

The LORD is a Man of War: A Theological Rationale for Pacifism

by Bren Hughes

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Introduction

In this time of global conflict and international terrorism, Christians need to give serious thought to the issues involved, lest their minds be commandeered by the electric aura of blood-lust that warfare always precipitates. How should the church respond to our nation's acts of vengeance and military preemption?

War is a delicate issue. Its effects are all too concrete; the emotions it stirs are all too urgent. The social, theological, and exegetical difficulties revolving around war are so complex, it becomes difficult to articulate and maintain a coherent position. I shall try to avoid this pitfall by narrowing my focus to establishing a narrative-theological rationale for pacifism, by which I mean the refusal of soldiers of Christ to participate in physical military conflict or condone such use of force.¹

Christian pacifism must never be confused with passivity. Even though Christ took his unjust punishment without retaliating, it is also true that Christ was being unjustly punished because of his belligerent religious confrontations and socially subversive activities. Stanley Hauerwas asks, "Why did [Jesus] get killed? Because he

¹"Pacifists do not ask for a special exemption because of their high moral views or delicate sensibilities; they refuse to participate in war because it is immoral. Their exemption from military service is simply the compromise position that has developed in a society in which moral objection to war is not unanimously shared." – David Hoekema, "A Practical Christian Pacifism," *Christian Century* (Oct. 22, 1986), 918.

challenged the powers that be. The church is a political institution calling people to be an alternative to the world. That's what the cross is about."² Christianity is an active lifestyle – a war of attrition against evil, injustice, and hopelessness through teaching and ministry.³

It is well established that before the great wars of the early twentieth century, many leaders in American churches of Christ took a strong pacifist position.⁴ Our subsequent shift toward nationalistic patriotism was not the result of careful biblical exegesis. We succumbed to social pressure, and in doing so lost part of our claim to be the counter-cultural community of citizens-of-heaven.⁵ We need to re-examine our embrace of the U.S. military. And to ensure a firm footing, we will need more than just dueling proof-texts to answer our questions.

² Colman McCarthy, "'America's Best Theologian' Walks Pacifist Road," (http://www.freelancestar.com/News/FLS/2003/042003/04202003/944336/index_html), 2.

³According to David Hoekema (918),
The tendency to equate pacifism with "passivism" and capitulation reflects how little we know of the remarkable historical successes nonviolent tactics have achieved, even in the face of brutal repression. From the courageous Swedish and Danish resistance to Nazism to the transformation of Polish society by the Solidarity labor movement, and from the struggle for Indian self-rule led by Gandhi to the struggle for racial equality in the United States led by Martin Luther King, Jr., and others, nonviolence has been a creative and effective force. Whether nonviolent resistance can always overcome aggression and whether its cost in suffering and death will in every case be less than that of war is difficult to say, but at least it cannot be said that pacifism is merely a policy of capitulation.

⁴For more on this subject (including a lengthy anti-war sermon by Alexander Campbell and the full text of David Lipscomb's *Civil Government*), see the "Peace Issues" page at Hans Rollman's Restoration Movement website: <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/subs/peace.html>. Cf. also Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 145-51; Michael Casey and Douglas Foster, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An International Religious Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2002), 85-115, 455-95; Douglas Foster, et. al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 586-88.

⁵Richard Hughes remarks on the intense social and government pressure for the churches of Christ to support WW I:

They could not support the war and at the same time cling to the apocalyptic/pacifistic perspective of the Stone-Lipscomb tradition. To support the war, they needed a theology far more progressive, far more amenable to militarism, far more centered on the concerns of the world, and far less focused on the coming kingdom of God (46).

The standard biblical arguments for pacifism are well-known and well-rehearsed. For those caught up in the emotion of wartime patriotism, the connection between “love your enemy” and foreign policy becomes difficult to establish, especially when going to war feels so right. This paper will attempt to go behind the well-known biblical passages and examine the overarching story of God and humanity in order to discover the theological rationale behind pacifism in the biblical world-view.

The Story of War in the Bible

The Bible is a graphically violent book, from Abel’s screaming blood in Genesis 4 to the apocalyptic slaughter of Revelation. And yet this book is ostensibly about Jesus, a teacher whom pacifists of all faiths identify as one of their own. How can the God who torched Gomorrah and ordered the slaughter of the Canaanites be the same God who walked among us as Jesus of Nazareth, teaching “do not resist the evil one?” The answer lies in the story.

Compared to many other creation stories, with their heavenly warfares and struggles with chaos monsters, the placidity of Genesis 1 and 2 is striking. In the “very good” state of the prelapsarian earth, the whole creation blossoms in peace. The humans and animals are all plant-eaters (1:29-30). Not even a rainstorm disturbs the tranquility (2:5-6). The peacefulness of Eden carries significant theological weight, as the harmonious picture of the deathless garden becomes in Scripture a goal to pursue. The story of the Bible can be read as the story of God working with mankind to resurrect the Eden experience. Eden in the Bible becomes not just the beginning, but also the end.

The first threat of violence in the Bible comes from God himself. If Adam and

Eve breach their trust in God by tasting the forbidden fruit, they would face capital punishment (Gen. 2:17). And yet the story takes a surprising twist when our primaeval parents are allowed to live for hundreds of years after their crime. Already we discover the principle that the power over life and death lies in God's hands. To kill or to have mercy is the prerogative of his creatorhood. YHWH has no qualms about threatening or meting out punishment when it serves his purposes. Yet he also retains the right to defer punishment or grant amnesty whenever he so desires.

When sin does enter the world, we find that "the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay. . ." (Rom. 8:20-21).⁶ Not only do Adam and Eve face death for their disobedience, but the whole earth becomes tainted with the ubiquitous presence of death and decay.⁷ This is the Curse in which the earth itself becomes antagonistic to mankind. The harmony of Eden becomes the struggle of man against nature. Entropy and decay replace growth and life. Animals become carnivorous, as humans eventually do, too (Gen. 9:3). The predators declare war on the prey. All of creation becomes locked in a self-perpetuating warfare. Not only is the animal kingdom now "red in tooth and claw," but even at the cellular level, our own bodies wage war against invading armies of germs and viruses. In the realm of the Fall, conflict, warfare, death, and decay become the natural order of things, both in the microverse and the macroverse.

This is why Paul borrows the word from Ecclesiastes – vanity (*mataistes*). From the Fall until the *eschaton*, human history (individual, corporate, and global) will be an

⁶Scripture references are from the *Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

⁷The Bible's first (implied) death occurs at this point, with the animals who provide the "garments of skins" with which God clothes Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21).

exercise in futility. As the Preacher laments, in the realm under the sun, death renders all things meaningless.

This Pauline commentary on Genesis 3 (e.g., Rom. 8:19-23) has considerable theological implications. It shows that the futility/vanity/meaninglessness of worldly existence is not the natural state of things. The shadow of entropy and death was imposed on creation by God. Like everything else, it serves his purpose. Transforming the garden of delights into a crucible of pain is a means to an end. It points toward a future hope. God is grooming his people, purifying them by fire so that when the curse is lifted his people will be proven and mature. The new heaven and earth will be greater than Eden, just as maturity is greater than innocence. God will dwell among not people ignorant of sin, but people who have tasted the delights of rebellion yet ultimately said no. So the Curse is not a failure of God, but rather part of his master plan to cultivate a people who love him freely – a people he can draw into the circle of his Triune loving fellowship.

But now back to the human manifestation of violence. The Bible teaches that Cain was the first to use violence to solve his problems. The earth's first human death was not natural, but a murder – a fratricide. God let Cain know that his anger was wholly unacceptable, even giving him an opportunity to prevent sin from possessing his body (Gen. 4:6-7). And yet Cain's punishment was not the eye-for-an-eye one might expect. His sentence was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13). Death would be preferable. Cain's banishment – his sentence to a life of loneliness and estrangement – is perhaps a foreshadowing of hell. Even in the New Testament, the ultimate punishment for those who choose evil is not cessation of existence but banishment – hopeless aloneness from God.

War first appears in the biblical story in Genesis 14, where Lot becomes

something of a hostage as five kings rebel against the imperialist practices of king Chedorlaomer of Elam. Somewhat ironically, Abram ends up fighting alongside the rebel kings of Sodom and Gomorrah (yet against the descendants of Ham). It is the king-priest Melchizedek of Salem who gives an interpretation to Abram's victory: God Most High had delivered Abram's enemies into his hand (vv. 19, 20). The biblical precedent is established that God is a participant in warfare. He takes sides, and he can turn the tables.

Next, in Exodus 1, we find that Pharaoh enslaves the Israelites because he fears that war might flare up and the descendants of Joseph would side with his enemies. The threat of attack becomes an excuse for oppression. The exodus comes when YHWH decides to battle singlehandedly against Egypt and its gods through the ten plagues. Pharaoh's final defeat at the Red Sea prompts Moses to sing, "The Lord is a man of war" (Ex. 15:3).

Israel's first battle takes place in Exodus 17:8ff, where God causes them to defeat Amalek so long as Moses' arms are raised. "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven," the Lord tells Moses, "the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

In Exodus 23:22, God promises to be an enemy to Israel's enemies, an adversary to their adversaries. He will send an angel before the conquering Israelites to soften up the Canaanites for their "blotting out." The chief concern in the rest of the chapter is that the Israelites must refuse to worship the gods of these condemned peoples.

The book of Numbers begins with an atmosphere of preparation for battle. The census God demands is for the purpose of determining the number of Israelites who "are able to go to war," a refrain repeated twelve more times in the first chapter. Yet

their next battle proves to be a failure because they went to war presumptuously (Num. 15:40-45). God was not fighting with them. The remainder of Numbers is peppered with tales of Israelite military victories, with reference being made to a “Book of the Wars of the Lord” (21:14). Here is how Balaam describes God’s people in his oracles:

Behold, a people! As a lioness it rises up and as a lion it lifts itself; it does not lie down until it has devoured the prey and drunk the blood of the slain. . . . God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows (Num. 23:24; 24:8).

Notice that the battles are called the “Wars of the Lord.” These are not the wars of Israel. Rather, God is fighting through Israel. The cosmic/heavenly realm has declared a *jihad* against certain nations on the material/physical realm. In this sense, the wars that continue through the Deuteronomistic History comprise an eschatological event. For the pagans of Canaan, Judgment Day has come early. Yet it was a long time coming, for God had announced to Abraham generations before that he was waiting for the iniquity of the Amorites to become complete (Gen. 15:16).

One of the more disturbing aspects of this “YHWH-war” is the concept of *herem*, or “the ban.” In the conquest of Canaan, sometimes God would order the complete destruction of a city’s inhabitants and culture – including women and children.

And we captured all [Sihon’s] cities at that time and devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children. We left no survivors. Only the livestock we took as spoil for ourselves, with the plunder of the cities that we captured (Deut. 2:34-

35; cf. 3:6).

The *herem* city thus became something of a sacrifice given over completely to the Lord. Like that which is holy (*qadosh*), the *herem* is set apart for God. Yet it is something that is offensive to him, so its separation is for the purpose of destruction. The verbal form of this word is applied to most of cities destroyed by Joshua (e.g., Jericho, Ai, Makkedah, Hazor), and the ban extended to any Israelite cities that tolerated idolatry (Deut. 13:12-15).

What is the theological value of such complete destruction of Canaanite culture? In addition to the concept of judgment explored above, perhaps God was trying to create a “sacred space,” a new sort of Eden where Israel could observe the Law without distraction and flourish as an example to the nations. This seems to be God’s stated objective in Deuteronomy 4:5-8. As with Noah, God is making a fresh start with his people. But instead of wiping out the remainder of pagan humanity, YHWH plans to woo them using Israel as his city set on a hill.

Human violence is not the OT’s only divinely commanded bloodshed. The religious system which Paul described as a “ministry of death” (2 Cor. 3:7) also demanded the ritualistic slaughter of countless thousands of animals each year. Much like its polytheistic ANE counterparts, ancient Judaism was a religion dripping with blood.

Moving on to the days of the kingdom of Israel, we learn that David is a “man of war” from his youth (1 Sam. 16:18). This history of violence becomes the reason why David is not permitted to build the temple (1 Chr. 28:3). At least in the later perspective of the chronicler, a true man of God must also be a man of peace. David was God’s friend at a time when godliness entailed being a warrior. But there is an expectation

that war, having served its purpose, should no longer be part of the life of God's people.

Later, when the nation of Israel fails to keep the covenant, God becomes an enemy, and uses wicked nations to punish Israel (Jer. 5:15; 21:1-10; Amos 5:14, etc.). Never again does he call his nation to wage war in his name. Gone is the glory. War becomes nothing more than the misery of human futility, or else the terror of divine punishment.

Thus, as we leave the golden age of the United Kingdom we begin to see the prophets envisioning a future free from carnal conflict. These are the prophecies of Jesus and his eschatological kingdom, the sublime new heaven and new earth which exists incipiently in his church:

. . . they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. . . For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. . . For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered. . . the wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord (Isa. 2:4; 9:5-7; 65:17, 25).

. . . And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field,

the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety (Hos. 2:18).

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. . . behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey. . . I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations. . . (Zech. 9:9-10).

So, bound up in what becomes the messianic expectation is the idea that war will vanish from the earth. This reign of peace extends even to the animal kingdom, as creation is restored to its prelapsarian state of wholesome, dynamic placidity.

In the ministry of Jesus, this in-breaking of the eschatological kingdom becomes a reality, albeit an invisible one. He has won the victory over the powers of darkness (Col. 2:15), though we do not feel all the results yet. He has made peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20), though we still wait for the full outpouring of this peace upon the physical realm.

Through his ministry, Christ, the man of the future, has spiritually recruited us into God's postapocalyptic realm. Our true home is with God. From this vantage point, the machinations of human political, economic, and social entities are but a futile pantomime. From the kingdom perspective, carnal warfare is meaningless. Christ's aphorism, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52), encapsulates the futility of violence in pursuing kingdom goals. War serves mainly the interests of the evil one (cf. James 4:1-7). Thus, Christ can say to Pilate,

My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world (John 18:36).

The subsequent Christian writings found in the NT and the church fathers suggest that pre-Constantinian Christians were fairly united in their refusal to participate in the military – not just because of opposition to Rome, but as a matter of principle that Christians belong to God at all times, and are never permitted to use their bodies to inflict violence, nor to swear allegiance to any other kingdom.⁸ A radical shift has occurred. God's warrior nation of Israel has given way to a society of peace – a society that has been spiritually raised into heaven with Christ and whose members are no longer of this earth.

Analysis

Any theology of warfare and any statement of a Christian pacifist position must take into account the brutality of the Old Testament while fully acknowledging the weight of its canonicity. Too many pacifist treatises are dismissive of the records of Israel's holy wars, as if the OT was irrelevant to the discussion. On the contrary, a full confrontation of the fact of YHWH-war is necessary for a robust picture of God's character and an appreciation for the radical nature of the New Testament's message

⁸For Tertullian, as for myself, this is a key issue. Military service involves an implicit (if not explicit) oath of loyalty to one's country. For Tertullian, military service must then be absolutely forbidden, for to pledge allegiance to anything but Christ would be an idolatrous betrayal. See his *On the Crown*, ch. 11 (*ANF* 3:99-100).

In light of the history of early Christianity, how odd it is that many of us allow our children to say a pledge of allegiance to the symbol of a secular institution at school every morning when the martyrs of our earliest heritage chose to face the jaws and claws of wild beasts rather than swear such an oath.

of nonviolence.

Current Church of Christ scholarship has done well to bring us away from the strict dispensationalism of previous generations. Both Testaments are God's word, and much of spiritual depth is uncovered in probing their continuity. And yet there are some features for which there is a clean break between the religion of Moses and the religion of Jesus. Not only is the sacrificial/Levitical system of atonement left behind, but so is the concept of theocracy along with its corollary – divinely ordained warfare.⁹

Allow me to rephrase that last thought. In the New Covenant, the sacrificial system of atonement has been spiritualized. Christ the perfect sacrifice has rendered animal sacrifices obsolete. His people are thus to spiritually sacrifice themselves (their autonomy, their egos) in imitation of their master (Romans 12:1). In the same way, Christ the perfect king has fulfilled and spiritualized the promise of Davidic monarchy. The battles in which he leads his people are now spiritual battles. The worldly nations and their wars exist on a different plane from the Kingdom world. They're playing in a totally different league.

The Lord who is "a man of war" is still our God, yet the sphere of our warfare has been changed. God may still use wicked nations to police or punish as he orchestrates world events, yet that is none of our concern. Whereas God used Israel as a tool of judgment against the nations, God now uses the church as a tool of redemption.

We have been transferred into another kingdom, separate from the futile clashes of worldly powers (Col. 1:13). The Bible invites us to acknowledge the spiritual reality that God's elect are currently living in the eschatological realm of Isaiah's prophecies. In our circles, the lion does graze with the lamb. Though our bodies may dwell in the

⁹Remember that even Israel was only permitted to wage war when God commanded it and he went with them.

material realm where war and death reign, this reality is illusory compared to the kingdom reality in which our spirits live. As Paul explains in Ephesians 2:1-6, though we once walked in the ways of the world, we have through faith been raised with Christ and have been seated next to Jesus “in the heavenly places.”

We Christians are trans-dimensional beings. Involvement in sin, and in any sort of worldly hostility, distracts us away from our true luminous existence and brings us back down into the carnal plane where we are vulnerable to the subtle satanic seductions that lead to spiritual death. In Christ we have died to the world (Col. 2:20). Fraternization with the demonic-physical realm puts us in the position of working against God (James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17).

The challenge is for the church to look at reality through different glasses. As citizens (proleptically) of the New Jerusalem, we understand that our nation’s battles are not our battles. Our enemy is just as invisible as the God the world fails to acknowledge. Hostile nations are simply groupings of our neighbors – our brother and sister humans – who may be in the throes of believing a diabolical lie.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

We are Christian soldiers, called to fight. Yet our weapons are spiritual and our enemies demonic (Eph. 6:11-20). In our personal ethics we are bound to follow the example of our general Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21-24), who can hardly be pictured wielding a weapon in the name of some political regime or nationalist cause. We must strive to be just as other-worldly as Christ and not become entangled in the muck of human

structures.

This all raises the question of social justice. Should we not use our power to vote and our freedom of speech to influence social reform through government? I would answer with a qualified yes. I won't go as far as Lipscomb to deem civic activity and government service as off-limits to Christians.¹⁰ What we need is a good dose of scriptural cynicism about the effectiveness of using human structures to accomplish spiritual ends. Worldly political, economic, and educational systems are extremely vulnerable to corruption.¹¹ The New Testament vision is for the church to be that institution which cares for the homeless, the poor, the widows. It is the church which enforces the standards of morality upon its members, not the state.

Many Evangelicals want the government to defend marriage when we've done a poor job keeping Christian families together. Many among us have been praying for the state to outlaw abortion, when we should be the ones teaching respect for life, and ministering to teen moms and adopting children. We've got to realize that when we meddle in the political sphere, we're trespassing on enemy territory. We can spend too much time waiting for our government to make this a "Christian nation," all the while ignoring God's plan that we are to change the world one soul at a time by being the salt

¹⁰Whereas Lipscomb held that all human governments were rebellious usurpations of divine authority, Rom. 13:3-6 identifies the (Roman) civil authorities as "God's ministers," having a right to impose order and to collect taxes.

¹¹My concept on pacifism is thus not based on any optimistic humanist (Gandhian?) notions of the inherent goodness of humanity. My pacifism is based on the moral objection against armed conflict, toward which fallen humanity is so easily inclined. The only thing that can ultimately drive the desire for war from the human heart is the indwelling of God's Spirit.

Hoekema (919) also takes a more pessimistic Augustinian/Calvinist view of human nature:

An army trained and equipped for national defense can quickly become an army of conquest or a tool of repression in the hands of an unprincipled leader. But a nonviolent national defense force, or a peacekeeping force bringing together citizens of a dozen nations, is of little use except for its intended purpose.

and light. The only way to eradicate war (and social evil) is to bring all of humanity into the alternate reality of kingdom existence.

How does Romans 13 fit into this picture? Does it not say that “whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed?” Although in general, Christians are to “be subject to the governing authorities,” this admits of exceptions, for there comes a time when the faithful must choose to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Paul’s point in Romans 13 is that his readers must not flaunt their extraterrestrial citizenship by rebelling against civil authorities and laws. Paul’s epistles evidence a deep concern that Christians not behave in any way that would be considered seditious by the Roman government.¹² In other words, we should keep out of trouble as much as possible. But again and again in early church history, we see the Lord’s people drawing the line at military service and any other type of oath of allegiance to Caesar.¹³

Conclusion

This narrative-theological examination of the story of war from the OT to the NT is in many ways more rewarding for our purposes than, say, studying the Sermon on the Mount. Christ’s “love your enemies,” “do not resist the one who is evil,” “turn the

¹²Consult, for example, Mary Ellen Pereira’s study of how Paul entreated Timothy to help uphold Roman codes of “household management” in “Hairstyles and Heretics: Exploring the Background and Application of 1 Timothy,” *Leaven* 13:1 (1st Q 2005), 22-27.

¹³For example, take the 12th canon of the First Council of Nice, which prescribes penance for ex-soldiers who return to their former occupation “like dogs to their own vomit” (*N&PNF* 14:27) The 14th canon of the church of Alexandria (sometimes ascribed to Hippolytus) likewise asserts that “a Nazarene (Christian) may not become a soldier unless by order” (*ANF* 5:257). A return to this type of thinking would create a praxis in which Christians who join the military are seen as subjects for church discipline rather than patriotic heroes.

other cheek,” and the Golden Rule are notoriously difficult to apply to national policy,¹⁴ and admit of numerous exceptions in the lives of individuals (such as self defense, or physically protecting another person from harm). The principle remains that our first reaction to physical hostility should always incline toward nonviolent resolution. The imitation of Christ demands nothing less.

What this canon-wide study has uncovered is that war is the appointed lot of the cursed postlapsarian world. This earth is still “filled with violence,” even at the microscopic level. Though geopolitical upheavals may seem to possess dire importance in the short term, we know that human maneuvers and achievements are ultimately vain, futile and meaningless.

Yet those who are in Christ no longer dwell on this violent plane of physical existence. We have been transferred to the invisible kingdom of God. Our mission is peace and redemption. Though our own nation may be at war, it is not *our* war.¹⁵ We have faith that God is in control, and he will use human violence to serve his own purposes. Our problem in assessing and diagnosing war is a problem of perspective. Despite our kingdom citizenship, we do not know which side God is on, if any. Theocracy ended with the exile. There is no Christian nation besides the invisible kingdom of God.¹⁶ There is no just war besides the war of light against darkness. God

¹⁴When asked about his alternatives to bombing Afghanistan and Iraq, Stanley Hauerwas replied that “Such questions assume that pacifists must have an alternative foreign policy. My only response is I do not have a foreign policy. I have something better--a church constituted by people who would rather die than kill” – Colman McCarthy, “‘America’s Best Theologian’ Walks Pacifist Road,” (http://www.freelancestar.com/News/FLS/2003/042003/04202003/944336/index_html), 1.

¹⁵This is not to say that human governments are unaccountable for the violence they perpetrate. Christians do have a divine duty to encourage society to pursue peace.

¹⁶In the words of Alexander Campbell, We have, indeed, had, for many centuries past, many nations called Christian nations; but we must fearlessly ask, at what font were they baptized? . . . A proper literal Christian nation is not found in any country under the whole heavens. There is, indeed, one Christian nation, composed of all the Christian

alone has the right to decide who lives and dies, and he no longer has a standing human army. This is the theological rationale behind the Christian refusal to join man-made militaries.¹⁷ It is a doctrine emanating from realized eschatology, and comprises one of the New Covenant's few ethical disjunctures from the Law of Moses.

Christian pacifism is not a passive withdrawal and disengagement from the world. Rather it is an active commitment, a troop advancement of the divine invasion (incarnation) into the fallen material realm. By demanding justice and peaceful conflict resolution, the salt asserts its own saltiness. Since we share God's concern for humanity, we keep our eyes open to developments in the world and inject ourselves into its politics, when necessary, using only nonviolent means, well-aware that we're treading on enemy territory. If God finds it necessary to use wicked nations to punish and police each other, we leave it in his hands. No human being or earthly power is our true enemy. Against no human being can we ever raise our hand in violence, for the New Testament has taught us to look beyond appearances and see every person as a potential sibling in Christ.

My position is illustrated most compellingly in the Bible's final narrative – the Apocalypse of John. Reading John's vision is like watching rays of light burst through the clouds amid a terrible dark storm. Suddenly, at the end of the pacifistic New

communities and individuals in the whole earth”

– “Address on War,” <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/people/acampbell/ac2.html>.

¹⁷According to Hauerwas, the problem with modern American Christian Conservatism is that “Christianity is defended not so much because it is true, but because it reinforces the ‘American way of life.’ Such movements are thus unable to contemplate that there might be irresolvable tensions between being Christian and being ‘a good American’” (ibid.).

I find it deeply ironic that many Evangelicals are rallying around their country as a “Christian nation” at the same time that militant Islam has declared war against American culture because of its godless moral decadence and militaristic imperialism. I am afraid that many of us have succumbed to the false propaganda of America as a “Christian nation” and blinded ourselves to the diabolical and self-serving activities of all human governments, including our own. This is no leftist rant, either. I am a political conservative whose theological studies have led me toward an apocalyptic world-view which is automatically suspicious of secular authority.

Testament, we return to the brutal, bloody world of the OT warrior God. Angels and monsters wage war. As the battle spills down into the physical world, nations ally themselves against God in their lust for power and wealth. One of the story threads has to do with the kings of the world (under the influence of demonic spirits) gathering their armies at Armageddon to wage war against God's kingdom (Rev. 16:12-16; 19:19).

One would expect to next see God's saints suiting up for battle as well. Surely a great conflict between Christians and pagans will ensue, like the one envisioned in so many premillennial schemes. But no, not a shot is fired. Before the battle can even begin, God intervenes. First the beasts are taken out (Rev. 19:20), and then Christ himself dispatches their armies with the sword from his mouth (i.e., his word). One thousand years later, the stunt is pulled again with a similar result. While the nations prepare to besiege the city of the saints, fire erupts from the sky and consumes them all (Rev. 20:7-10). Again, no saint is compelled to spill blood. The Lord is still a man of war. But now he fights for his people, instead of having his people fight for him. Our weapon is prayer, as we live with endurance and faith (Rev. 13:10) that God himself can deliver the oppressed, using his people as agents of healing rather than agents of death.

May the day come soon when the children of God are unveiled, and the labor pains of creation bring forth a true new world order (Rom. 8:19-23)!

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