6 28.6%
12	16	76.2%	3	14.3%	2 9.5%
13	7	33.3%	9	42.9%	5 23.8%

**Note:** This summary of the multiple-choice survey answers consolidates the answers “strongly agree” & “agree”, as well as “strongly disagree” & “disagree”.

	<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Years in the clergy</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Prior service in the military</b>	<b>Military service capacity</b>
1	Baptist	56	79	M	M	Caucasian	N	
2	Bible Church	34	63	M	M	Caucasian	N	Did volunteer, but was declined because of an ulcer
3	Assembly of God	13	47	M	M	Caucasian	N	
4	Apostolic	18	53	M	M	African American	Y	Military police
5	Mennonite	10	44	M	M	Caucasian	N	
6		30	62	M	M	African American	N	
7	Catholic	25	52	M	S	Caucasian	Y	Officer / Chaplain
8	United Church of Christ	23	54	M	M	Caucasian	N	
9	Lutheran - Missouri Synod	24	50	M	M	Finnish	N	
10	Lutheran LCMS	18	45	M	M	Caucasian	N	
11		16		M	M			
12	Bible Church	2	44	M	M	Caucasian	Y	Air Force Electronics
13	Mennonite	30	53	M	M	Caucasian	N	
14	Southern Baptist	13	40	M	M	Caucasian	N	
15	Assembly of God	15	37	M	M	Caucasian	N	
16	Lutheran - Wisconsin Synod	28	53	M	M	American	N	
17	Wesleyan	22	56	M	M	Dutch / Caucasian	Y	Army / Cook
18	Friends (Quaker)	48	65	M	M	English-Welsh-American	N	Conscientious Objector
19	Bible Methodist	9	31	M	M	Caucasian	Y	US Marines Infantry/Anti-Terrorism
20	Free Methodist	40	65	M	M	American	N	Son served in Desert Storm in 1991 - Airborne Ranger
21	none - Church of Christ	4	33	M	M	Caucasian	N	

	Denomination	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11	Question 12	Question 13
1	Baptist	SA	SA	SA	SA	N	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	N	SD	SA
2	Bible Church	SA	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	A	SD	SA
3	Assembly of God	SA	SD	SA	SA	N	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	SD	SD	N
4	Apostolic	D	A	SA	D	D	SA	SD	D	SA	D	D	A	SD
5	Mennonite	SD	SA	SD	SD	D	SA	D	N	N	N	D	SA	SD
6		A	D	A	A	D	D	A	A	D	D		A	A
7	Catholic	N	SA	SA	SA	D	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	SD	N	N
8	United Church of Christ	D	A	A	A	A	D	A	A	D	D	N	D	D
9	Lutheran - Missouri Synod			SA	SA	SD	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
10	Lutheran LCMS	SA	SD	SA	SA	SA	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	SD	SD	D
11		SA	SD	SA	SA	SA	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	SA	SD	SA
12	Bible Church	SA	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	A	SA	SD	SD		SD	
13	Mennonite	A	D	D	D	D	A	A	D	A	D	A	D	D
14	Southern Baptist	SA	SD	A	A	N	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	A	SD	A
15	Assembly of God	SA	SD	A	SA	A	SD	A	SA	SD	SD	A	SD	N
16	Lutheran - Wisconsin Synod	SA	SD	A	SA	D	SD	A	A	SD	SD	D	SD	A
17	Wesleyan	SA	SD	A	SA	N	SD	SA	SA	D	SD	N	SD	A
18	Friends (Quaker)	SA	N	SD	SD	D	A	A	A	N	N	N	N	SD
19	Bible Methodist	SA	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	A	SD	SA
20	Free Methodist	SA	A	SA	SA	N	SD	SA	SA	SD	SD	SA	D	A
21	none - Church of Christ	A	SD	A	A	N	N	SA	SA	SD	Sd	SD	SD	N

Survey Responses													
Question	SD			D		N		A		SA		No Answer	
1	1	4.8%	2	9.5%	1	4.8%	3	14.3%	13	61.9%	1	4.8%	
2	11	52.4%	2	9.5%	1	4.8%	3	14.3%	3	14.3%	1	4.8%	
3	2	9.5%	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	7	33.3%	11	52.4%	0	0.0%	
4	2	9.5%	2	9.5%	0	0.0%	4	19.0%	13	61.9%	0	0.0%	
5	4	19.0%	7	33.3%	6	28.6%	2	9.5%	2	9.5%	0	0.0%	
6	14	66.7%	2	9.5%	1	4.8%	2	9.5%	2	9.5%	0	0.0%	
7	1	4.8%	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	7	33.3%	12	57.1%	0	0.0%	
8	0	0.0%	2	9.5%	1	4.8%	4	19.0%	14	66.7%	0	0.0%	
9	14	66.7%	4	19.0%	2	9.5%	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
10	15	71.4%	4	19.0%	2	9.5%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
11	5	23.8%	3	14.3%	4	19.0%	5	23.8%	2	9.5%	2	9.5%	
12	13	61.9%	3	14.3%	2	9.5%	2	9.5%	1	4.8%	0	0.0%	
13	4	19.0%	3	14.3%	4	19.0%	5	23.8%	4	19.0%	1	4.8%	

Survey response rate:	
Surveys mailed via USPS:	99
Surveys emailed via internet:	22
Total surveys sent:	121
Non-deliverable mailed surveys (bad address):	11
Non-deliverable emailed surveys (bad address):	7
Total surveys received by clergy:	110
Responses to mailed survey:	21
Responses to emailed survey:	0
Mailed response rate:	23.9%
Emailed response rate:	0.0%
Overall response rate:	20.4%

### ***Interesting pastoral comments submitted with the surveys***

“Be careful to give the greatest weight to what God speaks to you [about war]. Earthly counsel is valuable but not infallible.”

“It is my conviction that for the Christian the only definitive source of information on God’s will is within the pages of Holy Scripture. While researching the publications of authors on the subject and gathering the opinions of current religious figures may add insight on the spectrum of views, Christian truth regarding God’s will still must come from God.”

“Arguments from Scripture to give evidence that God’s will shows a distinction between types of war are weak at best. If God allows and even at times has ordained a war effort, then there are going to be individual cases in which any type of “protective, preventative, defensive” war action is within God’s will for a sinful world, full of sinful creatures.”

“Christians are permitted, but not commanded to be a part of such war efforts”

“When God said (on Mt. Sinai), and Jesus affirmed (in Sermon on the Mount) “You shall not kill”, all understood that to mean that God’s children should respect life itself and the Creator-God who is the author of life. That respect means that we do everything we can to, not only refrain from taking of life, but to preserve and protect the life that God has given. When life (in this sinful world – not what God originally intended for us) presents us with a situation in which protection of the life God has given us and our loved ones, may only be accomplished through a defense of life that may result in the evildoer’s death. We are entrusted by God with Christian judgment to make decisions that God will use for everyone’s good.”

“I’m convinced that Christians are permitted to take preventative and defensive actions to stop evil. However, my reservations have to do with attitude, which I am equally convinced that God is concerned with in His children. The attitude which says: “God has given me a responsibility to protect my life and the lives and welfare of those entrusted to me, so I may be forced by an evildoer to inflict bodily injury, even death, to faithfully carry out my God-given responsibilities”, certainly reflects a proper attitude toward God in taking such action. However, the attitude that says: “Nobody had better give the impression that they are going to pose a threat to me or my loved ones, I’m ready to shoot first and sort out the situation later” appears to reflect an attitude of careless regard for upholding the sanctity of life and may be simply hiding behind the defense as a justification for a cavalier, vengeful, aggressive attitude.”

“I see God giving distinct roles of responsibility and authority to individuals as opposed to nations. He has not given nations the commission to spread the Gospel, but He has to individual Christians as His Church. He has not given the punishment of evildoers and the accountability of society to individuals, but to the powers that He has instituted.”

“The Romans and Peter references are clear that we are responsible to the governing powers, for God has instituted them. Our obedience to government includes engaging in violent conflicts, as our individual consciences permit.”

“Bear in mind that “We ought to obey God, rather than men” (Acts 5:29). This is not intended to be a license for disobedience, but a caution that we use Christian judgment when a government directs us to do something that appears to be in conflict with a direct, clear Word of Scripture.”

“The question that needs to be asked is: “Do we allow evil to destroy all that is good?” We already know that Satan would want to see nothing but misery for everyone.”

“We also know that prayer is the answer for all Christians when it comes to seeking God’s guidance, God’s will being done. I believe that if we were to pray more for our leaders, for wisdom and understanding and for God’s direct intervention, fewer wars would have to be fought.”

“The real question doesn’t begin with should we or shouldn’t we fight a war. Every situation is very different. The real question is, have we really sought out the will of God in the first place? How much time have we spent praying everyday? How much time have we spent with God, seeking out the answer from Him.”

“If we were to address the issue of government, that being ordained by God, then we would also have to say that we are paying people (the army) to kill for us. We can sit back and say, “well, I don’t agree” and yet by paying taxes (which is the law of the land) we are financing many acts which lack real God ordained morals, let alone the deaths that occur as a result of open warfare.”

“We find ourselves in trouble today because we have already asked God to leave our schools, leave our government, leave our society. How foolish can we be? And now we are to figure out if killing people before they attack us is right or wrong? I believe at this point, we are way behind before we begin. And until we get our hearts clear, we will never have our thoughts clear.”

“When people say God is on their side in a war, that’s their notion, not God’s”

“A person’s conscience must not be violated, even if government commands it (Acts 5:29).”

“May the same Lord, who leads us into all truth, allow each of us to understand the importance of these [war] matters in relation to the salvation that is ours through Jesus’ perfect life, innocent death, and victorious resurrection.”

*Actual Survey: Cover Letter + Survey*

Postmarked on 10 March 2003  
Return requested by 11 April 2003

# THE CHRISTIAN'S ROLE IN WAR

## A local Christian's personal search for truth

March 8, 2003

Dear fellow Christians:

I am a local Christian living in Washtenaw county that is seeking your insight as a church leader regarding the Christian's role in war. With the current state of affairs of our nation, I am sure you realize that this is a timely topic with which many Christians are faced. For some Christians, war ethics become a more personal decision than for others. This topic has become especially relevant to me in recent years. I am one of the founding employees of a research and development company in Ann Arbor that was formed to develop new weather satellite technology, a rather peaceful endeavor. The business led into other work, and I now find myself working in connection with the Department of Defense (DOD) to develop technologies for all branches of the military.

In my continuing journey to seek God's will for my life, I am faced with the challenge of learning about the Christian's role in war. In that endeavor I have scoured the Bible and read numerous publications by various Christian authors. To augment that study, I am reaching out to the Christian community in my local area to obtain their insight into God's will. We may all come from different denominations, but we are all part of the same unified body of Christ.

I included a short questionnaire, which I pray you will take a few minutes to fill out and return to me in the self-addressed, postage-paid envelope that I have included with the survey. The questionnaire is anonymous in nature, and should not take very long to fill out. I would like to limit the participants of this survey to members of the clergy. While fellow Christians may also provide valuable insight, I would like to know that the responses have been provided by an authority figure who has been ordained by God, and who has dedicated his/her life to the teaching of God's truth.

I would be extremely grateful for your response to this questionnaire! In addition, I would be overjoyed if you provided further insight and guidance concerning the topic at hand. Whether it is in the form of a letter that expounds upon why you selected the answers you did on the survey, or a copy of some previous sermon notes that speak to the issues of war and violence, the response would be truly appreciated. But don't feel like you must include any additional material. I would be thankful if you just returned a completed survey to me.

I intend to send this survey out to over 100 churches in Washtenaw County and its surrounding area, spanning over 28 denominations. I plan to sum up my study, including the results of this survey in a paper. This paper may potentially be published on the World Wide Web or as an article in print, so that other Christians may also benefit from it. Since the survey will span a multitude of denominations' responses, I believe it will be of interest to many people. Regardless of whether it is published, I would be happy to send you a copy if you like. It would give you a chance to see the results of the survey, which I am sure will be interesting, as well as to read my conclusions about the Christian's role in war. It is the least I can do in return for your response. I have spent a considerable amount of time and money to send out the survey to you. In order to save on costs for sending out the final paper, I would like to offer it to you via email. If you would like a copy of the final paper, including the survey results, please check the appropriate box on the survey itself, and provide an email address to which I could send the paper (don't worry, I won't send you spam). If you don't have an email address, include a phone number, and if I can, I will try to call you with instructions to download the paper (I prefer the email method if at all possible).

I am a member of New Life Church in Ann Arbor, part of the Great Commission Ministries. This is NOT an official survey of my church. Rather it is a personal study of my own. I thank you for your time and for your responses. I pray that God may use this survey to help other fellow Christians like me who are also faced with personal decisions pertaining to war and violence.

In Christ,

Christopher B. Watkins



## Questionnaire: The Christian's Role in War

When answering these questions please adhere to these guidelines:

- For the sake of this questionnaire, the term "war" refers to a national war, not a war between individuals.
- These questions are not specific to the current war crisis. Please answer the questions according to your general beliefs.
- You acknowledge that your survey answers will be included anonymously in the final paper, and that the paper could potentially get published in print or on the World Wide Web.

Christian Denomination: \_\_\_\_\_ How long have you been a clergy member? \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex (M or F): \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever served in the military (Y/N) ? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, in what capacity? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be interested in receiving a copy of the final paper (including the survey results) (Y/N) ? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, please provide an email address where it can be sent: \_\_\_\_\_

### Check the box that describes your level of agreement with the following statements:

*Key: SD-Strongly Disagree D-Disagree with reservations N-Neutral A-Agree with reservations SA-Strongly Agree*

	SD	D	N	A	SA
There are circumstances when God ordains war.					
God never ordains war; rather he allows it to occur.					
There are circumstances where Christians should participate in a PREVENTATIVE war action that would prohibit an evil deed from occurring.					
There are circumstances where Christians should participate in a war of DEFENSE.					
There are circumstances where Christians should participate in war, but only as a NON-COMBATANT.					
Christians should NEVER participate in any war in any role (neither combatant, nor non-combatant).					
Christians are permitted to take PREVENTATIVE action in order to stop an evildoer from attacking themselves, family, or friends (ie. rape, murder, torture), even if violence is required.					
Christians are permitted to take DEFENSIVE action in order to defend themselves, family, or friends (ie. rape, murder, torture), even if violence is required.					
Christians are not permitted to use violence in the prevention/defense of themselves, family, or friends (ie. rape, murder, torture), but are permitted to call in someone else to stop the attack using violent means.					
Christians are not permitted to use violence in the prevention/defense of themselves, family, or friends (ie. rape, murder, torture), nor are they permitted to call someone else into violence, therefore the victim must endure the suffering.					
God judges personal violence differently than national violence.					
There are circumstances in the old testament where God ordained war, however under the new testament covenant, which we now live, God no longer ordains war under any circumstances.					
In Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-21 Paul speaks about Christians submitting to their government's authority. According to these verses, a Christian should be obedient to his/her government when commanded to go to war and engage in violence.					

Please feel free to expound on any of your answers. I would appreciate any additional insights that you would have to offer on the topic. If you have any sermon notes related to this topic, I would be very grateful if you sent a copy.

**Additional Comments:** (use extra paper if necessary) \_\_\_\_\_

**I am most grateful for your participation in my personal search for God's truth!**