

APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN
CHURCH

The Way of Peace

Elder Teaching Resource Committee

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Introduction

Broadly speaking, issues of gun violence, bullying, hate speech, political and social division, and international conflict seem to be capturing more attention in American culture at large. Evangelical Christians in America have not provided a clear and consistent witness on these issues, but the large majority appear to believe that the Bible sanctions violent responses to aggression and oppression.

The Elders have perceived an “increasing cultural influence on some brethren to use force for self-defense.”¹ The use of a highly-skilled and effective professional (rather than conscripted) military seems to have reduced popular awareness of the scope and magnitude of American military deployment around the world, while personal familiarity with the realities of war has faded among the brotherhood. These realities for generations of Apostolic Christians in the past included both the hardships associated with non-combatancy and the blessings of experiencing God’s faithfulness during those hardships.

According to a survey of Elders, to which 57 elders responded, approximately 119 members carry a weapon. In the past three years, eighteen members have expressed interest in joining the military and fourteen have expressed interest in a career that involves the possibility of using violence. The total number of members reported on in this survey was 9,624, which suggests that about 1.5% of Apostolic Christians reject nonviolence on some level.² Just over half of the respondents report that their congregation is “strongly committed to nonviolence.” A little over a third report that their congregations moderately support nonviolence. One elder believes that his congregation does not support our stance, two say that their congregation is divided, with strong feelings going in opposite directions, and four indicate that nonviolence is not an issue of discussion in their congregation. Approximately two-thirds of elders report that their congregation’s support of nonviolence (whether unsupportive, moderately supportive, or strongly supportive) is “staying the same,” while one third believe that support is diminishing. Only one elder believes that support is increasing among his flock. There is no apparent difference between urban and rural churches.

The implementation of the survey apparently inspired a number of elders to inquire more directly into the attitudes and beliefs of their congregations with regard to concealed carry and

¹ Notes from the “Non-Resistance/Concealed Carry” Special Day Discussion, Wednesday, March 6, 2019.

² This may include double-counting. If members who conceal-carry also are interested in the military or other career that includes violence, the percentage would drop.

military service. Several of them have expressed surprise at the number of members in their congregation who have adopted the pro-gun culture expressed often in our polarized American society. Such reaction is similar to many of the responses from individual members who have noted to Fred Witzig the number of their Apostolic Christian friends who disagree with our historic position on not bearing guns. It is likely that the level of disagreement among our membership is higher than we had thought before this project was undertaken.

This project of the AC Elder Teaching Resource committee intends to lend support to the Elder body in a) developing clear teaching regarding the historic Christian rejection of violence and the traditional Apostolic Christian embrace of nonviolence, with specific attention to self defense and military service; and b) humbly shepherding the brotherhood as brothers and sisters seek to maintain a biblical Christian witness. The committee recognizes that any discussion of self-defense and military service cannot help but be affected by the social and political division that dominates American culture presently.

There are a number of ways to approach this topic. One is to mine the Bible for any instructions for what Christians are supposed to do or not supposed to do in the face of aggression and injustice. Another is to respond to a list of “what-ifs,” as in “what if someone breaks into my home and threatens my family?” It is likely that most discussions of violence proceed along these two lines. The primary author of this paper, Fred Witzig, has had numerous conversations with people with widely differing perspectives on the subject. Typically, it only takes one or two minutes for the conversation to turn to discussions of the what-ifs or individual Biblical passages. The conversation quickly gets mired in an endless litany of scenarios that evoke a surprisingly high level of emotional protest. Little good comes of this.

This paper suggests a different approach. We propose that the elders teach “The Way of Peace.” The Way of Peace is derived from the Bible’s (Old and New Testaments) progressive revelation of the heart of God, exemplified most vividly in Jesus Christ, the express image of God. It was confirmed almost unanimously by the Church of the first three centuries after Jesus. Rather than beginning by attempting to navigate any number of discreet scenarios, and rather than ending with a policy statement of what we believe as a church and how the elders will enforce these beliefs, we suggest that laying out before the brotherhood the peaceful, merciful, and gentle character of Jesus, whose meekness conquered the world’s sin, will help everyone achieve clarity in what they should do in virtually any scenario. The Way of Peace is comprehensive, it is proactive, and it is powerful. It is also costly and impossible to follow without the grace of God. Teaching the Way of Peace will likely not be simple and will likely encounter plenty of resistance. But the fruit of following the Way of Peace is historically beautiful, and the cost of abandoning it historically catastrophic.

We suggest leading with the term “The Way of Peace” rather than nonresistance, pacifism, or nonviolence. Some people take nonresistance and pacifism to mean that we stand idly by while evil occurs in the world. One must say nothing and do nothing if a shooter enters a church; we should do nothing on behalf of our nation when it is threatened by outside forces; and women must yield themselves meekly to an assault. The Way of Peace teaches us to actively love our enemies, and to use the power of prayer, preaching, and sacrificial service “against” them. We take upon ourselves the whole armor of God in the battle against the spiritual enemies that oppose us. Furthermore, it may be that non-lethal force in restraining an aggressor may be Biblical. For these reasons, the committee prefers the term nonviolence. For the purposes of this report, the ETR borrows from the work of historian Holger Hoock to define nonviolence. Hoock defines violence as “the use of physical force with intention to kill, or cause damage or harm to people or property.” He reminds us that violence can be psychological--“threats, bullying tactics, and brutality to instill fear in people and influence their conduct and decisions”--as well as physical.³ Nonviolence, then, is the rejection of such behavior. To some, however, the term nonviolence sounds too physical and may steer us away from consideration of how we can act violently in our speech and attitudes towards others. For these reasons, the committee prefers the term “Way of Peace,” though this paper will also use the term nonviolence as shorthand.

The ETR recognizes that intelligent, earnest, Bible-believing, God-fearing Christians disagree with elements of the Way of Peace as described here. While this document uses frank terms (such as “violence”) common to academic and popular discussions of the subject at hand (including by those who, as will be seen in this paper, advocate for the Christian use of violence), we in no way mean to imply that Christians who avail themselves of lethal force are afflicted with violent character. We in no way want to impugn the character of well-intentioned Christians who reasonably want to “do something” to protect their families and loved ones at home and in church. Christians have wielded the sword in self-defense and on the battlefield, sometimes with noble cause. We do well to not delve with a spirit of judgment into the ways and will of God with regard to Christians who bear the sword, or to His use of Christians in high levels of politics. We are seeking to discern the will of God concerning the Apostolic Christian Church and are pleased that God faithfully shepherds the rest of His people according to His good purposes. In sum, the ETR prays that nothing in this document will demean those who disagree with us.

In that spirit, the ETR also agrees with the sentiment expressed often at the forums that while there is a strong consensus regarding this topic among the Elder Body, teaching the Way of Peace to our local congregations requires sensitivity and care. Communication will be key, not only in substance but in spirit. Shepherding is in order, not scolding; reason and prayer, not harshness. What properly accords with the Way of Peace in any given situation is not always entirely clear and can be understood differently by people committed fully to following Jesus. It

³ Holger Hoock, *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth*, ebook (New York: Crown, 2017), 12.

is fitting that we walk the Way of Peace while we teach the Way of Peace. It is our prayer that this document proves useful to the success of this pastoral work.

After this introduction, the report will consider popular perceptions of how violence has operated in the Old and New Testaments. Commonly, the two testaments appear at odds, with the Old Testament seemingly portraying a violent God bent on punishing any infraction of His law, and the New Testament revealing God's Son as a man of mercy and gentleness. The paper will lay out several common avenues for resolving this apparent contradiction. Along the way it will pose and respond to typical arguments in favor of the Christian use of violence. Hopefully, elders will find this useful in answering those who point to particular passages that appear to favor Christian violence. Next, the paper will lay out the Biblical cobblestones, so to speak, of the Way of Peace, demonstrating that the Old and New Testaments harmoniously reveal a God whose heart is set towards peace. Next, the paper will show how the early church, before the change initiated by Emperor Constantine in the 300s, walked the Way of Peace with tremendous result. The next section surveys the consequences of the shift away from the Way of Peace that occurred after Constantine and continued all the way through American history. The final section provides a tentative evaluation of nonviolence in Apostolic Christian Church history.

The Progressive Revelation of the Way of Peace in the Bible

The Old Testament

To many people, including proponents of Christian non-violence, the Old Testament appears to bless the use of violence by God's people. Abraham gathered his men and "smote" those who had captured Lot (Genesis 14). Moses and Joshua fought violently against enemies during the conquest of Canaan. Many Jews and Christians view the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," as a prohibition of murder and not the taking of life in general. Along with that commandment came instructions for capital punishment for over thirty offenses, and soon after issuing these laws God led his people into battle.⁴ The Mosaic law recognizes the inevitability of war by establishing rules of warfare; Deuteronomy 20 begins, "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies. . . ." During the time of the judges the people of Israel, under the

⁴ David B Kopel, "The Torah and Self-Defense," *Penn State Law Review* 109, no. 1 (2004): 38–39.

leadership of Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, were delivered violently from the tyranny of foreign oppressors. David, a man after God's own heart, famously killed Philistines by the "ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). Elijah slew hundreds of prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18). In Deuteronomy 28, victory over enemies is the reward for and the sign of faithfulness to God's commands, and conquest by enemies that of unfaithfulness (48-57, 63-68). It seems difficult to reach any other conclusion than that the Old Testament sanctions violence when carrying out God's will. As one modern-day student of the Mosaic law, a lawyer writing for a scholarly law journal, concluded, "What can . . . be said, with some certainty, is that the first five books of the Bible offer nothing to support an argument that defensive violence or killing are inherently wrong. To the contrary, the law which God gave to the Israelites required use of deadly force in self-defense and defense of others. . . . Under the Torah, using force to protect innocents was not only a right, but a positive moral duty."⁵ This seems to be the most popular perception of the Old Testament's teaching on violence. Defenses of the Christian use of violence almost always rely on the Old Testament.⁶

The New Testament

In contrast, the teaching of the New Testament is overwhelmingly nonviolent (with the possible exception of the book of Revelation). There is a general consensus among most scholars and writers that the weight of New Testament Scriptures is nonviolent. It is likely that most Christians would agree that, as a matter of course, Christians should follow nonviolence. There are many relevant Scriptures that are direct and need no commentary.

- Matthew 5:9: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- Matthew 5:38-44: Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. 41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. 43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your

⁵ Kopel, 42.

⁶ Timothy Baldwin and Charles O. "Chuck" Baldwin, *To Keep Or Not To Keep: Why Christians Should Not Give Up Their Guns*, 2013, begins with the claim that, according to the Old Testament, God gave mankind self-defense as a natural right, and the New Testament did nothing to change that fact. See also "Jesus, Guns, and Self-Defense: What Does the Bible Say? • by Gary DeMar • The American Vision," *The American Vision* (blog), April 30, 2019, <https://americanvision.org/12889/jesus-guns-and-self-defense-what-does-the-bible-say/>; Steve Jones, *Stand Your Ground: The Biblical Foundation for Self-Defense*, Kindle (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014); and "The Bible And Gun Control | Gun Owners of America," accessed July 22, 2019, <https://gunowners.org/fs9902/>.

enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? 47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

- John 15:13: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
- Romans 12:17: Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.
- Ephesians 4:32: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15: See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.
- Hebrews 12:14: Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:
- 1 Peter 3:9: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Reconciling the Old and New Testaments

It appears, then, that the Old Testament allows for violence while the weight of the New Testament leads us to an attitude of nonviolence. At the minimum, there seems to be a shift of direction, if not an outright contradiction, between the Old and New Testaments. Christians have worked out several ways around this problem. The first is to dismiss the Old Testament entirely and teach only the New. Another is to minimize the New Testament peace teachings by applying its principles of nonviolence only to instances of personal insult. A third is to separate the civil and private activities of the Christian and apply the New Testament principles of nonviolence only to the private and personal sphere. The final method of reconciling the Testaments is to consider the entire Bible as one continuing and progressive revelation of God's truth and character. Under this light, in the Old Testament God teaches the seriousness of sin but always holds out the promise of forgiveness and redemption. The New Testament brings this revelation to its culmination in the person of Jesus. Seen from this perspective, the Old Testament appears much less violent and the reader recognizes Jesus as the express image of God's creative and life-affirming nature. We will consider each of these methods in turn.

Rejection of the Old Testament:

One way to deal with the apparent contradiction between the Testaments is to dismiss the Old Testament and its sanctioning of violence as irrelevant to the Christian. According to this argument, Jesus inaugurated an entirely new dispensation of grace and truth. The New Testament has done away with the Old, and Christians no longer need to consider the teachings of Moses and the prophets. This carries the danger of Marcionism, a heresy condemned by the Early Church. Marcion, a second-century son of a bishop, taught that there was a wrathful God of the Old Testament and different, merciful God of the New Testament who was revealed in Jesus Christ. Marcion rejected the Old Testament outright, and he cut out of the New Testament any passages that appeared to support the Old, leaving him with a much-shrunken Bible. The Church excommunicated Marcion as a heretic in AD 144.⁷

The New Testament teachings of nonviolence only apply to personal insults.

The second way of reconciling Old and New Testament is to reject any difference at all between Old and New Testaments by explaining all New Testament prohibitions of violence as applying only to personal insults. All other situations are open to violence, just as in the Old Testament. Wars are commanded by God, as is capital punishment. Self-defense is good, even to the point of killing the aggressor. We live in a violent world, just as the Israelites did, and since God has not changed, neither should we. Just as God used His people as violent instruments of justice in the Old Testament, so He can and does use us for similar tasks and purposes.

Defenders of Christian use of violence argue that Paul's teaching to "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21) has been misunderstood. If one starts with the presumption that self-defense is good, and defending the weak is good, and stopping people from committing a crime is good, then overcoming evil with violence qualifies as overcoming evil with good. "So," says a promoter of Christian use of violence, "when Romans 12:21 (kjv) states, 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good', self-defense is the good that may and should be used, when necessary, to overcome evil."⁸ The question then arises, in what situations are we to bless our enemy? If self-defense is a good, then when is it better not to defend ourselves and do good to our enemy? Only in cases where someone does "minor harm or inconvenience." Good is advanced by "letting personal inconveniences or trifles go, and where remedy is needed, using the proper "wrath" of government to repair civil wrongs." In cases of attack, or when the government fails to do its proper duty, the Christian can turn to self-defense

⁷ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Second (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), 62–64.

⁸ Baldwin and Baldwin, *To Keep Or Not To Keep*, 115.

or to armed revolution in order to protect against chaos or tyranny.⁹ This way of thinking reduces the Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel message in general, to grade-school instruction on how to play nicely with one's friends.

Advocates of Christian use of violence also point to New Testament texts that appear to sanction the use of violence by Christians. We will consider their arguments in full before responding.

- *The response of John the Baptist to soldiers in Luke 3:14.* When John preached in the wilderness, various people approached him for counsel. “And the soldiers likewise demanded of [John], saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse [any] falsely; and be content with your wages.” John did not instruct these soldiers to leave the military. It is also not clear in some translations that John even instructed them not to use violence. Here is NIV: Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely--be content with your pay." It is notable that John did not direct the soldiers to quit their profession. John had already shown himself to be a plain-speaking man, unafraid to confront sin directly. In verse seven of the chapter he rebuked his audience, saying “to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” If Christians could not use violence or join the military, why didn't John direct them to quit their jobs as part of their repentance?
- *Jesus clearing the temple.* This story occurs in all four Gospels. Mark and John are the fullest accounts, so we will skip Matthew and Luke. Here is Mark 11:15-18: “15 And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; 16 And would not suffer that any man should carry [any] vessel through the temple. 17 And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.” Here is John 2:13-17: “13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: 15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; 16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. 17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” It appears that Jesus himself used violence, which is consistent with the sharp words he used when confronting Pharisees. If Jesus did, should not we when the situation warrants? As one promoter of the use of violence by Christians argues, “Jesus showed

⁹ Baldwin and Baldwin, 104.

that sometimes verbal accusation and physical brawling are necessary to comply with one's greater duties."¹⁰

- *Jesus and the faithful centurion.* This account is recorded in very similar terms in Matthew and Luke, so we will use Matthew 8:5-13: “And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, 6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. 7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. 8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. 9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this [man], Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth [it]. 10 When Jesus heard [it], he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. 11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, [so] be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.” Here is a centurion, not just a soldier but a leader of soldiers, exhibiting tremendous faith in Jesus. Jesus not only healed his servant but commended him for his faith. Like John, Jesus did not reprimand the centurion for his occupation, nor tell him to quit his post. He didn't even instruct him to avoid violence. Instead, he held this Roman soldier up to his audience as an example of faith. If followers of Jesus are not to join the military or use violence, why did Jesus point to a Roman soldier as an example of faith?
- *Jesus's command to buy swords.* Luke records in 22:35-38: “35 And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. 36 Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take [it], and likewise [his] scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. 37 For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. 38 And they said, Lord, behold, here [are] two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.” Here Jesus commands his disciples to purchase swords. In fact, the command was so urgent that he instructed them to sell their coat to raise money to buy a sword. It turns out, two disciples already had swords, and Jesus said that would be fine. This is given in the context of his departure. He had taken care of them and protected them up to this point. Now he would be leaving, and they would need to defend themselves. Here Jesus teaches self-defense in no uncertain terms.
- *Peter and Cornelius.* In Acts 10 and 11:1-18 Peter preaches the Gospel to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household. This centurion was a “God-fearer,” a friend of Jews who worshiped God and sought to please him but did not become circumcised and

¹⁰ Baldwin and Baldwin, 111.

officially become a Jew. Peter had to have known that Cornelius was a soldier, but he never said a word about it. Neither did he demand Cornelius leave the military before he could be baptized. When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the other Apostles and leaders demanded to know why Peter had even mingled with Cornelius, not because Cornelius was a soldier but because he was a Gentile. Being a soldier was not an issue for the Church leaders.

- *Hebrews 11*. The great “Hall of Faith” chapter contains multiple examples of warriors. In fact, many of the men and women held up as examples of faith had committed violence at least once in their lives: Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Deborah, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel. How could we say that the New Testament condemns violence when it praises these men who were willing to do violence?
- *Jesus and the Apostles defending the weak and oppressed*. John 8 tells the story of Jesus taking the side of the woman caught in adultery, rather than the side of her accusers. Women were at great disadvantage in Roman culture, and Jesus showed courage in defending her. Jesus spoke to the disreputable woman of Samaria at the well. He welcomed the little children when others wanted to dismiss them. He and the Apostles healed the sick, including despised lepers. In short, Jesus and the early church teach us to stand up for the little guy, the oppressed, the weak, and the despised. Sometimes force is necessary to do this.

This way of reconciling Old and New Testaments is not without its weaknesses. The main weakness is that all of the New Testament defenses of the use of violence except one, when Jesus instructs his disciples to buy swords, depend entirely on inferences and implications that are probably highly misleading. Let’s set aside Jesus’s instruction to his disciples for just a moment in order to deal with all the others.

- *The response of John the Baptist to soldiers in Luke 3:14*. The KJV rendering of this account is the most literal, the closest rendering of the Greek wording, when it says that John instructed the soldiers to “do no violence.” Young’s Literal Translation has it this way: [Luk 3:14 YLT] 14 And questioning him also were those warring, saying, 'And we, what shall we do?' and he said unto them, 'Do violence to no one, nor accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.' The Greek wording includes the concept of violence. It also includes the concept of falsely accusing or defrauding someone. Since Roman soldiers were involved in enforcing monetary penalties and fees, some modern translators interpreted the Greek wording “do violence to no one” and “nor accuse falsely” to be describing a single situation, and a situation rather typical for the era, where a Roman soldier used physical intimidation to extort more money than they were supposed to. Here is ESV: (Luk 3:14) Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.” And here is NASB: “14 [Some] soldiers were questioning

him, saying, ‘And [what about] us, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse [anyone] falsely, and be content with your wages.’” These translations downplay the instruction against violence by treating it as though it merely modifies the act of extortion. But, in fact, there are three, not two, distinct instructions in this verse: the first involves violence, another with fraud and false accusations, and the last with contentment with wages. The instruction against violence was broader than merely warning against particular forms of extortion. It likely was meant to prohibit violence in any situation, including war. If so, then why didn’t John directly require the soldiers to leave the military? Because it was illegal and unnecessary. The typical enlistment period was 26 years, and soldiers who tried to quit early could suffer execution.¹¹ However, many served in roles that did not demand violence. It was quite possible for men to be in the military without fighting in war. They collected taxes and fees, stood guard duty and accompanied dignitaries, staffed jails, did menial work, and otherwise stood around looking imposing.¹² This is normal for the military, even today. There is a young man and professing Christian associated with one of our Illinois churches who joined the National Guard in order to get his college degree paid for. He hopes to enter medicine and work as a doctor. It is quite likely that he will never fire a gun at anyone for his entire life. Assuming he becomes a doctor or nurse, even in times of war he will likely spend most of his time healing the wounded, not making more of them. In times of peace, he may be called upon to rescue people during hurricanes and flooding, clear debris from natural disasters, or build up levies against floods. Of course, he, and the Roman soldiers who approached John, would still be expected to use violence when called upon, and this is the danger of joining the military. In those cases, it is probable that John would have expected them to refuse. This would mean execution. Hopefully they never faced that choice.

- *Jesus clearing the temple.* There is probably no way to understand this situation in any other way than to see that Jesus aggressively cleansed the temple. But was he violent towards others? No. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke he only overturns tables and drives out the businesses that were set up. They do not say that Jesus set upon the people violently. Only in John can it appear that Jesus uses violence against others, but this is a problem of translation. The way most translations provide this verse it appears that Jesus drove out the moneychangers and the animals with a whip. Here is the relevant text in several translations: KJV: “15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables”; ESV: “15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables”; NASB: “15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove [them] all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the

¹¹ Nigel Rodgers, *Roman Empire* (New York: Metro Books, 2010), 152 and 153.

¹² Rodgers, 160–61.

coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.” The problem is, according to New Testament scholar Preston Sprinkle, pointing to the way it is translated in the ESV and NASB, there is no “with” after “temple” in the original Greek. It is more accurate to say, “he drove them all out of the temple, the sheep and the oxen,” in which case the “them” being driven out refers to the sheep and the oxen.¹³ Here is the word-for-word interlinear translation: “And having made a whip of cords all he drove out from the temple both sheep and oxen and of the moneychangers he poured out the coins and the tables he overthrew.” Jesus drove out the animals with a whip, which is nothing remarkable, but he did not use violence against the people. Incidentally, even if we do follow modern translations and say that Jesus wielded a whip against people in the temple, it seems reasonable to agree with Dean Taylor, former soldier and now president of a small Anabaptist college (Sattler College), that it is problematic to refer to Jesus snapping a whip at people in the temple as authorization for us to shoot them dead.

- *Jesus and the centurion, and Peter and Cornelius.* Since the challenge to nonviolence is the same with both of these instances, we shall consider them together. First, in neither case is the point of the story the personal morality of the soldiers. Unlike the soldiers who approached John and received instruction on holy living, the point of these stories centers on the faith of Gentiles. We see this in Jesus’s response to the centurion’s faith; Jesus says that he had “not found so great faith, no not in Israel,” and then declares that there would be Gentiles who sit with the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven while the genealogical heirs are cast out. The story of Peter and Cornelius begins with God teaching Peter not to reject what God has pronounced clean. The first thing that Peter said to Cornelius when he entered the centurion’s house is that as a Jew he really was not supposed to be there. The story climaxes with Peter watching as Cornelius received the Spirit, and then exclaiming, “Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” Perhaps because Gentiles have had nearly two millennia to get used to the fact that we have been allowed into the family of God without first becoming Jews, this does not seem particularly startling. But this would have shocked Jesus’s and Peter’s Jewish observers. It certainly shocked the early Jewish Christians who heard about Peter baptizing Cornelius. The point in both cases is not that they were soldiers, or even sinners per se, but that they were Gentiles. Whatever else these Gentiles learned about following Jesus was outside the scope of the stories. Similarly, the point of Peter healing the beggar was not that the beggar needed to give up whatever particular sins he indulged in, but that Peter had Jesus’s power to heal a man of sickness. The point of Philip baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch was not that he needed to change this or that misbehavior in his life, but that a foreigner of dubious ethnic heritage was saved. We could go on and on with examples of people whose sins were not specified but who received salvation. None of these stories negate the Biblical teaching

¹³ Preston Sprinkle, *Fight: A Christian Case for Nonviolence* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2013), 236.

that everyone, without exception, needs to repent and turn away from any and all sins. It is just that a person's specific sins do not need to be identified in each and every case. This becomes even clearer when we consider the very important fact that Roman law demanded that centurions perform pagan religious services. Regular soldiers could avoid it, so we did not raise this fact when considering the soldiers who approached John. Officers, however, were required to offer sacrifices and conduct other rituals in order to win the gods' favor for battle. Yet in neither case did Jesus or Peter demand that the centurions give up idol worship in order to be saved. If we say that their silence regarding being soldiers means that they had no problem with Christians serving in the military, does that not also demand that we say that their silence regarding the centurions' pagan obligations means that Jesus and Peter had no problem with idolatry? That seems absurd.

- *Hebrews 11*: this chapter may actually be more useful to teach nonviolence than it is to teach the acceptability of violence. As such, we will leave this chapter for later. Suffice it to say here that with the exception of a vague expression of appreciation for some heroes' courage in battle--they "waxed valiant in fight"--which can be taken a number of ways, what is exalted in this chapter is not violence, but victory through human weakness and faith in God's power.
- *Jesus and the Apostles defending the weak and oppressed*. This argument is perhaps the weakest. It assumes that one cannot defend the defenseless without at least being willing to use violence when necessary, which, in turn, assumes that sometimes violence is necessary. As we will discuss later, the ways Jesus teaches us to defend and protect are supremely powerful without being violent.

The strongest reference to Scripture in defense of violence may be the claim that Jesus instructed his disciples to buy swords for self-defense. This appears to be the only place where Jesus directly condones violence, for, says the argument for Christian violence, he not only speaks approvingly of it, he instructs it. The weakness is that Jesus's instruction likely had nothing to do with self-defense. Dr. Sprinkle's explanation is worthy of full quotation:

Jesus tells them to go buy a sword, and lo and behold, two of them (probably Peter and Simon the Zealot) have swords already: "Look Lord, here are two swords." Jesus ends the discussion with a curious phrase: "It is enough." Which raises the question: Enough for what?

I've heard some people say this passage proves that Jesus advocated for violence in self-defense. This has always struck me as odd, since two swords for eleven disciples are not enough for self-defense, especially if they go out two by two as they did before. Also, nowhere else does Jesus allow for violence in self-defense. Quite the opposite according to Matthew 5 and Luke 6

Just to see if I was the only one who had problems with the self-defense view, I looked at ten of the most respected commentators on Luke--many of whom definitely

aren't' pacifists--to see if I was all alone. I wasn't. Of the ten, I found only one who took the self-defense view. And he didn't give any scriptural support for this view. There is little--if any--support from the text that Jesus all of a sudden advocates for violence in self-defense.

If self-defense isn't the point, then what does Jesus mean when He tells His disciples to buy a sword? Most scholars offered one of two interpretations. Some thought Jesus is speaking symbolically here. New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall said that the command to buy a sword is "a call to be ready for hardship and self-sacrifice." Darrell Bock of Dallas Seminary said the command to buy a sword symbolically "points to readiness and self-sufficiency, not revenge." And the popular Reformed commentator William Hendriksen put it bluntly: "The term sword must be interpreted figuratively." So when Jesus tells them to buy a sword, He is speaking figuratively about imminent persecution. According to this interpretation, when the disciples eagerly reveal that they already have two swords, they misunderstand Jesus's figurative language (this isn't the first time). When Jesus sees that His disciples misunderstand Him, He ends the dialogue with, "It is enough," which means something like "enough of this conversation."

This interpretation makes good sense in light of the context. But there's another interpretation that I think does slightly more justice to the passage. Notice that right after Jesus says, "Buy a sword," he quotes Isaiah 53:12, which predicts that Jesus will be "numbered with the transgressors" (Luke 22:37). Then the disciples reveal that they already have two swords, to which Jesus says, "It is enough." Now, Rome crucifies only those who are a potential threat to the empire. For Jesus to be crucified, Rome has to convict Him as a potential revolutionary. And this is the point of the swords. With swords in their possession, Jesus and His disciples will be viewed as potential revolutionaries, and Jesus will therefore fulfill Isaiah 53 to be numbered with other (revolutionary) transgressors. If Rome doesn't have any legal grounds to incriminate Jesus there will be no crucifixion.

This interpretation captures the meaning of Isaiah 53 and the flow of Jesus's ethical teaching. Up until Luke 22, Jesus has prohibited His followers from using violence, even in self-defense. Is Jesus now changing His mind by telling His followers to use the sword in self-defense? It seems better to take His command to buy a sword as we have suggested: Jesus is providing Rome with evidence to put Him on the cross.

So we could view Jesus's command as a figurative expression about their coming suffering or as a way of ensuring His own crucifixion. Either way, it's highly unlikely that Jesus encourages violent self-defense here. In fact, just a few verses later, Peter wields one of the two swords, and Jesus rebukes him: "No more of this!" (Luke 22:51). Peter, along with some interpreters, has misunderstood Jesus's previous command to buy a sword.

Whatever Jesus means by His command to buy a sword, it doesn't seem that He intends it to be used for violence.¹⁴

There is one more way of understanding Jesus's instruction to his disciples to buy swords. The word sword in English conjures images of ancient soldiers rushing into battle brandishing huge swords. The Greek word for such a weapon is *rhompaia*. The Greek word in Jesus's instruction, however, is *machaira*, and it refers to a much smaller weapon, perhaps even a knife. These could be used for self-defense against humans, of course, but they were also commonly used as tools for cutting up animals to eat, for instance. Nabeel Qureshi writes,

Like a machete, a *machaira* could be used for fighting, but that was not its only or primary purpose. It would certainly have been useful as a traveling tool. There appears to be confirmation of this interpretation within the text. As if to ensure that his disciples would not use the *machaira* for fighting, he tells them two are enough. . . . Two swords could not be sufficient among twelve disciples for fighting, but they could be sufficient as traveling tools. Either way, the verse says nothing about actually committing violence.¹⁵

Jewish religious historian Paula Fredrikson, writing from a non-Christian point of view with interests in the Jewish context of early Christianity, also points out the inappropriateness of translating the original Greek into "sword." She argues that Jesus was referring to knives used for sacrifices in the temple. The word Jews used to translate the Greek word *machaira* in ancient Jewish writings is the same word they used to identify the knife wielded by Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac, which was not a sword.¹⁶

The argument that we should understand this passage's use of "the sword" may be weakened by the fact that the same term, *machaira*, is used in places in the Bible that clearly refer to a more militant context. For instance, in Matthew's iteration of this episode, Jesus explained "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword [*machaira*] shall perish with the sword [*machaira*]" (Matthew 26:52). The "keeper of the prison" in Acts 16:27 bore a *machaira*, and in Romans 13:4 the "sword" given by God to the civil government is a *machaira*. Nonetheless, the fact that the nature and purpose of a *machaira* is ambiguous and can include its use as either a weapon or a tool does complicate Jesus's teaching his disciples to acquire "swords." It may be that we simply will not know with great certainty what Jesus meant in this passage. At the minimum, the appropriateness of this passage for the support of Christian use of lethal force is highly contestable.

¹⁴ Sprinkle, 237–39.

¹⁵ Nabeel Qureshi, *Answering Jihad: A Better Way Forward* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 129.

¹⁶ New Books in History, "When Christians Were Jews: The First Generation," accessed July 31, 2020.

In sum, all of the New Testament verses that appear to support Christian use of violence rely on unwarranted inferences and extrapolations. The verses that teach nonviolence are direct and simple. The New Testament remains radically nonviolent.

The Christian may use violence when acting as an agent of the state.

Another way to deal with the apparent conflict between the Testaments with regard to violence is to separate the Christian's civil obligations as a citizen of the nation and his private commitments as a Christian. In our personal life we live according to the radical commandments of the Sermon on the Mount. But Christians always remain citizens of the nation, encumbered with all of the duties that we owe to Caesar, and as such we should present ourselves as good citizens available to carry out all of the responsibilities of the state. In our capacity as earthly citizens we behave as Old Testament followers of God. This may mean military or police service, and, indeed, it is a good thing to spread the light of Jesus into these areas of society. If Romans 13 gives the sword to government for the purpose of maintaining peace and justice (see below), would it not be better if the police and military were staffed with Christian soldiers and officers? Versions of this argument usually allow for Christians to use violence on behalf of the state as long as they exhibit Christian character while committing that violence. Meanwhile, in all other areas of life they revert to New Testament principles of meekness and sacrificial suffering.

This method of understanding the New Testament and violence rests largely on Romans 13. This chapter appears to sanction the state's use of violence for the purpose of deterring evil and exacting justice. The state wields power "ordained of God" and is His "minister," His "revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." Therefore, says Paul, we "must needs be subject" to the state and pay tribute, or taxes, to support the state in its work. "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." To those who support Christian use of violence, this means that we should make ourselves available to perform the work of the state, even to the point of wielding the sword on its behalf.

It is unclear why "rendering tribute" should include bearing the sword. Nowhere in this chapter does Paul suggest that, since the state needs to use the sword, Christians should join in. The text does not advocate anything beyond paying taxes and obeying the laws that call us to do good and not evil. What counts as good and what counts as evil should, at least for the Christian, be defined by Scriptural principles. Verses 8-11 of Romans 13 clarify the difference between the state's duties and the Christian's mission. After affirming the state's obligation to enforce justice and instructing the Roman Christians in verse 7 to "render therefore to all their dues," he says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." After repeating a few of the Ten Commandments, Paul concludes, "if there be any other

commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” In sum, the instruction to fulfill our duties to the state takes place within the higher law of love, not justice. It is the state’s duty to render justice, while it is the Christian’s duty to render love. This may occasionally and regrettably bring us into conflict with the state. Plenty of Scriptures teach us to obey God before men. Peter’s courageous refusal to quit preaching the Gospel out of obedience to the Jewish leaders--”we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29)--is one example. There is no evident reason given in Romans 13 why the Christian should dismiss that imperative for the sake of rendering to the state police or military service in violation of Jesus’s commands to love our enemies and do good to those who mistreat us.

The use of Romans 13 in support of Christian use of violence is undermined further by the fact that it follows Romans 12. This chapter begins with Paul “beseeching” his Roman brethren to “not be conformed to this world,” but to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” This means walking humbly and peaceably among the brethren. The last part of the chapter is sort of another beatitudes modeled after the Sermon on the Mount. Christians are to love “without dissimulation,” to “be kindly affectioned,” zealous for the Lord, “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation,” prayerful, and generous. The section ends similarly to Jesus’s Sermon, with an exhortation to “bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not,” to “recompense to no man evil for evil,” and to, “if it be possible,” as much as they can, “live peaceably with all men.” Finally, and we will switch to NIV for clarity, “do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him: if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Chapter 12 is a clear call to Christian nonviolence. Only then does Paul move into his chapter 13 exhortation about the state as the minister of God and the need to pay taxes. Notice that the Christian’s role is to love and to leave vengeance to God. That God chooses to use the state as a “revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil,” is His prerogative. To join the state in exacting revenge would violate Paul’s command to believers to withhold revenge. The state’s business is not our business. We are not to conform to the world, but to conform to the character and behavior Paul sets out as “the will of God” in chapter 12.

One final point regarding Romans 13 may be useful. Paul was writing to an audience of Jewish and Gentile believers. None of them were required to join the Roman military. The Jewish believers, in particular, would have been far more likely to join a violent rebellion against the Romans. Such a rebellion occurred not long after Paul wrote this letter, when Jewish zealots rebelled and were defeated, Jerusalem sacked, and the temple destroyed in AD 70. According to historian Hershberger, “the military service with would have appealed to” Paul’s audience “would have been one of rebellion against the Roman Empire. Therefore, “subjection to the

higher powers” means primarily that the Christian can have no part in a rebellion or revolution against the government in control. In Romans 13 Paul is teaching non-resistance, not an obligation to military service.”¹⁷

Reconciling the Old and New Testaments by claiming that the New Testament affirms Old Testament sanctions of violence, as long as the violence is performed by the Christian as an agent of the state, also rests on at least two questionable assumptions. The first flows from the notion that Christians acting as soldiers and police officers can bring the light of the Gospel into these areas of society. The assumption is that there is a way to maintain one’s Christian character and witness while committing violence. Is there truly a Christ-like way of killing someone? Christians in the military today will argue that there is. Theologian Daniel M. Bell, Jr., argues that Christian participation in war is not permissible not because war is a necessary and regrettable evil, but because Christian soldiering properly performed is a kind of loving Christian discipleship. Done well, Christian warmaking “points to the One who came that all might have life and have it abundantly.”¹⁸ When Bell considers Jesus’s commands to “love one’s enemies,” he seems to define “enemy” as a belligerent nation, rather than as individual souls. One may kill an enemy soldier as an act of saving *the soldier’s society* from carrying out great acts of injustice. Thus, “the enemy” becomes a rather amorphous society, culture, or nation, rather than the individuals one faces on the battlefield.

Arguably, even the consideration of violence changes who we are, a problem not taken up by Bell or other defenders of Christian use of lethal force. It seems that even killing the most despicable person affects our personal nature. As one elder has noted, we have made “blood” a part of our persona or spirit. It is difficult to see how committing violence on the part of the state does anything to change or excuse that. Former American soldier Dean Taylor recalls a “drill sergeant’s bellowing out ‘What makes the grass grow?’ To all that we were supposed to respond, ‘Blood! Blood! Blood! Makes the grass grow!’ After that we would thrust our M-16s with

¹⁷ Guy F. Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1953), 55–56.

¹⁸ Daniel M. Bell Jr., *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church Rather than the State* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 20. In this book, Bell never lays out a Biblical defense of Christian participation in the military. He rightly observes that the early church rejected military service outright and, like others, locates the shift away from that early stance in the 300s when Christians assumed political power. In justifying that shift Bell repeats St. Augustine’s assertion that “times change” and that what was appropriate at one time may not be so at another” (28). Offered the chance to effect positive change in the world by using government power, a possibility not available in the time of Jesus or the early church, the church assumed the responsibilities of the state, including warmaking. To Augustine, and apparently to Bell, “just war was a form of love and as such, it was to be rightly understood not as a departure from the moral vision of Jesus and the early church but as an extension of that vision in different times and under changed circumstances” (33). Bell’s defense of war as love appears throughout the book but most directly in chapter One. Bell’s book will likely prove unpersuasive to anyone looking for a Biblical defense of Christian warmaking, but it may also be the most innovative, thoughtful, and intellectually stimulating defense of Christian participation in war.

bayonets attached in the air, shouting, ‘Kill! Kill! With cold blue steel! Kill! Kill! Kill! With cold blue steel!’ You know, looking back, I have often wondered, what was I thinking?”¹⁹ The United States military is clear and explicit in describing how it intends to overcome recruits’ reluctance to kill. More information about military training can be found in the “Issues Regarding Military Service” section towards the end of this document. Suffice it here to say that the military itself openly and without apology seeks to alter the psychological inhibitions most law-abiding citizens maintain against violence.

It is difficult to see how the emotional and psychological framework necessary to carry out purposeful killing is consistent with Christian character. If they are indeed inconsistent, how may it be that a Christian should suppress the nature of Christ instilled within him upon conversion (2 Peter 1) in order to take up the affairs of the state? If a man enters politics, the assumption would be that he will not lie, cheat, or steal in the process of getting elected or carrying out his work. The Christian is expected to maintain Christian character while carrying out his necessary duties. If a point is reached in which he is required to do something that violates Christian ethics, most Christians would presumably say he should disobey and, if necessary, resign. The expectation is that a Christian at work will not abandon his Christian virtues merely because he is an agent of the state or other employer. How, then, can he maintain his Christian virtue while killing another human being? As we will see, there was a time in the early church when Christians could remain as soldiers as long as they performed only service work and did not commit violence of any sort. A Christian soldier was to resign immediately if he was ever asked to kill or offer sacrifice to a pagan god. A Christian in the military was still a Christian, even though he performed his daily work in the service of the state.

The second assumption is that Christians can and will commit violence in a way that advances justice more than unbelievers can and will. Presumably, Christians are more in tune with principles of justice, and they can, for instance, help ensure that the only wars the state fights are just ones. As we will see later, this is a dubious claim to make in light of Church history. In the meantime, this is a good place to remind the reader that the intent here is not to impugn the character of Christians currently in the military. We recognize that military service does not necessarily turn a soldier into a bloodthirsty killer. Our purpose here is not to question the grace of God in attending to Christians currently in the military. Rather, this seeks to help discern the will of God with regard to Apostolic Christians under the pastoral care of the Elder Body by suggesting that military service can be detrimental to the pursuit of Christian virtue.

¹⁹ Andrew V. Ste. Marie, ed., *Should Christians Fight?: Nonresistance vs. Just War Theory, A Debate* (Manchester, MI: Sermon on the Mount Publishing, 2014), 13; The work of Dean Taylor is very helpful in understanding the realities of warfare and the possibilities of Christian nonviolence. See his book Dean Taylor, *A Change of Allegiance: A Journey Into the Historical and Biblical Teaching of War and Peace* (Ephrata, PA: Radical Reformation Books, 2009); or his CD set Dean Taylor, *A Change of Allegiance: Choosing the Way of Peace*, CD (Amberson, PA: Scroll Publishing Company, 2015).

That the leaders in the early church themselves made such a suggestion (as we will see later) supports this suggestion's legitimacy.

The Bible as a cohesive and consistent expression of the nonviolent heart of God.

There is a fourth way to reconcile the Testaments. It may be that the belief that the Old Testament sanctions violence, and that the New Testament differs in its approach to violence, is mistaken because, in fact, the Old Testament is not nearly so enthusiastic about violence as we have come to believe. The Old Testament may appear to us to bless violence because we are conditioned by our surrounding Christian culture to judge Christian behavior through a process of mining Scripture for verses that speak directly to the issue at hand. Doing this will turn up plenty of Old Testament verses that appear to honor violence. We then turn to the New Testament and search for verses that imply the legitimacy of Christian self-defense and military service, while arguing over the appropriate way to interpret and apply verses that teach us to, for instance, love our enemies. Whether we support or reject Christian nonviolence, we spend our time parsing Hebrew and Greek verbiage, comparing this verse to that verse, and putting select verses in various historical contexts that shade them one way or another. This can be a useful way to read and apply the Bible, but by itself, it is dangerously insufficient.

There is a better way to learn from Scripture without fighting over specific passages, and it is particularly useful when discerning how to deal with thorny cultural issues. The goal of this method is to learn the ways of Jesus and to seek to become like Jesus in our deepest being. Instead of isolating passages that strike us as relevant to the behavior in question, we seek to understand the character of God and then walk in the way that best reflects that character.

We begin with an instructive historical example. In the 1800s Christian pastors and theologians engaged in textual combat over the issue of slavery. Eventually abolitionist Christians backed off because of their enormous disadvantage: read this way, the Bible clearly supported (and still supports) slavery.²⁰ Some Christian abolitionists turned to a different way of reading the Bible that focused on the character of Christ rather than pointing to individual verses about slavery. It was a way that Anabaptist leaders had already settled on centuries before, and it served them well when discerning God's will with regard to one of the most momentous issues in the history of America and the world.

Anabaptists were almost to a person against slavery, long before the rest of society began to question the institution in the Revolutionary era. Anabaptists saw slavery as incompatible with

²⁰ A notable book on the failure of Christian theologians to resolve the debate over slavery is Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, The Steven and Janice Brose Lectures in the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

the character of Jesus Christ. It was inconceivable to them that Jesus would force someone else to work on his behalf. Jesus, the Logos, the word, the express image of God's character and will, came to us in meekness, love, peace, and goodwill, the epitome of a suffering servant. Jesus reveals to us a God that seeks loving intimacy so much that he is willing to sacrifice his only begotten Son to reconcile otherwise hopeless sinners to Himself. The practice of owning someone else for the purpose of forcing them into one's service violated every principle of Christ's character. Because assuming the nature of Christ and exhibiting the character of Christ was just as important as--arguably more important than--correctly interpreting and applying individual verses, Anabaptists concluded that while the Bible may allow for and regulate the institution of slavery, they could not own slaves without violating the most profound truths of the Bible.²¹ (Interestingly, once a person grounds himself in the character of Jesus, the verses in the Bible that appear to sanction slavery begin to appear less enthusiastic about slavery at the minimum and downright abolitionist at the most. But that is another topic.)

The Anabaptist way of evaluating New World slavery gives us a clue to how we might resolve the seeming incompatibility of the Old and New Testaments: The New Testament fulfills the Old. If we look through the Bible not to find individual verses that speak most directly to issues of violence, but to discover the way of Jesus as progressively revealed across the expanse of the Bible, from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21, we see that Old and New Testament together reveal a story that is much more grand than any of our narrowly focused arguments over particular verses. The Old and New Testaments need each other. Without reading the New Testament, the Old Testament may appear to depict a God that is capricious and violent. Without the Old Testament, the New Testament may seem detached from the realities of our sinful world. Together, they present a God that is intensely occupied with the nitty gritty details of our life while holding out to us a path to transcend those details to attain a much more excellent way.

That way is the nonviolent Way of Peace.²²

The Way of Jesus in the Old Testament

The Genesis of the Way of Peace.

The Bible begins with an act of Creation: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Thus begins the revelation of God as creative, not destructive. This creative God is also wonderfully imaginative, for he brings into the world a vast universe of light and darkness, water

²¹ Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1989), is a good overview of American Anabaptists in the nineteenth century and includes comments on slavery and the Civil War.

²² The next section draws much inspiration from George Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb: Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service*, Kindle (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

and land, plant and animal in glorious diversity. In the process of creation he brings life into the world, a power that only He possesses. God created life. God is life's author, initiator, and arbiter. Creation, pulsating with the breath of life and splendid in its beautiful variety, God repeatedly declares to be good, until he creates man and woman, whom he calls very good. Truly, as the Psalmist says, God is good, and he does what is good; teach us thy statutes (Psalm 119:68). God indeed teaches man his statutes, for He walks with Adam and Eve Himself. There, in the light of His presence, they learn through experience, and perhaps through word, all that is good and right and beautiful. The Bible begins with life.

Sadly, Adam chose to rebel against God's only command. Now a sinner, Adam could not reproduce and live forever, for that would lead to a world unbearably full of the ugliness of evil. God, being the God of justice, must not let that happen. Death entered the world. Humans were cut off from their intimate, pure and unmediated relationship with God. And yet, in the midst of their discipline, God revealed His ultimate plan. God confronted Satan with the fact that in the end, God wins and man will be redeemed: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise [or, better, "crush"] thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).²³ The verse speaks of the battle between good and evil, between God's children and Satan. Satan would "bruise" the son of Eve, but the son of Eve would crush Satan. Paul, writing to the Romans, encouraged them to stand fast against evil, for "the God of peace shall bruise [crush] Satan under your feet shortly" (16:20). God, acting as the God of peace, will defeat Satan. The act of justice comes framed as an act of peace. Indeed, at the very moment, the exact place and time, when death entered the world in Genesis, God brought about the means of restoring peace between Him and mankind. His plan from the beginning was centered on peace and reconciliation.

Banished from the Garden, Adam and Eve and their offspring faced the realities of a world broken with sin. The depth of human sin was soon revealed in the murder of their son Abel by their son Cain. Astonishingly, God, who would later declare "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6), revealed himself to Cain as a God of mercy, not bloodshed. Cain, a farmer, would be a wanderer, but God himself "set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him" (Genesis 4:15). Anyone who dared violate that command, "vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." It is unclear what that means exactly since an individual cannot be punished with death seven times over. Probably, the particulars of his punishment are not the point. Rather, a peacemaking and forgiving God wants mankind to understand how awful murder is in His sight without exacting the ultimate punishment.

²³ The same Hebrew word translated "bruise" is used both times in this verse, but in Romans 16:20, when Paul references this verse to describe how God would defeat Satan, he uses a Greek word that makes more sense as "crush." Perhaps considering this verse and the thorough nature of Jesus's triumph over Satan, some modern translations of Genesis 3:15 translate the word "crush" the first time and "bruise" the second.

Human sin got worse, but God's heart of mercy continued to temper his heart of justice. Adam and Eve's great-great-great-great grandson Lamech killed a man and reveled wickedly in God's mercy, saying that "if Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold" (Genesis 4:24). Rather than walking humbly in view of God's grace and mercy, Lamech used it to excuse his sin. No wonder that, by the time of Noah, God "repented" of creating man, since "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 6:6). God brought the flood upon the earth because of the unbearable measure of sin: "the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11). This verse points to human violence as one of the two specific sins God punished with the flood. It also suggests that God tolerated the violence until it "filled" the earth. (This is a point we will see again later: God withholds punishment until sin is "filled up.") Yet, when God reflected on man's evil, He reached a startling conclusion: "I will not curse the ground anymore for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done" (Genesis 8:21). Man is so evil that God must respond in mercy! If he were to fully punish men's sin and sinfulness, nobody would survive.

To make sure Noah appreciated the depth of God's mercy, God created the rainbow for "perpetual generations," a "token of a covenant between me and the earth" (Genesis 9:12). That covenant was a promise made by God. The substance of the covenant was that he would never again destroy with water the earth and its inhabitants, including Noah's descendants. God repeated the covenant over and over again in Genesis chapter nine. Repetition is a Hebrew literary method of emphasizing the main point, and here the point is that God had made a covenant with the earth because of man's evil nature. Incredibly, the rainbow would serve not to remind humans of this covenant, but, said God, "the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth." Does God need to be reminded? Of course not, but He likely said this as a way of establishing that whatever man does, and however much man neglects, misuses, and forgets God's mercy, God would remain faithful and merciful.

Mankind still got worse. Rather than clearing them off of the face of the earth, however, God went about setting up for the arrival of his salvation. He chose another couple, Abram and Sarai, for a special blessing. The blessing would not be for them alone: "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). All nations could join the family of Abraham through faith in Abraham's God. Many did, and when they did, they learned truth and righteousness from God's law. Later, David, inspired by God himself, would praise God over and over again for the goodness and beauty of this law. This is the way God wants his people to understand his law: "the law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple. The statues of the lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgements of the lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold,

yea than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is they servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.” (Psalm 19:7-11). The law is there to teach us what is good and beautiful.

It should be no surprise that much of what the New Testament is famous for--its teaching about love and peace and salvation--is actually taken directly from the Old Testament. When Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment given to man, he pointed to the Old Testament: “Love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might,” from Deuteronomy 6:5. The second greatest commandment according to Jesus came from Leviticus 19:18: “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. I am the Lord.” Even Jesus’s famous command to love our enemies was already hinted at in Exodus 23:4-5: “If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.”²⁴

The Nation of Israel and the Way of Peace.

Admittedly, the law can also appear harsh, for it is this same law that contains the commandments regarding capital punishment and the regulation of warfare. These were serious laws, and they represent God’s code, so to speak, of righteousness and justice. To minimize them or pretend as though God didn’t mean them, or that they were mistaken, seems badly wrong. How do we reconcile David’s praise of God’s laws with the realities of their harsh penalties? Several observations may help. This section takes much from the outstanding book by Preston Sprinkle, *Fight: A Christian Case for Nonviolence*.

The Mosaic laws are significantly less harsh than most codes of the ancient world. Preston Sprinkle writes, “Israel was less violent and had a stripped-down--almost absurd--warfare policy compared to nations around it.”²⁵ They were not allowed to maintain a professional army, they were required to offer peace before fighting, and they had to leave noncombatants and the land out of the violence. This was not typical of ancient warfare and indicates that the Israelites were not to be a militant people. Read most accounts of ancient warfare and it becomes apparent that nations customarily violated the precepts of God’s law. The Assyrians were downright bloodthirsty; they openly rejoiced in mutilating and torturing their enemies. Even the Israelites themselves violated their own law. Perhaps the bloodiest era in the Bible occurred in the time of the Book of Judges, when “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Much of the awfulness for which the Old Testament gets its violent reputation occurred as rebellion against God’s commands, not in line with them.

²⁴ Much of Sprinkle’s argument was anticipated in Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*.

²⁵ Sprinkle, *Fight*, 53.

The warfare that was carried out under the direction of God Himself on behalf of the Israelites is particularly instructive. Many of the wars that are referred to in the Old Testament as proof that God blesses violence can be easily mischaracterized. Time after time God did the fighting while humans watched from afar. God drowned the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Some scholars see in Exodus 23:20-30, where God promises to go ahead of the Israelites and drive out the Canaanites “little by little” as an indication that God’s plan to give the Israelites the land of Canaan was something that he would do, not the Israelite soldiers, and that the conquest would not be a mass campaign of extermination. This promise was dependent on their obedience; they rebelled and took the land violently instead.²⁶ Nonetheless, some of the campaigns of conquest took place without Israelites militant participation. Jericho was defeated by marching peacefully around the wall. In 2 Chronicles 20 the Israelites face a massive invasionary force of Moabites, Ammonites, and others. A Spirit-inspired Levite encourages the people with the revelation that God would fight on their behalf: “Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you.” And so the people of God headed out to the battlefield singing! Sure enough, all they had to do was pick up the loot left behind by the enemy.

When the people did need to engage in battle, if the battle was commanded by God (and this is a very important distinction to make), they often did not have to do much of the fighting. Gideon is a good example of this. Similarly, 2 Kings 6:8-23 illustrates the power of God to rescue his people using the might of His own angels. Elisha’s eyes of faith could see God’s legions surrounding the Syrian army laying siege to his city. The angels blinded the Syrians and deliver them into Israelite hands. The story ends beautifully, with the prophet Elisha counseling peaceful service to Israel’s enemies rather than violent retribution.

Additionally, there is good reason to believe that in many, perhaps most, cases the women and children of the enemy were spared. “Killing every living thing” was common hyperbole for the trouncing of one’s enemies but did not necessarily mean that every living thing was actually killed.

War was commanded by God when the sin of the people had risen to such a fever pitch that justice simply demanded intervention. When God revealed to Abram that the land of Canaan would belong to him and his descendants, he also told him that his descendants would not be able to conquer the land until after they had spent four hundred years in a foreign land, for the “iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Genesis 15:16). This is similar to the earth being filled with violence and being cleared by God with the flood.

²⁶ See, for instance, Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*, 30–35.

Some of the laws were apparently never intended to be carried out literally, at least not all the time. There is no evidence whatsoever that any Israelite children were stoned for disrespecting their parents. None. Indeed, the Bible is curiously sparse in its depictions of any harsh punishments being meted out in accordance with the law. Certainly the Bible does not portray God or His leaders as policing the people, striking down any violator of the law. It appears that mercy triumphed over justice quite regularly. Perhaps this is why God chose to withhold capital punishment from Cain and others even though they had shed men's blood. Maybe the law in its starkness intended primarily to teach the seriousness of sin rather than inflict a constant regimen of punishments. As we will see later, Jesus explained the law in just this way.²⁷

It is quite possible, even preferable, then, to understand that much of the violence committed by the people of the Old Testament cut against the grain of God's merciful and peaceful character. Certainly He redeemed it; like so much in the Old Testament, God worked with the realities on the ground and redeemed the violence his people committed. David is a great example of this. God in Acts 13:22 identifies David, the mighty warrior of the Old Testament nation of Israel, as a "man after mine own heart." Yet David was a polygamist and adulterer who purposely and deceptively risked the life of one of his loyal men in order to cover up his immorality. Indeed, that man paid with his life because of David's sins. Then David trusted too much in his own army, counting his soldiers rather than remembering that God was His true refuge and protector. So why was David counted a man after God's own heart? Was it not because David was intimately and profoundly aware of God's mercy? David repented time and again, from his heart. He was always loyal to God, and when he violated that loyalty, he confessed and took responsibility. God then forgave him and worked with David on his and the nation's behalf. God is a merciful God!

And yet, because of his violence David could not participate in the highest work of God's people. David wanted to build a house for God, who appreciated the kind sentiment but forbade David from doing the work. He explained why in 1 Chronicles 22:8-9, where He told David, "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. (9) Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days." The house of God could not be built with bloody hands. David could either do the earthly work of the earthly nation of Israel, or he could do the spiritual work of God's house. Not both. It seems this is a good lesson for the people of God's new temple, the body of Christ. As will be discussed later, Jesus's kingdom to whom we belong is not of this world. There is a strict divide between the kingdoms of the world, and the violence that God allows and often redeems among

²⁷ This section on the Old Testament relies heavily on Preston Sprinkle, *Fight*. This is an outstanding book on the Way of Peace.

the nations of this world, and the kingdom of Jesus, to which is given the ministry of reconciliation, not violence and vengeance. “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink,” said Paul. Rather, the Kingdom of God is “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” We do not fight and sue to claim what is rightfully ours, but “follow after the things which make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 12:17 and 19).

Indeed, this separation between the work of the kingdom of this earth, where violence is possible, and the nonviolent reconciling and edifying work of the church is seen generally in comparing the Old Testament nation of Israel with the New Testament Church, which are not equivalent in all respects. Israel was earthly in ways that the Church is not. Israel had a physical, identifiable territory with political borders. They had a physical temple that people gathered in and around for worship. This nation was a theocracy wherein God ruled by handing down laws that governed the details of their daily life. Some men, the priests, were to wear special clothing that visibly testified to the glories of God, the law, and the nation. These laws were given to point the way to Jesus, and the nation of Israel was to protect and live out that law as a beacon to surrounding nations. Now, the Church has no physical territory. We may meet in buildings, but none of them are the temple, for we are the temple. The Church does not merely point to Christ as a future promise; we testify that He has come, and we have met Him and are now His body. Though certainly commanded to pay heed to the moral direction laid out in the Old Testament law, we operate under the direction of the Spirit and according to the law of love.

The point is, it is misleading to assume that commandments and obligations that were given to the nation of Israel and its kings are now given to us. It is commonly understood that at the end of time the Kingdom of God will again take a much more tangible form on a new heaven and new earth. Until then, the physicality of the nation of Israel should be seen as a singular event for the people of God. The wars of conquest in the Bible were directed specifically to settling the nation of Israel, God’s people among whom He would dwell, in the land of Canaan. The law included commandments that reflected their particular needs, obligations, and realities. In other words, the wars and some of the law arose out of the unique situation of God establishing an earthly kingdom on earth. We do not face that situation today and apparently will not until Jesus returns as a conquering King at the end of time.²⁸

The Old Testament Culmination of the Way of Peace in the Prophets.

The law should also be read in light of the prophets. The prophets are usually categorized separately from the law. “The law and the prophets,” people say. Separating them has its advantages, but it should not be carried too far. The prophets are, in a sense, interpreters of the law, sifting the commandments for the higher purposes they were intended to teach. The prophets referred to the law repeatedly, and when they did, they used the law to point the way to

²⁸ Sprinkle explains this in *Fight*, 75–78.

mercy, peace, and reconciliation among men. Isaiah 1 is a beautiful example. It is quoted here in the ESV for clarity:

10

Hear the word of the Lord,
you rulers of Sodom!
Give ear to the teaching of our God,
you people of Gomorrah!

11

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?
says the Lord;
I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
and the fat of well-fed beasts;
I do not delight in the blood of bulls,
or of lambs, or of goats.

12

“When you come to appear before me,
who has required of you
this trampling of my courts?

13

Bring no more vain offerings;
incense is an abomination to me.
New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—
I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

14

Your new moons and your appointed feasts
my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me;
I am weary of bearing them.

15

When you spread out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.

16

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,

17

learn to do good;
 seek justice,
 correct oppression;
 bring justice to the fatherless,
 plead the widow's cause.

These words were meant to shock. God was weary of their sacrifices? Aren't sacrifices commanded in the law? The people's worship, which followed the letter of the law, had become a burden to God? Didn't the law teach that these actions and behaviors were the way that people could please God? Yes, in all counts, but God here does not negate the law. He did not abolish the commandments or reverse His teachings. The law was still as beautiful as David had described. But the law was more, much more, than mere regulations to be mined for rules about proper behavior. Perhaps the problem was that the Israelites, like us, parsed the verses of the law, comparing and contrasting each one, debating what the law would command, or even merely what it would allow, in this case or that case, rather than seeing in the law the revelation of their God, their Leader who went before them showing the way. They followed the letter of the law while leaving aside the moral precepts that pointed to higher principles. God did not seek to create a body of legalists who could robotically obey every precise letter of the law. He sought to create a people after his own heart.

Was Isaiah's commentary on the law the high point of God's revelation of himself to man? Or was it Hosea, who did the unimaginable and the unspeakable--he forgave his wife for her wretched adultery--in order to graphically communicate the unimaginable and unspeakable mercy of God towards the sinner. Maybe it was Amos, who wrote chapter after chapter of God's righteous judgment of the nations, including His own, but who ended with a wonderful promise from God, "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord." Or maybe the fullest expression of the surpassing love and mercy found in the character of God is found in Jonah, where God responds mercifully to repentance among the most bloodthirsty of nations, the Assyrians. Even God's prophet could barely tolerate that kind of mercy, which may be the point of the story. We often stand in judgment of the God of the Old Testament, but when we see for ourselves the extent of His mercy, we stand back in horror as we watch Him forgive our bitterest enemies.

We could go on and on through the prophets. Every time they pronounce judgment, it is a judgment that is horrible in its violence and death. But each revelation of God's judgment is paired with a plea for repentance and the promise of a forgiveness and restoration that far surpasses the awfulness of the impending judgment. Yet, it may be that the fullest revelation of God's intentions in giving the law comes from the pen of the prophet Micah. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten

thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” Reading the letter of the law, one would think the appropriate answer is yes. This is what God stipulated as proper sacrifices appropriate for approaching His Holy presence. But that is missing the teaching, the training, of the law, says Micah: “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Such is the point of the law.

Viewed in this way, the picture painted by the Old Testament may look quite a bit different. Instead of a cruel world of brutal punishments and bloody holy wars, presided over by a warmongering, genocidal God who constantly resorts to violence to beat his recalcitrant creation into submission, we see a patient God who seeks to train a rebellious and stiffnecked but not altogether unresponsive people in His ways of goodness and righteousness. Through God’s laws, His people would learn how to treat each other with the respect and dignity that comes from recognizing that we all bear God’s image, however much that image may have become marred by our own sin.

It gets better. All along the way, God kept pointing to a future Savior. This is not the place to list all of the ways and places in the Old Testament that speak of the coming Messiah, and such a list would likely be unnecessary anyway. Suffice it to say that Messianic prophecies are collectively one more way that God reveals Himself to humanity in the Old Testament as a God of hope and redemption. We can certainly learn about the nature of man, including his seemingly incorrigible nature, from reading the Old Testament; such is the way of man and the world he shapes even today. But if that is all we learn from the Old Testament--men and women are all sinners and God is our judge--than we have perhaps missed the most glorious picture of all, the picture of a God who is, indeed, righteous and just, willing to reward wickedness with appropriate punishment, but equally so a God who prefers mercy, forbearance, and peace and who encouraged his people to look forward to a glorious, future salvation. The Old Testament teaches us that God wanted his people to wait with eager anticipation for the arrival of Christ. He wanted them to walk in great expectation, a profound hope, that God was who he said he was: the Great Redeemer. In this way the grand narrative of the Old Testament is all about God’s great mercy in the face of man’s great sin.

In doing so the Old Testament points the way to Christ. More, it teaches about the Messiah, for when the Messiah came, He turned out to be God himself, the God of the Old Testament, born of and into the flesh. As God had revealed to and through Abraham many years before, God indeed provided Himself as an offering for sin (Genesis 22:8).²⁹

²⁹ Some translations prefer “God will provide for himself a lamb” (ESV) or “God Himself will provide the lamb” (NIV). Either way, God provided the atonement for man’s sin, and that atonement turned out to be Jesus, the Son of God Himself.

The Way of Peace in the New Testament

Jesus, the Word from the beginning, the Word made flesh, the Word who dwelt among us, the visible image of the invisible God.

The New Testament begins with John the Baptist. Even before he was born, John's father praised God for his birth, and in the process identified John's life work: John would "go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." He would call people to salvation "through the tender mercy of our God." And he would "guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:76-79). Jesus was born to lowly parents, and the location of his birth was in a manger in the small town of Bethlehem. Angels made up for the fact that there was nothing humanly glorious about his arrival by appearing to shepherds in the field and, as a heavenly choir, proclaiming the "good tidings of great joy": the Savior had come, extending "peace, good will towards men." (Luke 2:10, 14). They attributed this Good News to God himself, for Jesus's work would bring "Glory to God in the highest." This was not a rebuke of God's Old Testament behavior, or a concession God the Father, in an astounding break from his usual violent tendencies, had made to God the Son, the much more loving and compassionate member of the Trinity. Rather, Jesus came because truly, God so loved the world--God *loved* the world--that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. Jesus came not as a reversal of God's Old Testament policies, but as the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament's promises and hopes.

And so, as a young child (for this Messiah grew up like children everywhere) God the Son "was subject to" his earthly parents. When he began his public ministry as recorded in the Bible, he quickly established the purpose of his ministry in His famous Sermon on the Mount. It began with the beatitudes, which describes the type of character God would bless: poor in spirit, willing to mourn, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemaking, willing to suffer persecution, and willing to let the substance of one's life--one's works--shine brightly for God. Then Jesus connected this teaching, and the rest of his sermon and ministry, directly to the Old Testament: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." The word fulfill in Greek means to fill up, to complete, to bring to fruition, to consummate. Jesus's life would be the realization of the law, the perfect "coming to pass" of what the Old Testament had taught and predicted. The King James Study Bible (Tyndale, 1988) comments: "That is, the New Testament gospel is not contradictory to the Old Testament Law; rather it is the ultimate fulfillment of the spiritual intention of the law." So Jesus made it clear at the outset of his ministry that what he would be teaching would not be in opposition to the law, and neither would it set aside the law to bring about something new. Neither would it be merely another version of the law, a shift sideways to account for new social realities in order to keep being relevant. Rather, it would bring the law to its highest fulfillment. Jesus took the law to its ultimate conclusions.

Jesus intended his followers to likewise live on this higher spiritual plane of the law. Lest his listeners think that living in accord with the highest principles of the law was something that applied only to himself--that His fulfillment of the law would somehow render the law obsolete or defunct for his future followers--He went on to explain: "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-20).

The rest of the sermon explains how one is to fulfill the highest good taught by the law. The law said "Thou shalt not kill," but the highest purpose of this commandment is to rid His people of all hate and violence. The law said "thou shalt not commit adultery," but rather than feeling satisfied that, while we may have done everything leading up to the line, if we haven't crossed that line we can feel righteous, Jesus says to not even entertain lascivious thoughts in our mind. The law said to be careful to not swear by God's name, but the highest purpose is to simply tell the truth and make our word our bond. The law said that if a person wanted a divorce, there were official conditions that needed to be met. Jesus said that divorce is, nonetheless, unfaithfulness to our vow before God, and as such equal to adultery. He would in other places qualify that--this is certainly not the place to explore the particulars of divorce and remarriage--but he would also in another place explain that it was only for the hardness of the human heart that the law had allowed for divorce in the first place. The original goal of marriage is to reflect the nature of God as relational, faithful, and loving. Divorces destroys that witness and should not even be countenanced.

The Sermon on the Mount concludes with the golden rule (Matthew 7:12). Admittedly, all of this is so difficult. Jesus called it the strait gate and narrow way (13-14). He warned them of false prophets who would preach an easier way for their own benefit (15). But their works would show the falsity of their teaching (16-20; we will get to that in the history section below). There would be those who follow these false teachers (21-23), and so, it is so important that we build on the word of God and not be tossed to and fro by the winds of doctrine (24-27).

Matthew then records the people's reaction to the sermon: "the people were astonished at his doctrine." Rightly so. Jesus had just shown that their strictest obedience to the letter of the law as taught by the Pharisees, the righteous ones of that day who had parsed the Hebrew letters of the law in great detail, would not be enough for salvation. Jesus had negated the righteousness that comes from obeying the letter of the law and exalted the righteousness that comes from faith in God as revealed by the law. This faith would not depart from the precepts of the law, but would guide the believer into the fulfillment of the law's most beautiful promises and precepts.

The Christian life is to embody the character of God. Jesus would later call himself “the way, the truth, and the life.” For five hundred years Protestants have explored Jesus The Truth. But what does it mean to be The Way and The Life? Could it be that He was showing that being a Christian means walking the way that Jesus walked? Could it be that being a child of God means that we become one with Christ, as explained in John 17? Is it enough to believe true doctrine about Jesus, or are we to be united fully to Jesus, in the world but not of the world, living the Way, thinking the Way, preaching the Way, and loving the Way?

Jesus taught this “way” throughout his ministry, through word and action. When the legalists complained of his disciples plucking corn on the Sabbath so they would have something to eat, Jesus explained that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27). When the legalists complained that he had healed a man on the Sabbath, He asked them “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?” They had no response. (Mark 3:4). When he healed a woman on the Sabbath and the legalists protested, he challenged them to reevaluate their application of the law: “The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” (Luke 13:15-16). In each of these cases he pointed to a higher principle.

The lengthiest explanation of this principle that Jesus, the Way, is higher than the law but not opposed to it, and that He fulfills its most profound principles, is recorded in Mark chapter 12. His disciples stopped on the Sabbath to eat corn from a field. The legalists pointed out that this was against the law. Rather than parsing the Torah, and rather than denying that they had broken the letter of the law, Jesus pointed out that what they had done was fully consistent with how godly Old Testament men had lived in accordance with the higher principles of the law. He pointed first to David, who “when he was an hungred, and they that were with him,” “entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests.” Likewise, the “priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless,” referring to the way that priests handled blood and corpses while preparing the sacrifices. Normally, touching corpses rendered a person unclean according to the law. But the priests were serving the higher purpose of interceding with God on behalf of the people.

In his actions, too, Jesus fulfilled the principles of the Old Testament law and revealed Himself as the true Son of the Old Testament God. By healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and casting out demons, he fulfilled the laws that commanded the Israelites to care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. He also proved himself to be the Messiah who would “preach good tidings unto the meek . . . bind up the brokenhearted,” to “proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” Isaiah 61:1. Truly, “unto us a

child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus’s Way is clearly nonviolent. He never lashed out in self-defense. He could be sharp with his words, but he never used physical force against anyone. When mobs formed against Him, he slipped through them and disappeared. When his disciples realized that Jesus would face great danger in Jerusalem and offered to “command fire to come down from heaven, and consume” their enemies, Jesus rebuked them: “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Jesus’s rebuke did not merely point out that in killing enemies they would be breaking a particular commandment. Rather, he pointed out that they were of a different spirit than Him. They were not walking in the Way of Jesus. When Peter tried to defend him in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus rebuked him.

Jesus’s giving up of His life on the cross remains the single most powerful example of the Way. The crucifixion consummated the relationship between the Law and the Way of Peace. By fulfilling the sacrificial demands of the Law on behalf of mankind, the cross simultaneously satisfied justice and proved the limitlessness of God’s mercy. Everything the Law was about became personified in Jesus on the cross, including sacrifice for another, service, forgiveness, and love. At the same time, the cross exemplified the horrors of human sin as the place where the greatest act of violence ever committed by men, the killing of the Son of God, took place. Thus, the Way of Violence pitted itself against the Way of Peace. On the third day after the cross, the Way of Peace showed the world that He had won. The greatest battle ever fought, the greatest act of defense of the helpless, the supreme victory in the history of warfare, was won when Jesus meekly surrendered Himself to death on the cross. Nonviolence in the Way is not weak, or it could not have defeated sin and death, the most pitilessly violent enemy anyone has ever faced.

So great was this victory that it will never again be repeated. The conquest over sin and death for the entire world was won once and for all. It is finished. Yet, in another sense, the cross is duplicated time and time again in the lives of the followers of the Prince of Peace. Jesus calls his followers to take up their cross and follow him. In doing so, the Christian does not defeat sin on behalf of others, nor does he atone for his own sin. But there are at least three powerful victories won over evil by the cross a Christian bears.

For one, sanctification and victory over the flesh often occurs in the process of cross-bearing. This truth pervades the Old and New Testament. “Before I was afflicted, I went astray,” David wrote in Psalm 119:67, “but now have I kept thy word.” Paul wrote in Romans 5 that we should “glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; (4) And patience, experience; and experience, hope: (5) And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Peter encouraged his

suffering churches to endure persecution, telling them that “the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

For another, cross-bearing achieves victory over conflict between Christians. The teaching that we should submit to one another, that we should suffer for each other, and that we should deny ourselves lest we cause a brother or sister to sin, serves the purpose of stimulating peace and love among the churches. “Why do ye not rather take wrong?” asked Paul of the Corinthians, who were caught up in scandalous contentions. “Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” Love and forbearance would lead to reconciliation among these ambassadors of reconciliation in Corinth.

Finally, cross-bearing is a powerful means of achieving victory over sin in the world by evangelizing unbelievers. The spread of the Gospel often takes place in a context of cross-bearing. Peter and the other Apostles preached in Jerusalem against tremendous opposition, and this willingness to suffer courageously garnered much attention. After Peter and John spent a night in jail for their preaching, others “saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, [and] they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” Paul spread and nurtured the Gospel around Turkey and Greece, suffering wrong-doing all along. The church grew exponentially in the midst of this suffering and probably even because of it. Paul reminded the church at Thessalonica that “ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:” When he discussed his sufferings with the Philippians, he wanted them to “understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; (13) So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; (14) And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

Peter also encouraged believers to endure persecution because of the attention it can bring to the Gospel: “But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; (15) But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: (16) Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.” Notice how being ready to give an answer, a concept often mentioned in conversations about evangelism, is presented here in the middle of a teaching about suffering. Suffering, not self-defense or revolution, lifts up the Gospel and Way of Peace.

There is one more crucial component to the life and teaching of Jesus and His Way. It was not for the world. The Old Testament people of God lived as an earthly nation, with political

boundaries, a civil government, and a military, alongside all of the other nations of the earth. Some of this may have been a concession granted by God, who, for instance, was reluctant when the people demanded a man for king. He warned them that earthly kings required military service, taxes, and bureaucracies. Nevertheless, they got their king. In the New Testament, Jesus's teaching returned His people to what was probably the ideal from the beginning when He said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." Jesus preached often of the "Kingdom of heaven" and the "Kingdom of God." Matthew 4:17 may be a summary of his entire ministry: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." After his resurrection, Jesus again preached the Kingdom; Luke writes that he spent his forty days after the resurrection proving that he had, indeed, risen from the dead and "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). Some people today perhaps go too far in developing a "Kingdom Theology" that may or may not represent Jesus's intentions, but it remains true that much of Jesus's ministry was made up of teaching about His kingdom.³⁰ Jesus called His disciples, then and now, to preach the Kingdom after His departure when He prophesied that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).

Referring to the Church as the people of Jesus's Kingdom can be a useful alternative to calling us followers of the Way. The concept is the same: the Way and the Kingdom of Jesus are different than the way and the kingdoms of this world. Jesus repeatedly differentiated between the norms of earthly kingdoms and those of His own. The unworldliness of the Beatitudes is obvious and needed no direct comparison. In other places, Jesus did explicitly note the difference. Jesus taught that principles of leadership were different in His kingdom: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." He modeled this type of leadership himself: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Mat 20:25-28

One advantage of using the language of kingdoms is that it may help to explain Paul's reference to the sword in Romans 13. Jesus taught that, however legitimate it may be for kings of this earth to wage wars of self-defense, His kingdom was different. In the hours before his death, Jesus told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). The kingdoms of this world may use violence. Romans 13 suggests that warfare and violence can be a legitimate business given the brokenness of this world. Christians, however, are not of this world. They are soldiers--military language occurs at times in the New Testament--but their warfare is not relevant to the kingdoms of this world. As good

³⁰ "Kingdom Theology" has become a buzz-word for a number of movements, some of which may make us uncomfortable.

soldiers, Christians reserve their energy, zeal, and attention for their heavenly King; after all, “no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:4). In this light, Romans 13 appears as a “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” type of teaching. We pay our taxes and obey the laws as much as possible, since that is what we owe Caesar, but we do not engage ourselves in the business of worldly kingdoms.

In sum, the Old Testament people of God lived as an earthly kingdom, but in the New Testament, the ideal of a people separated for God’s purposes and living according to God’s eternal nature and principles was restored. God still governs among earthly kingdoms and gives earthly rulers their authority, but His people live in a Kingdom not of this world and busy themselves with the business of the Kingdom of God.

The Apostles Follow The Way of Peace

The Apostles, commissioned by Jesus Himself to continue the laying down of the foundational doctrines and practices of the church (Matthew 16:19, for instance), worked within the progressive revelation of Jesus’s Way and Kingdom. The Apostles and the early church were known as people who followed a way. Saul traveled to Damascus seeking “any of this way” (Acts 9:2). Apollos was a man “instructed in the way of the Lord” but who needed to learn “the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:25-26). When Paul first visited Ephesus, he encountered opposition to the Gospel: “But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus” (Act 19:9). This quote is from the ESV, which capitalizes “Way” to emphasize the unique nature of the Gospel message. It does the same in Acts 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, and 24:22.

The Way, according to the Gospel preached by the Apostles, involved mercy, sacrifice, service, and suffering. It never included violence or self-defense. Never does the book of Acts or any of the letters suggest that anyone in the Apostolic age resorted to violence in self-defense or other-defense. Rather, their doctrines and practices reinforced the teaching of Jesus. We have already surveyed some of the relevant Scriptures, but really, Acts and the entire set of letters could be marshalled in defense of nonviolence. Here is a randomly chosen sample from each of the letters, minus Romans, Philippians, James, and 1 Peter, which we have already considered. The only letters missing are 2 and 3 John.

- 1 Corinthians 13:7 Charity “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”
- 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; (9) Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not

destroyed; (10) Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

- Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, (23) Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”
- Ephesians 6:12-13 “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (13) Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”
- Colossians 3:12-14 “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; (13) Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. (14) And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. (15) See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.”
- 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8 Persecution “is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: (6) Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; (7) And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, (8) In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:” It is God who will avenge Christian suffering.
- 1 Timothy 6:2 “And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.” Here even slaves are to offer their services willingly. They were not to fight back or assert their rights as individuals created in the image of God. They were to display the image of Jesus as a servant.
- 2 Timothy 2:24-26 “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, (25) In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; (26) And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”
- Titus 3:1-2 “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, (2) To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.”
- Philemon 1:15-16 “For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; (16) Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?” Here

Paul entreated Philemon to be merciful to his slave. By rights and by tradition, Onesimus deserved to be severely punished (the law would have supported Philemon had he decided to kill his formerly rebellious slave).

- James 1:19-20 “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: (20) For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”
- 1Jn 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”
- Jude 1:20-21 “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, (21) Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” This comes after Jude identifies, in no uncertain terms, the horrible sinfulness of the world, and then reminds his readers that Jesus will come and set all things straight.
- Revelation 22:11 “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.” After dramatic descriptions of how God will bring justice to the world (without Christians using violence themselves), and right before he calls on Jesus to come soon, John encourages the churches to not take matters of justice into their own hands.

The Apostles derived this Way from Jesus’s life. They preached mercy and forgiveness and loving one’s enemies and such not merely because they believed that Jesus commanded it, but because Jesus lived it himself. They took Jesus’s words seriously when He told them, after washing their feet, an act of tremendous humility: “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. (14) If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. (16) Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him” (John 13:13-16). Peter encouraged his churches to persist through persecution, waiting patiently for God to deliver and reward them. That this included nonviolence is made clear by the example Peter chose from Jesus’s life: the crucifixion. “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: (22) Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: (23) Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: (24) Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (25) For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Peter 2:21-25). This is important to understand, for we should not think that Jesus’s surrender to death, his sacrifice on behalf of those who killed him, was only for Him, as in, “He was saving the world, so that was for Him do to, but we should defend ourselves.” Actually, He did this to save us, but he also did this as an example of the Way he wants us to walk.

The Apostles did not view this Way as a reversal of the Old Testament, or as a wholesale replacement for the Law. Rather, as Jesus explained, the Christian walk lifts the Christian to the highest ideals and principles of the Law, even as it relieves them of the need for sacrifice and the burden of following the letter of the ceremonies. “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord,” said James, “for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. (11) Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (James 5:10-11).

Perhaps the most beautiful and striking example of the Apostles’ use of the Old Testament to highlight the Old Testament’s greatest principles, including that of nonviolence, is found in Hebrews 11. We have already noted how supporters of Christian use of nonviolence point to this chapter’s praise of warriors as evidence that the Apostles recognized the legitimacy of violence. What stands out in this chapter, however, is how the lessons gleaned from Old Testament saints actually point in the other direction. Almost all of the examples of faith in Hebrews 11 tell of the conquering power of nonviolence. Noah built an ark. Abraham sojourned, dwelt, and looked for a city built by God. Sarah conceived. Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. Jacob blessed Joseph. Joseph asked that his bones be buried in Canaan. Moses chose to suffer affliction, forsook Egypt, endured, and kept the passover. The Israelites passed through the sea, which closed on the Egyptians without their help. The walls of Jericho fell down. Rahab “received the spies with peace.” The rest “wrought righteousness,” “stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword,” “received their dead to life,” “were tortured, not accepting deliverance,” “were stoned” and “sawn asunder,” “were slain with the sword,” “wandered,” and suffered affliction and torment.

The summary argument, the governing theme, in this chapter comes in the middle of chapter 11: “out of weakness they were made strong.” This comes as the center point of the list of what the saints endured, with a roughly equal number of verbs before and after it. As such, the writer evidently adopted a Hebrew literary strategy for emphasizing a point, with the list leading up to the main point and then away from the main point. Thus the great teaching of Hebrews 11 is that followers of the Way, even in the Old Testament, trusted in God for deliverance, even to the point of sacrificing their own lives. What a Jesus theme, a God theme brought to its culmination in Jesus and then repeated again in the lives of His disciples: out of Jesus’s “weakness” on the cross, sin was defeated and victory won for Old Testament believers and New! Seen this way, the chapter’s oblique references in verses 33 and 34 to subduing kingdoms and turning armies to flight (which was often done by God or through human nonviolence, at any rate) and waxing valiant in fight, appear anti-climactic. Now wonder Paul, suffering in the flesh in spite of his earnest prayers for deliverance, learned that Jesus’s “grace is sufficient,” for Christ’s “strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). It is crucial to understand

that the Way of Peace--the Way of Nonviolent "Weakness"--is paradoxically a Way of Great Power.

There is a supporting theme in Hebrews 11 that widens the scope from "victory through weakness" to the Christian hope. The chapter begins with a definition of faith: "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." The chapter ends in a rather startling way by pointing out how these heroes of the faith were actually *not* rewarded with their hearts desire. "These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise"! Abraham never did enter the "city . . . whose builder and maker is God." Why? Because they were to receive the promise in eternal fashion, not as a temporal pleasure in this earthly life. Their hearts were in heaven, and as Paul would say elsewhere, so was their citizenship. They "fought" for heavenly purposes, even as they were set upon by the flesh in this life. Rather than seeing their earthly citizenship, with all of its temporal privileges and rewards, as something to be defended at all cost, they willingly suffered in order to await God's final reward.

The Way of Peace requires great courage and faith. No wonder Hebrews 11, the "Faith Chapter" and the "Hall of Faith," begins with a verse defining faith and speaks of faith throughout. The Christian must trust God's providence and promises. It is impossible to understand why innocent Christians must suffer in any given situation. We often ask "why?" when hearing of an injustice done against a brother or sister, or when we are confronted with stories of Christians enduring horrible persecution. The temptation is strong to resort to violence to bring about an end we desire *here and now* rather than to wait for our eternal reward. Guns seem to offer an easier path to a safer and more secure future. Even King David, the mighty warrior who lived before the full revelation of the Prince of Peace, warns us of misplaced trust when he wrote, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. (8) They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright. (9) O LORD, save the king! May he answer us when we call." (Psalm 20:7-9)

Such is the Christian calling. The Bible is frank and honest about how painful The Way can be. Walking the Way of Peace is not some 1960s drug-induced peacenik pacifism. Biblical nonviolence is very nearly humanly impossible. So how can we live this way? We can't perfectly, and so, just as in the Old Testament, we need sacrifices to atone for our sin. But Jesus fulfilled those sacrifices in his own death and resurrection, so we are free from the curses of the law and the wages of our sin without paying for our sin through our own sacrifices or through making animal sacrifices according to the law's prescriptions. Jesus's sacrifice would take care of the sacrifice of the law. Paul and the Apostles would release Gentiles from the other rituals of the law. But the moral standards would remain. They would constitute not merely a moral code, but a style of life, a way of thinking and feeling, and a path upon which to walk. It is our great privilege, as well as our final victory, to follow in the Way of Peace.

History of Nonviolence and the Christian Church

The Early Church

The view that the Old and New Testaments agree in affirming that nonviolent peacemaking represents the Christian's calling is strengthened by the fact that it is wholly compatible with the witness of the pre-Constantinian church. If we become confused by the various arguments for and against nonviolence, or we feel unsettled that we disagree with so many of our evangelical neighbors, it may comfort us to know that the Way of Peace just explained is fully consistent with the testimony of the church in the first three centuries, from the days of those who knew the Apostles to those pastoring churches in the years before the ascension of Constantine as Roman Emperor. The unanimous and unequivocal teaching of the church in the first three centuries was against Christians resorting to violence. Church fathers consistently taught against Christians joining the military. If a soldier converted, he would be encouraged to leave, if possible. If not, he was to serve peacefully and refuse to do violence, even upon penalty of his own execution. The fathers spoke less often to the issue of private self-defense directly, but when they did, they rejected it, and given their condemnation of killing and violence of any physical kind, there is little room for assuming that there would a situation in which they would consent to a violent response.

Evidence regarding the early church's stance with regard to nonviolence survives in four forms. The first is the collection of letters by early church fathers. These are the usual documents consulted by people who want to know what the early church taught about an issue. The second includes the various pastoral manuals used by local church leaders in governing the churches. The third is made up of comments about military service made by non-Christians. The fourth is the collection of archeological artifacts, such as gravestone epitaphs, that suggest Christian participation in the military.

Early Church Fathers.

The early church fathers of the first few centuries of the church were overwhelming nonviolent, but not in the verse-parsing way of modern American evangelicals. They worked from an ethic of peace derived from the Way of Peace learned from Jesus and His Apostles. Thus, their comments about war come to us embedded in catechisms, works of Christian apologetics, and depictions of Christian virtue. They pointed to Christian nonviolence as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would initiate a new age of nonviolence when people would beat their swords into ploughshares. In this way Christian nonviolence proved that Jesus was the Messiah. The early church fathers used the widespread

Christian practice of doing good to enemies and turning the other cheek as evidence of the power of the Spirit of God working in the church. They saw the development of Christian character as incompatible with the purposes of the military and state. And they cherished the principle of loving one's enemies. According to Sprinkle, "this command became the most-often-quoted verse during the first four centuries of the Christian Church."³¹ We will consider each of the relevant church fathers in approximate chronological order.

The nonviolent testimony of the post-Apostolic church started early. The letter Second Clement is of unknown origin, but it dates to the early 100s AD. It recognizes the evangelistic utility of nonviolence when it says "When [unbelievers] hear from us that God says, "It is no credit to you if you love those who love you, but it is a credit to you if you love your enemies and those who hate you," when they hear these things, they marvel at such extraordinary goodness."³²

Famous Christian apologist Justin Martyr wrote sometime in the mid-100s of the way that Christians had given up their vengeful and violent ways in order to follow the "good precepts of Christ." He quoted the teachings of Jesus to "love them that hate you" and "to him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other." He pointed out that Christian love and nonviolence was a fulfillment of prophecy, and thus was a proof of the truth of Christianity. The "Spirit of Prophecy" in the Old Testament spoke of a time when the Word of the law would proceed from Jerusalem and teach people to "beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." This came to pass when "from Jerusalem there went out into the world, men, twelve in number, and these illiterate, of no ability in speaking: but by the power of God they proclaimed to every race of people that they were sent by Christ to teach to all the word of God, and we who formerly used to murder one another do not only now refrain from making war upon our enemies, but also, that we may not lie or deceive our examiners, willing die confessing Christ."³³

This use of nonviolence as an apologetic apparently proved useful. According to Justin Martyr, people noticed how Christians, formerly men and women who had been "filled with war, and mutual slaughter, and every wickedness" were changed by the power of the Spirit. Now, they "cultivate piety, righteousness, philanthropy, faith, and hope," and in doing so, they conquer all with love. "It is plain," said the man who would himself suffer a horrible death as a martyr, "that, though beheaded, and crucified, and thrown to wild beasts, and chains, and fire, and all other kinds of torture, we do not give up our confession; but the more such things happen, the

³¹ Preston Sprinkle, *Fight: A Christian Case for Nonviolence* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2013), 142.

³² Ronald J. Sider, *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment*, Kindle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 21.

³³ Sider, 23–25.

more do others in larger numbers become faithful, and worshipers of God through the name of Jesus.”³⁴ In its strangeness, its difference from the human norm, Christian nonviolence proved effective in spreading the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Athenagoras, writing in the 170s AD, is an excellent example of the evangelistic power of the Way of Peace. Like so many others, he used Christian love to argue against critics of Christianity and to prove the beauty and truth of following Jesus. He did not address military service directly, but his treatment of other issues is evidence that he believed in the principle of nonviolent, active love. It appears that he applied nonviolence to the issue of self-defense.

The injury we suffer from our persecutors is not aimed [merely] at our property or our civil rights or our honor or anything of less importance--after all, we hold these things in contempt (although they appear of great importance to the masses), for we have learned not only not to return blow for blow, or to bring to court those who plunder and rob us, but to those who strike us on the one cheek to offer the other, and to those who take away our shirt to give also our coat--for when we have given up our property, they plot against our very bodies and souls. . . .”

This ethic of peace and love, learned from Jesus, is evidence of the belief--and the power of that belief--in Jesus as God. In loving their enemies even the most unlearned of Christians merely follow their leader, such that they “may be sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.” No philosopher has ever suggested such a radical teaching, said Athenagoras,

yet among us, you will find uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women who, even if they cannot prove the benefit of [our faith] through words, through their deeds they prove the benefit that results from our devotion; for they do not memorize speeches, but rather they exhibit good works; when struck, they do not strike back, and when they are robbed, they do not bring charges; to everyone who asks of them, they live, and they love their neighbors as themselves.³⁵

Writing at the end of the second century, Iranaeus affirmed Christian nonviolence and used it in ways similar to Justin Martyr. Iranaeus was taught by Polycarp of Smyrna, who was

³⁴ Sider, 25–26.

³⁵ Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb*, 89–90. Nabeel Qureshi, *Answering Jihad: A Better Way Forward* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016) is an example of a modern use of nonviolence in apologetics and evangelism. Qureshi contrasts the historic violence of Islam with the nonviolence of Christianity. In confronting the Christian violence of the Middle Ages and Modern Era (see below), Qureshi points out that violence violated the clear teaching of Jesus, who taught us to love even our enemies. “Not only does Jesus never allow offensive violence,” Qureshi concludes, “he explicitly teaches against self-defensive violence, living out this difficult teaching in the garden of Gethsemane” (130-131).

most likely trained by John the Apostle himself. Iraneus is, according to scholar Ron Sider, “widely regarded as the most significant theologian of the second century.” He observed that Jesus held Christians to a high ideal when He taught them “not only not to strike, but even, when themselves [were] struck, to present the other cheek to those that maltreated them; and not only not to refuse to give up the property of others, but even if their own were taken away, not to demand it back from those that took it.” Iraneus held up the Old Testament prophecies of peace, when “nations did form the swords and war-lances into ploughshares,” and pointed out that such is the situation with Christians who “offer also the other cheek” because of Jesus, who “effected” the fulfillment of the prophecies. The disciple of Polycarp affirmed Paul’s teaching in Romans 13, but noticed that the sword was instituted because of the rebelliousness of people who “did not acknowledge the fear of God.” As for the people of God, they were transformed from “people who formerly acted like animals and waged war on other people” into people of peace who do not need to be governed by such laws, because they, “coming to know Christ, and believing Him, no sooner believed than they were changed.” Now, such a follower of Christ “cannot even put forth his hand to revenge.”³⁶ His recommendation of nonviolence appears to apply to all situations of self-defense and military service.

Clement of Alexandria, writing from the late 100s and early 200s, was a student of the great theologian Origen. Clement did not speak directly against the use of violence, but he did consistently portray Christians as people of peace who follow Jesus in loving their enemies. He contrasts soldiers of earthly war with heavenly soldiers of Jesus who pursue peace. In doing so, Clement often uses language of the military, which some proponents of Christian violence point to as evidence that he sanctioned military service. This seems like an unnecessary conclusion. In one place, Clement tells people of various occupations to do their best work. Those who were converted to Christianity while in the military-- a very important detail to notice--Clement instructed to “Listen to the commander, who orders what is right.” Again, some suggest that he was condoning military violence, but after giving this instruction Clement reminds his Christian audience of the commandments issued by “God thy lawgiver,” among which is the command not to kill, and to “love thy neighbor as thyself.”³⁷ Thus, Clement wrote as one aware that, since resigning from the military could be hazardous, the soldier converted to Christianity should be obedient as much as possible without violating God’s teachings.

Now we arrive at Tertullian, one of the preeminent Christian writers of the very late 100s and early 200s. Later in his career Tertullian was attracted to Montanism, a rather extreme and possibly heretical movement that taught a rigorous, ascetic form of Christian living. Tertullian’s most famous remarks concerning war seem contradictory to some. His early, pre-Montanist writings strike some as comfortable with Christians in the military, while his later writings are

³⁶ Sider, *The Early Church on Killing*, 27–29.

³⁷ Sider, 35.

unquestionably against them. A closer reading, however, suggests that he did not change over time but maintained a witness against Christians using violence.

The claim that the early Tertullian was not anti-violence relies on a particular interpretation of a couple of comments he made in his book *Apology*, which he wrote in c. AD 197. In this work, he defended Christianity against charges of rebelliousness against the emperor, pointing out that Christians actually pray for the emperor, his house, the senate, the people of the empire, and the emperor's "brave armies." Meanwhile, Christians also pray for their enemies and "beseech blessings on our persecutors." Christians refuse to hate, and they resist the urge to exact revenge against their persecutors. Were they of a worldly mind for revenge and defense, Tertullian claimed that Christians numbered enough to raise a fierce rebellion from all quarters, for they were "spread over all the world! We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you--cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the [military] camp itself, tribes, companies, place, senate, forum,--we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods."³⁸ It is this last comment that some interpret as pro-military, for he seems to imply that Christians were numerous even in "the camp" itself.

Two points work against this interpretation. First, Tertullian here was writing an apology, a defense of Christians. His point is that Christians were not bad citizens or dangerous foreigners or some exotic species of humanity. They were all over the place and living as constructive citizens. Historians perceive that he was resorting to hyperbole, for while the church had, indeed, grown to spread out over the entire empire, they nowhere near "filled every place among you." They did not fill cities and towns and market-places and the senate. And no historian believes that Christians literally filled the fortresses and military camps, so we should not read this as evidence that Christians were flooding into the military. Tertullian's words here should be taken as a signal that there were Christians in the military at the end of the AD 100s. It is quite possible that they were converted to Christianity as soldiers and had not had an opportunity to leave yet. Nor should we take Tertullian's words as any statement at all of his beliefs in the moral legitimacy of Christians in the military, much less on his views of violence. In the context of the *Apology*, that was clearly not his point. He merely sought to defend Christians against charges of treason.

In fact, and this is the second point that works against using his *Apology* statements as evidence that pre-Montanist Tertullian was not non-violent when it came to the military, what Tertullian had to say about Christians in the military suggests that those Christians probably expected not to fight. Tertullian continued, "For what wars should we not be fit, and ready even with unequal forces, we who so willingly yield ourselves to the sword, if in our religion it were not counted better to be slain than to slay?" Christians, said Tertullian, are not afraid of the sword. Indeed, they have much experience suffering at the edge of the sword. They would

³⁸ Sider, 45.

certainly have the courage to fight militarily, but they count it better to be killed than to kill. This is hardly an indication that Christians, even in the military, accepted the legitimacy of violence. More troubling to the argument for Christian nonviolence is his statement in the *Apology* that “we sail together with you, we go to war, we till the ground, we conduct business together with you.” It is unclear, however, that “we go to war” meant that they fought in war. Tertullian wrote in Latin, and, according to historian Stephen Gero, there is some reason to translate the phrase as “we do service together.” As noted above, plenty of soldiers served in noncombatant roles. At any rate, Tertullian here, as with the previous phrase, used this example as evidence that Christians were not dangerous foreigners but citizens willing to contribute to the community. He did not intend the *Apology* to be the place where he would lay out his beliefs about nonviolence.³⁹

Other writings of his from about the same time as his *Apology* confirm his generally nonviolent stance. In *Against the Jews*, a theological work explaining the status of Christians as God’s people in comparison to the Jews, he echoed Justin Martyr and others in showing how Christians fulfilled the Old Testament prophecy of beating “their swords into ploughshares.” In *On the Spectacles*, Tertullian condemned Roman games, showing how their violence was incompatible with God’s “prohibition of every sort of man-killing” expressed in the Sixth Commandment. Christians are called to “love our enemies.” In *On Patience*, Tertullian repeated the Sermon on the Mount instruction to love our enemies. Here Tertullian rejected violence in personal self-defense. “If one attempts to provoke you by manual violence, the admonition of the Lord is at hand: ‘To him’ He saith, ‘who smiteth thee on the face, turn the other cheek likewise.’”

In *On Idolatry*, Tertullian questioned how a Christian could serve in government, since government officials participated in the execution of capital punishment. He held up the example of Jesus the King rejecting the pomp and circumstance of earthly power and authority commonly enjoyed by government officials and concluded that it would be inappropriate for Christians to indulge in them. Then Tertullian turned to “whether a believer may turn himself unto the military service, and whether the military may be admitted unto the faith,” even among the lower ranks, where soldiers were not required to perform pagan rituals or execute capital punishment. Tertullian said no, for “there is no agreement between the divine and the human sacrament, the standard of Christ and the standard of the devil, the camp of light and the camp of darkness.” Soldiers need a sword, and these “the Lord has taken away.” By “disarming Peter” in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus “unbelted every soldier.” Not even the uniform was excusable, for “no dress is lawful among us, if assigned to any unlawful action.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Stephen Gero, “‘Miles Gloriosus’: The Christian and Military Service According to Tertullian,” *Church History* 39, no. 3 (1970): 291–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3163465>.

⁴⁰ Sider, *The Early Church on Killing*, 46–51.

In *Against Marcion*, Tertullian styled Jesus as a warrior, but not of an earthly sort. Unlike the common soldier, whose sword produced “deceit, and harshness, and injury,” Jesus armed Himself with the “sword of the Word.” The heretic Marcion had argued that the God of the Old Testament was violent, which would make Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount inconsistent with the Old Testament. Not so, said Tertullian. He is the same God in both testaments, and when Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies and turn the other cheek, His commandments were “quite in keeping with the teaching of the Creator.” So why did God in the Law require an eye for an eye? That code was instituted because of the nature of man. Those “who believed in God might expect vengeance from God, while he who had no faith (to restrain him) might fear the laws which prescribed retaliation.” The rebellious needed the punishments of the law, but the faithful needed guidance. “This purpose of the law,” said Tertullian, “which it was difficult to understand, Christ, as the Lord of the Sabbath and of the law, and of all the dispensations of the Father, both revealed and made intelligible, when He commanded that ‘the other cheek should be offered (to the smiter),’ in order that He might the more effectually extinguish all reprisals of an injury, which the law had wished to prevent by method of retaliations. . . . Thus, whatever new provision Christ introduced, He did it not in opposition to the law, but rather in furtherance of it, without at all impairing the prescription of the creator.” Therefore, Christians patiently endure, confident in God’s ability to inflict vengeance Himself.⁴¹ This is precisely method four of reconciling the Old and Testaments that we discussed above.

It is likely that when the *Apology* was published in 197 there were not many Christians even in the military, and that Tertullian had never pondered Christian military service much at all. Government policy in the late 100s and early 200s apparently changed this. As the *Pax Romana* (the Peace of Rome brought about by the Roman Empire) began to weaken, new policies were instituted to shore up the strength of the military upon which the Empire depended. Military pay increased, soldiers were allowed to marry and live with their families, and other policies were implemented to attract new men into the ranks. Gero explains, “the empire became militarized to a great degree.” It appears that more Christians were enticed into the military. Tertullian would have none of it, and he made his views clear in a work called *de Corona*, or *The Crown*, published in the AD 210s. By then, his Montanist sympathies were evident, but Gero, who does see a difference between Tertullian’s pre- and post-Montanist views of military service, nonetheless explains that Tertullian’s later systematic rejection of Christian military service owes itself not to his movement towards Montanism but to Christians’ movement towards the military: “It seems rather than charging his very definite change of attitude to Montanism, one should recognize the sudden influx of Christians into the military profession, with its new opportunities for advancement and greater respectability, as a contributing, if indeed not the main, factor.”⁴² It is likely that these Christians would already have been baptized before they joined the army, which also presented a new challenge to Christian teaching.

⁴¹ Sider, 52 and 54.

⁴² Gero, “Miles Gloriosus,” 291.

In *de Corona*, Tertullian praised the example of a Christian who suffered martyrdom for trying to leave the army. This soldier had endured the ridicule of his peers. Tertullian did not know if any Christians were among those peers, but if so, they were deluded, for they “imagined they could serve two masters.” They also erred in trying to avoid martyrdom at all cost. Their spiritual leaders were no better: “I know, too, their pastors are lions in peace, deer in the fight.” For Tertullian, the problems associated with military service were legion. The soldier had to swear allegiance to someone other than Christ; had to “make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword”; had to participate in imprisoning, torturing, and otherwise punishing wrongdoers; had to “guard temples which he has renounced”; had to “carry a flag, too, hostile to Christ;” and had to take orders from an emperor that may conflict with the orders he received from God; and had to participate in idolatrous ceremonies. “And shall the son of peace take part in the battle when it does not become him even to sue at law?” asked Tertullian. Evidently not.

Tertullian drew a distinction between Christians who chose to join the military and men who were converted after joining the military. The case was different for “those whom John used to receive for baptism” and “the centurion whom Christ approves, and the centurion whom Peter instructs.” Tertullian observed that in those cases there seemed to be some allowance for continuing in the military, but not much of an allowance. He still believed it was typical for the newly converted soldier to leave the military. Tertullian approved of this, “or all sorts of quibbling will have to be resorted to in order to avoid offending God, and that is not allowed even outside of military service.”

Then Tertullian’s teaching reaches its climax, which is worth quoting in full:

Neither does military service hold out escape from punishment of sins, or exemption from martyrdom. Nowhere does the Christian change his character. There is one gospel, and the same Jesus, who will one day deny everyone who denies, and acknowledge everyone who acknowledges God--who will save, too, the life which has been lost for His sake; but, on the other hand, destroy that which for gain has been saved to His dishonor. With Him the faithful citizen is a soldier, just as the faithful soldier is a citizen. A state of faith admits no plea of necessity; they are under no necessity to sin, whose one necessity is, that they do not sin.

In sum, the Christian in the military is still a Christian. If he must give up his life by resigning from the military rather than sin against God within the military, God will save his life for eternity. Conversely, a life saved dishonorably--through a compromise with sin--is a life that God will destroy in the end. Tertullian actually wrote this to answer a question of whether or not a Christian could wear a crown as a soldier, a custom perhaps not unlike today’s soldiers wearing

medals on their uniform. After writing at length about all of the moral problems with military service, Tertullian suggested that wearing a crown was a moot point. “If, putting my strength to the question, I banish from us the military life, I should now to no purpose issue a challenge on the matter of a military crown.”⁴³

Tertullian was not the last of the nonviolent Christian writers. Minucius Felix was a Roman lawyer of the late second or early third century. He wrote an apology which explained why Christians rejected abortion and infanticide. Christians simply abhor any shedding of human blood in any context. “To us it is not lawful either to see or to hear of human slaughter; and so much do we shrink from human blood, that we do not use blood even of eatable animals in our food.”⁴⁴

Then there was Origen, who was, in the judgment of historian Jonathan Hill, “the most famous Christian of his day,” and one who “dominated both the church and the intellectual world of his day.”⁴⁵ Origen recognized the validity of a nation fighting for its interests, but he came down solidly against Christian violence of any kind, apparently including self-defense. “Taking simply what [Jesus] says, ‘those who take the sword shall perish by the sword,’ we should beware lest because of warfare or the vindication of our rights or for any occasion we should take out the sword, for no such occasion is allowed by this evangelical teaching, which commands us to fulfill what is written, ‘with those who hated me I was pacific.’ If therefore with those who hate peace we must be pacific, we must use the sword against no-one.” Origen also argued that violence of any kind, in war or in self-defense, violated the “milder spirit” that Jesus had “introduced into the conduct of things.” For Origen, Jesus’s nonviolence was all-encompassing, for “He nowhere teaches that it is right for His own disciples to offer violence to anyone, however wicked,” or to “allow the killing of any individual whatever.” This included capital punishment, sanctioned by the Mosaic law for the Jewish nation, but something that Christians could never perform. Finally, Origen, like many before him, used Isaiah’s prophecies of the peaceable kingdom of the Messiah to explain the Christian identity: “And to those who inquire of us whence we come or who is our founder, we reply that we are come agreeably to the counsel of Jesus, to ‘cut down our hostile and insolent ‘wordy’ swords into ploughshares, and to convert into pruning hooks the spears formerly employed in war.’ For we no longer take up ‘sword against nation,’ nor do we ‘learn war anymore,’ having become children of peace, for the sake of Jesus, who is our leader.”⁴⁶

For Origen, war in the Bible was an Old Testament practice of the Jews, but now Jesus has commanded his followers to pursue peace, fight spiritually against spiritual enemies, and

⁴³ Sider, *The Early Church on Killing*, 60–61.

⁴⁴ Sider, 64.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Oxford: Zondervan, 2006), 55–56.

⁴⁶ Sider, *The Early Church on Killing*, 70, 72, 76, and 74.

trust God to defend them. Now “the struggles of the soul have to be exerted against spiritual adversaries.”⁴⁷ When his critic complained that if every Roman converted to Christianity, the Empire would be left defenseless, Origen responded with two arguments. First, these Christian Romans would pray to God like Moses prayed for the Israelites, and the result will be as when God reassured Moses that “The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace.” If all of Rome would pray, “they will be able to put to flight far more enemies than those who were discomfited by the prayer of Moses when he cried to the Lord.” Second, if persecution would fall on a Christian Rome, Jesus’s followers would be bolstered by the power of the Spirit to endure. Christians are soldiers, and do much for the empire, for they form “a special army--an army of piety--by offering our prayers to God.” The spiritual work of the Christian is far superior, and of more use to the empire, than the work of soldiers and government officials. “It is not for the purpose of escaping public duties that Christians decline public offices, but that they may reserve themselves for a diviner and more necessary service in the church of God--for the salvation of people. And this service is at once necessary and right.”⁴⁸

Cyprian came a half step after Origen, writing in the mid-200s AD. His extensive use of military language should not mislead the reader into thinking he was not committed to nonviolence. Cyprian used militant language much as Paul did in depicting the Spirit’s equipping of the saints in terms of the armor of God. As Christians we are soldiers of the Lord, but that does not mean we fight violently. One of Cyprian’s most famous witticisms is his observation that “when individuals commit homicide, it is a crime; it is called a virtue when it is done in the name of the state.” In support of nonviolence as a Christian virtue Cyprian turned to Jesus’s command to “love your enemies” and to the Old Testament instruction to wait on the Lord’s revenge against one’s enemies. “For this reason it is that none of us, when he is apprehended, makes resistance, nor avenges himself against your unrighteous violence, although our people are numerous and plentiful.”⁴⁹ Cyprian wrote of the Christian church as a nonviolent army pitted against the Roman aggressors. The Church wins its battle even though it does not fight violence with violence, for “it is not lawful for the innocent even to kill the guilty.”⁵⁰ Cyprian wrote about official persecution of Christians, but it is difficult to see how, if it was wrong for masses of Christians to kill masses of Roman soldiers it would be okay for a single Christian to kill a single Roman aggressor in a personal attack, especially if a Christian was not allowed to “kill the guilty.”

There is more to say about each of these authors, but the point should be clear: the intellectual and theological leadership of the first three Christian centuries was decidedly committed to the Way of Peace. New Testament scholar Preston Sprinkle writes that all of them

⁴⁷ Sider, 70.

⁴⁸ Sider, 80–83.

⁴⁹ Sider, 85 and 86.

⁵⁰ Sider, 89.

agree that “Christians should never kill. Not in self-defense. Not as capital punishment for the guilty. Not in a just war. Never.” Furthermore, “there was not a single Christian writer in the first three hundred years of Christianity who said that Christians should serve in Rome’s military.”⁵¹

Against this historical fact that the leadership of the early church was vigorously committed to nonviolence is the argument that they rejected military service because soldiers were required to participate in pagan worship services. Historian John Helgeland is probably the leading historian who advances this argument. He admits in an oft-quoted article that “church fathers, to be sure, abhor war and murder; references supporting that stance are found frequently throughout their writings.” But, he says, they still recognized the utility and necessity of fighting in war. He works around explicit rejection of violence by saying that what they really were concerned about was paganism. He concludes his article with the assertion that “the only problem the church ever had with the army was the nature of army religion.” It is very difficult to take his argument seriously in light of the many statements against violence itself in the early church fathers. His article does nothing with the concept of the early church building upon a foundation of an ethic of peace and humility.⁵² It ignores the fact that modern militaries, including the American, require oaths of allegiance similar to those of ancient Rome that early church fathers protested.⁵³ Anyone who wishes to learn more of his way of thinking can read a short article listed in the bibliography.

Helgeland is strongest when he points to evidence that Christians joined the military. Some of the writers we surveyed wrote in a way that acknowledged the presence of professing Christians in the military, especially in the third century. As we will see, gravestones with both Christian symbolism and military insignia indicate that some people in the Roman world sustained a public identity as both Christian and militant. He admits that “from the centurions mentioned in the New Testament until the year 173, we have no explicit reference to Christians in the army.” In 173 a story surfaced of a Christian legion, the “Thundering Legion,” successfully praying for God’s intervention in a hopeless battle. The veracity of this story is not certain. Pagan Roman writers attributed the intervention to Roman gods, and there is precious little evidence to ascertain exactly what happened anyway. George Kalantzis and David Hunter suggest the Christian use of the story is “an apologetic invention” intended to defend Christians

⁵¹ Sprinkle, *Fight*, 198 and 202.

⁵² Helgeland less famous book, John Helgeland, Robert J. Daly, and J. Patout Burns, *Christians and the Military: The Early Experience* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), provides a marginally better treatment of the evidence from the early church but still fails to take into account many of the witnesses against Christian violence.

⁵³ “Oaths of Enlistment and Oaths of Office - U.S. Army Center of Military History,” accessed June 7, 2019, <https://history.army.mil/html/faq/oaths.html>. Adolf Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries*, trans. David McInnes Gracie (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981), provides a useful analysis of all of the reasons why the early church rejected military service. They included the various types of idolatry and divided allegiances that service implied. Harnack does not dispute that violence was a very important reason why thy church rejected service.

against the charge of disloyalty.⁵⁴ At any rate, Helgeland claims that “Christians made a practice of enlisting.”⁵⁵

On the surface, this seems to be a significant blow to any claim that the early church was nonviolent. What do we do with evidence that Christians did indeed join the military? We should probably respond to this news the same way we respond to any news that Christians in any age did not live up to the high standard of Scripture. We should not take it as evidence that the early church was “not against” military service or other violence, any more than we should take Christians’ use of pornography today as evidence that the church now is “not against” lasciviousness.

Catholicism and abortion may be a useful analogy. The Catholic stance against abortion is well known. Leadership from the pope to regional bishops and most local priests, from lay fraternities to official religious orders, from Catholic official statements to most public discussion by Catholic lay and official spokesmen is nearly unanimous against abortion. The Catholic church was the first to publicly condemn the legalization of abortion in America, and their stance has met with relentless opposition. It is doubtful that many Americans are confused about whether the Catholic church is pro- or anti-abortion. However, it is also true that self-identifying Catholic Americans obtain abortions at rates equal to or greater than the general American population. Catholic women obtain almost a third of all abortions in America. This is a startling statistic, yet it would not be correct to say that abortion rates among Catholic women prove that the Catholic Church is not pro-life. Many of the women know this and express guilt and shame over their decision, knowing that they are violating the firm teaching of their church.⁵⁶ In similar fashion, the presence of self-professing Christians in the Roman military proves only that not all people affiliated with the Christian church in the Roman Empire abided by the clear teaching of the church. And the rates of Christian membership in the Roman military in the first three centuries were undoubtedly far lower than the rates of abortion among Catholic women today in terms of percentage of members choosing to disobey church teaching.

Pastoral Manuals

The second type of evidence of the early church’s stance on non-violence comes from pastoral manuals intended to guide local pastors in the shepherding of their congregations. All of them teach nonviolence. We begin with the *Didache*, a catechetical guide for Christian living that dates to the late first century and, as such, purports to represent the views of the Apostles.

⁵⁴ Sider, *The Early Church on Killing*, 157; Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb*, 56.

⁵⁵ John Helgeland, “Christians and the Roman Army A.D. 173-337,” *Church History* 43, no. 2 (1974): 157, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3163949>.

⁵⁶ “The Catholic Abortion Paradox,” accessed July 3, 2019, <https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/catholic/2001/01/the-catholic-abortion-paradox.aspx>.

Whether or not it does is debatable, but it still is an important representation of views of the early church in the late first century. Its most direct reference to violence is simple and direct, and it begins the document. “There are two ways, one of life and one of death. . . . The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, your neighbor as yourself. And whatever you would not want to happen to you, you should not do to another.” Later it repeats Christ’s command to “bless those who persecute you, pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you.” Historian George Kalantzis uses the *Didache* as an example of how “love of enemy as an overwhelming apologetic of love of God and as a pious Christian obligation is a theme that permeates Christian writings of this period.”⁵⁷ The early church set about setting people on the Way of Peace.

The *Apostolic Tradition*, from the 200s most likely, was probably written first in Greek, and we no longer have that copy. We do have Latin, Sahidic, Arabic, and Ethiopic translations, which strongly suggests that it was used widely around the Roman Empire. Historian Alan Kreider concludes that the *Apostolic Tradition* “remains one of the most informative texts about the life and worship of early Christian communities.” As such, he says, “Helgeland and his colleagues, who argue that the early Christians were worried about idolatry in the Roman legions but not killing, have paid little attention to the *Apostolic Tradition*.” The document differs only slightly between its various translations. All of them are nonviolent in all situations. One prohibits baptism of soldiers, while the others allow it only for soldiers of a lower rank who promise not to kill. All of them prohibit catechumens and baptized individuals from joining the military. Catechumens who insisted on enlisting were to be dismissed from consideration of baptism and the already-baptized excommunicated. Here is the Sahidic version: “A catechumen or faithful [person] if he wishes to become a soldier, let them be cast out, because they despised God.”⁵⁸

Interestingly, the prohibitions have to do with whether or not a person is able to “hear” church teaching. The idea is that a person’s earthly commitments may make them resistant to the commitments to the body of Christ and violate the witness the body is seeking in the world. “The *Apostolic Tradition*’s assumption is clear: Inner and outer are inextricable; if you live in a certain way outside of the church you cannot hear, comprehend, or live the gospel that the Christian community is seeking to embody as well as teach.”⁵⁹

The *Canons of Hippolytus*, from the mid-300s, was equally nonviolent if more concessionary to the realities of the changing Roman Empire. Christians were not to join the military unless forced, and in that case they must refuse to kill or to swear the oath. By the time

⁵⁷ Kalantzis, *Caesar and the Lamb*, 52.

⁵⁸ Alan Kreider, “Military Service in the Church Orders,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 31, no. 3 (2003): 419–20.

⁵⁹ Kreider, 422.

of the *Canons* the system of penance was already in development, which we can see in its treatment of those who disobeyed. If a Christian soldier disobeys and does kill someone, “he is not to partake of the mysteries [the sacraments], unless he is purified by a punishment, tears, and wailing. He is not to come forward deceitfully but in the fear of God.”⁶⁰ By the 400s these admonitions against military service were well on their way to disappearing entirely, but the surviving evidence confirms that local practice echoed prominent Christian theologians in seeking to build communities living out Jesus’s ethic of peace and love, and in that context violence would find no place.

Testimony of Non-Christians

The third form of evidence is what others said of Christians. Origen wrote his defence of Christian nonviolence in response to a complaint by a man named Celsus, about whom we know virtually nothing and of whose writing we only know through Origen’s quotations. Celsus apparently complained about Christians avoiding military service, and in doing so confirms that few Christians even in the 200s had enlisted. “Celsus clearly thinks that the normal Christian practice is to reject military service,” writes Ron Sider. So, apparently, did Origen.”⁶¹

Archeological Evidence

The final category of evidence is archeological. A mosaic on the floor of a building in a Roman military camp at Megiddo, Israel, has caused archeologists to describe the room as a Christian “prayer hall” dating to the AD 200s. No information about who worshiped there is available, including whether the men were converted before or after enlisting.⁶² There are also epitaphs adorning Christian gravestones that attest to the presence of Christians in the military in the first few centuries. Helgeland makes something of this fact, although even he admits that only a handful, as in a total of seven, can be proven to be before Constantine. There are other gravestones that might possibly date to before Constantine. At the most, however, we have less than a dozen.⁶³ This can hardly be seen as evidence of widespread Christian participation in the military. Furthermore, one scholar notes that many “Christian” gravestones from the early church (not necessarily pre-Constantine) exhibit both pagan and Christian symbolism, “typical for the age of syncretism of the first decades of the 4th century.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Kreider, 426.

⁶¹ Sider, *The Early Church on Killing*, 67.

⁶² Sider, 144.

⁶³ Sider, 146.

⁶⁴ Alexandru Madgearu, “A Note on the Christians’ Presence in the Sacer Comitatus Before 313 A.D.,” *Aevum* 75, no. 1 (2001): 116.

Conclusion

We can summarize the teaching of the first few centuries this way:

- On the most basic level, the early church viewed nonviolence as the Christian norm, because nonviolence represented the character and way of Jesus. They based their ethic on the direct teachings of Jesus to love one's enemies, on Jesus's example of meekness and gentleness, on the Old and New Testament commandment to leave vengeance to God, and on the Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Jesus that the advent of the Messiah would bring about a beating of swords into ploughshares.
- The first evidence of post-Apostolic Christians in the military occurs in the 170s AD with the Thundering Legion, which was possibly a fictional legend.
- By the 200s there is evidence that an increasing number of Christians were present in the military. Whether they joined post-conversion or were converted after they were already soldiers is unclear, but the latter is probable.
- The church's witness against the use of violence by Christians was universal and uncontested until at least the late 200s, when it began to weaken slightly as more Christians joined the military.

The testimony of the early church is a powerful argument in favor of the Way of Peace. Christians of the first few centuries appear to have presented to the world a consistent witness by avoiding violent military service (and capital punishment, which was carried out by the military). They spoke less often of self-defense in situations of robbery or personal assault, but it is very difficult to imagine how they would have advocated "stabbing back" when they believed that Christians could not kill anyone, not even the guilty. It does not necessarily follow that Christians willingly submitted themselves to violent assault. There are plenty of stories of Christians fleeing persecution, something even the Apostles did in the book of Acts (think of Paul escaping Damascus in Acts 9:25). Investigation of the responses of early Christians to the threat of rape or robbery will be conducted at a later time. It is doubtful, however, given the testimony against killing, that the early church sanctioned lethal resistance in those cases.

If a Christian today wonders if we should side with the majority of modern American evangelicals in applying Jesus's Sermon on the Mount to minor issues of personal offense, or with the more radical interpretation that holds that Jesus meant what he said about doing good to our enemies in all situations, they should know that the Christians closest to the time of Jesus through the next two centuries agreed with the latter. To the vast majority of early Christians, following in the Way of Peace meant trusting that responding in love and faith to even the worst persecution would work to the furtherance of the Gospel. It seems they were right. The church grew from a minor, persecuted and despised sect of fishermen, artisans, laborers, slaves, and

servants to the dominant religion of the Mediterranean in less than three centuries. By the time of Constantine, the church had grown from a small group of disciples in Jerusalem to a million members around the Mediterranean and western and northern Europe!⁶⁵

The Constantinian Shift and the Middle Ages

“The relationship between Christianity and war has been a tangled one. Despite Christ’s admonition to love one’s neighbor and to turn the other cheek, Christians historically have slaughtered their fellow men, to include their fellow Christians, in breathtakingly large numbers.”⁶⁶ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism*

The quote above is true, so pathetically true. But it only applies to the Christian church after the AD 300s. We have seen that the early church cherished nonviolence, even though it brought with it suffering for the cause of Christ. Unfortunately, that testimony would change. The consequences in terms of lives lost is horrifying.

The distinct shift away from the ethic of Christian nonviolence occurred coterminous with the “Constantinian shift.” In the AD 310s, Constantine, one of several emperors of a divided Roman Empire, defeated his rivals and became its sole leader. Famously, he claimed that the night before he defeated Emperor Maxentius, who held the city of Rome, he had a vision of God telling him to conquer under the sign of the cross. He commanded his soldiers to exhibit Christian symbols on their gear as they entered the battle the next day. They won a resounding victory. In what must have been a mind-boggling scene to the long persecuted and despised Christian church in Rome, Constantine’s troops entered Rome under the sign of the cross. Shortly, Constantine legalized Christianity, and by the end of the century his successors made it the only legal religion of the Empire.

There is much to say about this change in status of the Christian church. Christians went from a historically persecuted minority to a persecuting majority. Christian leaders became increasingly preoccupied with affairs of the state. While it is incorrect to say that church and state became wholly one, it is accurate to describe their relationship as one of close cooperation and competition. In eastern Europe, the Byzantine Emperor claimed ecclesiastical oversight, while in the West, the Roman Catholic Pope competed fiercely with kings and princes for the right to tax peasants, control territory, and even appoint bishops and other clergy.

⁶⁵ Marcus A. Yoder, *Cathedrals, Castles, Caves: The Origins of the Anabaptist Faith* (Winesburg, OH: JPV Press, 2017), 23.

⁶⁶ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced By War*, Updated (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 124.

The church also began to embrace coercive force. By the AD 400s, only Christians could fight in the imperial army, although, tellingly, clergy were forbidden. In an age before Luther's recovery of the Biblical teaching of the "priesthood of all believers," the church believed that only spiritual leaders could not stain themselves with others' blood. Over time, a theology developed that made the violent defense of the weak a Christian virtue. Loving one's neighbor came to mean the allowance of the use of lethal violence to stop another act of lethal violence. Celsus's earlier complaint that the empire would be defenseless if Christians did not fight proved persuasive to Christians who now held power over the empire. To alleviate the tension between the Sermon on the Mount and the newly adopted acceptance of violence, the church developed a rather sophisticated theology that effectively privatized the Sermon on the Mount, similar to what we have discussed above. The fact that many Christians from Paul through early church theologians had used militant language to describe spiritual warfare may have helped make the move to Christian violence palatable. In short, by the 400s Christian military service became part of the work of God's Kingdom.⁶⁷ While technically the Church usually eschewed managing armies directly, they did influence the decision to go to war. Kings and princes fought in the name of Jesus with the church's blessing and sometimes with the enticement of full absolution of sin. The crusades are merely the most obvious instance of the church investing in the business of war.

The role of the Church in warfare can also be exaggerated. Much fighting occurred against the will of anyone in Europe, such as when the Vikings invaded from the North, the Slavs from the East, and the Muslims from the south and east. Princes and kings often made war in violation of the will of church leaders. The church also attempted to impose restrictions on warfare. Most famously, they developed the policy of the "Peace of God," whereby fighting was prohibited in most civilian locations, and the "Truce of God," which prohibited fighting on holy days. Many "saints" were also known for their nonviolence. St. Francis is perhaps the most famous--he traveled to the Holy Land to try to resolve peacefully the problem of Muslim control of Christian holy sites--but there were others. Many priests tried to intervene nonviolently on behalf of their flocks. Religious orders required pacifism and sacrificial suffering. Occasional reform movements took nonviolent stances, such as the Waldensians and their successors beginning in the 1100s. It is evident that many Christians disagreed with the Christian use of violence and maintained the pre-Constantinian stance of meekness, gentleness, and love of enemies.

There was another way that the church attempted to restrain violence. Historians often date the beginning of the Just War Tradition to the Bishop Ambrose of Milan and, probably more

⁶⁷ James F. Childress, "Moral Discourse about War in the Early Church," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 1 (1984): 2–18, surveys the transformation of Christian views of the moral acceptability of warfare from pacifism to violence. The fact that only Christians could fight in the army is found on page 12. ; Harnack, *Militia Christi*, a short but famous book originally published in German, also describes the shift to a violent church.

importantly, to Ambrose's protege Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Augustine's importance to the Church, particularly in the West, is enormous in so many ways. For our purposes, he is probably as responsible as anyone for the legitimation of Christian participation in war. But not just any war. Augustine, and Just War theorists after him all the way down to today, posit rules that should govern warfare. There are rules for deciding when to go to war (only legitimate authorities can take up war, and only for a just cause), how to fight a war (civilians must be left alone, and damage must be proportional to the threat), and when war should be concluded (when the objective is met). Just War theory has become so dominant in mainstream Christianity that it forms the theoretical basis of all major denominations, including Catholicism, Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and the various Reformed denominations. Startlingly, religious leaders of the Reformation period actually "made pacifism a heresy and a crime."⁶⁸

At the beginning of this paper we noted that Just War theory is outside the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that the theory has rarely been effective in any way. Rarely, if ever, has a war satisfied all of the rules in order to qualify as a truly just war. Rarely has anyone resisted engaging in war when confronted with just war rules. Instead, as perhaps the most famous Christian pacifist author of the 20th century, John Howard Yoder, has pointed out, the trend even among those who claim to abide by just war theory is to continually expand the boundaries of what is acceptable and increase the list of exceptions to what is unacceptable.⁶⁹

The result is abysmal. The record of the church when it comes to violence is appalling. Historians can usually only offer rounded numbers and guesstimates when it comes to lives lost during any particular event of the Middle Ages, regular censuses being an invention of modern democracies. In the supposedly Christian region of Europe in the Middle Ages, countless people died from battle wounds and the devastation wrought by marauding armies (whose densely populated camps also acted as breeding grounds for disease). The crusades are infamous today, and the damage caused by these Christian military campaigns continues to inhibit the Gospel message brought by missionaries to the Middle East.

Unfortunately, it got worse.

The Reformation Period

Today Protestants celebrate the Reformation of the church in the 1500s. There is, no doubt, much to celebrate. But there is also much, very much, to lament. The Reformation unleashed two centuries of almost unimaginable violence in the name of Christ. The Protestant

⁶⁸ John Howard Yoder, *When War Is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1996), 6.

⁶⁹Such is the thesis of Yoder, *When War Is Unjust*.

Reformation stands as a bright, flashing neon warning sign of what happens when Christians open the door to violence. Undoubtedly, all of the militant Christians believed they were engaging in just warfare. All of them, they would claim, turned to violence only to impose the righteous justice of God against their seemingly heretical opponents. If people ever believed that Jesus would lead them into battle, this was the time. And that is the problem. *Only in retrospect do Christians stand aghast at what they have wrought.* Convinced that Jesus's command to love one's enemies did not apply to those who dared to reconceptualize the eucharist in symbolic terms, or who did--or did not--properly recognize the graces of the Virgin Mary, or who taught a misguided theology of justification, Catholics and Lutherans and the various Reformed Protestants set upon each other with a determination that does not escape the notice of atheists and other Christian critics today. The horrors of the toll in human lives is surpassed only by the damage done to the reputation of the one who taught His followers that the way to identify His true followers was by the love they showed to each other. That earnest followers of Jesus disagreed with each other to the point of not recognizing their shared foundational doctrines, and that this erupted into sharp confessional lines, is sad, but might be seen as an internal family dispute. But since the church had long grown comfortable with the use of violence to defend oneself, the Gospel, and the state, the results turned cataclysmic.

There are several ways of approaching the problem of violence during the Reformation of the 1500s and 1600s. One is to recount the lives lost in the major wars. This is not an easy thing to do for the same reasons that prohibit us from really knowing how many people died from violence in the Middle Ages. So historians estimate in large numbers. They suggest that *two to four million* people died in the French Wars of Religion of the late 1500s, in which Catholics and French Reformed defended themselves and the Gospel with violence. From 1618 to 1648 about a third of the population of central Europe died during the Thirty Years War, in which various denominations lent religious credibility and inspiration to political machinations. The war began when two Catholics were thrown out the window--they were defenestrated--in Prague by their Protestant opponents. They survived, either by divine intervention (the Catholic explanation), or by landing on a heap of manure (the story preferred by Protestants). The Defenestration of Prague makes for a humorous anecdote unless one remembers that this local religious mischief spun into the disastrous war that claimed untold millions of people.⁷⁰

Focusing on the wars does not take into account the many Europeans who lost their lives to local riots and individual execution. Scholars estimate that some 3,000 people were massacred in Paris on one St. Bartholomew's Day in 1572. Thousands, maybe tens of thousands, died at the same time in the countryside.⁷¹ Meanwhile, other violent campaigns were waged against witches,

⁷⁰ For more information, Google "Defenestration of Prague" and "Thirty Years War." For a scholarly account, see Richard S. Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars, 1559-1715*, Second (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), 82–92.

⁷¹ "Massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day | Definition, Background, & Facts | Britannica.Com," accessed July 23, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Massacre-of-Saint-Bartholomews-Day>.

real or merely accused. Whatever they accomplished in preserving sound doctrine, they did succeed in persecuting and killing tens of thousands of Europeans.⁷²

Not everyone participated in the violence. No doubt many Lutherans, Reformed, and Catholic individuals resisted the call to war for any number of reasons. But one entire category of believer existing outside those other denominations rejected war altogether as a matter of Christian principle. These were the Anabaptists. The label was applied by their opponents rather indiscriminately and has ever since come to refer to any of a number of groups whose only common belief is that they rejected infant baptism. This is unfortunate and misleading, because within the first decade of the appearance of the Anabaptist persuasion, the entire movement, with almost no exception, also shared a deep commitment to nonviolence.⁷³

In the first ten years of Anabaptism, nonviolence was not entirely universal among those who believed in adult baptism. Most famously, the Anabaptists who took over the German city of Munster turned to coercion and physical abuse and intimidation to rule their little kingdom. They also employed polygamy as a means of growing their ranks, and they indulged in all sorts of unfortunate and absurd heresies as they sought to bring in the reign of Christ on earth. The experiment in violent Anabaptism did not last long and ended tragically. The long-term consequences were important, though, for it was in part their example that sealed nonviolence in the theology of Menno Simons, founder of the historically nonviolent Mennonites. Unfortunately, in the minds of some anti-Anabaptists, the City of Munster has come to stand in for virtually the entire Anabaptist movement. This type of storytelling is close to historical malpractice and is rejected by professional historians, including those who count the City of Munster among Anabaptists. At best, Munster is an interesting and dismal aberration among Reformation era proponents of adult baptism. We could just as easily and just as unfairly point to Munster as a model of Protestantism because they shared a belief in Christian violence.

The rest of Anabaptism was almost entirely nonviolent. Swiss Brethren, Mennonites, Amish, Hutterites, and others arrived at their strong commitment to nonviolence for reasons very similar to those of the early church. Violence violated Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps more importantly, physical coercion of any sort contrasted unfavorably with the meek and gentle character of Jesus. German-speaking Anabaptists promoted the concept of *Nachfolge*. *Nachfolge*, literally "the following after," referred to Christian devotion to following Jesus in thought, word, deed, desires, and demeanor. Arguably, Anabaptists determined to follow Jesus, and become like Jesus in character, with more single-mindedness than any other Christian group.

⁷² Richard M. Golden, "American Perspectives on the European Witch Hunts," *The History Teacher* 30, no. 4 (August 1997): 412. Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided By Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) is a good source for how violence pervaded early modern Europe even outside of warfare.

⁷³ The best scholarly overview of Anabaptism in the 1500s is C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: Revised Student Edition* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press and Herald Press, 1997).

While others debated fine points of theology concerning the eucharist and election, Anabaptists set about pursuing the life of Christ, both as individuals and as a community of believers called out from the world to conform to the image of Jesus Christ.

Following Jesus can be dangerous, and it proved exceedingly so to Anabaptists. Caught up in the Catholic and Protestant machines of violence, Anabaptists suffered greatly. They were cast out of cities, which could serve nearly as a death sentence for city-dwelling artisans and laborers. They were separated from families in the process and as a consequence of spending many months in jails. At worst, they were executed. People with such names as Plattner, Schneider, Baumgartner, Weiss, and Huber paid the ultimate cost to testify to the Gospel of Peace.

In the midst of their suffering Anabaptists also clung to the notion of *Gelassenheit*, a term that has no English language equivalent but refers to a spirit of humble yieldedness. Their model for this was, of course, Jesus Christ, who himself endured ridicule and abuse on his way to yielding submissively to the cross. In following Jesus, Anabaptists developed a theology of martyrdom. So did all of the other Christian persuasions of the era, but Anabaptism martyrdom was unique in that it included the principle of nonviolence. While others could achieve the glories of martyrdom on the battlefield, fighting to defend true doctrine, the Anabaptist could only gain it by loving their enemies to the end by not fighting back.

Other Christians came to accept religious toleration at the end of the Thirty Years War, when, facing the real possibility that the entire population could be wiped out by the fighting, they concluded the Peace of Westphalia. This treaty allowed local princes to determine the religious affiliation of their own people while respecting the choices of neighboring princes. One of the foremost political theorists of the twentieth century suggested that the acceptance of this limited principle of toleration came about as a *modus vivendi* following Reformation violence: they granted religious toleration reluctantly and only because it was the only workable alternative to endless and destructive civil strife.⁷⁴ As such, it was a far cry from religious freedom, but it was a beginning. Only when the disentanglement of church from state came about in the age of democracy beginning in the late 1700s did Christians begin to embrace religious freedom as a social good, rather than accept it as a concession to practical realities.

⁷⁴ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Paperback (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 159.

The Modern Western Church

Unfortunately, modern western⁷⁵ Christians embraced a theology of religious toleration that did not include nonviolence. One might have predicted the outcome. In the past several centuries the death toll resulting from the Christian rejection of nonviolence has been even more nightmarish than during the Reformation period and the Middle Ages. Christians participated in virtually all of the modern wars. They did precious little to stanch the flow of blood.

The grisly nature of modern warfare owes itself largely to two main historical developments.⁷⁶ One factor in the unparalleled deadliness of modern warfare is the invention of technologies that lend themselves to the business of destruction. This goes beyond such new weapons as the machine gun, tank, bomber, and atomic bomb, as devastating as they are. The steamship and railroad enabled commanders to move troops quickly and with much less exhaustion than marching on foot and sailing at the whims of the ocean currents and winds. Telephones and other communication advancements allowed heads of state to turn about armies more nimbly. The advent of mass media technology equipped demagogues with the means to whip up entire populations into a warmongering frenzy. It is not easy to see how a nonviolent church could have prevented these new technologies, and given their honorable peacetime uses, it would undoubtedly have been better if they would have simply protested their application to warmaking.

The other main factor in modern warfare is the rise of democracy. Traditionally a King paid subjects and mercenaries to fight on his behalf; now, leaders of democratic nations convince entire populations to make war on other entire populations. War is no longer the business of kings and their professional armies but the preoccupation of modern society. Today when a nation goes to war, the entire workforce moves into military production, and not just weapons factories. Restrictions on consumer goods restrain the production of consumer items, and farmers divert some of their production to feed the vast armies overseas or next door.

While churches could probably not have prevented the application of technology to warmaking, they should have been able to slow down the march to war of entire populations. Most spectacularly, almost all of the nations that led the world into war twice within thirty years claimed to be Christian nations. World Wars I and II were both fought to keep the world safe for the supposedly Christian democracies. No professional historians today claim that World War I

⁷⁵ Further study could reveal to what extent non-western Christians have historically embraced nonviolence. Since the center of gravity of the church has in the past half-century moved south into Africa and South America and east into Asia, and there is at least anecdotal evidence that many of them seek to walk the Way of Peace, it is quite possible that nonviolence is now the doctrine of the majority of Christians in the world.

⁷⁶ This section on modern warfare relies on Fred Witzig's college lecture notes. Unfortunately, they do not include citations. What is described here about modern warfare is typical for how historians describe modern warfare.

was fought for any good reason, and yet, the armies that headed out to the awful trenches were supported with great gusto by European and American churches. Christian historian Philip Jenkins' book *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* is a fascinating but depressing survey of how Christians who were not used to turning the other cheek made mincemeat of their enemies. Pathetically, their enemies included people who professed the same Christian faith. The Pope himself, sitting in his palace in the Vatican, outside national boundaries, anguished over the grim specter of brother killing brother. (Christians today would do well to ponder the possibility that they might end up shooting their brothers in Christ on the battlefield. That seems a far cry from Christ's exhortation that we should be known for our love for each other.) In the end, ten million people lay dead. Had the supposedly Christian nations of Europe entered 1914 in the nonviolent tradition of the early church, such carnage would be unimaginable. Many at the time noticed the contradiction between Christians' professions of love and the slaughter of World War I.⁷⁷

One of the most regrettable consequences of World War I was World War II.⁷⁸ Most professional historians draw a direct line from 1919 to the outbreak of war in Manchuria in 1931 and the declarations of war in Europe in 1939. This is not the place for a lengthy explanation of why, but the reasons could be summed up in one decidedly non-Christian word: revenge. In 1919 the nominally Christian nation of France sought revenge against Germany by imposing unbearable war reparations. Eventually the nominally Christian German nation sought revenge against the rest of Europe for the unbearable war reparations imposed in 1919. Once again, armies, supported by their nationalist-minded churches, headed off to the battlefields to defend their freedoms against the atrocities of the other side. It is important to understand that World War II was not fought to end the Holocaust, a reality that was either denied or downplayed by most people outside German held territory until concentration camps were liberated long after the war had begun. At any rate, the Holocaust could have been prevented, or at least minimized, had supposedly Christian nations, including the United States, opened their doors to the Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Hitler's Germany before the war. Instead, they turned a deaf ear to the pleading of these refugees, considering them expensive nuisances. Unfortunately, the cost of ending the Holocaust turned out to be much, much more expensive than providing sanctuary. The final death tally of the war is simply staggering. Some 50 million people lost their lives, while countless others lost mind and limb.

The eastern theater is hardly better. Japan went to war in part because supposedly Christian European nations refused to recognize the legitimacy of Japanese imperialism. In the

⁷⁷ Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); the New Books in History podcast, "Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy," provides an easily accessible summary of the book.

⁷⁸ This section on World War II relies on Fred Witzig's training and teaching. Any standard college history textbook will provide a similar history.

1920s, Japan, looking upon European imperial holdings, including many Asian colonies right next door, became bitter at European imperialists' refusal to accept Japanese imperialism. Japanese imperialism mimicked what they saw and experienced at the hands of Europeans, who in the late 1800s and early 1900s had conquered militarily much of Africa and Asia. Supported by their vast military and bureaucratic machines, Europeans made imperialism look attractive and morally legitimate. So Japan indulged, especially in the 1930s. Right in the middle of their expansionist ambitions lay the American colony of the Philippines. As Japan expanded their territory, the United States chose to side with their European allies who were in the meantime struggling to meet the challenges of Nazi Germany. The United States did not vigorously defend French and British imperialism in Asia; though the United States has long prided itself as the standard bearer of little nations who threw off the yoke of empire, and President Roosevelt worried much more about the growing cloud over Europe. But when the President did give attention to Asia, he made it clear that Japan could expect American resistance to Japanese imperial ambition. Japanese commitment to that expansion made war with the United States almost inevitable, and so they chose to attempt to strike first in a sudden knockout blow that would, at worst, give Japanese troops time to conquer the rest of East Asia and entrench themselves in preparation for an American counterattack. At best, the attack on Pearl Harbor would demoralize Americans so badly that they would sue for peace without a fight.

This telling of the outbreak of war in the Pacific by no means intends to excuse the abominable and completely unjustifiable attack on Pearl Harbor. Rather, it seeks to place Japanese imperialism within the larger context of European (and American) imperialism. By launching unprovoked and unwanted attacks throughout East Asia and the Pacific, including Pearl Harbor, Japan was following in the footsteps of European imperialists who already had conquered, with a fair amount of violence, much of the Asian and African continents. It is unclear how any of it is excusable.

Unfortunately, Asians and Africans could learn other lessons from the World Wars. The 1900s was the great age of Christian missions around the world. It is important to state emphatically that this mission work was almost entirely nonviolent. Much of it was carried out at tremendous sacrifice of missionary health and comfort. Often missionaries worked hard to soften the sharpest edges of imperial occupation. Yet, it is also true that mission work sometimes followed, and at times hid behind, imperial European armies. Given the temporal and geographic proximity of missionary and imperial government authority in their countries, mission work and military power could easily become conflated in the minds of conquered peoples. Given the horrors of the World Wars, in which colonized peoples often had to fight on behalf of their European overlords, this conflation could have horrible consequences for the Gospel. This is not unlike mission work today that follows American military activity in the Middle East. An Apostolic Christian sister who now does mission work there tells of how some people react to her outreach. "Oh yes, you are Christian. You are the ones who bomb our villages." She has to

spend time explaining how the American military does not represent American Christianity. But does it?

Christian Nonviolence in the United States

Christians in the United States have never provided a strong witness to the Way of Peace. Quakers and Anabaptists in the colonies sacrificed much to live peaceably with Native Americans. Unfortunately, their efforts were often thwarted by the militancy of other Christian groups. The list of wars in American history is long and painful. Worse, these wars were often justified by claims that God sided with Anglo-Protestant colonists against Catholics and Native Americans. For example, when Puritans in New England burned down an enemy Indian village in 1637, with women and children trapped inside, even their Indian allies shrunk back in horror. The Puritan response to the tragedy is telling. Here is how Governor William Bradford described the burning village and the colonists' interpretation of the carnage: "It was a fearful sight to see them thus frying in the fire and the streams of blood quenching the same, and horrible was the stink and scent thereof; but the victory seemed a sweet sacrifice, and [colonists] gave the praise thereof to God."⁷⁹ This attitude towards the demise of Native Americans has been common among Americans in the colonial era through the nineteenth century.

Yet, Americans came to rely most heavily on volunteer militia and grew skeptical of professional armies, especially after the abuses of British soldiers in the Revolutionary Era. This would change only in the twentieth-century. Following World War II, "Christian" America fell in love with its military. Historian Andrew Bacevich, himself a deeply religious Catholic and political conservative, has written extensively about the sea change in the attitude of many Americans towards their military. He is not a pacifist; he argues for the use of military in a wide range of situations. He does worry about the way Americans are so quick to use the military around the world with seemingly little introspection, and he highlights how evangelicals have contributed to the problem. One may sense a bit of exaggeration on the pages of his book, *The New American Militarism: How Americans are Seduced by War*, but the contours of his argument ring true and form the basis of this survey of Christian militancy in America.

Americans, according to most historians, including Bacevich, have always been suspicious of permanent armies. The United States has entered every one of its major wars almost completely unprepared. This is because the founding fathers perceived that armies posed great dangers to free peoples. They also worried that permanent armies would lead the nation into unnecessary wars. If the cause was truly just and war became necessary, they trusted that the American people would respond sufficiently to fend off any aggressors. Besides, the vast

⁷⁹ Nathaniel Philbrick, *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* (New York: Viking Press, 2006), 178.

expanse of the oceans buffered the nation from the world's great overseas powers. Better to spend the nation's creative energies and material resources on peaceful enterprises.

American churches expressed skepticism about the World War that broke out in 1914. Most Americans were reluctant to join the war, believing it did not concern American interests. But when Congress declared war in 1917, American churches stumbled over themselves to prove their patriotism in support of the war. No professional historian that I know of considers World War I worth fighting. It was a senseless, purposeless war that solved nothing, and many American religious leaders realized that within just a few years of the war's end. Many either became pacifists or near-pacifists. Most of them pointed out war's incompatibility with the Sermon on the Mount. To a degree that would probably surprise most evangelical Christians today, they actively tried to prevent America's entry into World War II, only reluctantly cast their support behind American involvement in World War II, and sought throughout the war to bring about its hasty end and a just peace. Historian Gerald L. Sittser writes, "they were devoted to the nation but not without ambivalence and reservations. Church leaders in particular did not want to let the war undermine their greater loyalty to God, justice, humanitarianism, and peace. However severe the crisis, they tried to resist being overcome by patriotic fervor."⁸⁰

The Cold War, following close on the heels of World War II, began to erode that default position of anti-militarism. The wars in Korea and Vietnam necessitated the expansion and maintenance of what President Eisenhower called, with disapproval, the military-industrial complex. Americans, including many evangelicals, were similarly skeptical. "For generations," says historian Andrew Bacevich, "American evangelicals had cultivated a robust anti-war tradition. Furthermore, they had tended to take a rather dim view of soldiering, seeing the profanity, harsh conditions, loose women, and cheap whiskey associated with camp life in the Old Army as not especially conducive to Christian living. Nor had they sought to engage in collective political action or to attach themselves to a particular political party."⁸¹ This would change beginning in the 1970s.

In that decade Americans experienced a series of setbacks to their historic national pride and optimism. Vietnam ended badly, and Middle Eastern oil nations seemed to hold the nation's economy captive. The Iranian hostage crisis at the end of the decade did not help. Neither did the social chaos lingering from the 1960s leftwing movements offer any hope to America's Christians. In the evangelical mind, the removal of the Bible and prayer from public schools, the sexual revolution, the eruption of urban disorder, and assassinations all became integrally connected to anti-war protestors. Evangelicals began their shift towards their present militancy.

⁸⁰ John F. Piper, Jr., *The American Churches in World War I* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985); Gerald L. Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2.

⁸¹ Bacevich, *New American Militarism*, 125.

The election of 1980 sealed the warm relationship between American evangelicalism and the American military. Ronald Reagan spoke directly to evangelical social concerns. He was anti-abortion and pro-school prayer, and he expressed skepticism over the sexual revolution and modern feminism. He also was an ardent supporter of the military. Evangelicals quickly moved into his camp, and in the process, enlisted in Reagan's campaign to build up the nation's armed forces. In return for the President voicing strong support for evangelical moral causes, such as pro-life activism (Reagan as governor of California had signed California's first bills legalizing abortion in the state but became an ardent supporter of pro-life advocacy as President), evangelicals adopted Reagan's love of the military.

Since then, evangelicals have been outspoken fans of the military, to the point of spiritualizing a strong defense. Unfortunately, in the minds of conservative evangelicals the fact that liberal Protestantism in America has been more willing to critique American nationalism and militancy has only confirmed the link between true Christianity and the belief that the American army is God's army. Furthermore, "In a decadent and morally confused time," says historian Andrew Bacevich, evangelicals "came to elaborate the military itself as a bastion of the values required to stem the nation's slide toward perdition: respect for tradition, an appreciation for order and discipline, and a willingness to sacrifice self for the common good. In short, evangelicals looked to soldiers to model the personal qualities that citizens at large need to rediscover if America were to reverse the tide of godlessness and social decay to which the 1960s had given impetus."⁸² Oh the irony: Christians looking to the military for exemplars of Jesus's virtues. How far the church has wandered from the ideals of its first few centuries!

Today, America's conservative evangelicals join their neighbors in singing the praises of the American military. The nation's armed forces have become the representatives of American virtue and the bastion of America's freedom. (See Appendix A for an example of how Americans have placed their trust in their military might and have become infatuated with all things military.) America's evangelical thinkers defend this militaristic mindset. The influential evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem published a textbook on Christian politics in which he firmly supports capital punishment and the Christian use of violent force in self defense and in the military.⁸³ There has rarely been a war in the past three decades that conservative evangelicals have not supported, though, as historian Andrew Bacevich notes, they are more nuanced in their support when there is a Democrat in the White House.⁸⁴

Evangelical support for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was thoughtful but eventually solid. *Christianity Today*, the flagship periodical of the American evangelical subculture, reported a

⁸² Bacevich, 124.

⁸³ Wayne Grudem, "Chapter 6: The Protection of Life," in *Politics--According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 157–212.

⁸⁴ Bacevich, *New American Militarism*, 143–44.

wide diversity of opinion among America's religious leaders, including evangelicals.⁸⁵ To their credit, several prominent evangelical leaders went to some length to defend the invasion on the basis of Just War theory.⁸⁶ One editor of a popular evangelical magazine used the Golden Rule to defend the war, saying that "if I were an Iraqi I'd still prefer a month of danger to more decades of Saddam & Sons." However cogent their arguments may be--and this is not the place to evaluate the righteousness and appropriateness of the Iraq War--Christian leaders rarely included in their public pronouncements of their pro-war conclusions the principle of humility and regret that Just War theorists often say is necessary. Some even saw the war as an opportunity to share the Gospel with Muslims after the invasion. Others proclaimed that God is pro-war.⁸⁷ In the days after the war started white evangelicals supported the invasion to a substantially greater degree than their non-evangelical neighbors (87% evangelical support compared to 76% of the American public at large).⁸⁸

Meanwhile, conservative evangelicals lend enthusiastic support to gun rights and concealed carry. According to a 2010 Pew poll, two-thirds of white non-Hispanic evangelical protestants support gun ownership and reject strong gun control. Only a third of Catholics and 44% of non-affiliated share their views. Some argue that gun ownership and lethal self-defense are biblically mandated.⁸⁹ A gun control advocate and gun use trainer who provides counsel to churches called the lethal use of guns in defense of innocent life not only "appropriate, it is an obligation."⁹⁰ Another asserts that "self-defense rejectors are slothful in heart, mind, and actions and voluntarily put today's Christians in a place of slavery--a place where God delivered Israel centuries ago through Moses' act of defense. How absurd."⁹¹

The problem is not limited to evangelicals, or even American Christians. Recently, Russian Orthodox priests have been discussing whether or not they should continue blessing nuclear missiles.⁹² But in America, conservative evangelicals have done precious little to hold back the tide of militarism. A car dealer in Alabama recently offered a gun and an American flag

⁸⁵ Ted Olsen, "Clergy Respond to Bush's Ultimatum to Saddam," ChristianityToday.com, accessed July 5, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/marchweb-only/3-17-22.0.html>.

⁸⁶ "The-Land-Letter.Pdf," accessed July 5, 2019, <https://waynenorthey.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/The-Land-Letter.pdf>.

⁸⁷ Charles Marsh, "Wayward Christian Soldiers," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2006, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/20/opinion/wayward-christian-soldiers.html>.

⁸⁸ Marsh; Gallup Inc, "Seventy-Two Percent of Americans Support War Against Iraq," Gallup.com, accessed July 5, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/8038/SeventyTwo-Percent-Americans-Support-War-Against-Iraq.aspx>.

⁸⁹ Pew Research Center, "Gun-Control-2011.Pdf," Views of Gun Control: A Detailed Demographic Breakdown, January 13, 2011, <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/old-assets/pdf/gun-control-2011.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Home Defense Gun, "Guns and The Bible," *Home Defense Gun* (blog), June 4, 2014, <https://homedefensegun.net/guns-bible/>; Baldwin and Baldwin, *To Keep Or Not To Keep*.

⁹¹ Baldwin and Baldwin, *To Keep Or Not To Keep*, 65.

⁹² Alec Luhn, "Russian Orthodox Church Reconsiders Blessing Missiles," *The Telegraph*, June 24, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/06/24/russian-orthodox-church-reconsiders-blessing-missiles/>.

to anyone who purchased a vehicle from his store.⁹³ In 2010 the popular evangelical family ministry Focus on the Family answered a question from a young person who was considering joining the military over his or her parent's pacifist objections. The organization respectfully summarized arguments for and against Christians enlisting in the military. Then it pointed out that "the vast majority of contemporary evangelicals seem to agree" that it is proper for a Christian to fight on behalf of the nation. "They believe that there are times when Christians are justified in going to war if the cause is righteous. In addition, many feel strongly that the War against Terrorism is a case where the biblical and theological justifications for the use of force are fairly obvious."⁹⁴ Bacevich sums up the situation well:

Conservative Christians have conferred a presumptive moral palatability on any occasion on which the United States resorts to force. They have fostered among the legions of believing Americans a predisposition to see U.S. military power as inherently good, perhaps even a necessary adjunct to the accomplishment of Christ's saving mission. In doing so, they have nurtured the pre-conditions that have enabled the American infatuation with military power to flourish. Put another way, were it not for the support offered by several tens of millions of evangelicals, militarism in this deeply and genuinely religious country becomes inconceivable.⁹⁵

At the conclusion of this section it is fitting to recall the comments in this paper's introduction regarding how Christian use of lethal force in the past 1700 years squares with God's nonviolent purposes. Christian participation in the awful record of violence since Constantine is certainly an uncomfortable fact, but it is a fact nonetheless. The telling of history in this section represents the professional consensus among historians. But how could it be that God's people became so caught up in warfare? Why did God not stop this? Where do these countless Christians stand before God? Is it not true that Christians participated in the armies that God used to stop the conquest of Europe by Islam in the 1600s or to defeat fascist Germany and Japan in the 1940s? How can that be? This paper does not seek to explain the inner workings of God's dealings with earthly kingdoms or the Christians who inhabit them. It makes no claim to be able to judge other Christians' relationship with God. We desire deep humility when considering God's ways with the world and the global, historic church. This paper merely seeks to assist the Elders in discerning the will of God for the Apostolic Christian Church in light of the Word and human history.

⁹³ "God, Guns and Freedom': A Rural Alabama Ford Dealership's Fourth of July Promotion Is a Viral Sensation," USA TODAY, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/06/25/alabama-car-dealership-includes-bible-shotgun-us-flag-purchase/1567166001/>.

⁹⁴ "Christians and Military Service," Focus on the Family, December 22, 2011, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/family-q-and-a/for-teens/christians-and-military-service>.

⁹⁵ Bacevich, *New American Militarism*, 146.

The Apostolic Christian Church and Nonviolence

Much more work needs to be done in order to adequately understand anything from our own denominational past. Compared to other denominations that have bookshelves full of primary and secondary sources dealing with their past, and that often publish history journals with the latest discoveries and analysis, good research and interpretation of Apostolic Christian history lags far behind. Because of this, everything in this section should be considered provisional.

Samuel Froehlich was influenced by at least three major streams of thought. He began in the Swiss Reformed Church, which by Froehlich's time was imbibing Enlightenment thought and German liberal theology. He most likely would have not learned nonviolence from the church of his first ministerial calling. The second stream was evangelical in nature, largely Pietistic and Baptist. These traditions may, or may not, have nudged him towards nonviolence. The third stream would have. Anabaptists have long been known for their consistent stance towards nonviolence.

It is unclear how much Anabaptism influenced Froehlich's thinking regarding violence. Froehlich spoke remarkably little about war and self-defense. On one hand, concern for authentic conversion from the natural man to the nature of Christ permeates Froehlich's writings. His writings unquestionably imply a "walking in the Way of Jesus" type of theology. In his sermon notes for Romans 12:1, he wrote that Paul "wanted to show the believers how the new, holy, righteous life of Christ in us must be formed into the divine stature of the Man, Jesus Christ as He appeared in His thirty-third year of life." He spoke of how Christians should love one's enemies and "not let ourselves become bitter against them either, but show them good for evil so that they are ashamed." Froehlich must have rejected the violent revolutions that wracked the European continent during his life, for he acknowledged the right of the civil government to use force, "even if they exceed the limits assigned to them and abuse the power entrusted to them." Even in such a case the government's use of the sword can "be a chastening rod from God for the people." For Froehlich, as with so many others in the church's past, the Christian's warfare was spiritual, and so "we should cover ourselves with the protective armor of light, with meekness, humility, patience, etc. as protection against insults so that they do not incite us to evil, do not hurt our inner man, and draw us out of the fortress. . . . We are to use the offensive weapons of light against the weapons of darkness, for light prevails over darkness."⁹⁶

In spite of writing in a way so consistent with the nonviolent tradition, Froehlich seems to have moved from an earlier "strong" stance against military service to a belief that the decision

⁹⁶ Samuel Froehlich, *Meditations on the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans*, trans. Nathan Wiegand (Fairbury, IL: Heritage Center Foundation, 2017), 322, 349, 352, 350, 347.

to be nonviolent could be left up to the individual brother. In 1848 and 1849 he wrote two pastoral letters counseling brothers who were troubled by the thought of Christians bearing arms in the military. He began the first one by explaining how his views had evolved over time: “I ten to twelve years ago was strongly inclined to the side or opinion of the brothers in Canton Bern, who by a law in the church forbid, with expulsion, war service to all whom it concerned. However, since then I have reverted from this severity and hold that we are not permitted to make a law if God does not make one.” Froehlich said that he found no “divine command” or even “an inhibition concerning” military service. If God had meant for us to avoid bearing arms, he said, “God would not have left us in uncertainty concerning it, but would have given us a definite command to warn everyone” (an interesting comment coming from a man who fought vigorously against infant baptism, which lacks a direct, explicit Biblical prohibition).

Perhaps more surprisingly, Froehlich used arguments common to those who defend Christian use of violence. He acknowledged Scripture that spoke about spiritual warfare, such as in 2 Corinthians 10, but explained that Paul’s purpose there was “to preach the gospel and to maintain order in the churches,” for which “he needed not carnal but spiritual weapons.” Paul’s reference to spiritual weapons should not be applied to earthly war. “All that I find in the New Testament is that the Lord Jesus for His cause, for His spiritual kingdom, for the defense of the faith would not have it that we lay hold of carnal weapons.” This argument is somewhat similar to the argument that when dealing with spiritual things, we follow nonviolence, but when we act as agents of the state, Christians may use violence. Froehlich also referred to John the Baptist with the inquiring soldiers, and Jesus and Peter speaking to the centurions, and concluded that “the first converted believer from the heathen were of the order of war people.” All of this he believed suggested that the Bible was not entirely against Christians in the military.

Neither did Froehlich forcefully condemn killing in the military. He noted that the “commandment, Thou shalt not kill, cannot possibly apply or refer to war service, but only to high-hand perfidious killing out of hatred in peace times.” Froehlich seems to have countenanced self-defense, for he used the story of Peter in Gethsemane in a way typical of those who defend concealed-carry today: “And do think of what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, ‘He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. . . .’ In fact, Peter had a sword with him as they passed over the brook Cedron into Gethsemane. If Peter, or I would rather say Jesus, had your mind,” Froehlich wrote, “He would have said to Peter: Leave thy sword here, such be not our weapons.” At any rate, Froehlich counseled, his inquirer “would be bearing the sword only as a soldier-in-name and not for putting to death and, for that matter, could keep [his] conscience clear and serve God.”

Froehlich here may have been writing within a context of military conscription, the late 1840s being a time of revolution in Switzerland and much of the rest of Europe. As such, he seems to have been reluctant to prohibit members from exercising their duty to the state. He may

have taken a stronger stance against voluntary enlistment, especially in times of peace. But above all, he did not want to cause division in the church. He preferred that “as a matter of conscience” it should be “left to each brother’s option as to whether he would not accept such service and is willing to suffer on that account. . . . If a brother should say: I have no conscience concerning it, then should I not make him a conscience.” To conclude, Froehlich wrote, “I will say no kind word in favor of war service, but I would like to consider the matter in the right light, so that at all events no schism exists in the churches.”⁹⁷

Understanding the context of Froehlich’s letters may help us make sense of how he ended up in such an unexpected place. For someone whose church seems to have become from an early age firmly nonviolent, one would expect Froehlich to have taken an adamant position against military service. Yet, his published writings include almost nothing about the subject. He could be quite dogmatic regarding such matters as infant baptism, true conversion, and sin. He wrote with force against the union of church and state, which would have been a prime opportunity for him to denounce forced military service. Similarly, his personal marital situation caused him to write at some length about the intervention of the state into the realm of the family. It is interesting that his writings evidence little concern with issues of violence. Yet, in other ways he wrote as one who deeply valued meekness and humility among Christians, and it does not appear that many of his followers joined the military. In his two letters considered above, he identifies only one brother, a “brother J.R.,” as an example of how a Christian could join the army and still “continue in the faith and life of Jesus.” And this brother had only joined because “he believes that in this respect he must be submissive to tolerable authority.” It appears that Froehlich’s followers felt more strongly about nonviolence than he did.

If so, where did their nonviolence come from? Probably from their Anabaptist background. Froehlich preached to audiences that included Catholics, Reformed, Lutherans, and anyone else who would listen to him. Many of them joined his churches. Yet it appears that his preaching was most persuasive among Anabaptist audiences, especially in the United States. Since so much of what Apostolic Christians are known for (close church community, humility, congregationalism and egalitarian leadership, simple living, the Holy Kiss, carefulness about technology, to name a few) align closely with Anabaptist traditional distinctive practice, it only makes sense that our adherence to nonviolence stems from Froehlich’s Anabaptist followers.

At the same time, we should hesitate to say too much about how this nonviolence has played out over the centuries. Without more rigorous, perhaps academic, study, we should be careful about making assumptions regarding how firmly the Apostolic Christian Church in its various forms in Europe and the United States has advocated for nonviolence. *The Decatur Daily*

⁹⁷ *Writings of S.H. Froehlich* (Fairbury, IL: The Heritage Center Foundation, 1978), 598–603, http://www.acpublications.org/media/pdf-download/0400_complete_set_of_froehlich_writings.pdf. The letters quoted are “To Brother J. G. Graf in Karlsruhe” dated April 3, 1849 and “To Brother Hodel in Ehrstaedten” dated January 18, 1848, on pages 598-603.

Republican, a newspaper in central Illinois, on Tuesday, September 8, 1896, reveals that Elders in the Midwest directed their flocks to avoid voting in the hotly contested presidential election that featured William Jennings Bryan, an outspoken Christian whose most ardent devotees were farmers in the Midwest and Great Plains. Nonvoting signals nonviolence, since the two have gone hand in hand among some Anabaptists. Apostolic Christians endured some suspicion and persecution during World War I. Amish, Hutterites, and Mennonites had partial success avoiding combatant service in World War I, but some of them refused to even peel potatoes in the camp kitchens, judging that any contact with the military sullied their antiwar witness. By World War II Apostolic Christians were working with the national government to secure permission to be drafted as noncombatants. Finally, virtually all anecdotes pertaining to self-defense and military service suggest a strong adherence to nonviolence.

Walking the Way of Peace: Practical Issues

Cultural Difference and the Way of Peace

The Elders are encouraged to consider how the Way of Peace can be received, interpreted, and applied differently across cultures. Gun violence is hardly an issue for our churches in Japan, for instance. There, society adheres to strong social norms that are commonly perceived as polite and respectful. How may Christians be lights and witnesses by loving as Jesus loves in a culture where “niceness” is standard behavior and is often misunderstood as sufficient for salvation? Our churches in Mexico face great danger from drug cartels, who sometimes threaten members with kidnapping and ransom. In Haiti Christians suffer under the seemingly constant threat of rioting and other forms of social breakdown. The need for such cultural awareness may increase along with the internationalization of the Apostolic Christian denomination. The elders are encouraged to think about how the teaching of the Way of Peace may need to take into account these differing national contexts.

Issues Regarding Concealed Carry and Self-Defense

1. Many states have laws mandating safe gun storage at home:
<https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/child-consumer-safety/child-access-prevention/>
2. Mississippi does not allow guns in churches, even for those who have concealed carry permits. In Arkansas, **Georgia**, Louisiana, **Michigan**, **Missouri**, Nebraska, North Dakota, **Ohio**, South Carolina, and **Washington, DC**, **a person must ask the pastor for**

permission to carry a gun into church.

<https://www.concealedcarry.com/law/concealed-carry-in-churches/>

3. The use of violent force is associated with increased levels of mental illness, including depression and PTSD. This is true even for police officers: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3974970/>. Killing war is also associated with mental health problems: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jts.20451> (unfortunately this link does not provide the entire article). A pro-concealed carry website confirms that killing in self-defense often leads to psychological distress, though it blames the distress on society: <https://armedcitizensnetwork.org/preview-emotional-and-psychological-aftermath-of-a-self-defense-shooting>. Another article from the NRA!: <https://www.shootingillustrated.com/articles/2011/6/3/post-shooting-trauma/>. And another from a pro-gun site: <https://www.usconcealedcarry.com/blog/post-shooting-trauma/>. This is much more information than anyone probably wants, but it goes into detail about trauma police officers experience after shooting someone: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1310&context=thesesdissertations>. An article from Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cop-doc/201706/cops-and-ptsd-0>. The point is, shooting someone in self-defense carries significant psychological stress and can lead to mental illness.
4. There are too many stories of individuals using guns to stop crimes to say that it never happens. It does. See, for instance, this webpage from a pro-gun group: <https://www.usconcealedcarry.com/blog/category/true-stories/>. On the other hand, it is highly questionable how often “successful” self-defense with a gun happens. Here is a Harvard study that shows how gun use in self-defense is complicated: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hicrc/firearms-research/gun-threats-and-self-defense-gun-use-2/>. Another good article from *npr* is here: <https://www.npr.org/2018/04/13/602143823/how-often-do-people-use-guns-in-self-defense>. This is a study from Harvard that claims that “Compared to other protective actions, the National Crime Victimization Surveys provide little evidence that SDGU [self-defense gun use] is uniquely beneficial in reducing the likelihood of injury or property loss”: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743515001188>. A summary of the article can be found on this pro-gun control site: <https://www.thetrace.org/2015/07/defensive-gun-use-myth/>. The issue is extremely contentious, as one might expect in today’s political climate. See “Cautionary Stories of Violence” below for stories of how trusting in gun protection can be problematic. The point here is simply that using guns for self-defense is complicated, dangerous, and not always successful.
5. There are non-lethal and even non-injuring “weapons” to use for self-defense: <https://www.gearhungry.com/best-non-lethal-self-defence-weapons/>.
6. ALICE training is a popular training program for churches, schools, and other institutions worried about active shooter situations: <https://www.alicetraining.com/>.

Issues Regarding Military Service

1. Historically, the time to effectively work through the church's perspectives on military service is during a time of peace, not war. If a national emergency arises involving the return to a draft, there may not be time to wait for church leadership to issue guidance or to develop the appropriate planning needed with Selective Service. But, as we consider the *Way of Peace*, we will not only need to address the possibility of a future draft, but also the increased nationalistic and patriotic spirit that is encouraging our young people to be more inclined toward voluntary enlistment in the military.
2. To assist our church leadership in future decisions for our brotherhood, there is a need to be aware of the following:
 - a. Changes since the Vietnam war regarding a future draft.
 - b. Current issues and changes in the U.S. regarding Conscientious Objectors.
 - c. The probability of women being required to register with Selective Service.
 - d. Proposed nationalistic and patriotic initiatives for all young people in the U.S.
3. Joining the military requires the taking of the following oath. Recall that one of the problems the early church saw in joining the military was the taking of a similar oath, which in their view compromised the covenant of loyalty they had made with Jesus, their King.

I, (YOUR NAME), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.⁹⁸

This oath is to the nation, the President and the officers assigned over the soldier, not to God. Every person who joins the military pledges to carry out all military orders. The ability of an army to fulfill its task depends significantly on orders being followed promptly and exactly as they are given.

4. There is good, scholarly evidence that it is difficult for men to kill another human being. During World War II, the percentage of armed soldiers who actually fired their weapon at the enemy may have been as low as 25%. To break down these inhibitions (gained through socialization of the family and religious instruction) the military has developed training tactics that include the development of reflexive firing (shooting without

⁹⁸ U.S. Army Oath of Allegiance, www.army.mil/values/oath.html.

thinking in a way that bypasses moral decision-making) and mob psychology. This is not a matter of interpretation or anti-military sensationalism; the military is quite upfront and proactive about this. They need men to kill as obediently and efficiently as possible, and they have purposely developed training to accomplish those goals. Most of their training tactics to develop a combat mind run directly counter to Christian character. Gary Weimberg's documentary *Soldiers of Conscience* and Dave Grossman's *On Killing* book and author interview (see the Bibliography below) explain this clearly. These resources involved military participation and approval. Grossman is a strong supporter of the military.

5. The Selective Service System provides the U.S. with a structure and a system which will provide the most prompt, efficient, and equitable draft possible, if the country should need it. The Selective Service System is wholly in place today and forced conscription (the draft) could be enacted speedily. The local draft boards are trained and prepared to act in the event of a crisis requiring the callup of men to serve in the military.
6. Since there is no longer a draft, men are no longer classified now, and the military does not accept a Conscientious Objector (CO) or non-combatant as an enlistee, the separate basic training and medical training program has been eliminated. All current voluntary enlistees into the military are trained for combatant service (training with weapons), including those trained to be medics or for any other assignment.
7. Noncombatant status (what Apostolic Christians received in World War II and beyond) includes any assignment of the primary function of which does not require the use of arms in combat, provided that such assignment does not require them to bear arms or to be trained in their use. A noncombatant works within the military and is in support of military objectives. But, because of the prevalence of asymmetric warfare today, everyone in the military is now required to carry a weapon, except for chaplains. The reason is that the battle can be anywhere, at any time. There is no "rear area" like there is with conventional warfare. This means there is no safe area. Today, all medics are part of the fighting force and are required to be trained with weapons and to carry a weapon. This will not likely change in the future event of a draft. As a result, there may be fewer positions available for noncombatants. The military will have a harder time placing anyone with a "noncombatant" conviction. It is possible they could eliminate the noncombatant (1-A-O) classification, and/or the status of 1-A-O may become more difficult to obtain.
8. Conscientious Objector (1-O) draftees serve the nation separate from the military as a civilian alternative service worker. If a draft is reinstated, the Alternative Service Program of the Selective Service System is responsible for finding alternative civilian

work for registrants who have been exempted from military service and training because of conscientious objection to both combatant and noncombatant military service. However, obtaining such status is not as simple as obtaining non-combatant status in previous wars. It is a lengthy process that needs to be carefully thought out. Selective Service is equipped and eager to work with churches who seek CO status.

9. The Alternative Service Program includes those persons whose conscientious objection encompasses both combatant and noncombatant military training and service. The program allows men who have been classified 1- O by their local boards to fulfill their service obligation in a civilian capacity contributing to the maintenance of the national health, safety or interest. Other churches have long histories of participating in it in ways that fulfill our civic duties to our communities while maintaining a nonviolent Christian witness. Some churches have developed their own programs that continue in times of peace. An example of this is the Conservative Anabaptist Service Program.⁹⁹ Christian Aid Ministries in Berlin, Ohio has developed this model for how this program would work. They have partnered with the Alternative Service Program to form the Conservative Anabaptist Service Program (CASP). This program provides alternative places of employment for conscientious objectors to serve should the U.S. government activate a military draft. The goal of CASP is to provide ethical and moral work environments for conscientious objectors working in alternative service.
10. In the past, if we belonged to a certain “peace” church that was nonviolent, when we made our petition for CO status, church affiliation would give us credibility. Although the position of the church will still have value, now each person must be able to stand on their own faith and give clear personal evidence. After receiving a draft notice, the draftee will have just ten days to make a petition for conscientious objector status.
11. If a person joins the military today, they cannot enlist as a Conscientious Objector. Since there is no draft today, those who join the military voluntarily are often serving in combat units, and there is no likely possibility of them obtaining a position of noncombatant service. One cannot request a position of noncombatant in the military when no positions of noncombatant exist.
12. If a draft were held today, it would be dramatically different from the one held during the Vietnam War. A series of reforms during the latter part of the Vietnam conflict changed the way the draft operated to make it fairer and more equitable. If a draft were held today, there would be fewer opportunities to excuse a man from active military service.

⁹⁹ Conservative Anabaptist Service Program (CASP),
www.christianaidministries.org/program/conservative-anabaptist-service-program.

13. Currently, women are not required to register for a military draft and there are no laws to draft women into the military. But this could change in the event there is a need in a national emergency, and in light of the push for “gender equality” in our country. Following a unanimous recommendation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta announced, on January 24, 2013, the end of the direct ground combat exclusion rule for female service members. The service branches continue to move forward with a plan to eliminate all unnecessary gender-based barriers to service. Since front-line infantry, armor and artillery jobs are open to female volunteers, it will be difficult for anyone to make a persuasive argument that women should remain exempt from registration.

14. National Commission on Military, National, & Public Service

The National Commission on Military, National, & Public Service was created amidst a debate in Congress over whether the Selective Service registration requirement should be extended to include women. It was then expanded to include questions about the future of the Selective Service System and considerations for additional national and public service. After the Secretary of Defense opened all military combat roles to women in 2015, there have been debates in Congress about whether women should be required to register with the Selective Service System and be eligible for the draft.

The National Commission was to study and make recommendations on the draft registration, registration of women, and the feasibility and advisability of modifying the military selective service process in order to obtain for military, national, and public service individuals with the necessary technical skills for which the Nation has a critical need, without regard to age or sex. It is hoped that the increased nationalistic and patriotic sentiment will create a more positive attitude toward military service. The Congress charged the National Commission with two primary tasks, and to submit recommendations on these two tasks to the Congress and the President by March 25, 2020.

First Task

To review the selective service registration process operated by the Selective Service System. The Department of Defense would use this information to identify individuals for military service. This review would encompass whether the selective service registration requirement should be extended to include women.

Second Task

To examine and recommend ways to increase participation in military, national, and public service as a means to strengthen our nation. The Commission is exploring whether the government should require all Americans to serve in some capacity as part of their

civic duty and investigating ways to encourage more Americans to serve.

Final Report

As of March, 2020, the National Commission had been working on this for 2-1/2 years. They were commissioned by Congress to do the research and make recommendations. During 2018 and 2019, the Commission held both public and closed-door meetings with members of the public and invited experts and other witnesses. The Commission issued its Final Report on March 25, 2020. Following is a quote from the section in the final report about expanding Selective Service registration to women.

“In reviewing the question of whether Selective Service registration should include women, the Commission seriously considered a wide range of deeply felt moral, legal, and practical arguments and explored the available empirical evidence. The Commission concluded that the time is right to extend Selective Service System registration to include men and women, between the ages of 18 and 26. This is a necessary and fair step, making it possible to draw on the talent of a unified Nation in a time of national emergency.”

But, this being said, it is important to note that the National Commission doesn't write policy, nor make laws. This is the responsibility of Congress. At this point, the Military Selective Service Act language has not changed, and they are not expecting any changes to the law at this time.

Planning for the Future

Because of the increased emphasis on nationalism and patriotism in the U.S., the possibility of requiring women to register with the Selective Service and the push for universal national or public service, the recommendations in this final report will likely have implications for our church. Due to these increased efforts to promote military service, we will also need to actively discourage our young people from voluntarily enlisting in the military, and be prepared to explain the reasons. Even though these changes will not happen overnight, we believe that we need to be preparing our church for these potential outcomes.

15. During the Vietnam war era, men and women were trained separately. Currently 16% of the military is female. In the military today, there is unsegregated training with men and women. The potential for moral and spiritual compromise is a significant concern. In addition, sexual harassment and rape are a real threat to women in the military. One survey found that 30% of women reported being victims of rape or attempted rape while in the military; 75% had experienced sexual harassment (Reuters Health).

16. There are incompatible values that exist between military activity and Christian behavior. Every believer should be aware that joining the military will lead to ethical dilemmas that are virtually unavoidable. Therefore, we should not voluntarily seek to be placed in circumstances that would put us in spiritual peril. A militant spirit is clearly not the spirit of Christ. Instead, we have the opportunity to engage in Christlike behavior and should seek every opportunity to bring justice and actively foster peace. This engagement for peace is demanding and could even require more sacrifices than would violent fighting. Christian love, even for our enemies, requires great grace, courage, commitment and wisdom.

Stories of Nonviolence

1. On November 17, 2018, a gunman opened fire in the crowded Borderline Bar in Thousand Oaks, California. Thirteen people were killed, including the gunman, who shot himself. Some young men acted bravely to protect the women in the crowd without using violence. Matt Wennerstrom was one of them. Here is an article from the Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/real-men-saved-lives-in-thousand-oaks-1542066538>. If you cannot see this because of subscription requirements, many websites have news and commentary about the actions of young men. Here's one of them: [https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2018/november/ca-shooting-barstool-hero-knowingly-risked-his-life-\"i-know-where-i-\"m-going-if-i-die-\"](https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2018/november/ca-shooting-barstool-hero-knowingly-risked-his-life-\).
2. *Captive: The Untold Story of the Atlanta Hostage Hero*, by Ashley Smith, with Stacy Mattingly (William Morrow/HarperCollins). This book tells the true story of a woman who was held captive in her own apartment by an escaped prisoner. She seeks to free herself, but she resists using the criminal's gun to kill him and escape. Instead, she seeks a way to free herself while saving the criminal's life and telling him of Jesus. She tells of how, in the process of praying her way through the ordeal, she finds a deeper faith herself.
3. There are many accounts of Muslims in the Middle East turning to Jesus because Christians there serve them with love, in contrast to the division and violence they experience under Islam. Here is one account: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/muslims-turn-to-christ-in-unprecedented-numbers-pt-1/> . Here is another: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2019/12/gods-garbage-people>
4. The books *What Would You Do?*, by John Howard Yoder, and *Disarming the Church*, by Eric A. Seibert, relate stories of successful combating evil with nonviolence. Be aware that while the stories are generally good, we may disagree with some of the arguments made in these books.

Cautionary Stories of Violence

This section is not intended to prove that people do not stop crime with guns. Neither does it intend to imply that all use of guns for self-defense end with someone being killed or injured. Undeniably, some crimes are averted when a person merely points a gun at the criminal without actually firing. Likewise, some bloodshed can be limited by a person shooting the criminal and ending the mass-murder situation.

However, sometimes the use of guns for self-defense seems simpler and safer than it often is. Awful things can and do happen unintentionally. These are examples.

1. An off-duty Dallas police officer shot and killed an innocent man when she walked into a his apartment thinking it was her own: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/crime-courts/amber-guyger-sentencing-resumes-after-murder-conviction-death-botham-jean-n1061146>
2. Leigh Jones, a news editor for the podcast “The World and Everything In It,” produced by conservative evangelical *World Magazine*, tells of how her father trained her to use guns for self-defense. She tells her story here, with a surprising twist at the end: <https://worldandeverything.org/2019/09/leigh-jones-personal-trauma-and-walking-with-god/>
3. Here is the story of a mother who shot her daughter at home, thinking she was an intruder: <https://www.wkbn.com/news/local-news/police-report-mom-mistakenly-shoots-daughter-in-girard/>
4. This is a blog by a man who is pro-gun but concerned about the dangers of gun-owners who do not take necessary gun safety precautions. He claims that the chances of unexpectedly encountering a family member are far greater than encountering an intruder: <https://tacticalprofessor.wordpress.com/2019/09/04/avoiding-mistaken-identity-shootings/>.
5. A man shoots his son-in-law who jumped out from behind a bush to surprise him: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/10/03/florida-man-shot-and-killed-son-law-case-mistaken-identity/3859041002/>
6. And an article about how often this happens: <https://www.thetrace.org/2018/03/mistaken-identity-shooting-self-defense/>
7. Here is a story of how self-defense can lead to bad judgment and manslaughter: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/florida-stand-your-ground-case-michael-drejka-verdict-jury-finds-man-guilty-of-manslaughter-2019-08-23/>

Appendix A: The Veterans Memorial in Washington, Illinois

Historian Andrew Bacevich's book *The New American Militarism* describes how Americans have become enamored with their military. In the past half century they not merely express gratitude for sacrifices soldiers have made on behalf of the nation but glorify the power and sophistication of the American military machine. Americans now view the military as the guarantor of their rights and freedom.

A veterans memorial in the public Washington Park in Washington Illinois exemplifies this trend. The site had its genesis in 2004 as an Eagle Scout project, but the list of donors includes many private citizens, the Washington Chamber of Commerce, a bank, various branches of the U.S. military, the local Congressman, and numerous businesses. The state of Illinois awarded it a Governor's Home Town Award, First Place, in 2006. It truly represents a community project, and as such it indicates that the sentiments expressed by the memorial run deep in the community.



Looming over the site is a “Cobra” helicopter of the type that was made famous in Vietnam. It is poised in attack position, with its front guns set to fire on the enemy.

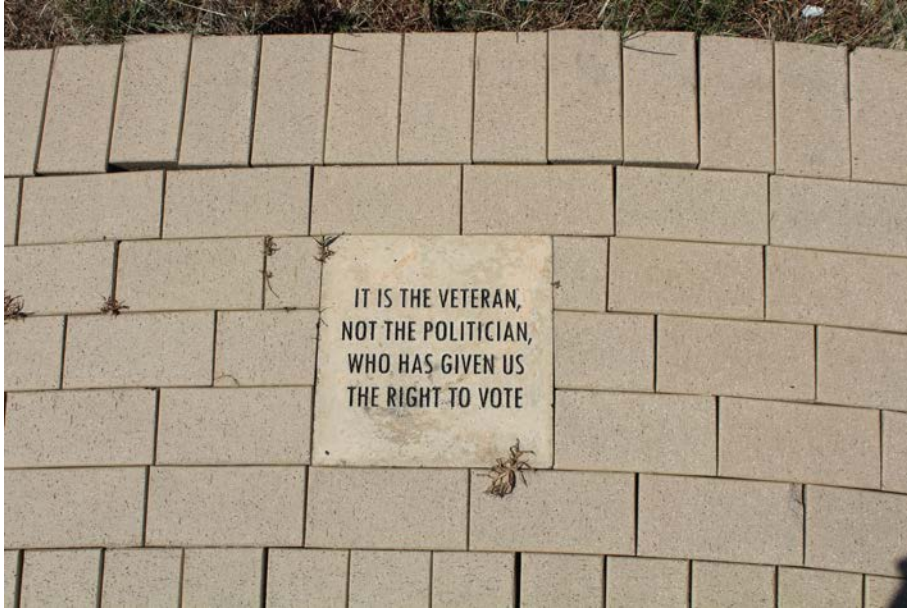


The memorial is located right next to a public grade school and across the street from the main public park. Children walking to and from school each day will pass by the helicopter, which sits a mere twenty to thirty feet from the street. Likewise, people enjoying the park could hardly miss seeing the memorial. In this way the memorial normalizes in the minds of local families the presence of the American military in its most intimidating form.

In this picture the school is visible in the background. A baseball diamond is directly to the left of the memorial.



Bricks set around the edge of the memorial make it clear that Americans owe their freedoms to the military, not to private citizens or God.



This includes our religious freedom.



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