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A History of Christian Attitudes Toward Just War Theory and Combatancy

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Abstract

The basic premise of Christian just war theory, a development of just war theory from the ancient world, is that, in a fallen world, war is sometimes necessary to protect innocent people or to defend against aggression. It is held, however, that such war should be undertaken only as a last resort and with a clear and just *cause*. The theory also sets out guidelines for the *conduct* of war, emphasizing the need to minimize harm to non-combatants and to avoid the use of excessive force. The Scriptural backgrounds of this theory are reviewed, then the history of the church is examined, to look at the waxing and waning of just war theory, and its interaction with other approaches, such as pacifism, conscientious objection, and conscientious cooperation. It is argued that, while the Christian ideal is one of peace-making and reconciliation, in this fallen world, the use of force is sometimes necessary to restrain evil and protect the innocent. Christians make their contributions best by working for peace and healing, and should do so at every opportunity. But Scripture teaches that God has ordained the state as His minister to use force to protect good and restrain evil. Christian citizens may at times find themselves needing to speak and witness to, and at certain times act in support of, the appropriate and just use of that force.

Keywords: Christian just war theory, pacifism, conscientious objection, war and peace, crusade, holy war, defensive war

1. Introduction to Christian Just War Theory

Just war theory is a set of principles and criteria used to determine whether a war is morally justifiable. As a theory and practice, it pre-exists Christianity, having its roots in Greek, Roman, and Hebraic thought. In the West, however, just war thought comes as modified and mediated through a variety of Christian thinkers, scholars, and jurists. After the time of Constantine in the fourth century, Christians began to have ongoing influence in state circles and began to think deliberately about the morality of war. In the fourth and fifth centuries AD, Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo sought to reconcile the principles of Christian morality with the realities of warfare. Theologians after Augustine developed the theory, including Thomas Aquinas, Hugo Grotius, and, in the modern world, Reinhold Niebuhr. More recent expressions of just war theory include the United Nations Charter, which outlines the principles of the use of force in international relations, and various international treaties and conventions, all of which have, to some degree, been influenced by this history of religious thought.

The basic premise of Christian just war theory is that, in a fallen world, war is sometimes necessary to protect innocent people or to defend against aggression, but that it should be undertaken only as a last resort and with a clear and just *cause*. The theory also sets out guidelines for the *conduct* of war, emphasizing the need to minimize harm to non-combatants and to avoid the use of excessive force.

Key elements of Christian just war theory generally include some version of the following elements:[1]

1. Just cause: A war must be fought for a just cause, such as defending against an aggressor or protecting innocent people from harm.
2. Legitimate authority: A war must be declared by a legitimate authority, such as a government or an international organization.
3. Right intention: A war must be fought with the intention of achieving a just and peaceful outcome, rather than for selfish or malicious reasons.
4. Probability of success: A war must have a reasonable chance of success in achieving its goals, in order to avoid unnecessary loss of life and resources.

[1] James Turner Johnson, *Can Modern War Be Just?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 18–29.

5. Proportionality: The harm caused by a war must be proportional to the good that is being achieved, in order to avoid excessive or unnecessary destruction.
6. Discrimination: Combatants must distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, and take care to minimize harm to non-combatants.

Some have argued, especially Protestants in the pacifist or peace-church tradition, that just war theory is a product of post-Constantinian theological reflection made necessary by the shift of the morphing of Christianity into the civil empire of Christendom. As such, they argue that it is a product of heretical Christianity rather than an expression of the genuine thing. True Christians and Christianity, they argue, are fully non-violent and pacifist.

As we write this, the complexities of Christians and the question of the just war concept are being exhibited in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Both countries are ostensibly Christian in national identity. Both have expressed moral and even Christian reasons for their role in the conflict. The leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church has essentially blessed the invasion as a kind of holy war against the liberalism and secularism of the West—sentiments frequently echoed by Vladimir Putin, the Russian president. Putin views himself as something of a successor of St. Vladimir, the ruler of Rus, who is said to have founded the Russian Orthodox Church in 988 AD. For their part, the Ukrainian Orthodox have separated themselves from the Russian Orthodox Church, with more than 400 Ukrainian clerics calling for church leaders in Ukraine to declare the pro-war views of the Russian patriarch as heresy. Ukrainian president Volodymyr has a Jewish identity and frequently casts the war in moral terms. Despite their claims, it is hard to believe that, at an objective level, both sides to the conflict are truly in a position of justice, whatever their subjective views might be.[2]

To those in the pacifist tradition, this picture of competing moral and spiritual claims is the expected outcome of any attempt to invoke just war theory. Such efforts, they argue, will merely lead religious groups to wrap their patriotic and national allegiances in the sanctity of religion. This will result, it is asserted, to terrible crimes in the name of religion and schisms within bodies of faith that straddle conflicting countries. If this picture is true, then what use is just war theory? It would be better to leave any moral

[2] The religious views and divide in the Orthodox Church over the Ukrainian war can be found here: https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/18/world/europe/ukraine-war-russian-orthodox-church.html.

justification of violence alone and seek only to promote peace. Surely, this is the only appropriate role, it is argued, for those that claim to be followers and disciples of the Prince of Peace.

This argument assumes that the Bible teaches, at least for Christians, the complete abstention from violence, direct and indirect. This position of non-violence is generally known as pacifism. Some pacifists will allow that the secular state may use force to restrain and punish evil, but Christians should not participate in such efforts. In addition to pacifist and just war positions, another approach to war considered by Christian thinkers is that of the holy war or crusade, where the war is directed and overseen by command of God. Fallen into disfavor in modern times, it was a position of some influence during the middle ages, that saw a series of "Christian" crusades to the middle east and Jerusalem.

2. Christian Attitudes Towards War and Peace

As Yale historian Roland Bainton puts it, "broadly speaking, three attitudes to war and peace were to appear in the Christian ethic: pacifism, just war, and the crusade." He then goes on to assert that these positions "chronologically … emerged in just this order" within the church.[3] Bainton's categories expresss the Christian ethic in terms of a corporate view of the state and not necessarily that of the individual Christian. It is possible to think of individual Christians as acknowledging the correctness of one or more of these categories, for instance, that the state may engage in just war, yet to view themselves as holding personally to a different view, e.g., pacifism.

In addition to the three corporate positions set out above, it is possible to see three personal ethical positions held by many Christians: pacifism/non-cooperative conscientious objection, combatancy (at least insofar as a war is just), and conscientious, non-combatant cooperation. The last would involve a willingness to serve one's country in non-combat roles but in positions supporting and aiding those in combatant roles. This could include service as a medic, supply officer, or engineer, or perhaps to participate as an experimental subject in the testing of chemical or biological weapon materials.[4]

[3] Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), 14–15.

[4] Zoltan Szallos-Farkas, "Military Service and Just War: An Historical Overview," in Frank Hasel, Barna Magyarosi, and Stefan Höschele, eds., *Adventists and Military Service* (Madrid: Safeliz, 2019), 116; and on participation in testing, something Adventists did in the post-World War II United States, see chapter 12 by Michael F. Younker in

The pacifist insists that the only position fully consistent with the teachings of Christ would be that of non-cooperative conscientious objection.[5] There is certainly some evidence to support this view, ranging from the teachings of Christ on peace, to the attitude and teachings of the early church, which contain some strong expositions on the desirability of pacifism.

It also seems true that the church only began promoting military involvement as a public good for Christians starting with the reign of Constantine—when Christianity was made a formal part of the Roman Empire. Once it was part of the political framework of society, Christian leaders had to adapt the church's theology, it is argued, to allow the empire to defend itself from its enemies. Now that the civil leaders were "Christians," at least of some sort, surely it was acceptable for Christian members to participate under their oversight in the armed forces.

This embrace of just war, especially as articulated by Augustine, later morphed into the promotion of holy war, as seen in the Crusades. Such wars were where Christian leaders and soldiers could now embark on aggressive wars to fulfill the will of God, including spreading the church of Christ in the Holy Land. And thus is completed, the argument goes, the descent and fall of the church from its primitive, peaceful spiritual prosperity, to the fallen harlot who works with the dragon to use civil coercion to advance its spiritual agenda.[6]

This story creates an attractive narrative, and there are true elements within it. However, historical evidence suggests that it is not the whole story. Indeed, it overlooks important factors that are needed to create a balanced and coherent approach by Christians today to the state and the use of force. In our discussion, we will take into account both the three corporate approaches to war—pacifism, just war, and crusade—as well as the individual categories—pacifism, combatancy, and conscientious cooperation—

the same volume.

5 Indeed, this is the position that appears to have been taken by many of the contributors to and editors of the volume *Adventists and Military Service*, cited in the previous footnote.

6 This narrative is most robustly promoted by theologians and historians in the anabaptist, pacifist tradition, such as John Howard Yoder in his *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 42–57. But some Adventists, including a curious coalition of progressives and conservatives, have also been proposing this position in recent years, including in the *Adventists and Military Service* book in footnote 4, as well as in Barry W. Bussey, ed., *Should I Fight? Essays on Conscientious Objection and the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Belleville, Ontario: Guardian Books, 2011).

where appropriate. These categories are related and overlap but need to be distinguished in certain places.

3. Biblical Backgrounds—War and the Use of Force in the Bible

If one is persuaded that the Bible forbids all use of deadly force, except by direct command of God, then the just war discussion is over before it can even begin. Likewise, if Christ brought into being an ethic that forbids believers from any use of force or violence, then there can be no Christian theory of just war. All use of force, by definition, must be wrong and thus unjust. What follows is a brief overview of a biblically conservative reading of Scripture that allowed biblically committed believers throughout history to support the use of force in certain circumstances.

3.1 Old Testament Roots: Just War Woots in the Moral Government of God

3.2.1 Thou Shalt not Kill—Exodus 20:13

The first scriptural text to deal with killing is not the earliest, but is the most famous and, thus the most influential.[7] Many Christians believe that the Sixth Commandment, read straightforwardly and literally, forbids the killing of any human under any circumstances. What can be clearer, they argue, than "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod 20:13)?[8] But what most of these Christians overlook is that underlying the word kill found in English translations, like the King James Version, is the Hebrew verb רצח (*rṣḥ*). This word is used consistently throughout the Bible for unlawful killings, such as murder, manslaughter, and even accidental killings (Num 35:11; Judg 20:4; Hos 6:9).

However, *rṣḥ* is not the term used in another category of killings that might be called lawful or justified killings. These would include at least some killings in war, capital punishment carried out by the community, sacrifices commanded by God, or actions taken in self-defense (Gen 22:10; Num 31:17). These use a variety of other words, including שחט (*šḥt*)—used to describe Abraham's intended slaying of Isaac (Gen 22:10)—but not *rṣḥ*. This distinction helps make some sense of Abraham's apparently impossible dilemma with Isaac. As difficult as it was, he was asked to commit the ritual

[7] See the chapter by Jiří Moskala, in Hasel, Magyarosi, and Höschele, *Adventists and Military Service*, chapter 1.

[8] All biblical quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the King James Version.

sacrifice of *šḥt*, but not asked to violate God's other command against committing the murder of *rṣḥ*.

There are words used as catch-all phrases that include both lawful and unlawful killings, such as הרג (*hrg*). If the Sixth Commandment was intended to outlaw all killings of persons, then one of these words would have been more appropriately used. The King James Version use of "kill" is thus not the best translation of Exodus. Other versions get closer to the real meaning with "murder," such as the English Standard Version, the New International Version, and the New King James Version. Even this does not capture the full meaning of the text, as *rṣḥ* also includes reckless behavior that endangers the lives of others, even if death is not intended. The western legal concept and word "manslaughter" would capture these concepts. "Thou shalt not act in a way to endanger or threaten innocent human life" is perhaps a more accurate, though lengthier way of saying it.

3.2.2 God's Moral Government and Divine Killings

This verbal distinction between the unlawful killings of *rṣḥ* and the other kinds of killings that are not absolutely forbidden is helpful in understanding God's role in killings throughout the Bible, and in the final judgment. If the Sixth Commandment applies to all killings, then why is God exempt from it? Adventists teach that the law is as sacred as God Himself, because it is an expression of who He is, the principles of His character expressed in words. If this is so, how can God violate it? Some attempt to avoid this conundrum by saying that God does not kill, that sin destroys itself in the end. But this argument does not answer the interim deaths and killings that the Bible depicts God as carrying out in biblical history, such as in the story of the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, or the plagues of Egypt.

Again, it is not safe to say, as some do, that, as God created life, He can take it. Such an argument would allow God to take it for any purpose, reason, or no reason. But the Bible does not portray God as acting in this way. To the contrary, Abraham's famous bargaining with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah shows that Abraham believed that God would, and should, only destroy and use violence if it was justified by principles of righteousness and justice.

As he began his famous bargaining with God over saving the cities for the sake of the righteous in them, Abraham asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25). He did not have the view of God, often promoted by the Calvinists, that whatever God might choose to do is just, merely because He is God. Rather, Abraham argued that God could

not, should not, use force and violence without proper justification. God was the creator and ruler of the Universe, yes; but His was a government governed by moral principles that could be discerned, appreciated, and even argued for by human beings.

Placing God under the principles of righteousness and justice of His own nature had the effect of both elevating and confining human action. Elevating it, in that humans could be expected to also approach questions of life and death with the principles of justice and righteousness that God uses. But confining it, by preventing arbitrary and capricious use of force. Might simply does not make right, but might must be directed by right.

It was this philosophy that directed Abraham to come to the aid of his captured nephew Lot and his neighbors in launching an armed rescue mission to free them from local chieftains who had launched a war against the king of Sodom (Gen 14:1–16).

In commenting on this foray, where Abraham "smote … and pursued" the enemy, and "the king of Elam was slain," Ellen G. White wrote that Abraham had been a man of peace, shunning strife as much as possible. But in rescuing Lot, and smiting his captors, "Abraham had not only performed a great service for the country but had proved himself a man of valor. It was seen that righteousness is not cowardice, and that Abraham's religion made him courageous in maintaining the right and defending the oppressed."[9]

Abraham's righteous use of force to rescue and protect the innocent is only one in a number of incidents in which God approves of the use of force by His people in the Old Testament. Some attempt to limit the influence of these by positing that they were carried out under a theocracy by the direct command of God, and can find no parallel since the end of Israel's theocracy. But this view is only part of the story, and does not take into account the general legal standards for the use of force that Moses communicated to the people.

In Deuteronomy, seeking out whether an entire Israelite city had apostatized and gone after other gods, God instructed that "you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently." If it is determined after this investigation that the charges are true, then "you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword" (Deut 13:14–15). Similarly, in the case of the killer who fled to the city of refuge to escape retribution, there would need to be a trial where it was decided if the death was accidental or purposeful. If accidental, the accused would live in the city till the death of the high priest,

[9] Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1890), 134.

and then could return home. If purposeful, however, he would be executed as a murdered. It was "the congregation" who would "judge between the manslayer and the avenger of blood" (Num 35:24). An accused murdered could only be executed "on the evidence of witnesses," of which there must be two or more (Num 35:30).

If all use of the sword was only by direct command of God, the Israelites would not have needed general injunctions such as those discussed above. We know that there were a number of executions and killings where there is no hint of a special command of God, but neither is there any indication that the killing was wrong or problematic (see, for instance, 2 Sam 4:9–12; 1 Kgs 2:31–34). Also, even so-called holy wars typically had what we would call moral, or ethical, or even legal justification. The Deut 13 passage discussed above above envisioned a kind of holy war, punishing those that went after other gods, but would only be pursued after careful investigation and proof of the rebellion.

3.2.3 Holy Wars and Civil Wrongs

Some influential commentators on war and peace have proposed that the Old Testament "holy wars" of Israel needed no other justification than the command of God, and that these then served as the basis for "holy wars" during the Christian era, such as those of Constantine and during the era of the Crusades. This view suggests that "holy wars" have no other justification than the command of God, whose command alone justifies the violence and death of war.[10] These views tend to overlook the fact that while the OT wars may have been commanded by God, they were not without a human, moral, justificatory basis.

As God explains in Lev 18, "Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out from before you; And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land vomiteth out her inhabitants." (18:24–25). The sins listed in Leviticus include widespread sexual immorality, violence, and even child sacrifice. The civil nature of these wrongs is highlighted by the fact that God enjoins on Israel that not only must the children of Israel not do these wrongs, but also the strangers sojourning among them (Lev 18:26).

So yes, holy wars were initiated at the command of God, but not just over spiritual matters, but over genuine civil wrongs and immoralities that

[10] Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 105–12; Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, 44–48.

harmed others, such as Abraham's attack on the kings of Sodom (Gen 14:8–17), and the attack by the Israelite tribes on Benjamin for failing to bring the murderers of the concubine to justice (Judg 20:4–20). Some of the Old Testament wars were not perhaps "just" in the sense that a nation could justify them purely on grounds of national interest or defense. Yet they were "just" in view of bringing punishment and limitation on unjust acts by certain tribes or groups, against people that threatened, or even breached, the peace and safety of their own or surrounding communities. This proportionate and targeted punishment of unjust acts causing signficiant temporal harms and wrongs to life, liberty or property is distinguished from Crusade-like holy wars, which would broadly target groups for heresies, false worship, and other spiritual wrongs.

3.3 New Testament: Christ and the Two Kingdoms

Pacifist commentators argue that, with the coming of Christ, the Old Testament structure of holy/just wars comes to an end, and a new period of lamb-like peace, at least for the Christian, is ushered in. Certainly, there are some texts that appear to point in this direction: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matt 5:9); "Ye have heard that it was said, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth,' but I say unto you, resist not him that is evil; but whosoever smiteth thee on the thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt 5:38–39); "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36).

There are other texts, however, that make it appear that Christ is not undoing the Old Testament allowances for self-defense and the just use of the sword by the state. These would include His commendation of the faith of the Roman centurion He encountered, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel" (Matt 8:10; Luke 7:9). In His encounters with the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, and with the rich young ruler, we know that Christ was not shy or unwilling to point out the shortcomings or need for reform of people He loved, cared for, and was trying to spiritually reach.

Had the centurion's profession disqualified him from a life of true faith, would Christ have been unwilling to point this out? His silence on this point is not an isolated incident, but part of a pattern in which the New Testament approaches the issues of soldiers and their faith (Luke 3:14). John the Baptist urges soldiers to be honest and not to extort money, and Paul baptized the centurion Cornelius and his family without a recorded word about his profession as a soldier (Acts 10:22–48).

And while Christ commanded Peter not to wield the sword on His behalf against His captors (John 18:10–11), He also directed His followers on mission trips "that [he] hath none, let him sell his cloak, and buy a sword." The disciples respond by saying that they had "two swords," and "He said unto them, it is enough" (Luke 22:36–38). Two swords among twelve men would be entirely inadequate to take on even a small contingent of Roman soldiers; but they could be useful to defend themselves against wild animals and roving thieves or brigands.

And it is that distinction between personal self-defense against evil-doers, versus using force to advance the ideals of the kingdom of God, that is the most likely way of understanding these two potentially conflicting series of texts. Christ gives the hermeneutic for interpreting these passages when the Pharisees confront Him about His attitude towards Caesar. Asking Him if it was "lawful to give tribute to Caesar," Christ asked them for a coin. Noting that it had Caesar's picture on it, Christ made His famous proclamation that we are to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God, the things that are God's" (Matt 22:17–22).

In this world, the kingdom of God, Christ clearly stated, was not to be advanced by the sword or civil force. When the Jews and Romans came to take Christ, to question His role, authority, and kingdom, He clearly rebuked Peter for resorting to physical force, and declared to Pilate that His followers would not fight on behalf of advancing the spiritual truths of the kingdom. He was the prince of peace, His kingdom was the way of peace, and it could only be advanced through peaceful methods. While it seems He would allow His followers to defend themselves against lawless brigands and thieves, as strongly impled in Luke 22, He would not use force to defend His spiritual claims against duly constituted civil authority.

On the other hand, in their roles as subjects of Caesar's kingdom, they had duties to pay taxes (which supported the Roman occupying army), help soldiers carry their loads if asked (indeed, even further than asked, Matt 5:41), or even preserve their own lives and those of their friends if attacked by evil-doers, as allowed for in the Hebrew Scriptures (Exod 22:2–3). Christ's command about His followers carrying swords only makes sense in that context (Luke 22:36).

Later in the New Testament, the use of the sword by the state, to punish evil and reward good, is actually viewed as so much part of the divine plan that civil magistrates are described as διάκονος (*diakonos*)—the same word used for deacons, or ministers, in the Christian church. Most translations render this, appropriately, "minister of God." "For he is a *minister of God* to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not

the sword in vain: for he is a *minister of God*, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil" (Rom 13:4 ESV, emphasis mine).

The population of the early church mostly came from communities on the outskirts of Roman political and military power and mostly among non-citizens (which made up about 90% of the residents of Roman territories). While non-citizens could join the auxilia units of the Roman army, these were generally voluntary units, and thus early Christians did not face the question of compelled military service.[11] Rather, they had the option of opportunistic, voluntary military service, tempted by upward mobility or to gain Roman citizenship.[12]

Military service, even if not forbidden by Christian teaching, was evidently not a pathway where the Christian mission of spreading the gospel through teaching, preaching, and healing could be most ideally advanced. One can imagine why it would not be promoted by the church to young people as an ideal career path for a growing Christian.

But neither was military imagery shunned by early Christian leaders and teachers. On the contrary, the New Testament draws in a number of places on military imagery and ethos to communicate truths of the Christian life: "breastplate of faith and hope, and helmet of salvation" (1 Thess 5:8); "fellow soldier" (Phil 2:25; Phlm 1–2); "put on the whole armor of God" (Eph 6:10); "No soldier on service gets entangled in civilian pursuits" (2 Tim 2:3–6). These are just a few examples.

The soldiers that were drawn to the church were not, in Scripture, discouraged from military service. The ambivalence towards military service found in the New Testament is illustrated by an extra-biblical, but first-century text on church order that held that a Christian should not join the army, but that a soldier could join the Church, and remain a soldier.[13]

4. Early Church—Proclamation and Praxis

Some have argued that the early church was uniformly pacifist until very nearly the end of the second century, at which point some members began to deviate and participate in the military. It was this deviation, it is argued,

11 Duncan B. Campbell, *Roman Auxiliary Forts 27 BC–AD 378* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009).

12 Phillip Wynn, *Augustine on War and Military Service* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 38–39.

13 Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 133.

that forced Christian theologians such as Tertullian and Origin to begin to write against military service to explicitly defend the pacifism that had ruled the church until that point.[14]

A pacifist position, however, does not seem to fairly acknowledge even the Scriptural facts discussed above, where soldiers were commended for their faithfulness, and even allowed into the church, without any mention of ceasing their professions. Further, historical evidence tells us that a meaningful number of Christians must have been in the Roman army by at least the mid-2nd century.

It was from just after then, in about 172 AD that the story of the "thundering legion" derives from an expedition of Marcus Aurelius. His army was fighting the Germans, and the Roman water supply became exhausted, threatening their survival. A frustrated emperor, the story goes, turned to the Christians in his ranks, and asked for them to pray for rain. They did, and rain allegedly came. The story is quite widely attested to in both Christian and pagan literature, each claiming that it was their own gods, or God, that did the miracle.[15]

For our purposes, the interesting feature of the telling of the story in Christian literature, some of which dates to just a decade or two after the event, is that the authors never explain why there were such a large number of Christians in the army. Indeed, some portrayals indicate there were "numerous" Christians, enough for the emperor to recognize as a meaningful group and call upon. The early Christian authors "were not surprised by the presence of Christians in the [army] ranks nor did they think their congregations and readers would be."[16] Yet, when one looks for evidence in the early church of a Christian attitude which assumes the evil nature of war and the evil motives behind war, there is much available.[17] The difficulty of telling a single story of Christian attitudes toward war and military service is this very ambiguity and seeming contradiction. Rather than an early church tradition on the military, it is probably better to speak in terms of traditions.

[14] Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 48–50; Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War*, 66–69; Szallos-Farkas, "Military Service and Just War," 88–96 ("Christians during the 2nd and 3rd century essentially did not participate in military service. Hence, early Christianity was pacifist and non-violent.")

[15] Despina Iosif, *Early Christian Attitudes to War, Violence and Military Service* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2013), 61–67.

[16] Iosif, *Early Christian Attitudes to War*, 66.

[17] C. John Cadoux, *The Early Christian Attitude to War* (New York: Seabury, 1982), 49–160.

The involvement in the army continued into the third century AD, as there are many stories of Christian martyrs in the army. This especially occurred during times of Christian persecution, where the Roman religion was more severely enforced on the ranks. Again, though, it shows that Christians who were faithful and unwilling to worship Caesar or the Roman gods were still willing and able to serve in the army, until their religious loyalty was challenged.[18]

Clement of Alexandria, writing towards the end of the second century, found the notion of a Christian soldier to be common-place and unremarkable enough to include in a general statement of how Christianity changed a man. It changed his attitude and values, though not necessarily his profession or vocation. His advice to new Christians included to "continue to be a farmer if you were a farmer ... but know God while farming; continue to be a shipping enthusiast but call on your heavenly oarsman. In case the revelation of truth comes to you while you are on [military] campaign, then pay attention to the general who orders what is right."[19]

There were important voices towards the end of the second century that began to vocally challenge and question military service. But the question is whether this was in response to new and wider outbreaks of Christian military involvement; or whether it might reflect a changing philosophy within Christianity, which was moving towards a more dualistic, spiritualized version that unduly dismissed the importance of the material world and its attendant necessities like keeping the peace from evildoers. There is evidence to suggest that the latter might be the better explanation.

The three most prominent voices that began writing at the end of the 2nd century against military service were Origen, Cyprian, and Tertullian. It is claimed that "they all said the same thing with regard to war and military service.... They were all pacifists."[20] But this statement is only partially true. Its exception gives insight into a larger pattern that this pacifism was part of a creeping dualistic spiritualization that was beginning to significantly impact Christianity.

[18] John Helgeland, Robert J. Daly, and J. Patout Burns, *Christians and the Military: The Early Experience* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 56–66 ("The Military Martyrs"); Christopher Holdsworth, "'An Airier Aristocracy': The Saints at War (The Prothero Lecture)," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6 (1996): 103–22.

[19] Clement of Alexandria, *Protr.* 10.100, 3.10–11, quoted in Iosif, *Early Christian Attitudes*, 71.

[20] Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 49.

All three scholars were steeped in Greek dualism, with Origen believing in the spiritual pre-existence of all souls and the highest interpretation of Scripture being the spiritual, allegorical meaning. Cyprian viewed baptism as having sacramental, saving efficacy, and the Genesis days of creation as representing 1,000 years. Both views tend to spiritualize or make symbolic the physical and the literal. But it is perhaps Tertullian who is key to understanding this move towards pacifism. He shows a change in his thought on the topic, moving from an apparent acknowledgement and acceptance of Christian soldiers, to a complete repudiation of military service or the use of force for Christians, especially during his Montanist-connected years, where he moves into a more thorough-going dualism.[21]

The difference between earlier and later writings is quite incontestable, as a comparison of representative quotes will show. In his *Apology* addressed to the emperor in the late 190s, Tertullian avers that Christians pray for "security to the empire; for protections to the imperial house; for brave armies." But Christians did not stop with prayer but involved themselves in the life of the empire, including civic duties and roles, including the army. We have "filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods." Leaving no doubt that the camp, tribes, and companies refers to military service, Tertullian later says that "we sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you."[22]

A decade and a half later, Tertullian sounds quite a different tone. In his *Treatise on Idolatry* he asks whether a Christian can become a soldier, or whether a soldier who becomes a Christian can stay a soldier. Departing from earlier Christian tradition, he strongly answers no in both instances. Even if a Christian is merely a rank-and-file soldier, without obligation to participate in camp sacrifices, Tertullian says he cannot stay a soldier:

> There can be no compatibility between the divine and the human sacrament (military oath), the standard of Christ and the standard of the devil, the camp of light, and the camp of darkness. One soul cannot serve two masters—God and Caesar.... The Lord, in subsequently disarming Peter

[21] George Kalantiz, *Caesar and the Lamb: Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 98–100.

[22] Tertullian, *Apol.* 30.4, 37.3, 42.2, 3. See also Tertullian, *Mart.* 3. For a discussion of these passages see Helgeland, Daly, and Burns, *Christians and the Military*, 21–22 and Harnack, *Militia Christi*, 54–59.

> disarmed every soldier. No uniform is lawful among us if it is designated for an unlawful action.[23]

Tertullian takes a similar absolutist position in his later published *Treatise on the Crown*. In that work, he tells the story of a Christian soldier who refuses to wear the "idolatrous laurel-crown" that victorious legions wore. He has his military rank stripped from him, and suffers martyrdom for his convictions.

In telling the story, Tertullian reveals that Christians are a part of the ranks of the military, but in his view, the only faithful Christian was the one who was martyred. "He alone brave among so many soldier-brethren, he alone a Christian." Yes, there were those that identified as Christians in the military, Tertullian would have said, but they were such in name only. The faithful ones either left or were martyred.[24]

Ironically, those that insist that the early church forbade all military involvement are actually defending the position of that portion of the early church that was most aggressively moving into a body/soul dualism. They over-emphasized the spiritual at the expense of the bodily and material. Whilst he opposed the gnostic and Marcionite dualists, Tertullian himself embraced an ascetism that flowed from a suspicion of the material world, including the desires of human bodies. This anti-materialism can perhaps be most clearly seen in his movement towards downplaying and eventually asking if marriage is not superseded in the age of the church, and as not for the truly spiritual, certainly as to second marriages for widowers, and perhaps even for first marriages.[25]

Ironically, Tertullian is the one who famously wrote "what indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?"[26] It would seem that in vowing to not use pagan philosophies and ideas that he became all the more unaware of his capture by the Greek, dualist thought of his day that he apparently mistook for just "the way things are."

Christian dualism was susceptible of the extremes of pacifism and disregard of defense of bodily integrity; but it could also be shaped into a reason for using force in the cause of spiritual truth and advancement; whether it be as Christian magistrates punishing the flesh of heretics to save their

[23] Tertullian, *Idol.* 19, in Helgeland, Daly, and Burns, *Christians and the Military*, 22–23.

[24] Tertullian, *Cor.*, ch. 1, in Helgeland, Daly, and Burns, *Christians and the Military*, 25–26.

[25] Tertullian, *Exh. cast.*, "Ch. IX – Second Marriage a Species of Adultery. Marriage Itself Impugned as akin to Adultery" (https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0405.htm).

[26] Tertullian, *Praescr*. 7.

eternal souls, or the Christian soldier pursuing the infidel or pagan to advance the kingdom of God on earth. Thus, after the "conversion" of the empire under Constantine, it was simple enough to switch the teaching of the church from one of pacifism to militarism, on behalf of both the empire and the church. Underscoring the pervasive dualism was the fact that at the time that the majority of the church adopted militarism, the main opponents of it, and the keepers of pacifism, were monks who abandoned the idea of family life and lived as ascetics in desert monasteries.[27]

5. Augustine to Aquinas and the Rise of Holy War

Augustine is at times referred to as the originator of Christian just war theory, but this is to overstate the matter. As we have seen above, there were Old Testament antecedents, as well as thinkers of the Greco-Roman world, including Aristotle and Cicero, who provided the framework from which Augustine drew. But Augustine was also preceded in his application of these ideas in a Christian framework by Ambrose of Milan, who he viewed as his mentor and even spiritual father.[28]

Ambrose had been the pretorian prefect of Northern Italy before being made Bishop, and he was thus well positioned to combine the military ideas of Stoicism with principles from the Old Testament. He insisted that war must only be conducted for the just cause of maintaining peace, and clerics themselves, including monks and priests, must not participate.[29] With his gift for systematic exposition, and in the face of an imploding Roman empire, Augustine built on Ambrose's foundation. He believed that war defending against aggression or protecting innocent people could be just, but that it should only be waged under certain conditions. These included being declared by a legitimate authority, with the intention of restoring peace, with the use of force proportional to the harm being inflicted, and the sparing of non-combatants as much as possible.[30]

Less commented on in the literature discussing Augustine's views of just war are his views of the millennium and treatment of heretics. It was his developing views in these areas that caused the church's views on just war to veer into an ominous and ultimately destructive direction. Earlier in his

27 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 85, 89.
28 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 89–91.
29 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 89–91.
30 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 95–98.

life, Augustine had been both a premillennialist and opposed to the use of force in dealing with heretics. But both these views changed over time.

In his dispute with the Donatist sect, Augustine famously changed his position on the use of force with the heretic. After becoming frustrated with the Donatists' refusal to listen to reason and persuasion, he argued that their persuasion threshold would be lowered by the use of punishment and force. He cited Christ's parable of the wedding feast, where it was said of the recalcitrant guests, "compel them to come in." In his view, this served as a precedent for the use of force and punishment against heretics, so they might more easily change their minds and pursue eternal things.[31]

He also shifted from a premillennial view of the thousand years of Revelation, which envisioned Christ's kingdom being set up upon His second Advent, to an amillennial view. This latter view held that the church was working to set up Christ's kingdom in this world now. These two points, that force could be used to persuade heretics, and that Christ's kingdom was meant to be part of the here and now, meant that the stage was set for just war to be not only concerned with temporal peace and justice, but also with spiritual and heavenly values.

Augustine himself appears not to have used the term "holy war," or connected his just war principles with his approach to the millennium or heretics. But the principles were now in place that would justify church leaders encouraging civil authorities to carry out not merely just wars aimed at preserving the peace, but supposedly holy wars, with purposes of advancing the spiritual kingdom of God in the temporal world.

In the centuries following Augustine, his use of Christ's words "compel them to come in" were cited with increasing frequency to justify the use of force against heretics, and then eventually against Muslims in the Crusades. There was a transitional period where the new barbarian tribes that had displaced the Roman empire made the use of force a necessary element of survival in the absence of the *pax romana*. The newly Christianized barbarian chiefs and leaders found it easy to claim "Jesus as the new Yahweh of hosts."[32]

Whether protecting one's town against Viking raids or barbarians from the east, the use of private force in self-defense by these Christian rulers was seen as a necessity, one made more noble by wrapping the struggle in a religious identity. Even religious leaders and bishops were drawn into battle,

[31] Augustine, *Letter 173* (AD 416), pars. 2, 10 (viewed at https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102173.htm).

[32] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 103.

despite Augustine's earlier injunctions against this.[33] But the real shift was the implementation of Augustine's own logic that civil force could be acceptable, even sanctified, when based not merely on principles of civil justice, but to further religious and spiritual aims. This led to the acceptance of the so-called holy war, the medieval manifestation being the crusades of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries.[34]

The crusades were not to force the conversion of the infidel and pagan. Augustine and later Thomas Aquinas generally limited the use of force for spiritual punishment against the heretic, the Christian believer who had fallen away. Rather, the crusade was ostensibly an attempt to safeguard the trips of Christian pilgrims to the holy sites of Jerusalem, which were allegedly being made difficult to access by their Muslim rulers. But the reasoning extended beyond the just war tradition, as the justification was based on religious and spiritual goals. The religious nature of the crusade became even more apparent when it was used against "heretical" groups within Europe itself, such as the Cathars and Albigenses.[35]

The use of force for spiritual, as opposed to civil, purposes, was affirmed by the next great thinker in the Christian just war tradition, Thomas Aquinas. Writing in the middle of the period of the crusades, Aquinas reaffirmed Augustine's view that civil force could be used for spiritual ends, especially against heretics who corrupted the Christian faith. He famously compared heretics to forgers of money, who under the civil laws, faced the death penalty. He argued as "it was a much graver matter to corrupt the faith that quickens the soul, than to forge money, which supports temporal life ... much more reason is there for heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even put to death."[36]

Unsurprisingly, the crusades abroad (and at home) soon became matched with the institution of the inquisition, which persisted in Europe long beyond the period of the crusades. These uses of force for religious, rather than civil purposes, mainly ended only in the nineteenth century under the scrutiny and opposition of Protestant tolerance and Enlightenment reason. Yet neither Protestantism nor the Enlightenment rejected the underlying framework of just war theory, but rather expanded and refined it. Par-

[33] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 103–5.

[34] Yoder, *Christain Attitudes to War*, 109–12.

[35] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 114–15.

[36] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. II-II, Question 11, Article 3 (quoted from https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3011.htm#article3.)

ticularly, they joined the parallel currents that focused, or at least emphasized, either the just cause behind a war, or the justice of the methods used to pursue the war.

6. Reformation and the Wars of Religion

Martin Luther, a main fountainhead of the reformation, had a teaching of the two kingdoms that led him to separate the church from civil concerns and force; but at the same time allowed that the civil ruler was God's minister to keep temporal peace and safety, by force if necessary.[37] But he strongly rejected the idea of the crusade, or holy war. He taught that Christians were not to advance the kingdom of God against the Turks through the use of arms. He wrote that the papacy, "undertook to fight against the Turk in the name of Christ, and taught and incited men to do this, as though our people were an army of Christians against the Turks, who were enemies of Christ. This is absolutely contrary to Christ's doctrine and name."[38]

He did allow, however, Christian princes to defend their territories against the unjust invasion of the Turks. But this use of force must be consistent with just war principles, not that of holy crusade. And if individual soldiers thought the princes cause and war was unjust, they should refuse to serve.[39]

Luther's position about not using force on behalf of the gospel was tested as the Protestant princes of Germany came under threat from their Catholic fellows and emperor. He eventually acknowledged the legitimacy of magistrates and their subjects bearing arms to *defend* both territory and consciences from outsiders seeking to control both. But even then, he retained the medieval tradition that clergy themselves should abstain from the use of force.[40]

Calvin had a somewhat more theocratic tendency than Luther, and was responsible for Geneva, a kind of Protestant island surrounded by a number of Catholic territories. He and his followers rather quickly developed the notion of the inferior magistrate who could hold accountable, through arms if necessary, princes and kings who overstepped the bounds of true religion and sought to infringe conscience.[41]

37 Nicholas Miller, *500 Years of Protest and Liberty* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 30–31.

38 Martin Luther, *On War Against the Turk*, vol. 46 in *Luther's Works,* 164–65.

39 Martin Luther, *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved*, vol. 46 in *Luther's Works*, 130.

40 Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 138–39.

41 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.20.31.

So in theory, both Luther and Calvin rejected religious wars of aggression, the crusading template of the Middle Ages. But in practice, it became at times difficult to determine where a defense war ended, and a crusading war began. Did Protestants have the right to recover lands taken by Catholics in offensive wars of religion? The Huguenots and Waldenses thought so, as they fought campaigns to recover their ancestral lands and valleys; the Puritans and Cromwell fought the king and his army in England, eventually executing him in the name of their righteous cause; and the Thirty Years War on the continent, largely in Germany, was known as a central part of the wars of religion, with the belligerents mostly divided along denominational lines.[42]

Out of all the religious groups, it was really only the radical reformers, the Anabaptists and their kin that stayed, mostly, out of the fray. Even they are complicated, as the apocalyptic branch of the Anabaptists engaged in holy war, most notably at the City of Munster. But the main body of the Anabaptists not only foreswore war and violence, but also believed that they should avoid all possible involvement in civil matters that touched on force, including serving in the magistracy, military, or police force. Their scruples extended to oath-taking for civil purposes, or even acknowledging social hierarchy by tipping one's hat to a social superior.[43]

Anabaptism was the source of the pacifist, peace-church movement in the west, a tradition that has been carried on by the Quakers, Mennonites, Amish, and other heirs of the radical reformation. One might think that early Adventists would find their roots in the radical, Anabaptists tradition of pacifism. But in her account of these events, church founder Ellen G. White has little to say about the Anabaptists—just a bit about Menno Simons—and does not touch meaningfully on their pacifism. She does, however, speak in laudatory terms of some of the Protestant and proto-Protestant leaders who fought in defense of their faith.

She writes of the Bohemian leader Ziska, "one of the ablest generals of his age," being "raised up" to oppose the papal crusade against the Hussites. Under Ziska, who is described as "trusting in the help of God," faithful protestants "withstood the mightiest armies that could be brought against them. Again and again the emperor invaded Bohemia, only to be repulsed."[44]

[42] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 142–50.

[43] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes*, 153–56.

[44] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), 116.

She likewise speaks glowingly of Gustavus II, king of Sweden, who came to the aid of the Protestant German states during the Thirty Years War. "It was from Sweden," she notes, "that deliverance came to Germany in her terrible struggle against the papal armies" at a time when "the religion and liberty of Christendom were on the point of being trodden out." Despite possessing only "slender means and a small army," Gustavus moved forward in the "faith that God, whose cause he was undertaking, would sustain him." It was this knowledge that "urged him forward to become the defender of Protestantism."[45] It is hard to read these passages and not see some level of agreement with Luther, Calvin, and Grotius, at least on the point that force can appropriately be used to defend one's home and conscience against aggressors.

7. Hugo Grotius and the Development of Modern Just War Theory

The life and teachings of Hugo Grotius reveals the value to the world of those Christians who have viewed just war as a legitimate concept and possibility. He was one of the early modern voices to put the new Protestant view on the use of force into a clearer context and teaching. Grotius was a Dutch jurist, theologian, and scholar. Writing in the early 1600s, Grotius is considered one of the founding fathers of modern international law and his works on just war theory helped to shape the development of this field. Less well known in today's world are the theological foundations of his work. Grotius was a follower of the Dutch theologian Jacobus, or James, Arminius, who popularized free will anthropology in Western Protestant thought.

Grotius took the insights of Arminius regarding human free will and divine benevolence and applied them to the ongoing question of the atonement and why Christ died. He articulated a construct known as the moral government of God, where God oversaw a universal government, governed by principles of justice and equity, that needed to be upheld for the universe to exist with peace and harmony. These principles were not only part of God's nature, but also imbued into His creation, where they could be uncovered and understood, at least in part, by human beings. Grotius based his theory of just war on these principles of natural law, which he believed were universally applicable and could be used to guide human behavior in

[45] Ellen G. White, *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Basle: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), 191–92.

matters of war and peace. He believed that wars could be justifiable under certain circumstances, but only if they met certain criteria.[46]

Grotius outlined his just war theory in his major work, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (*On the Law of War and Peace*), which was published in 1625.[47] In this work, Grotius laid out a set of criteria that a war must meet in order to be considered just. One of the key criteria in his theory is that a war must be fought for a just *civil* cause, such as to defend against aggression or to protect innocent people from harm. This excluded wars being fought for religious causes or purposes. He also believed that a war must be authorized by a legitimate civil authority, such as a government or a recognized international organization.[48]

Another basis for the theory of just war as articulated by Grotius is the idea that wars should be fought only as a last resort, and that they must be conducted in a way that is justifiable and ethical. His work, though grounded in a Protestant, natural law outlook, has had a significant impact on the development of international law. His ideas continue to be studied and debated by scholars and policymakers today. The ideas of Grotius continue to inform the important moral and policy debates, even in the age of nuclear bombs and drone strikes.[49]

8. Ellen G. White on the Just Use of Force

In addition to her comments on the just use of force in European wars of religion quoted above, Ellen G. White showed in her own life a practical acceptance of the need for force to thwart evil in this sinful, fallen world. In 1879, she and her husband James led a wagon train from Texas to Colorado, which involved a passage through Indian Territory. The party appears to have been made up of Adventist members. In a letter to her children, Ellen G. White describes how Sabbath was kept by the group.

But along with the description of Sabbath-keeping was a less expected recounting of the reliance on weapons by the group. "We have to be very

[46] Nicholas P. Miller, *The Reformation and the Remnant: The Reformers Speak to Today's Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 39–40.

[47] Originally published as *De iure belli ac pacis libri tres*, Paris: Buon, 1625; a recent English translation being *The Rights of War and Peace*, Books I–III, ed. Richard Tuck (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2005).

[48] Hugo Grotius, "Rights of War and Peace," II.1.1-II.1.7; as discussed in Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and Revolution*, 39, 107.

[49] Freiberger, Erich, "Just War Theory and the Ethics of Drone Warfare," *E-International Relations*, July 18 2013.

well armed," White wrote, "in passing through the Indian territory. We have our wagons brought up in a circle, then our horses are placed within the circle. We have two men to watch. They are relieved every two hours. *They carry their guns upon their shoulders*. We have less fears from Indians than from white men who employ the Indians to make a stampede among the horses and mules and ponies."[50] It is instructive that when Ellen and James White was the closest they ever came to being a civil authority—a leader of a wagon train in the "wild west"—that they saw no problem with being prepared to repel evil with the use of force.

When it came to the Christian and military service, Ellen G. White, along with other Adventist leaders sought to gain noncombatancy exceptions for Adventist believers during the Civil War. They perceived a conflict between military service and the commands of God, as no allowance was made for Sabbath observance in the military during the Civil War. Also, the commands of officers may not always follow principles of fairness and justice. Ellen G. White saw that "*In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers.* There would be a continual violation of conscience."[51]

This comment was made in the context of voluntary military service. But interestingly, in opposing military service in the Civil War, Ellen G. White did not cite the Sixth Commandment, the one against murder, in opposing mili-tary service during the Civil War. James White did mention both the Sabbath and Murder commandment in an editorial. But he believed that in a draft situation, the "government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God, and it would be madness to resist. He who would resist until, in the administration of military law, he was shot down, goes too far, we think, in taking the responsibility of suicide."[52]

Ellen G. White seems to have agreed with her husband James about avoiding war when possible, but not opposing an involuntary draft. When she was in Europe, she noted that faithful Adventist young people who were required to serve in the military, and that their service was both notable and exceptional, as they "had tokens of honor for faithfulness in their

[50] Ellen G. White, Letter 20a, 1879 (found at https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/3488.1) (emphasis supplied).

[51] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 361–62 (emphasis supplied).

[52] James White, "The Nation," *Review and Herald,* August 12, 1862.

work" from their regiments. Again, she noted that "these did not go from choice, but because the laws of their nation required this."[53]

White was still alive when World War I broke out, and the challenges facing Adventists in Europe were brought to her attention by her son Willie White. He told her about the draft laws in various countries, where some Adventists had been pressed into military service. He said that some Adventists believed that those who had been "forced into the Army would have done wrong to submit to military service. They think it would have been better for them to have refused to bear arms, even if they knew that as a result of their refusal they would be made to stand up in line to be shot." Her response was pragmatic and telling. "I do not think they ought to do that, I think they ought to stand to their duty as long as time lasts."[54]

Her position on matters of the draft and use of arms differed from that of the historic peace churches, which generally embraced a thorough-going pacifism, whatever the costs or sacrifices. Her position might be better described as one of a pragmatic conscientious objection, or even cooperation when necessary, rather than principled opposition to any and all use of force or arms. This position is a necessary corollary to a just war outlook, as a principled objection to any and all use of force or violence makes a just war position impossible, practically if not theoretically.

9. Christian Just War Influence in the Modern Era

Given the horrors of war in the twentieth, and now also the twenty-first, centuries, one may question the value or restraining influence of Christian just war outlooks and theories. They arguably do not appear to have halted the human drive for conquest, bloodshed, and barbarism. And yet, we do not really know the horrors that may have been faced if these ideas had not been present. To insist that an absolute pacifism is the only appropriate way for a Christian to engage public and political policy would have undermined an important source of ideas for the Geneva Convention, the Nuremberg Trials, and the United Nations.

The list of positive contributions by Christian just war theory to our world in the last century includes the following:

[53] Ellen G. White, Uncopied Letter 23, written from Basel, Switzerland, Sept. 2, 1886 (viewed at https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/766.143.)

[54] Willie C. White to Guy Dail, May 26, 1915, cited in Arthur White, *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years: 1905–1915* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 427.

1. **Nuremberg Trials and War Crimes Prosecution**: The principles of just war theory played a crucial role in shaping the legal framework for prosecuting war crimes and crimes against humanity after World War II. The Nuremberg Trials, in particular, emphasized the idea that individuals could be held accountable for their actions during wartime, even if they were following orders. Similar tribunals have operated for war crimes in relation to the former Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide. These efforts reflected the Christian emphasis on individual responsibility and the principle of proportionality in the use of force.[55]
2. **Nuclear Weapons Debate**: Christian just war theory has informed discussions surrounding the morality and ethical implications of nuclear weapons. Many Christian leaders and theologians have questioned the proportionality and indiscriminate nature of nuclear warfare, raising concerns about the principles of discrimination and noncombatant immunity. These discussions have influenced the development of international law regarding the use and proliferation of nuclear weapons.[56]
3. **Humanitarian Intervention**: Just war theory has influenced debates on humanitarian intervention, particularly during conflicts such as the genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia. The principle of just cause has been invoked to argue for intervention when gross human rights violations occur within a state. Christian thinkers have contributed to discussions on the responsibility to protect, and the conditions under which military force can be justified to prevent or halt mass atrocities.[57]
4. **Conscientious Objection**: Christian just war theory has also spurred conscientious objection to military service. These movements have influenced public discourse on the morality of war and led to legal provisions for conscientious objection in many countries.[58]

[55] Mark J. Osiel, Obeying Orders: Atrocity, Military Discipline, and the Law of War (London: Routledge, 2017), 1–4.

[56] Paul Ramsey & John H. Hallowell, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1961), 63–75.

[57] Bainton, *Christian Attitudes toward War and Peace*; John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth: Veritatis Splendor* (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993); Brendan Simms and D. J. B. Trim, eds., *Humanitarian intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[58] John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 76–85.

5. **Ethical Considerations in Military Operations**: Christian just war theory has influenced military ethics and the conduct of warfare. Principles such as proportionality, discrimination, and the preservation of non-combatant immunity have been integrated into military doctrines and rules of engagement. The ethical reflections derived from just war theory have guided military decision-making processes, emphasizing the moral responsibility to minimize harm and uphold human dignity during armed conflicts.[59]

When Christ declared "blessed are the peacemakers," He was declaring a goal and an ideal, but not necessarily describing all the options for achieving that goal in a fallen and sinful world. Paul's reference to rulers who wield the sword to restrain evil and protect good as "servants" or "ministers" of God makes this point well enough. The limited use of force to restrain violent evil may at times be the best pathway forward to having more peace, and not less.

One can believe, based on New Testament teaching, that Christians should, wherever possible, avoid military, combatant service, and use instead their skills to heal, uplift, and mend. The conscientious objector tradition of the Adventist church is an important, and somewhat sidelined teaching, that needs new life breathed into it. But surely this can be done without removing the Christian and Adventist voice from a place of influence and guidance in the foreign policy and military deliberations of nations, where it can be heard.

To deny any possibility of the just use of force would be to deprive the world of a restraining and moderating influence of Christian and moral insight that has helped minimize violence—and maximize peace and justice—in a world more and more desperately in need of both. It is also to make very strange, peculiar and even contradictory one of the final images we have of "the Prince of Peace" in the Bible—astride a war steed, with a sword to "strike down the nations," and a rod of iron with which to "rule them" (Rev 19:11–15).

It is true that this force is used against Satan and his minions, but this would include his human followers, in what would be the last, final, and fully justified holy war and crusade, the kind that God, in His infinite wisdom and justice, reserves for Himself. But this vivid picture reveals that peace, in a fallen world, is ultimately the result of the fair, timely, and just use of force—not of its complete rejection or absence. But as Christians, the

[59] Jeff McMahan, *Killing in War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 203–12.

pathway of peace should be our primary and ideal calling, as we seek to be voices of conscience and care for those who do wield power to protect good and defend against evil.