

forbade David to build His temple because David was a man of war, telling him: “You may not build a house for my name, for you are a warrior and have shed blood” (1 Chron. 28:3).

## II. THE NEW TESTAMENT VIEW OF WAR

God allowed the Israelites of Old Testament times to engage in many practices that were against His ultimate will for mankind. He therefore prohibited Christians from engaging in practices which had been permitted to the Israelites, such as polygamy and indiscriminate divorce. Apparently, war also fell into this category. Through the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, God breathed a new spirit of love and gentleness into the entire world. For example, Jesus told his followers: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:38, 39, 43, 44).

Those were revolutionary teachings, and they were the opposite of what most Jews expected to hear from the Messiah. The Jews were expecting a Messiah who would lead them in a victorious war of liberation from the Roman yoke. For the Messiah to tell them to love their enemies and to turn the other cheek was more than many were willing to accept. Because of Jesus’ message of love and the miracles he performed in harmony with it, some of the Jewish leaders feared that the people would follow him and bring disaster on the nation. As certain Jewish leaders remarked: “If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation” (John 11:48). But Jesus not only *taught* against violence, he lived what he taught. He never used physical violence to defend himself or his disciples. In fact, when Peter used a sword to try to defend him on the night of his arrest, Jesus told him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52).

The apostles taught as their Master did. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly” (2 Cor. 10:3, 4). He also told the Ephesians, “For we are not contending against flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12). In his letter to the Romans, Paul taught Christians to “bless

# The Early Christian View of War\*

DAVID W. BERCOT

Of all the evils that plague mankind, war is perhaps the greatest. In this century alone, war has claimed over 70,000,000 lives. Over the past few decades, more and more thinking Christians have asked themselves: “How should a Christian view war?”

## I. THE OLD TESTAMENT VIEW OF WAR

In the Old Testament we find that God not only permitted the Israelites to engage in war, He often commanded them to do so. Yet, these were not merely earthly wars. God often gave supernatural assistance to the Israelites in their battles, and He sometimes fought entire battles for them without their having to lift a sword (2 Kings 19:35, 36; 2 Chron. 20:15-23; Ex. 14:23-28). He specifically taught the Israelites to rely upon Him for their protection, and He punished them severely when they relied upon the strength of their armies or upon military alliances (1 Chron. 21:1-8; 2 Chron. 16:1-9).

God also indicated that participation in war was not His ultimate purpose for mankind. He foretold a time when He would judge between the nations and they would “beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks” and would train for war no more (Isa. 2:4). God

\*Originally appeared in *The Christian Quest*, Summer 1989, Vol. 2, No. 1. Used by permission.

those who persecute you. . . . Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:14-21).

To live literally by the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, a Christian obviously could not engage in warfare. But are we meant to take these teachings so literally? How did the first-century Christians apply these teachings to war? Unfortunately, the Scriptures are fairly silent on this matter. However, this silence is not strange. Jesus’ disciples were nearly all Jews, and so were most Christians until the latter part of the first century. Most Jews living in the first century never faced the issue of participation in war because there was no national Jewish army and the Romans prohibited Jews from serving in the Roman army. So about the only occasion that most would have had to engage in war was during the Jewish revolt against the Romans, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. However, history does testify that Jewish Christians did not take part in that uprising; rather they fled from Jerusalem at their first opportunity.

Because the New Testament does not specifically address the question of Christians serving in the military or engaging in warfare, the writings of the early Christians from the second and third centuries have become invaluable. They help us to know how the early Church understood the application of New Testament teachings to war. In quoting from these early Christian writings, we should remember that they are not an inspired source of *authority* apart from the Bible (nor were they intended to be such), but rather they are *evidence* of how the Church originally viewed war.

### III. THE EARLY CHRISTIAN VIEW OF WAR (100-311 C.E.)

Although the New Testament writings leave room for doubt on the subject of Christian participation in war, the same cannot be said of the second- and third-century Christian writings. War is specifically discussed in many of those writings, and the attitude of the Church towards war is very clear: the Church unequivocally equated war with murder. In fact, the Church pointed to the slaughter and cruelty of wars as examples of the vilest sins ever committed by mankind.<sup>1</sup> Rather than praising war,

<sup>1</sup>For example, see Athenagoras, *Resurrection of the Dead*, chap. xix in *The Ante-*

the early Christians uniformly taught that in order for a person to be obedient to Christ, he must love his enemies and never return evil for evil. They understood the prophecy of Isaiah 2:4 to apply to the Church, and Christians symbolically “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.”

For example, Justin Martyr (110-165 C.E.) wrote in his *Apology* to the Romans: “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 nor deceive our examiners, willingly die confessing Christ.”<sup>2</sup> In another work he wrote, “. . . we who were filled with war, and mutual slaughter, and every wickedness, have each through the whole earth changed our warlike weapons,—our swords into plowshares and our spears into implements of tillage. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Tertullian (170-230 C.E.) raised the following question about war: “Shall it be held lawful to make an occupation of the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword? And shall the son of peace take part in the battle when it does not become him even to sue at law? And shall he apply the chain, and the prison, and the torture and the punishment, who is not the avenger even of his own wrongs?”<sup>4</sup>

When pagans circulated a rumor to the effect that Christianity was a sect which had broken away from Judaism by armed revolt, Origen answered this false charge with the words:

And yet, if a revolt had led to the formation of the Christian commonwealth, so that it derived its existence in this way from that of the Jews, who were permitted to take up arms in defence of the members of their families, and to slay their enemies, the Christian Lawgiver would not have altogether forbidden the putting of men to death; and yet He [Jesus] nowhere teaches that it is right for His own disciples to offer violence to any one, however wicked. For He did not deem it in keeping with such laws as His, which were derived from a divine source, to allow the killing of any individual whatever. Nor would the Christians, had they owed their origin to a rebellion, have adopted laws of so exceedingly mild a character as not to allow them, when it was their fate to be slain as sheep, on any occasion to resist their persecutors.<sup>5</sup>

*Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), Vol. II, 159, 160. Hereafter *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* is listed simply by the letters ANF.

<sup>2</sup>Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Chap. XXXIX in ANF, Vol. I, 176.

<sup>3</sup>Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chap. CX in ANF, Vol. I, 254.

<sup>4</sup>Tertullian, *De Corona*, Chap. XI in ANF, Vol. III, 99.

<sup>5</sup>Origen, *Against Celsus*, Book III, Chap. 7 in ANF, Vol. IV, 467.

Cyprian (200-258 C.E.), a contemporary of Origen and the bishop or overseer in the church at Carthage, made the following observation about war: "The whole world is wet with mutual blood; and murder, which in the case of an individual is admitted to be a crime, is called a virtue when it is committed wholesale. Impunity is claimed for the wicked deeds, not on the plea that they are guiltless, but because the cruelty is perpetrated on a grand scale."<sup>6</sup>

Arnobius (260-303 C.E.), a Christian apologist, explained the Christian position on war to the Romans in this manner: "For since we, a numerous band of men as we are, having learned from His teaching and His laws that evil ought not to be requited [repaid] with evil, that it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it, that we should rather shed our own blood than stain our hands and our conscience with that of another, an ungrateful world is now for a long period enjoying a benefit from Christ, inasmuch as by His means the rage of savage ferocity has been softened, and has begun to withhold hostile hands from the blood of a fellow creature."<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Lactantius (260-330 C.E.), who tutored Constantine's son, wrote:

For when God forbids us to kill, He not only prohibits us from open violence, which is not even allowed by the public laws, but He warns us against the commission of those things which are esteemed lawful among men. Thus it will be neither lawful for a just man to engage in warfare, since his warfare is justice itself, nor to accuse any one of a capital charge, because it makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word, or rather by the sword, since it is the act of putting to death which is prohibited. Therefore with this precept of God, there ought to be no exception at all; but that it is always unlawful to put to death a man, whom God willed to be a sacred animal.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that the Christian writers quoted herein were not simply some independent thinkers stating their own personal views about war. From Eusebius' *History of the Church*, it is clear that all of them were considered to represent the thinking of the Church in general.<sup>9</sup> Nowhere in the pre-Nicene writings of the Church is warfare or military service spoken of as something praiseworthy. At a time when military valor was considered to be one of the greatest of virtues by the world, the early

<sup>6</sup>Cyprian, *To Donatus*, Sec. 6 in ANF, Vol. V, 277.

<sup>7</sup>Arnobius, *Against the Heathen*, Sec. 6 in ANF Vol. VI, 415.

<sup>8</sup>Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, Book VI, Chap. 20 in ANF, Vol. VII, 187.

<sup>9</sup>Tertullian, however, later joined the Montanist sect.

Christians stood alone in declaring that war was simply murder on a grand scale. The refusal of Christians to join the army and to engage in warfare was noted by the Romans, and many of them, such as Celsus (130-180 C.E.), castigated the Christians for their stance. Celsus went so far as to suggest that, because Christians did not assume their necessary "civic obligations," they should not be allowed to marry or bear children, so that they would eventually become extinct.<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. ACCEPTANCE OF SOLDIERS INTO THE CHURCH

Despite the early Church's condemnation of war and killing, it did not require a soldier to leave the army before being baptized as a Christian. The earliest example of this position is, of course, that of Cornelius, who was a military officer at the time he was baptized by Peter. We might speculate that Cornelius later resigned his military commission, but the Scriptures are silent about that.

Many commentators believe that the Church originally required soldiers to leave the army after their conversion but that it later softened its position with respect to that matter. In support of this view, they cite the fact that there is no evidence that any Christians served as soldiers before the time of Marcus Aurelius (121-180 C.E.).<sup>11</sup> However, the truth of the matter is that historical records are simply silent. There is no absolute proof that Christians did not serve in the Roman army before the reign of Marcus Aurelius. But given the strong pacifistic sentiment of the second- and third-century Church, it is hard to believe that most would have softened their attitude towards military service. Surely, if there had been such a general change in the Church's teaching, men like Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian would have commented on it. Yet none of them give any indication that it had done so, and as has already been noted, all three were outspoken pacifists. But most important, they seem without question to represent the overwhelming sentiment of the Church as a whole during their time.

Actually, the refusal of the early Church to make any disciplinary rules about Christian soldiers is quite consistent with its position on most other issues of morality. It was very reluctant to make any new commandments or disciplinary rules that had not been handed down by Jesus or the

<sup>10</sup>Origen, *Against Celsus*, Book VII, Chap. 55.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 1153.

apostles. Therefore, since the Scriptures do not specifically prohibit a Christian from serving as a soldier, it made no such prohibition. Besides, it should be remembered that the Roman Empire was at relative peace during much of this early period of Christianity, so it was quite possible that a Christian could spend his entire life in the army and never be required to shed blood or violate any other Christian principles. In fact, during the first and second centuries, soldiers primarily served in a capacity similar to modern police officers. Yet even in battle, a Christian would avoid shedding blood, albeit at the risk of his own life.

That this was the case is demonstrated by a letter purportedly written by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius concerning the conduct of Christian soldiers when he was fighting to defend the northern frontiers of the Roman Empire against Barbarian hordes. We cannot prove that that letter was actually written by that emperor, although Justin Martyr believed it to be genuine. He included a transcript of it in his first Apology, which was addressed to the Roman emperor, Antonius Pius, the adoptive father of Marcus Aurelius. This letter is the earliest historical reference to Christian soldiers, and it proves that even they were known for their position of non-violence. In it, Marcus Aurelius describes how he and his troops were hemmed in by opposing forces and were about to perish from thirst. He then goes on to say:

Having then examined my own position, and my host, with respect to the vast hordes of the barbarian enemies, I quickly prayed to the gods of my country. When my prayers were unanswered, I summoned those among us who go by the name of Christians. After inquiring, I found that there were a considerable number of them and so I began to revile them. But my curses were quite undeserved, for I soon learned of their power firsthand.

. . . they began the battle, not by preparing weapons, nor arms, nor bugles; for such preparation is hateful to them, on account of the God they bear in their conscience. Therefore it is probable that those whom we suppose to be atheists have God as their ruling power entrenched in their conscience. For having cast themselves on the ground, they prayed not only for me, but also for the whole army as it stood, that they might be delivered from the present thirst and famine. . . . And simultaneously with their casting themselves on the ground, and praying to God (a God of whom I am ignorant), water poured from heaven, upon us most refreshingly cool, but upon the enemies of Rome a withering hail.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Justin, *First Apology*, Chap. 68 in ANF, Vol. I, 187.

Roman historical records verify the account described in this letter, although they do not credit the prayers of the Christians for bringing the life-saving rain. This account is important, however, in that it demonstrates that the position of non-violence was maintained even by those Christians serving as soldiers.

Admittedly, it would be hard to serve as a soldier and not face situations involving a choice between serving Christ or serving Caesar. Early Christian writings cite many examples of Christian soldiers who eventually were commanded to perform acts that they could not do and keep their faith. Unfortunately, the grim alternative was nearly always death.<sup>13</sup> Christian soldiers were rarely allowed simply to leave the army. This may have been another reason why the Church did not insist that a soldier abandon the army upon his conversion. Of course, it is unlikely that many of those who became members of the early Christian community joined the Roman legions *after* their conversion. Since Rome rarely conscripted anyone into its armies, there would be little reason for a Christian voluntarily to enter a situation that would severely test his integrity to Christ and quite possibly cost him his life.

## V. THE EARLY CHRISTIANS' STANCE OF NON-VIOLENCE

Christians not only refrained from participation in war, they detested any form of violence whatsoever. As Tertullian explained to the Romans: “. . . in our religion it is counted better to be slain than to slay.”<sup>14</sup> The early Christians so utterly abhorred violence that they refused to attend the bloody gladiatorial games or to watch public executions—all of which were considered normal pastimes in Roman society. For example, Athenagoras (150-190 C.E.) wrote: “For when they know that we cannot endure even to see a man put to death, though justly, who of them can accuse us of murder or cannibalism? Who does not reckon among the things of greatest interest the contests of gladiators and wild beasts . . . ? But we, deeming that to see a man put to death is much the same as killing him, have abjured such spectacles.”<sup>15</sup> Minucius Felix (170-215 C.E.), a Christian lawyer, explained to the Romans: “To us it is not lawful to see or hear of homicide [that is, to watch or hear humans be put to death]; and so much

<sup>13</sup> For example, see Eusebius, *History of the Church*, Book VII, Chap. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Tertullian, *Apology*, Chap. 37 in ANF, Vol. III, 45.

<sup>15</sup> Athenagoras, *Embassy*, Chap. 35 in ANF, Vol. II, 147.



do we shrink from human blood, that we do not use the blood of eatable animals in our food.”<sup>16</sup>

#### VI. THE CHURCH’S NON-VIOLENT RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION

From the time of the Emperor Trajan, around 100 C.E., until the Edict of Milan was issued in 313, the practice of Christianity was illegal within the confines of the Roman Empire. Just being a Christian was a crime punishable with death. But Roman officials did not ordinarily hunt out Christians. They tended to ignore them unless someone formally accused them of being Christians. Thus persecution was sporadic and intermittent. Christians in one place would suffer horrible torture and death while those in nearby areas would remain untouched. Persecution was therefore totally unpredictable; yet every Christian lived daily with the threat of a death sentence over his or her head.

Although most Christians tried to flee local persecution when possible (in obedience to Matthew 10:23), they did not use force to defend themselves against persecutors. Like little children, they believed their Master when He said that His church was built on a rock over which the gates of Hades could not prevail. They realized fully that thousands of them might suffer imprisonment, experience excruciating tortures, and die monstrous deaths. But they were absolutely convinced that their heavenly Father would not let the church be annihilated. Christians stood before Roman officials with naked hands, letting them know that they would not use human means to try to preserve the church. They trusted God, and God alone, as their protector. As Origen told the Roman people:

When God gives to the Tempter permission to persecute us, then we suffer persecution; and when God wishes us to be free from suffering, even in the midst of a world that hates us, we enjoy a wonderful peace, trusting in the protection of Him who said, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” And truly He has overcome the world. Wherefore the world prevails only so long as it is the pleasure of Him who received from the Father power to overcome the world; and from His victory we take courage. Should He even wish us again to contend and struggle for our religion, let the enemy come against us, and we will say to them, I can do all things through Christ Jesus our Lord, which strengthens me.<sup>17</sup>

Origen had lost his father to persecution when he was a teenager, and

<sup>16</sup>Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, Chap. 30 in ANF, Vol. IV, 192.

<sup>17</sup>Origen, *Celsus*, Book VIII, Chap. 70 in ANF, Vol. IV, 666.

he himself eventually died from torture and imprisonment at the hands of the Romans. Yet, with unshakable confidence he stated: “. . . every form of worship will be destroyed except the religion of Christ, which will alone prevail. And indeed it will one day triumph, as its principles take possession of the minds of men more and more every day.”<sup>18</sup>

#### VII. SHOULD NOT CHRISTIANS DEFEND THEIR COUNTRY?

“Does not a Christian have a responsibility to defend his country?” The early Christians would have answered, “Yes, but in a very different way from that employed by ‘men of the world.’” “One of the underlying principles of early Christianity was that the end does not justify the means. The Church taught that how something is accomplished is just as important as what is accomplished. Overcoming evil by adopting evil methods was totally unacceptable to the early Church. Although the Romans considered it noble to defend the Empire by shedding other men’s blood, Christians viewed such an action as sinful. Lactantius explained:

It is not virtue, therefore, either to be the enemy of the bad or the defender of the good, because virtue cannot be subject to uncertain chances. . . . When the agreement of men is taken away, virtue has no existence at all; for what are the interests of our country, but the inconveniences of another state or nation? —that is, to extend the boundaries which are violently taken from others, to increase the power of the state, to improve the revenues, —all which things are not virtues: for, in the first place, the union of human society is taken away, innocence is taken away, the abstaining from the property of another is taken away; lastly, justice itself is taken away, which is unable to bear the tearing asunder of the human race, and wherever arms have glittered, must be banished and exterminated from thence. This saying of Cicero’s is true: “But they who say regard is to be had to citizens, but that it is not to be had to foreigners, these destroy the common society of the human race; and when this is removed, beneficence, liberality, kindness, and justice are entirely taken away.” For how can a man be just who injures, who hates, who despoils, who puts to death? And they who strive to be serviceable to their country do all these things. . . .

Nor . . . [can] a man who gives way to grief and anger, and who indulges these affections, against which he ought rather to struggle, and who rushes wherever injustice shall have called him, does not fulfil the duty of virtue. For he who endeavors to return an injury, desires to imitate that very person

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, Chap. 68.

by whom he has been injured. Thus he who imitates a bad man can by no means be good.<sup>19</sup>

The Roman critic Celsus had censured the Christians for failing to defend the Empire, to which Origen replied:

... Celsus urges us “to help the king [emperor] with all our might, and to labour with him in the maintenance of justice, to fight for him; and if he requires it, to fight under him, or lead an army along with him.” To this our answer is, that we do, when occasion requires, give help to kings, and that, so to say, a divine help, “putting on the whole armour of God.” And this we do in obedience to the injunction of the apostle, “I exhort, therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority;” and the more anyone excels in piety, the more effective help does he render to kings, even more than is given by soldiers, who go forth to fight and slay as many of the enemy as they can. And to those enemies of our faith who require us to bear arms for the commonwealth, and to slay men, we can reply: “Do not those who are priests at certain shrines, and those who attend on certain gods, as you account them, keep their hands free from blood, that they may with hands unstained and free from human blood offer the appointed sacrifices to your gods; and even when war is upon you, you never enlist the priests in the army. If that, then, is a laudable custom, then how much more so, that while others are engaged in battle, these too should engage as the priests and ministers of God, keeping their hands pure, and wrestling in prayers to God on behalf of those who are fighting in a righteous cause, and for the king who reigns righteously, that whatever is opposed to those who act righteously may be destroyed!” And as we by our prayers vanquish all demons who stir up war, and lead to the violation of oaths, and disturb the peace, we in this way are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them. And we do take our part in public affairs, when along with righteous prayers we join self-denying exercises and meditations, which teach us to despise pleasures, and not to be led away by them. And none fight better for the king than we do. We do not indeed fight under him, although he require it; but we fight on his behalf, forming a special army—an army of piety—by offering our prayers to God.<sup>20</sup>

#### VIII. IS PACIFISM WORKABLE?

We may be inclined to call the early Christian pacifistic view unrealistic; the early Christians called it trust. Who is right? History indicates

<sup>19</sup>Lactantius, *Institutes*, Book VI, Chap. 6 in ANF, Vol. VII.

<sup>20</sup>Origen, *Celsus*, Book VIII, Chap. 73 in ANF, Vol. IV, 668.

that perhaps those Christians were not so naive as they might seem to many today. During the period from the birth of Christ to 180 C.E., the Roman Empire experienced a period of general peace, and it did not even suffer one successful invasion of its frontiers. Historians call this the period of the *Pax Romana* or Roman Peace and view it as a rather extraordinary period in the history of western civilization. Of course no secular historian would credit this peace to the presence and prayers of the Christians, but they firmly believed that it was the result of divine intervention.

For example, Origen told the Romans: “How, then, was it possible for the Gospel doctrine of peace, which does not permit men to take vengeance even upon enemies, to prevail throughout the world, unless at the advent of Jesus a milder spirit had been everywhere introduced into the conduct of things?”<sup>21</sup> In contrast, after the time of Constantine, when Christian teachers such as Augustine began teaching the doctrine of “just war” and Christians had come to support Rome with the sword, the Empire experienced serious invasions and within a century thereafter the collapse of the Western Roman Empire itself before barbarian hordes. Did the Roman Empire fall because the Church changed its position on war? No one can answer that question with certainty. But at the very least it is certainly a remarkable coincidence that Rome prospered and was safe from its enemies as long as the early Christians served as a “special army of righteousness,” trusting only in God for the Empire’s protection, but that once they began to wage physical war on behalf of Rome, the Empire collapsed.

The efficacy of loving one’s enemy is also demonstrated by the early Christians’ response to persecution. Even though the Church looked solely to God for protection, refusing to fight back against its persecutors, Rome was never able to annihilate it. In fact, the vast majority of early Christians never suffered imprisonment, torture, or death. Of course loving their persecutors took an enormous amount of faith and courage, for thousands were killed in persecution. But far more would have died had they fought or resisted violently. Far from annihilating the Church, persecution actually led to its rapid growth. As Tertullian reminded the Romans: “The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed. . . . For who that contemplates it [the constancy of Christians under persecution], is not excited to inquire what

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, Book II, Chap. 30 in ANF, Vol. IV, 444.

is at the bottom of it? Who, after inquiry, does not embrace our doctrines? And when he has embraced them, desires not to suffer that he may become [a] partaker of God's grace . . . ?"<sup>22</sup>

#### IX. CONCLUSION

To the early Christians, Jesus' command to love their enemies was not seen as some unattainable ideal but, rather, as a way of life. They applied His teachings quite literally and refused to fight against those who persecuted them. They also labeled war simply as murder on a grand scale. At the same time, the Church did not insist that a soldier leave the army upon his conversion, but it did expect him to refrain from torturing or killing others. Today's churches could well learn from the example of those early Christians so that we would be able to say as did they: "We love one another with a mutual love, because we do not know how to hate."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>Tertullian, *Apology*, Chap. 50 in ANF, Vol. III, 55.

<sup>23</sup>Felix, *Octavius*, Chap. 31.