

SPECIAL STUDY

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

by

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INTRODUCTION

I. A Continuing Christian Concern

- A. As long as there are unregenerate people there will be wars, James 4:1-4
- B. Viet Nam "cease fire" and end of the draft do not necessarily mean the Christian will never have to face the problem again.
- C. In addition, when we broach this subject we have entered the whole area of the Christian and civil government (laws, taxes, politics, social welfare, etc.).
- D. If I read the N.T. correctly at all, I am convinced the Christian cannot ignore these problems. We may not be "of" the world, but we certainly are "in" the world.
- E. To a larger extent than we may realize, unbelievers may be watching our Christian witness in this area (government) more than they watch it in the religious rituals we perform!

II. A Coherent Christian Certitude

- A. Christians, of all people, should have the most coherent answers to these problems.
- B. Christians, because they have regenerated their minds and they are no longer prejudiced by sin, should think logically, reasonably and sensibly.
- C. But more important than that, Christians have the written, revealed mind of Christ in the N.T.—the Divine Will settles the question.

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

- D. We will approach the subject on these two bases:
1. Reason
 2. Revelation

DISCUSSION

I. Reason (Natural Law; Conscience)

- A. All men, even those who do not have a special-revealed law of God (O.T. or N.T.) have a revelation in the natural order of God's creation and in their reasoning capabilities which tells them
1. God's wrath on ungodliness and wickedness and suppression of the truth (Rom. 1:18ff); and His eternal power and deity.
 2. They are either doing or not doing God's law (Rom. 2:14-16)
 3. Of course, sinful men may wilfully refuse to recognize truth and may deliberately ignore historical and rational facts (II Pet. 3:5; II Thess. 2:9-12; I Cor. 15:34).
 4. But Christians are commanded to use logic (Rom. 12:1-2) as a result of having their minds transformed. **CHRISTIANS ARE NOT PERMITTED THE "LUXURY" OF IRRATIONALITY! CHRISTIANS ARE NOT PERMITTED THE ESCAPISM OF REFUSING TO FACE REALITY!**

B. Axioms

1. Necessity of law and order (local, national and international)
 - a. In order to the maintenance of any kind of society (and man is by nature and necessity a social being) there must be law and order.
 - b. If this is doubted, just *universalize* a few actions which are presently considered anti-social:
 - (1) What if there were no sanctions against murder, i.e., that anyone and everyone were free to take anyone else's life violently, indiscriminantly, without cause or for any cause, at any time.
 - (2) What if there were no laws against theft and

ISAIAH

- robbery. What if any man were free to rob or steal from any other at any time, for any cause or without cause.
- c. The two above are, in effect, what wars of aggression and imperialism are all about. What if all nations acted as described above?
 - d. I Tim. 1:8-9 Law is not for just but lawless . . . etc.
2. Where there are no sanctions or penalties and where penalties are not executed, **THERE IS NO LAW!**
- a. We may enact and write local and national laws against murder, draft-dodging, theft, etc., until we are blue in the face but if we have no penalty or the penalty is not executed, we have no laws—we just have reams and reams of paper!
 - b. We can join United Nations bodies, debate, enact, sign and proclaim eloquently the international laws controlling our nations all we want, but if there is no penalty and no enforcement, there is no international law!
 - c. Eccl. 8:11; "Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil."
 - d. As Socrates reasoned: An unjust law is bad, but *no* law is worse!
3. Punishment must fit the crime
- a. Senator Taft (Robert Sr.) reportedly said: The war criminals at the Nuremburg trials were tried and punished after fact, i.e., they were tried and sentenced for a crime for which there was no law. Perhaps, technically speaking, there are no *written* international laws by which political leaders of nations which perpetuate international murder (war) may be tried and punished, but there certainly is a natural moral law—**JUSTICE**.
 - b. Justice is the action according to which one renders to another that which is the latter's *right* or the latter's *due*.

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

- c. To sustain the majesty of the law there must be just and commensurate punishments (national or international).
 - d. In the realm of civil or national law, capital punishment is a vindictory sanction; that is, it vindicates the majesty and justness of the law against taking of life in cold blood. A murderer, when he takes another person's life, has taken something out of the totality of being which cannot be restored, namely, the victim's greatest good (his life); hence the state (society acting through its government), in order to restore the balance of justice, takes the murderer's greatest good (his life) in reciprocity.
 - e. Man is a person by virtue of the fact that he is a rational being. By heinous crimes which are offenses against the law of reason, he withdraws violently from the society of reason and sets out wilfully to destroy society. Therefore he forfeits his right to continue to live in that society.
 - f. Crimes of murder, robbery, aggressive war, etc. are all crimes against SOCIETY . . . not merely crimes against individuals. THE WHOLE STRUCTURAL FABRIC OF SOCIETY IS AT STAKE!
 - g. This principle of justice, punishment commensurate with the crime, has to be applied to international criminal acts. WHEN ONE NATION COMMITS VIOLENT, HEINOUS CRIMES (WARS) AGAINST INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY, COERCIVE, PUNISHING, RESTRAINING FORCES OF DEFENSIVE WARS MUST BE WAGED TO VINDICATE THE INTERNATIONAL LAWS AGAINST WAR!
 - h. A punishment which is not commensurate with the crime will not vindicate the law against the crime!
- C. Conclusions
1. Man must have government to exist.
 2. Without government there would be social chaos.
 3. There can be no government without law.

4. If obedience to government or law is determined individually or subjectively, then no law would be immune from some people's disapproval or disobedience. The result would be anarchy.
5. It is a greater evil not to resist an international aggressor than to fight against him. "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

II. Revelation

A. Government, in general

1. Is ordained by God (Rom. 13:17)
 - a. No Christian is exempt from obedience to government just on the grounds that he is a Christian.
 - b. He who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed.
 - c. The O.T. teaches the authority of civil government as a God-ordained institution (Ezra 7:26; Ex. 22:28; Prov. 24:21-22).
 - d. The N.T. is plain and specific (Mt. 22:21; Titus 2:15—3:2; I Pet. 2:13-17).
 - e. Society must have government. God has provided it and preserves it—even "pagan" government (Jer. 27:5-7; Isa. 10:5ff).

"He (the Christian) may exert his effort to have unjust laws changed and unjust national objectives withdrawn. He may use every legitimate effort to convince the ruler that the laws are unjust or the war is unjust. But he has absolutely *no scriptural* authority to incite anarchy. Anarchy is satanic. God does not will anarchy in this present world; He wills order. Satan is the one who seeks anarchy, in order to oppose the will of God." Wm. LaSor, C.T. 1-30-70.

Anarchy is satanic whether it be by Bolsheviks, Red Guards, Black Panthers or Weathermen (see Reader's Digest, November 1970, *The Destruction of Diana*).

2. Originated for God (Rom. 13:1-7)

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

- a. As a terror to bad conduct—to restrain evil and to punish the wrong-doer (the unrestrainable)—to execute the wrath of God upon the wrongdoer. Government is God's executive!
- b. "Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient . . ." I Tim. 1:8-9
- c. I Tim. 2:1-4
- d. Rulers do not wield the sword (instrument of execution) in vain! There is a purpose, a God-ordained purpose, in punishment—even in *capital punishment!*
- e. "It seems to me that those who advocate abolition of all capital punishment ignore three vital factors (1) The absolute sovereignty of God as the creator and giver of human existence on earth; (2) the malignancy of sin which left unchecked would destroy the universe; (3) the divinely delegated authority to human society to remove from its fabric those who are incorrigibly devoted to the destruction of that fabric by acts of violence against the innocent.
It is not the distance from animals but the proximity to God which makes man unique . . . Man abdicates his responsibility when he gets on the animal level or when he seeks to dethrone God. And he does both when he becomes a wilful and malicious murderer. He attempts to be under what he is over (animal)—and aspires to be over what he is under (God). AND IT IS HERE THAT GOD DECREES THAT MAN FORFEITS HIS RIGHT TO CONTINUE TO LIVE WITH THOSE WHO REMAIN WITHIN THE STATUS FOR WHICH MAN WAS MADE." Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger*, Vol. 31, August 1969, p. 118ff.
- f. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man." Gen. 9:6 (the first book of the Bible)
- g. "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with

- the sword." Rev. 13:10 (the last book of the Bible)
- h. "Some object that capital punishment is action so utterly final and irretrievable, but it is not any more so than the death of a victim shot in the heart by a robber, or the death of a woman choked or bludgeoned to death in her own home by a rapist. Why is it that modern morality seems always to be on the side of the criminal aggressor without taking account of the rights of the innocent victim . . . Capital punishment for murder is to be exacted because it is the divine judgment to keep the land from being drenched in innocent blood. The forfeiture of one's right to continue in the land of the living is conditioned upon his blatant disrespect for the person of one made in the image of God. 'Mercy but murder, pardoning those who kill.' " Ketcherside, *ibid*.
 - i. People against capital punishment always quote the Decalogue "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13). This is ridiculous because just 27 verses later in the same book, God said, "If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die." (Ex. 21:12-17). **GOD HAS ALWAYS DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN MURDER AND JUDICIAL EXECUTION. . . . ALL MURDER IS KILLING BUT NOT ALL KILLING IS MURDER!**

"He (the Christian) has no Biblical authority to tell the state it must renounce the use of force in order to preserve law, or to demand that the law of the state be changed to disarm policemen. This would be to take the 'sword' from the magistrate—and the bearing of the sword by the magistrate is recognized and approved by the Word of God." LaSor, *op. cit*.
 - j. The great apostle Paul stood for the fair and just execution of capital punishment—even if it meant his own death! Acts 25:11

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

- B. Government in International relationships (war, etc.)
1. The erosion of the public conscience against capital punishment and against international policing (war) against aggression is a device of Satan to take the sting out of rebellion, anarchy and social chaos.
 2. “. . . it seems to me that nothing is more unrealistic in the present state of the world than to say that war must never be used as a means of thwarting wilful and deliberate aggression. This position ignores the fact that God employed war as a judgment upon nations, and even upon Jerusalem (Ezek. 14:21). Surely He was not immoral. This does not mean that God likes war any more than I like it. I did not punish my children because I derived pleasure from the experience but in order to produce ‘the fruit of real goodness’ in their characters . . . Gen. Sherman said that ‘War is hell,’ and I concur, but I do not forget that God also made hell. And it was made as the result of war in heaven! If Michael and his angels had been pacifists, the devil might have taken heaven over, and if this had happened those who went to heaven would have been in hell. . . . Certainly war is an evil, but it is not necessarily a *sin*. All sin is evil, but not all ‘evil’ is sin. Obviously not every war is justified, but that is not the question . . . it will be necessary for all nations to desist from lifting up the sword against each other, for so long as one learns war with a view to the destruction of others, the others will have to defend themselves . . . God will turn those nations which hate Him and His rule into hell. War is the judgment of God upon such sin here, and hell is the judgment of God upon such sin hereafter. When I assist in the work of rewarding good or in striking terror into the hearts of evil men, I am abiding God’s minister to fulfill a responsibility to God.” Ketcherside, *op. cit.*
 3. Some scripture references: (additional to ones already cited)

- a. Genesis 14:21-24; Abram's going after and defeating the kings of the East who had kidnapped his nephew, Lot, and the blessing of God's great high priest Melchizedek.
 - b. Joshua 8:1-29; Joshua's conquest of Ai, even instructed by God to *ambush* the warriors of Ai.
 - c. I Sam. 30:1-31; David inquired of the Lord about avenging violent aggression done upon his people by the Amalekites, and God commanded David to do so.
 - d. Eccl. 3:8; "a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace." Eccl. 8:8; "No man has power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death; there is no discharge from war, nor will wickedness deliver those who are given to it." Eccl. 8:11 "Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil."
 - e. Jer. 48:10; "Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord with slackness; and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from bloodshed."
 - f. Daniel 5:17-28; Daniel informed Belshazzar of God's providential maintenance of Nebuchadnezzar's policing of the world and that all rulers, even pagan ones, when they usurp God's sovereignty, God brings them down.
 - g. Obadiah, verses 10-14; Obadiah tells the Edomites they should not have "stood aloof" when their neighbor nation (Israel) was being plundered by aggressors. **GOD HOLDS ALL NATIONS (EVEN PAGAN ONES) RESPONSIBLE TO HELP OTHER NATIONS DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST AGGRESSION!**
 - h. Amos 1:9; Amos says God will judge Tyre because Tyre broke a "covenant" she had made with Israel by allowing Edom to plunder Israel. **GOD HOLDS NATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE TREATIES AND COVENANTS THEY MAKE WITH ONE ANOTHER!**
4. Some examples:

THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR

- a. Cornelius, a devout Roman soldier became a Christian and was not (so far as we know) forbidden to continue as such (Acts 10 and 11).
- b. John the Baptist and the soldiers (Luke 3:14). John the Baptist did not tell them to give up soldiering.
- c. Sergius Paulus became a Christian and continued as a proconsul. Acts 13:5-12
- d. It appears that Paul may have converted some of the elite military personnel of Caesar's own body guard (Phil. 1:13 and 4:21).
- e. Erastus was city treasurer in Rome (Rom. 16:23); this meant he was an official of a "pagan" government.
- f. Paul did not command the jailer at Philippi to resign when the jailer became a Christian (Acts 16:25-40).
- g. Angels, servants of God, moral beings with power to choose to obey or disobey God, serve God by engaging in war and in killing rebellious aggressive oppressors (Isa. 37:36-38; Dan. 10:1ff, etc.).
- h. Heaven protected itself by entering into a war of self-defense (Rev. 12:7-17; 19:11-16).

C. Conscientious Objection

1. The only conscience a Christian should have against compulsory military service in a world with continued aggressive pressures like ours which demands a ready military establishment as a deterrent, would be if he were a missionary or a minister actively preaching the Gospel . . . and even then there may come a time when all able-bodied men might be needed to hasten the overthrow of evil aggressive forces at work in the world.
2. Conscientious objection to war or military service cannot be based on personal desires, but on the direction of God's expressed will in matters. Romans 13 (and all the other scriptures and reasons we have cited) is a clear expression of God's will for Christians in regard to war and the use of force and killing, if necessary, to check and punish aggression!
3. The Christian has a right to only one conscience. A

ISAIAH

conscience directed by God. The non-Christian must be forced to do right and justly by laws (conscription/draft) if he will not do right otherwise (cf. I Tim. 1:8ff). This is exactly what government and law is for! Men cannot be left to do only what they feel is right (especially unregenerate, lawless men). The main function of government is to force the immoral and ungodly to be as moral as is necessary to maintain society. Government was instituted by God to protect and enforce this fundamental necessity.

CONCLUSION

“In America, a man stood up in a free pulpit to preach; he quoted detached sentences from the Christ whose hand held the lash when His Father’s House was a den of thieves, and whose eyes were often as a flame of fire. The preacher declared that evil, no matter how diabolical, was never to be resisted with any physical weapons. Rhetorically, he asked, ‘What has a sword ever accomplished worthwhile?’

“In a pew was a worshipper in whose heart was an aching void and in whose home was a Gold Star, speaking of the valor of a young crusader who marched forth with a righteous sword and came not back. At the church door, following the service, that worshipper said to the clergyman: ‘I can tell you one thing that righteous sword has done.’

“What?” replied the minister.

“Replied the listener with deep feeling: ‘The sword in the hand of those who have resisted militant evil has given you the right to stand here today and to proclaim your convictions without fear of being liquidated.’

“The one who had publicly said that rampant evil was never to be resisted by force paused for a moment and then acknowledged, ‘I am afraid I cannot refute that.’

“There is no refutation in God’s world and man’s for the flash of a righteous sword!” (Dr. Frederick Brown Harris, Chaplain, U.S. Senate, 1943-1969, quoted in *U.S. News and World Report*, October 30, 1972.)