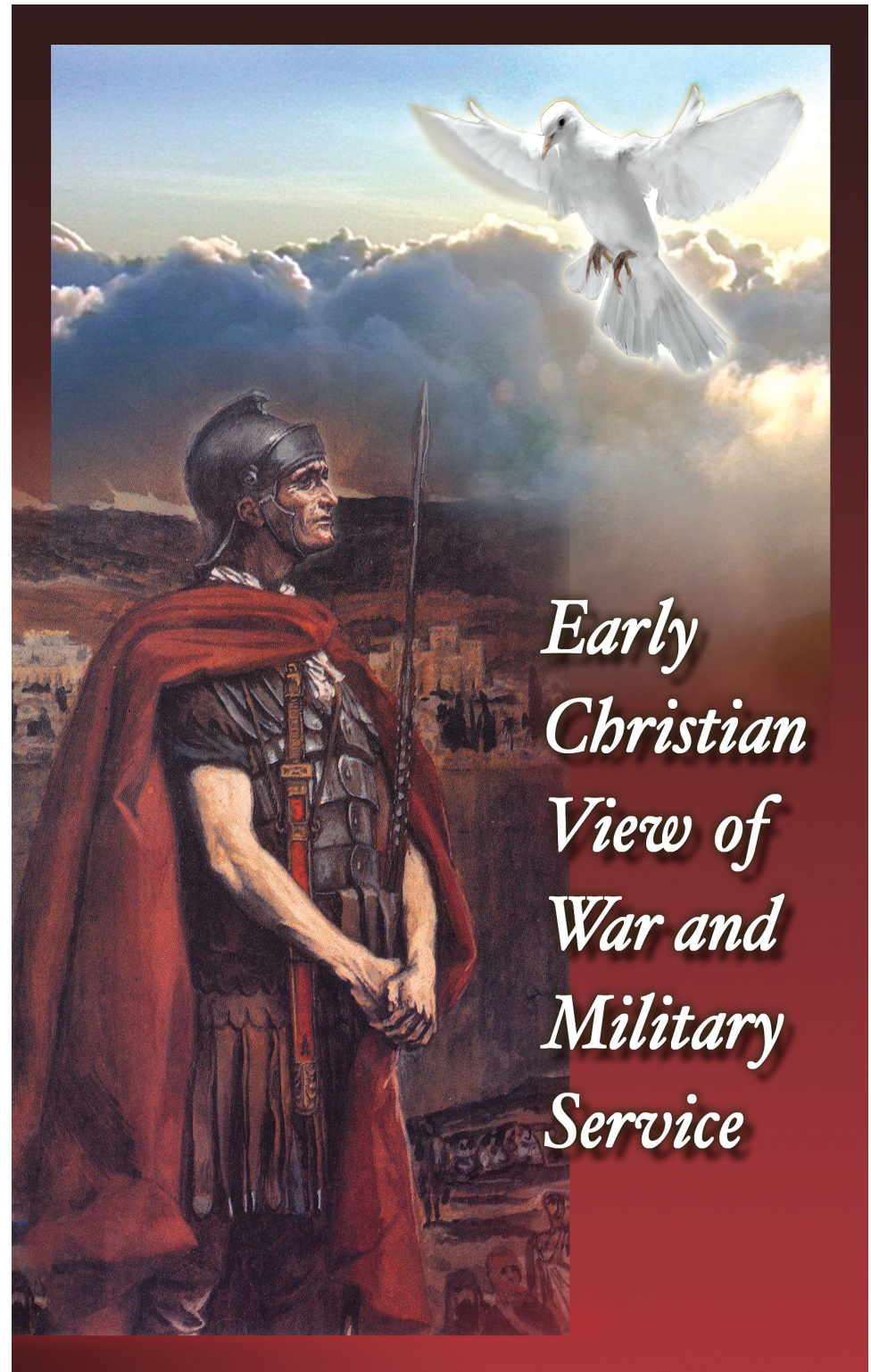

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Selective Service Concerns*

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*Early Christian View
of War
and Military Service*

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Part One

The Historical Facts

◆ CHAPTER ONE ◆

Military Conscription Conducted by Roman Empire During Period of Early Church's History

“Early Rome originated the term ‘conscription.’ The expression ‘*conscribere milites*’ denotes the enrollment or registration of males chosen for the Roman Legion from the whole body of freeborn citizens capable of bearing arms. In the days of the early republic, compulsory service was the sole source of military recruitment, contrasting in this respect, with the Carthaginian principle of dependence on mercenaries...The cavalry was drawn from the ranks of the wealthy, the infantry from the middle classes, and the poorer citizens...served as light auxiliaries...From the very outset, delinquency on the part of the conscript was punished with imprisonment and the confiscation of his property. Liability to service extended from the age of 17 to 60, the older men being restricted to garrison duty. Under the prolonged strain of the Punic Wars (ending in 146 B.C.), slaves and non-citizens were forced into the ranks...Under the heavy drain of constant campaigning, increasing dependence was placed on the drafts called up from subject peoples, and on mercenaries.”¹

“The methods of raising men for the army have varied...The Roman system depended on the annual levy, consisting of four legions of infantry...each legion containing 6,666 men. The consuls...would announce by herald or written proclamation that a levy was to be made.”²

“The government could nearly always get as many soldiers as it needed by ordinary methods of enlistments without making wide use of its powers to compel the unwilling. Such forcible recruiting as did occur took place more and more among the least civilized population of the Empire. Gentile free and freed men who were Christians would thus hardly ever be called upon to serve.”³

Nevertheless, it seems evident that definite attempts were made to conscript Christians for military service: “Celsus (about 178 A.D.) thought it necessary to appeal to the Christians as a body to help the Emperor zealously, to cooperate with him in maintaining justice, and to fight for him, if he should call upon them to do so, both in the ranks and in positions of military command. He argued that, if all did as they did, the Emperor would be deserted, and his realm fall prey to savages and barbarians.”⁴

♦ CHAPTER TWO ♦

The Early Christian Church Conscientiously Opposed to Military Service

A. General Historical Perspective

“The rise of Christianity led to a rapid growth of conscientious objection. According to A. Harnack, C.J. Cadoux, and G.J. Herring, the most eminent students of the problem, few if any Christians served in the Roman Army during the first century and a half A.D.; and even in the third century there were Christian conscientious objectors.”⁵

“That many early Christians accepted the injunctions of the Sermon on the Mount quite literally is certain and their attitude brought them into much the same kind of conflict with the Roman authorities which conscientious objectors of our own time face in dealing with the military authority. G.C. Macgregor (THE NEW TESTAMENT BASIS OF PACIFISM) points out that ‘until about the close of the third quarter of the second century the attitude of the church was quite consistently pacifist.’ Harnack’s conclusion is that no Christian would become a soldier after baptism at least up to the time of Marcus Aurelius, say about A.D. 170 (MILITIA CHRISTI, p. 4). After that time, signs of compromise became increasingly evident, but the pacifist trend continues strong right up into the fourth century.”⁶

“During its first three centuries of existence, the Christian church was opposed to war and other forms of violence. Christian opposition to war early expanded into a denial of the rightness of all coercive action on the part of the civil power. Thus arose that form of conscientious objection which has been designated as political non-participation.”⁷

“For years many Christians regarded service in the army as inconsistent with their profession. Some held that for them all bloodshed, whether as soldiers or executioners, was unlawful.”⁸

“During a considerable period after the death of Christ, it is certain...that his followers believed He had forbidden war, and that, in consequence of this belief, many of them refused to engage in it, whatever were the consequences, whether reproach, or imprisonment, or death. These facts are indisputable: ‘It is as easy,’ says a learned writer of the 17th century, ‘to obscure the sun at midday, as to deny that the primitive Christians renounced all revenge and war.’ Of all the Christian writers of the second century, there is not one who notices the subject, who does not hold it to be unlawful for a Christian to bear arms.”⁹

“Christ and his apostles delivered general precepts for the regulation of our conduct. It was necessary for their successors to apply them to their practice in life. And to what did they apply the pacific precepts which had been delivered? They applied them to war; they were assured that the precepts absolutely forbade it. This belief they derived from those very precepts on which we have insisted: They referred, expressly, to the same passages in the New Testament, and from the authority and obligation of those passages, they refused to bear arms. A few examples from their history will show with what undoubting confidence they believed in the unlawfulness of war, and how much they were willing to suffer in the cause of peace.”¹⁰

“Our Savior inculcated mildness and peaceableness; we have seen that the apostles imbibed his spirit, and followed his example; and the early Christians pursued the example and imbibed the spirit of both. This sacred principle, this earnest recommendation of forbearance, lenity, and forgiveness, mixes with all the writings of that age. There are more quotations in the apostolical

fathers, of texts which relate to these points than of any other. Christ’s sayings had struck them.”¹¹

“If it be possible, a still stronger evidence of the primitive belief is contained in the circumstance, that some of the Christian authors declared that the refusal of the Christian to bear arms, was a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. (Isa. 2:3; Micah 4:2) The peculiar strength of this evidence consists in this: that the fact of a refusal to bear arms is assumed as notorious and unquestioned.” [Regardless of the validity of the prophetic interpretation.]¹²

“A very interesting sidelight is cast on the attitude of the early Christians to war by the serious view they took of those precepts of the Master enjoining love for all, including enemies, and forbidding retaliation upon the wrongdoer, and the close and literal way in which they endeavored to obey them. This view and this obedience of those first followers of Jesus are the best commentary we can have upon the problematic teaching in question, and the best answer we can give to those who argue that it was not meant to be practiced save in a perfect society, or that it refers only to the inner disposition of the heart and not to the outward actions, or that it concerns only the personal and private and not the social and political relationships of life.”¹³

B. Affirmations of Early Church Orders

1. THE DIDASKALIA

“The *Didaskalia* forbids the acceptance of money for the church ‘from soldiers who behave unrighteously or from those who kill men or from executioners or from any (of the) magistrates of the Roman Empire who are polluted in wars and have shed innocent blood without judgment,’ etc.”¹⁴

2. THE TESTAMENT OF OUR LORD

“*The Testament of our Lord,*’ which dates in its present form from the middle of the fourth century or a little later, arose among the conservative Christians of Syria or southeastern Asia Minor.” It embodies a list of rules and regulations governing the “acceptance of new members into the Church and (deals) with the question of the trades and professions which it is legitimate

or otherwise for Church-members to follow. It will be observed that...*‘The Testament of our Lord’* is consistently rigorous in refusing baptism to soldiers and magistrates except on condition of their quitting their offices, and forbidding a Christian to become a soldier on pain of rejection (from the Church):

“If anyone be a soldier or in authority, let him be taught not to oppress or to kill or to rob, or to be angry or to rage and afflict anyone. But let those rations suffice him which are given to him. But if they wish to be baptized in the Lord, let them cease from military service or from the post of authority, and if not let them not be received. Let a catechumen or a believer of the people, if he desire to be a soldier, either cease from his intention, or if not let him be rejected. For he hath despised God by his thought, and leaving the things of the Spirit, he hath perfected himself in the flesh, and hath treated the faith with contempt.”¹⁵

3. THE CANONS OF THE CHURCH OF ALEXANDRIA

“The canons of the Church of Alexandria absolutely forbade volunteering, which was the foundation of the Roman Army, and authoritatively laid it down that ‘it was not fitting for Christians to bear arms.’”¹⁶

C. Writings of Early Christian Leaders

CHRISTIAN CONDEMNATION OF WAR

“The view was widely prevalent in the early Church that war is an organized iniquity with which the Church and the followers of Christ can have nothing to do. This sentiment was expressed, though with varying degrees of lucidity and emphasis, by Justin Martyr, Tatian, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origenes, Athanasius, Cyprian, and Lactantius.”¹⁷

ARISTEIDES (140 A.D.)

(He) “says of the Christians: ‘They appeal to those who wrong them and make them friendly to themselves; they are eager to do good to their enemies; they are mild and conciliatory.’”¹⁸

ARNOBIUS (300 A.D.)

“The treatise of Arnobius abounds in allusions to the moral iniquity of war. Contrasting Christ with the rulers of the Roman Empire, he asks: ‘Did he, claiming royal power for himself, occupy the whole world with fierce legions, and, (of) nations at peace from the beginning, destroy and remove some, and compel others to put their necks beneath his yoke and obey him?’

“‘What use is it to the world that there should be...generals of the greatest experience in warfare, skilled in the capture of cities, (and) soldiers immovable and invincible in cavalry battles or in a fight on foot?’ Arnobius roundly denies that it was any part of the divine purpose that men’s souls, ‘forgetting that they are from one source, one parent and head, should tear up and break down the right of kinship, overturn their cities, devastate lands in enmity...hate one another...in a word, all curse, carp at, and rend one another with the biting of savage teeth.’

“Addressing himself to the pagans, he says: ‘Since we... (Christians) have received (it) from his (Christ’s) teachings and laws, that evil ought not to be repaid with evil, that it is better to endure a wrong than to inflict (it), to shed one’s own (blood) rather than to stain one’s hands and conscience with the blood of another, the ungrateful world has long been receiving a benefit from Christ...But if absolutely all...were willing to lend an ear for a little while to his healthful and peaceful decrees, and would not, swollen with pride and arrogance, trust to their own senses rather than to his admonitions, the whole world would long ago have turned the uses of iron to milder works and be living in the softest tranquility, and would have come together in healthy concord...’

“(He) speaks as if abstention from warfare had been the traditional Christian policy ever since the advent of Christ.”¹⁹

CLEMENT

“In the third century Clement of Alexandria contrasted warlike pagans with ‘the peaceful community of Christians.’”²⁰

“Clement of Alexandria calls his Christian contemporaries the ‘Followers of Peace,’ and expressly tells us that ‘the followers of peace used none of the implements of war.’”²¹

“Above all, Christians are not allowed to correct by violence sinful wrongdoings. For (it is) not those who abstain from evil by compulsion, but those (who abstain) by choice, (that) God crowns. For it is not possible for a man to be good steadily except by his own choice.”²²

CYPRIANUS (250 A.D.)

“Cyprianus declaims about the ‘wars scattered everywhere with the bloody horror of camps. The world,’ he says, ‘is wet with mutual blood (shed): and homicide is a crime when individuals commit it, (but) it is called a virtue, when it is carried on publicly. Not the reason of innocence, but the magnitude of savagery, demands impunity for crimes.’ He censures also the vanity and deceitful pomp of the military office.”²³

IRENAEUS (180 A.D.)

“For the Christians have changed their swords and their lances into instruments of peace, and they know not how to fight.”²⁴

JUSTINUS (150 A.D.)

“Justinus told the Emperors that the Christians were the best allies and helpers they had in promoting peace, on the ground that their belief in future punishment and in the omniscience of God provided a stronger deterrent from wrongdoing than any laws could do.

“We who hated and slew one another, and because of (differences in) customs would not share a common hearth with those who were not of our tribe, now, after the appearance of Christ, have become sociable, and pray for our enemies, and try to persuade those who hate (us) unjustly, in order that they, living according to the good suggestions of Christ, may share our hope of obtaining the same (reward) from God who is Master of all.

“And we who formerly slew one another not only do not make war against our enemies, but, for the sake of not telling lies or

deceiving those who examine us, we gladly die confessing Christ.”²⁵

JUSTIN MARTYR (150 A.D.)

“That the prophecy is fulfilled, you have good reason to believe, for we, who in times past killed one another, do not now fight with our enemies.”²⁶

“We, who had been filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness, have each one—all the world over—changed the instruments of war, the swords into plows and the spears into farming implements, and we cultivate piety, righteousness, love for men, faith, (and) the hope which is from the Father Himself through the Crucified One.”²⁷

LACTANTIUS (300 A.D.)

“Lactantius also, in his *Divine Institutes*, again and again alludes to the prevalence of war as one of the great blots on the history and morals of humanity. Speaking of the Romans, he says: ‘Truly, the more men they have afflicted, despoiled, (and) slain, the more noble and renowned do they think themselves; and, captured by the appearance of empty glory, they give the name of excellence to their crimes...If any one has slain a single man, he is regarded as contaminated and wicked, nor do they think it right that he should be admitted to this earthly dwelling of the gods. But he who has slaughtered endless thousands of men, deluged the fields with blood, (and) infected rivers (with it), is admitted not only to a temple, but even to heaven.’

“In criticizing the definition of virtue as that which puts first the advantages of one’s own county, (he says): ‘All which things are certainly not virtues, but the overthrowing of virtues. For, in the first place, the connection of human society is taken away; innocence is taken away;...in fact, justice itself is taken away; for justice cannot bear the cutting asunder of the human race, and wherever arms glitter, she must be put to flight and banished...For how can he be just, who injures, hates, despoils, kills? And those who strive to be of advantage to their country (in this way) do all these things.’

“If God alone were worshiped, there would not be dissensions and wars; for men would know that they are sons of the one God, and so joined together by the sacred and inviolable bond of divine kinship; there would be no plots, for they would know what sort of punishments God has prepared for those who kill living beings.”²⁸

“And so it will not be lawful for a just man to serve as a soldier—for justice itself is his military service... And so, in this commandment of God no exception at all ought to be made that it is always wrong to kill a man whom God has wished to be a sacrosanct creature.”²⁹

“There cannot be a thousand exceptions to God’s commandments: Thou shalt not kill. No arm save truth should be carried by Christians.”³⁰

LUCIFER

“Lucifer, Bishop of Calaris, professed that the Christians should defend their greatest possession, faith, not in killing, but in sacrificing their own lives.”³¹

ORIGENES (240 A.D.)

This great Alexandrian scholar took occasion to defend early Christian pacifism in his rebuttal to “*A True Discourse*,” which was an attack on the Christian community by the heathen philosopher Celsus, written in 178 A.D.

Arguments of Celsus: “Towards the close of his treatise, Celsus dealt with the customary refusal of the Christians to serve in the Imperial legions and to hold public office. He was concerned for the safety of the Empire in the face of the attacks of the barbarian tribes of central Europe. And, indignant though he was at what he regarded as the selfish lack of patriotism on the part of the Christians, he mingled appeals with his reproaches, and begged them to abandon their fanaticism and take their share in the common task of defending the civilization of the Empire from destruction.”³²

“(Celsus) not only exhorts the Christians to take part in civil government, but ‘urges us to help the Emperor with all (our)

strength, and to labor with him (in maintaining) justice, and to fight for him and serve as soldiers with him, if he requires (it), and to share military command (with him).”

Reply to Celsus by Origenes. First, in replying to the objection that, if all did the same as the Christians, the Emperor would be deserted, and the Empire would fall a prey to the barbarians, Origenes says: “On this supposition” (that all did the same as himself and took no part in war) “the Emperor would not be left alone or deserted, nor would the world’s affairs fall into the hands of the most lawless and savage barbarians. For if, as Celsus says, all were to do the same as I do, clearly the barbarians also, coming to the Word of God, would be most law-abiding and mild; and every religious worship would be abolished, and that alone of the Christians would hold sway; and indeed, one day it shall alone hold sway, the Word ever taking possession of more (and more) souls.

“How much more (reasonable it is that), when others are serving in the army, these (Christians) should do their military service as priests and servants of God... And we, (in) putting down by our prayers all demons—those who stir up warlike feelings... and disturb the peace—help the Emperors more than those who, to all appearance, serve as soldiers. We labor with (him) in the public affairs—(we) who offer up prayers with righteousness... And we fight for the Emperor more (than others do); we do serve as soldiers on his behalf, training a private army of piety by means of intercessions to the Deity.”³³

“It is noteworthy that both Celsus and Origenes write here as if the refusal to serve in the army was not the universal attitude of the Christians. We know that this was not quite the case...(after 170 A.D.). Still the language of these two writers is significant as showing what, at both their dates (178 and 248 A.D.) was understood by well-informed persons to be the normal Christian view and practice.”³⁴

“Origenes happily lays great stress on the positive service which he claims is diviner, more needful, and more effective than that of the soldier or magistrate... Of this service, he specifies two forms: (a) Intercessory prayer, which he rightly regards as

exceedingly effective when coming from Christians: this prayer is that the Emperor and those associated with him may be successful in their efforts, in so far as their purposes are righteous. (b) Influence for good over others by the activities of the Church and the power of Christian life, ‘educating the citizens and teaching them to be devout towards...God’...and working effectually for their moral and spiritual salvation.”³⁵

“To those who ask us whence we have come or whom we have (for) a leader, we say that we have come in accordance with the counsels of Jesus to cut down our warlike and arrogant swords of argument into plowshares, and we convert into sickles the spears we formerly used in fighting. For we no longer take ‘sword against a nation,’ nor do we learn any more to make war, having become sons of peace for the sake of Jesus, who is our leader, instead of (following) the ancestral (customs).

“He points out that God united the warring nations of the earth under the rule of Augustus, in order that by the suppression of war the spread of the gospel might be facilitated: for ‘how’ he asks, ‘would it have been possible for this peaceful teaching, which does not allow (its adherents) even to defend themselves against (their) enemies, to prevail, unless at the coming of Jesus the (affairs) of the world had everywhere changed into a milder (state)?’ Later he says: ‘If a revolt had been the cause of the Christians’ combining, and if they had derived their origin from the Jews, to whom it was allowed to take arms on behalf of their families to destroy their enemies, the Lawgiver of (the) Christians would not have altogether forbidden (the) destruction of man, teaching that the deed of daring (on the part) of his own disciples against a man, however unrighteous he be, is never right—for he did not deem it becoming to his own divine legislation to allow the destruction of any man whatever.’”³⁶

“And the reason why Christians avoid the public services of earthly life is not because they want to evade them, but because they are reserving themselves for the more Divine and more needful service of the Church of God, taking the lead—at once needfully and righteously—in the salvation of men, and being concerned for all men...”³⁷

TERTULLIANUS (210 A.D.)

“You must confess that the prophecy has been accomplished, as far as the practice of every individual is concerned, to whom it is applicable.”³⁸

“...the new law pointed to clemency, and changed the former savagery of swords and lances into tranquility, and refashioned the former infliction of war upon rivals and foes of the law into the peaceful acts of plow and cultivating the earth. And so...the new law...has shown forth in acts of peaceful obedience.”

“Dealing specifically with the question of military service, Tertullianus writes (in his *Apology*): “(The question) also concerning military service, which is concerned both with rank and power, might seem (to have been) definitely settled in that (last) chapter. But now the question is asked on what (very point), whether a believer may turn to military service, and whether the military—at least the rank and file, or (say) all the inferior (grades), who are under no necessity of (offering) sacrifices or (passing) capital sentences—may be admitted to the faith. There is no congruity between the divine and human ‘sacramentum,’ the sign of Christ and the sign of the devil, the camp of light and the camp of darkness: one soul cannot be owed to two, God and Caesar. And (yet, some Christians say), Moses carried a rod, and Aaron (wore) a buckle, and John was girt with a leather belt (the allusions are to various items in the Roman soldier’s equipment), and Joshua...led a line of march, and the people waged war—if it is your pleasure to sport (with the subject). But how will (a Christian) make war—nay, how will he serve as a soldier in peace (time)—without the sword which the Lord has taken away? For, although soldiers had come to John and received the form of a rule, although also a centurion had believed, (yet) the Lord afterwards, in disarming Peter, ungirded every soldier. No dress is lawful among us which is assigned to an unlawful action.” (The military oath asks too much of a man who owes his allegiance to Christ.)³⁹

In another work, (*De Corona Militis*), written in 211 A.D., Tertullianus writes: “Do we believe that...(a Christian) may (give a promise in) answer to another master after Christ...? Will it be

lawful for him to occupy himself with the sword, when the Lord declares that he who uses the sword will perish by the sword? And shall the son of peace, for whom it will be unfitting even to go to law, be engaged in a battle? And shall he, who is not the avenger even of his own wrongs, administer chains and imprisonment and tortures and executions? Shall he now go on guard for another more than for Christ, or (shall he do it) on the Lord's Day, when (he does) not (do it even) for Christ? And shall he keep watch before temples, which he has renounced? And shall he carry a flag, too, that is a rival to Christ? And shall he ask for a watchword from his chief, when he has already received one from God? And (when he is) dead, shall he be disturbed by the bugler's trumpet—he who expects to be roused by the trumpet of the angel? (And) how many other sins can be seen (to belong) to the functions of camp (life)—(sins) which must be explained as transgressions (of God's law)...If the faith comes subsequently to any (who are) already occupied in military service...when faith has been accepted and signed, either the service must be left at once, as has been done by many, or else to resolve to endure death for God...Faith knows not the meaning of the word 'compulsion.'"⁴⁰

Commenting on these forceful views of Tertullianus, Cadoux says: "It is a mistake to regard Tertullianus as an individual dissenter from the Church as a whole on this question of whether Christians ought to serve in the army or not...When we consider these views...agree with the testimony of Origenes and the oldest Church-Orders as to the normal Christian practice in the earliest part of the third century, and were apparently endorsed by so representative a churchman as his own fellow countrymen and admirer Cyprianus, we shall hardly be inclined to believe that at this time he was voicing the opinion of a minority of Christians, still less that he represented the views of a mere handful of fanatical extremists."⁴¹

LETTER FROM CONFESSORS IN PRISON AT ROME (250 A.D.)

"The confessors of Rome wrote from prison to their brethren of Africa: 'What more glorious and blessed lot can fall to man by

the grace of God, than to confess God the Lord amidst tortures and in the face of death itself...to become fellow-sufferers with Christ?...Pray for us, then...that the Lord, the best captain, would daily strengthen each one of us more and more, and at last lead us to the field as faithful soldiers, armed with those divine weapons (Eph. 6:2) which can never be conquered."⁴²

D. Example of Early Christian Believers

1. ATTITUDE TOWARD MILITARY LIFE AS A VOCATIONAL CALLING

"No Christian (from 70-110 A.D.)...would voluntarily become a soldier after conversion: He would be deterred from doing so, not only by fear of contamination by idolatry, but also by a natural reluctance—and doubtless in many cases by a conscientious objection to using arms.

"There were certain features of military life which could not have failed to thrust themselves on a Christian's notice as presenting, to say the least, great ethical difficulty. The shedding of blood on the battlefield, the passing of death sentences by officers and the execution of them by common soldiers, the judicial infliction of scourging, torture, and crucifixion, the unconditional military oath...the average behavior of soldiers in peacetime, and other idolatrous and offensive customs—all of these could constitute in combination an exceedingly powerful deterrent against any Christian joining the army on his own initiative."⁴³

Harnack: "The position of a soldier would seem to be still more incompatible with Christianity than the higher offices of state, for Christianity prohibited on principle both war and bloodshed... We shall see that the Christian ethic forbade war absolutely (*überhaupt*) to the Christians...Had not Jesus forbidden all revenge, even all retaliation for wrong, and taught complete gentleness and patience? And was not the military calling moreover contemptible on account of its extortions, acts of violence, and police service? Certainly: and from that it followed without question, that a Christian might not of his free will become a soldier."⁴⁴

“It has been sometimes said, that the motive which influenced the early Christians to refuse to engage in war, consisted in the idolatry which was connected with the Roman armies. One motive this idolatry unquestionable afforded; but it is obvious from the quotations which we have given, that their belief of the unlawfulness of fighting, independent of any question of idolatry, was an insuperable objection to engaging in war. Their words are explicit: ‘I cannot fight if I die.’ ‘I am a Christian, and, therefore, I cannot fight.’ ‘Christ, by disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier,’ and Peter was not about to fight in the armies of idolatry.”⁴⁵

“It is also interesting that neither Celsus, nor Origenes in replying to him, alludes explicitly to the fear of contamination with idolatry as the Christians’ (sole) reason for refraining from military service: Celsus does not say what their ground was; but Origenes makes it perfectly clear elsewhere in this treatise that it was the moral objection to bloodshed by which they were mainly actuated.”⁴⁶

“The prohibition of military service was partly due to the consideration that the soldier was required to compromise his faith by participation in the pagan rites associated with Roman warfare, and to jeopardize his character by association with brutal and licentious comrades, but objection was also taken on principle to the military profession, and was supported by arguments such as these—that the military oath was inconsistent with the pledge of loyalty to Christ, that Christ had warned His disciples against taking the sword (Matt. 26:52), that, if the lesser strife of litigation be forbidden, much more is the greater (1 Cor. 6:7), that, if it be unlawful to fight on our own behalf, it is also unlawful to fight in the quarrels of others, and especially that in war men fight to kill, and that intentional killing is murder.”⁴⁷

“Christians objected not only to war, but also because soldiers were called upon to execute death sentences. Then, too, army service was intimately bound up with the religious-political system of emperor worship, which Christians believed was a form of idolatry.”⁴⁸

“Gibbon, writing in 1776, said of the imperial Roman armies: ‘The common soldiers, like the mercenary troops of modern

Europe, were drawn from the meanest, and very frequently from the most profligate, of mankind.’ Harnack says: ‘The conduct of the soldiers during peace was as opposed to Christian ethics as their wild debauchery and sports at the Pagan festivals.’ Marcus Aurelius called successful soldiers robbers; but he was a soldier himself, and was obliged to fill his ranks with gladiators, slaves, and Dalmation brigands.”⁴⁹

“This collection of passages will suffice to show how strong and deep was the early Christian revulsion from the disapproval of war, both on account of the dissension it represented and of the infliction of bloodshed and suffering it involved. The quotations show further how closely warfare and murder were connected in Christian thought by their possession of a common element—homicide...The strong disapprobation felt by Christians for war was due to its close relationship with the deadly sin (of murder) that sufficed to keep the men guilty of it permanently outside the Christian community.

“It has already been remarked that the sentiments expressed by (early) Christian authors in regard to the iniquity of war, the essentially peaceful character of Christianity, the fulfillment of the great plowshare prophecy in the birth and growth of the Church, the duty of loving enemies, and so on, all point to the refusal to bear arms as their logical implicate in practice.”⁵⁰

(a) SUMMARY OF OBJECTIONS TO MILITARY SERVICE

- (1) Refusal to kill—on authority of Ten Commandments and Jesus’ teaching.
- (2) Refusal to bear arms—on authority of Master’s command not to take sword.
- (3) Refusal to violate Christian principles—love, gentleness, and patience replacing hate, revenge, strife, and envy.
- (4) Refusal to abide by unconditional military oath on ground of inconsistency with the pledge of loyalty to Christ.

(5) Refusal to comply with military life which necessitated:

Extortions.
Police service.
Acts of violence, scourging, torture, crucifixion.
Association with brutal and licentious comrades.
Contamination by idolatry, emperor worship,
and pagan rites.

2. CHRISTIAN REFUSAL OF INDUCTION: MARTYRDOM

MAXIMILIANUS (295 A.D.)

“Maximilianus, a young Numidian Christian, just over 21, was brought before Dion the proconsul of Africa at Teveste (Numidia) as fit for military service. This was in 295 A.D. during the reign of Maximilianus.

“Maximilianus answered, ‘But why do you want to know my name? I dare not fight, since I am a Christian.’ ‘Measure him,’ said Dion the proconsul; but on being measured, Maximilianus answered, ‘I cannot fight, I cannot do evil; I am a Christian.’ Said the proconsul, ‘Let him be measured.’ And after he had been measured, the attendant read out ‘He is five feet ten.’ Then said Dion to the attendant, ‘Enroll him.’ And Maximilianus cried out, ‘No, no, I cannot be a soldier, I am a soldier of my God. I refuse the badge. Already I have Christ’s badge... If you mark me, I shall annul it as invalid... I cannot wear ought laden on my neck after the saving mark of my Lord.’ To the proconsul’s question as to what crime soldiers practiced, Maximilianus replied, ‘You know quite well what they do.’” Maximilianus was beheaded.

Unknown to most Roman Catholics, Maximilianus has been honored as one of the canonized saints of the church, though he died as a conscientious objector!⁵¹

TYPASIUS (305 A.D.)

“Typasius, who (earlier) had served honorably as a soldier in Mauretania and had been discharged because he desired to devote himself wholly to religion, refused to re-enter the service when recalled to the ranks and suffered martyrdom.”⁵²

3. DESERTION AFTER CONVERSION: MARTYRDOM

“During the early period of Christianity, soldiers who were converted usually left the army immediately, although such action might mean death or other severe punishment.”⁵³

“The primitive Christians not only refused to be enlisted in the army, but when they embraced Christianity whilst already enlisted, they abandoned the profession at whatever cost... These were not the sentiments, and this was not the conduct, of the insulated individuals who might be actuated by individual opinions, or by their private interpretations of the duties of Christianity. Their principles were the principles of the body. They were recognized and defended by the Christian writers their contemporaries.”⁵⁴

ACHILLEUS AND NEREUS

“Pope Damasus (366-384 A.D.), who took a great interest in the records and tombs of the martyrs, put up an epitaph to two praetorian soldiers, Nereus and Achilleus, who, he says ‘had given (their) names to military service, and were carrying on (their) cruel duty (but) suddenly laid aside (their) madness, turned around (and) fled; they leave the general’s impious camp, cast down (their) shields, helmets, and bloodstained weapons; they confess, and bear (along) with joy the triumph of Christ’: they were put to death with the sword.”⁵⁵

JULIUS

“Julius, who suffered martyrdom in Moesia, said to the judge at his trial: ‘During the time that I was, as it appears, going astray in vain service of war, for twenty-seven years I never came before the judge as an offender or a plaintiff. Seven times did I go out on a campaign, and I stood behind no one, and I fought as well as any. The commander never saw me go wrong; and dost thou think that I, who had been found faithful in the worse things, can now be found unfaithful in the better?’”⁵⁶

MARCELLUS (298 A.D.)

Marcellus had been a centurion in the Roman army, but “in 298 A.D. took the initiative and insisted on resigning from his office. On the occasion of the Emperor’s birthday, he cast off his

military belt before the standards, and called out: ‘I serve Jesus Christ, the eternal king.’ Then he threw down his vine staff and arms, and added: ‘I cease from this military service of your Emperors, and I scorn to adore your gods of stone and wood, which are deaf and dumb idols. If such is the position of those who render military service, that they should be compelled to sacrifice to gods and emperors, I renounce the standards, and I refuse to serve as a soldier.’

“While the objection to sacrifice thus appears as the main ground for the bold step Marcellus took, it is clear that he was also exercised over the nature of the military service as such: for his last words to the judge were: ‘I threw down (my arms); for it was not seemly that a Christian man, who renders military service to the Lord Christ, should render it (also) by (inflicting) earthly injuries.’

“When he was sentenced to death, Cassianus, the clerk of the court, loudly protested, and flung his writing materials on the ground, declaring that the sentence was unjust: he suffered death a few days after Marcellus.”⁵⁷

MARTIN

“Martin, of whom so much is said by Sulpicius Severus, was bred to the profession of arms, which on his acceptance of Christianity, he abandoned.”⁵⁸

TARAKHOS (304 A.D.)

“Tarakhos of Cilicia, on trial because he had left the army, told the governor he had been a soldier, ‘but because I was a Christian, I have now chosen to be a civilian.’” He was martyred in 304 A.D.⁵⁹

4. ACTION OF CHRISTIANS IN JEWISH INSURRECTIONS

FIRST REVOLT (66-70 A.D.)

“Shortly before the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, the Christians of that city, in obedience to ‘an oracular response given by revelation to approved men there’ left Jerusalem, and

settled at Pella in Peraea, thus taking no part in the war against Rome.”⁶⁰

SECOND REVOLT (132-135 A.D.)

An insight into the conduct of Christians during this second revolt of the Jews against Rome is afforded by ancient scroll and manuscript findings discovered since 1947 in the Holy Land. The following is an excerpt from a newspaper article entitled “New Scrolls Aid Testament Study” which described some of these findings.

“Experts have asserted that it will take decades to decipher these manuscripts and reassemble their fragments...but...one possible early reference to Christians has been deciphered. A freshly translated letter written by Simon ben Kaseba, leader of a Holy Land revolt from A.D. 132-135, refers to a group of ‘neutrals’ in the war between Rome and Jewish insurgents. They are called ‘Galileans,’ and conceivably may be Christians.”⁶¹

5. ATTITUDE TOWARD GLADIATORIAL CONTESTS

“It was not only looking askance at military service that Christians separated themselves from the secular life about them. Far more sweeping was their condemnation of some of the most prominent of the prevailing amusements. It is, of course, a commonplace that among the outstanding popular forms of entertainment of the pre-Christian Roman Empire were the theatre, gladiatorial combats and contests between beasts and men...For gladiatorial combats and the theatre many of the leading Christians had nothing but condemnation. There was a time when the Church refused to receive for baptism a professional gladiator unless he promised to surrender his calling, and excluded from the communion those of its members who entered the games.”⁶²

“The brutality of gladiatorial combats was something on which a Christian could not voluntarily gaze.”⁶³

“So entire was (the early Christian) conviction of the incompatibility of war with our religion, that they would not even be present at the gladiatorial fights, ‘lest we should become partakers of the murders committed there.’ (Theophilus). Can anyone

believe that they who would not even witness a battle between two men, would themselves fight in a battle between armies?”⁶⁴

“The opposition of the Church, had, of course, at first only a moral effect, but in the fourth century it began to affect legislation, and succeeded at last in banishing at least the bloody gladiatorial games from the civilized world. (The historical Lecky comments: ‘There is scarcely any other single reform so important in the moral history of mankind as the suppression of the gladiatorial shows, and this feat must be almost exclusively ascribed to the Christian Church.’)”⁶⁵

E. Military Non-Conformity a Cause of Roman Persecutions

Cadoux, commenting on the various cases of early Christians who either refused induction into the military or deserted the service after conversion, says: “It is probably true that such instances of refusal were sufficiently numerous to have helped to bring about that imperial suspicion and dislike, out of which sprang the great persecution of 303 A.D.”⁶⁶

“Then, too, the conscientious refusal of the Christians to pay divine honors to the emperor and his statue, and to take part in any idolatrous ceremonies at public festivities, their aversion to the imperial military service, their disregard for politics and depreciation of all civil and temporal affairs as compared with the spiritual and eternal interests of man, their close brotherly union and frequent meetings, drew upon them the suspicion of hostility to the Caesars and the Roman people, and the unpardonable crime of conspiracy against the state.”⁶⁷ (From section entitled “Causes of Roman Persecution—Obstacles to the Toleration of Christianity.”)

“The comparative indifference and partial aversion of the Christians to the affairs of the state, to civil legislation, and administration, exposed them to frequent reproach and contempt of the heathens. Their want of patriotism was partly the result of their superior devotion to the church as their country, partly of their situation in a hostile world...They fervently and regularly

prayed for the emperor and the state, their enemies and persecutors. They were the most peaceful subjects, and during this long period of almost constant provocation, abuse, and persecutions, they never took part in those frequent insurrections and rebellions which weakened and undermined the empire. They renovated society from within, by revealing in their lives as well as in their doctrine a higher order of private and public virtue, and thus proved themselves patriots in the best sense of the word.”⁶⁸ (From the section entitled “Secular Callings and Civil Duties.”)

F. Summary

CADOUX

“The early Christians took Jesus at his word, and understood his inculcations of gentleness and non-resistance in their literal sense. They strongly identified their religion with peace; they strongly condemned war for the bloodshed which it involved; they appropriated to themselves the Old Testament prophecy which foretold the transformation of the weapons of war into the implements of agriculture; they declared that it was their policy to return good for evil and to conquer evil with good.

“With one or two possible exceptions, no soldier joined the Church and remained a soldier until the time of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.). Even then, refusal to serve was known to be the normal policy of the Christians—as the reproaches of Celsus testify (177-180 A.D.). In the time of Tertullianus (200-210 A.D.), many soldiers had left the army on their conversion.

“While a general distrust of ambition and a horror of contamination of idolatry entered largely into the Christian aversion to military service, the sense of the utter contradiction between the work of imprisoning, torturing, wounding, and killing, on the one hand, and the Master’s teaching on the other, constituted an equally fatal and conclusive objection.”⁶⁹

DYMOND

“It is, therefore, indisputable that the Christians who lived nearest to the time of the Saviour, believed, with undoubting

confidence, that He had unequivocally forbidden war—that they openly avowed this belief, and that, in support of it, they were willing to sacrifice, and did sacrifice, their fortunes and their lives.”⁷⁰

TOLSTOY

“The declarations made before the military judges by conscientious objectors are only repetitions of what has been said since the appearance of the Christian doctrine. The most ardent and sincere fathers of the Church declared the teaching of Christ to be incompatible with...armed force; in other words, a Christian must not be a soldier, prepared to kill every one that he is ordered to do.”⁷¹

♦ CHAPTER THREE ♦

The Church’s Rise to Secular Power and Substitution of Human Decrees for Original Bible Truths Leads to Abandonment of Early Pacifist Principles

“As the Church increased in wealth and power and the government gradually ceased to insist on Pagan rites in public service, objection to war declined. The conversion of Constantine virtually made the Church an agency of the Roman state.”⁷²

“It is generally thought that, with the accession of Constantine to power, the Church as a whole definitely gave up her anti-military leanings, abandoned all her scruples, finally adopted the imperial point of view, and treated the ethical problem involved as a closed question. Allowing for a little exaggeration, this is broadly speaking true. The sign of that cross, to which Jesus had been led by his refusal to sanction or to lead a patriotic war, and on which he died for the salvation of men, was now an imperial emblem, bringing good fortune and victory. The supposed nails of the cross, which the Emperor’s mother found and sent to him, he had made into bridle-bits and a helmet, which he used in his military expeditions.

“In 314 A.D. the Synod of Arelate enacted a Canon, which, if it did not, as many suppose, threaten with excommunication Christian soldiers who insisted on quitting the army, at least left military service perfectly free and open to Christians.

Athanasius, ‘the father of orthodoxy,’ declared that it was not only lawful, but praiseworthy, to kill enemies in war...In 416 A.D. non-Christians were forbidden to serve in the army. Historians have not failed to notice, and in some cases to deplore, the immense compromise to which the Church was now committed.”⁷³

“In 416 A.D. an order was decreed with the result that pagans were not admitted to the army. All the soldiers had become Christians; or, in other words, all the Christians had, with few exceptions, denied Christ.”⁷⁴

“Says Clarkson, ‘It was not till Christianity became corrupted that Christians became soldiers.’” (*Essays on the Doctrines and Practice of the Early Christians.*)⁷⁵

“Christians...became soldiers...when? When their general fidelity to Christianity became relaxed: when, in other respects, they violated its principles...In a word, they became soldiers, when they had ceased to be Christians.”⁷⁶

K.H.E.De Jong: “The increased worldliness of Christendom had naturally resulted in an increased number of Christian soldiers.” (*Refusal of Military Service Among the Early Christians*, Leiden, 1905.)⁷⁷

“Another circumstance that operated in the same direction (Christians becoming soldiers) was the gradual and steady growth throughout the Church of a certain moral laxity, which engaged the serious and anxious attention of Christian leaders as early as the time of Hermas (140 A.D.) and had become an acute problem by the time of Pope Kallistos (216-222 A.D.): This abatement of the primitive moral rigor would naturally assist the process of conformity to the ways of the world.”⁷⁸

“The departure from the original faithfulness was, however, not suddenly general. Like every other corruption, war was obtained by degrees. During the first two hundred years (approximately) not a Christian soldier is upon record. In the third century, when Christianity became partially corrupted, Christian soldiers were common. The number increased with the increase of the general profligacy, until at last, in the fourth century, Christians became soldiers without hesitation, and perhaps,

without remorse. Here and there, however, an ancient father still lifted up his voice for peace; but these, one after another, dropping from the world, the tenet that war is unlawful ceased at length to be a tenet of the church.

“Such was the origin of the present belief in the lawfulness of war. It began in unfaithfulness, was nurtured by profligacy, and was confirmed by general corruption...Had the professors of Christianity continued in the purity and faithfulness of their forefathers, we should now have believed that war was forbidden.”⁷⁹

♦ CHAPTER FOUR ♦

***Pacifist Principles Retained
Only by Religious Minorities
After Third Century A.D.***

***A. Minority Church Groups Retaining
Early Christian Attitude***

“The Church herself later became identified with the state; with the result that conscientious objection to governmental coercion has been transmitted to the modern world by a line of obscure peace sects. The Albigenses, Waldenses, Bohemian Brethren, and Moravians carried on the early Christian tradition of non-violence from the Edict of Constantine to the Reformation. Outstanding among the post-Reformation groups are the Mennonites, Dunkers, Schwenkfelders, Shakers, Quakers (Society of Friends), Molokans and Dukhobors. These groups, together with a few more recent religious movements such as the Christadelphians and International Bible Students, constitute most conscientious objectors of the religious type in modern times.”⁸⁰

B. Major Church Groups Opposing This Stand

“The medieval Catholic Church resolved the tension between the Gospel counsels of non-resistance...on the one hand, and the

apparent needs of ordinary human society on the other, by earmarking the former as the exclusive business of the “religious” par excellence, i.e., the clergy, the monks and the friars...The Christian layman was not only not required to take this yoke upon him; he was in a certain measure forbidden to do so. Men who in view of the Sermon on the Mount insisted that the Christian must not wield the sword either as soldier or as magistrate were regularly adjudged heretical and were sharply persecuted for their pains. When the Reformation brought to the rank and file of church members fresh and first hand acquaintance with the New Testament, the problem cropped up again; but, although the Catholic solution of it was felt to be unsatisfactory, neither the Lutheran nor the Calvinist group managed to do any better than to bar out the non-resistance teaching from the Christian’s practical life and to confine it strictly to his inner personal temper and disposition. Only the Anabaptists insisted on applying it practically, regardless of the social and political difficulties which such an application might raise; and they accordingly incurred the disapproval of Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist alike.”⁸¹

“Periodically, dissident sects arose having as one of their principles conscientious objection to all war. Such were the Albigensians of the 11th and 12th centuries, against whom Pope Innocent III directed a crusade. The Albigensians were annihilated. During the Reformation, principles of conscientious objection were at one time enunciated by a large proportion of the Anabaptists, and for this and other reasons they were wiped out by a political combination led by orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics.”⁸²

“Testimony is not wanting to show that the absolutist conscientious objectors found their bitterest opponents in religious leaders of almost every kind. The Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, the separate denominational establishments, and the YMCA all neglected to bespeak mercy for the conscientious objectors, much less to defend them, while they suffered under excessive prison sentences. This attitude of organized religion reflects the almost universal hostility of the public toward conscientious objectors.”⁸³

C. Recent Changes in Traditional Attitude of Major Church Groups

“This popular hostility (against expressions of conscientious objections) was followed after the war by widespread admiration for the work done by religious objectors and by an extraordinary revulsion against war on the part of the great Christian denominations.”⁸⁴

“Due partly to the general increase of knowledge through a more widespread education of the masses, and because some of the prejudices of the past have been forgotten, even the larger church groups are now recognizing the right of their members to be opposed to war. Practically all the major denominations, as well as the Federal Council of Churches in the U.S.A., and the World Council of Churches, have passed resolutions setting forth their position on this issue and declaring their readiness to stand by and assist any of their individual members who may be conscientiously opposed to participation in war. To mention some who have passed resolutions, there are the American Baptists; the Southern Baptists; the Christian Scientists; the Congregational Christian Churches; the Methodist Church; the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.; the Protestant Episcopal Church; and the United Lutheran Church.”⁸⁵

Excerpts taken from a review of Pierre Lorson’s *Can a Christian be a Conscientious Objector?* Paris, 1950:

“When an eminent Catholic theologian (Pierre Lorson) devotes a book of 200 pages to the problem of conscientious objection, one must feel that pacifist history is being made. Hitherto the Roman Church has refrained from expressing an official view on the subject...The Catholic view...was laid down by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century, when he specified the conditions of a ‘just war’ in which alone Christians might lawfully participate. Some modern Catholic theologians, such as the Austrian, Professor Ude, have contended that no modern war can fulfill those conditions and that therefore every Christian should refuse to take part. The Church, however, has never

officially taken this line...Lorson examines the historic instances of conscientious objectors whom the (Catholic) Church has recognized as saints and martyrs...He admits that the character of modern war makes the case for conscientious objection much stronger (than in former times)...The book concludes with a powerful plea for the legal recognition of conscientious objection (in France, where the Assembly was about to consider a bill on the subject).”⁸⁶

Part Two

Significance of the Early Christian Witness

♦ CHAPTER ONE ♦

General Perspective

A. Modern Importance of Early Christian Example

1. Those who lived nearest to the time of the Founder of Christianity were the most likely to be informed of His intentions and will.
 - a. Jesus made special efforts to clarify His teachings and commandments to His own followers.
 - b. The early Christians benefited by the personal example of Jesus and the Apostles.
2. Jesus' followers practiced their ideals in their lives without those adulterations known to have been introduced by the lapse of ages.
 - a. Consciences were then not dulled by compromise with the world.

3. In taking this stand, the early Christians repelled the very same arguments which are advanced today by opponents of conscientious objection.
 - a. The common question of what would happen to the welfare of the nation if all took the same stand as the Christians was answered masterfully by Origenes in the reply to Celsus. (See p. 15)
 - b. The view of Christians as social parasites, benefiting from society yet refusing to cooperate in preserving it, was similarly countered by Origenes in this same treatise where he emphasizes the positive service that Christians do render to the state. (See p. 16)
4. The conduct of these early Christians and others since affords proof that Christian principles are not above the possibility of being carried out by men and represents a foretaste of the future when "peace on earth, good will to men" will become a reality.

B. Necessity and Reasonableness of Early Christian Witness

1. The early Christians were setting the standard of obedience to God's will.
 - a. Their example of upright Christian living has been a powerful influence for the moral purification of the world.
 - b. Any other course would have denied the way of Christianity and detracted from its uplifting moral influence.
2. The early Christian opposition to war, even though it led to suffering, persecution, and martyrdom, involved less conflict and suffering than any other course consistent with faithfulness to their cause.

3. That their actions were prompted through cowardice or fear of death is understood when it is recognized that:

- a. Cowards could not have endured torture and martyrdom with the constancy and faithfulness that the early Christians displayed.
- b. Christians do not fear death, realizing that eternal life has been gained for them through the love and power of God and the sacrifice of their Lord and Redeemer.

♦ CHAPTER TWO ♦

Summarizing Views— Significance of Early Christian Witness

CADOUX

“It is quite true that the Christian Church stands in a very different position from that in which she stood in the first three centuries of our era. But the question is, is there anything in that difference; is there anything in our modern conditions, which really invalidates the testimony against war as the early Christians bore it, and as Origenes defended it?”

“Not, we may answer...the development of...laws making military service compulsory, for the laws of the States can never make right for the Christian what according to the higher law of the kingdom of God is wrong for him. Not his obligations to society, for these obligations he already renders in overflowing measure by the power and influence of his life and prayers as a Christian...Not the unreadiness of the rest of the world to become Christian, for the Christian’s work now as then is essentially one that has to be done by those who constitute only a portion, for the present a very small portion, of society...Not, finally, the offense that lies in its path, for the best service Christians have ever done for the world has been done under the shadow of the world’s frown and in the teeth of the world’s opposition.”⁸⁷

DYMOND

“Some of the arguments which, at the present day, are brought against the advocates of peace, were then urged against these early Christians; and these arguments they examined and repelled. This indicates investigation and inquiry, and manifests that their belief of the unlawfulness of war was...the result of deliberate examination, and a consequent firm conviction that Christ had forbidden it...So that the very same arguments which are brought in defense of war at the present day, were brought against the Christians sixteen hundred years ago; and, sixteen hundred years ago, they were repelled by these faithful contenders for the purity of our religions.”⁸⁸

REV. W.E. ORCHARD

“The only real objection which can be urged against the revival of the early Christian attitude is that Christianity has accepted the State, and that this carries with it the necessity for coercive discipline within the waging of war without; in which disagreeable duties Christians must as citizens take their part. To refuse this will expose civilization to disaster...”

“The truth is that the way of war, if persisted in, is going to destroy civilization anyhow, and the continual demand for war service will, sooner or later, bring the modern State to anarchy...It is a subject that will not cease to vex the Church until we have decided either to make as unequivocal a condemnation of war as we have of slavery, or to abandon altogether any profession of whole-hearted allegiance to the Christian faith.”⁸⁹

Part Three

Scriptural References

Romans 13:1,2

*“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,
For there is no power but of God:
the powers that be are ordained of God.
Whosoever therefore resisteth the power,
resisteth the ordinance of God...”*

The validity of Romans 13—“*Be subject unto the higher powers*”—justifying Christians going to war is based on the Old Testament concept of God using the armies of Israel as his executioners. Why was it just for God to destroy Sodom, Gomorrah, the Canaanites and other nations slaughtered by Israel?

First, an illustration. Say that your brother was murdered and the murderer was apprehended. He was tried in court and found guilty, to be punishable by death. At that point, you stood up and shot the murderer. What would happen to you? You would be prosecuted for murder. Where's the fairness in this? The judge has appointed an executioner to kill the murderer. Why would you be prosecuted for killing the murderer of your brother? The matter is simple. The judge as a judge had the authority to order the death sentence. The judge had the authority to determine who the executioner would be. You did not have that authority or right.

The lesson is: God and God alone is the judge of the universe. He has already condemned the human race to death and he alone has the authority to determine the manner of execution.

The reason God destroyed nations or individuals prematurely is two-fold.

1. Certain nations or ethnic groups based on Gen. 15.

When God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants, he said the iniquity of the Ammorites and/or Canaanites had not yet “*come to the full.*” Abraham was told that the nation of Israel would enter Canaan 450 years later, when the iniquity of the Canaanites had “*come to the full.*” Archaeological discoveries reveal that nations like the Canaanites, Sodom and Gomorrah, etc., had become very immoral and debased to the extent that if their lineage had continued uninterrupted, their consciences would have become so seared that it would be impossible for God to appeal to them with truth and righteousness in the kingdom. Actually, it was for their eternal welfare that they were cut off so that they would have a conscience that God could deal with in the future probation for eternal life.

2. God as an executioner had the right to carry out the death any of the human race from the time of their birth onward.

The human race will come forth in the resurrection for their trial for eternal life. In order to illustrate certain principles to the church of the Gospel Age, God used nations and individuals in these pictures. The lessons sometimes required their premature dying.

For instance, Israel’s warfare against the Canaanites became a graphic picture of the Christian’s necessary warfare against the imperfections of his flesh.

The seemingly extreme judgment of God putting Uzzah to death was an important lesson to the church showing why faith in God’s arrangements and commandments is so necessary. It was Uzzah’s lack of confidence in God’s ability to care for the sacred ark of the covenant that resulted in his death. Uzzah and a few other individuals, who were seemingly put to death prematurely, were already under God’s judgment of Adamic death with the whole human race. God as a judge could determine the time and method of their execution. The justice of it all is further reflected

in their future opportunity for salvation. An eternity of blessings far excels any time limitations that might be required in our present life span.

***“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers,
For there is no power but of God:
the powers that be are ordained of God.
Whosoever therefore resisteth the power,
resisteth the ordinance of God...”
Romans 13:1,2***

What kind of rulers are these higher powers?

Daniel 4:17 informs us that God raised up the “*basest of men*” to rule during the seven times of Gentile powers (2520 years). Does this mean that God directly selected the basest men in these countries? No. God knew in an evil society generally the most power hungry and corrupt would arrive at the top of the governments. This is why Peter and the Apostles in Acts 5:29 observed when the laws of these ordained/permitted rulers differ from the laws of God, we must obey the laws of God. “*The basest of men*” are not the type of rulers that God would directly raise up to execute his judgments.

We have a general principle here. Every nation and tribal unit has a moral code that is enforced by its rulers. This moral code was retained in part from the fall of Adam. Adam had the law of God written in his heart. Also, in Christian countries many laws have been strongly influenced by the ten commandments. But remember, this is only a general principle. Therefore, there are notable instances when the basest of rulers have done much harm. However, from a general standpoint there were benefits.

For example, Germans who lived in the time of Hitler’s regime observed that as evil as that rule was, the anarchy after Hitler’s government fell, during the interim before the Allies were able to set up their administration, was far worse than Hitler’s rule. Yes, God permits base men to rule over nations and as evil

as their governments are, they are better than anarchy. At least under Hitler's rule murderers, etc., were arrested and imprisoned. That is why Romans 13 is only a general principle.

It is hopeless to try to evaluate what principles of government the Christian should support even to the extent of becoming involved in a just war. Christians should not become involved, period.

2 Timothy 2:4,5

***“No man (Christian) that warreth
entangleth himself with the affairs of this life;
that he may please him who hath
chosen him to be a soldier.”***

Paul uses the illustration of becoming good soldiers, not of this world, but of Christ. In a natural army, soldiers have no part in the affairs of the society. Their sole life is army life. So we, as good soldiers of Christ, are not to become entangled with the affairs of this life.

The word “*entangleth*” is significant. No one claims that all wars are just. Only a few are just, if any. In most wars there is more black than white. We cannot become entangled in the affairs of this life trying to ferret out details of black and white, such as, should Chamberlain have stopped Hitler in the beginning? History shows that Hitler and bin Laden had some justification for their grievances. World War II and the war on terrorism is not all black and white. That is why we cannot become entangled in the affairs of this world.

If we do become entangled and decide a war is a just cause, who are these enemy soldiers coming at us whom we are willing to kill?

1. If Christians should go to war in the U.S., then they should go to war in all countries and some of these enemy soldiers charging at us might be members of the body of

Christ, who, like us, went to war in the enemy's army. Are we willing to kill our brothers in Christ?

2. Some hated Hitler and what he stood for, but they were forced to fight. This would be true in a just war today. Are we willing to kill those of the enemy who did not endorse the principles of the enemy, but were forced to fight? Are we willing to kill them?

3. Most who fight in wars against the U.S. are brainwashed against the U.S. The U.S. is the ‘big demon’ causing all the evils in the world. For that matter, in every war each side has its propaganda of truth and error. Many of these poor people we would be fighting against don't know better—they believe they are right. They are victims of manipulation. Are we willing to kill them?

4. Collateral damage. In modern warfare thousands of innocent civilians, old people, women, mothers, and children are killed. Are we willing to be the one who kills them?

And if we are willing to kill in these four areas, what will all of this do to our Christian character? Inevitably, it will have a brutalizing effect on our conscience. We do not kill or have a part in the kingdoms of this world, but we will kill in God's kingdom when the issues are black and white. We will enforce justice and, if necessary, put to death those who are incorrigible sinners.

Romans 12:17-21

***“Recompense to no man evil for evil.
Provide things honest in the sight of all men.
“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you,
live peaceably with all men.***

***“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves,
but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written,
Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.***

***“Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him;
if he thirst, give him drink:
for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.
“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”***

We are instructed of God to avenge not ourselves for vengeance belongs to God. For the most part, and there are exceptions, the Christian does not exact justice from his fellow man. God knew that living this lifestyle of love, while not exacting justice, was the only the way the Christian could develop details of sympathy and love for his fellow man. God says to live at peace with all men. We are not to avenge ourselves for “*vengeance is mine*” saith the Lord.

We are to obey Jesus’ commands, “*My kingdom is not of this world [this present evil world] else would my servants fight.*” We do not fight for the many issues of justice in the affairs of this world or social order. We do not want to become entangled in these matters, but instead we try to live a lifestyle of love without entering into any of the unjust causes of our fellow man. If we are harshly opposed at times for following this position, this is good—we are learning sympathetic love for all our fellow men. But in the world to come, we will fight for justice, having the sympathy of the love of God. We will be able to exact justice for mankind in God’s way.

Every evil that is committed in this life adversely affects at least two parties—the party offended and the party doing the offending. Most of these issues of justice will be finalized in God’s kingdom as far as each human character is concerned. If this present life were all there is to life, then life is unjust. If the blurred justice carried out by our church friends as a part of the nations “*ordained of God*” is the exacting of God’s justice—Bible Students are so thankful they were not a part of the U.S. army “*ordained of God*” [?] to drop two atomic bombs on Japan. What a sincere, but distorted expression of justice.

Another important aspect of Romans 13 is that since 1914, nations are no longer ordained and/or permitted of God. Why? The time of trouble is gradually destroying these nations. By being in the military a Christian might be trying to defend [pre-serve] a nation God might want to destroy. If we engage in war during the time of trouble, we actually might be working against the cause of God as he is gradually setting up his kingdom.

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Duties Vary

The surgeon skilled and authorized
Has duties the unqualified
May not perform.

Policemen trained and deputized
Have duties those unauthorized
May not perform.

An husband's duties throughout life
Are duties others to his wife
May not perform.

One man's duty and another
Vary, to country, God, and brother,
What to perform.

Some making vows to God above,
To do his will and live by love -
These must perform.

These vows which call for sacrifice,
Those who, but pay a lesser price,
Need not perform.

One conscience goes to war away,
While C.O. cannot thus obey,
Yet both perform;

And law provides alternative
That in good conscience both may give,
And full perform.

Published by:
Associated Bible Students
P. O. Box 92, Clawson, MI 48017 USA

Printed in the
United States of America