

Christians and War

by Anthony F. Buzzard

A. Historical perspective:

“The plain fact is that the church since the first century and with few exceptions has never, despite its protestations, taken Christ with complete seriousness...‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus’” (Charles E. Raven, *The Theological Basis of Christian Pacifism*, p. 22).

“Since 313 AD the Church has officially accepted war...In a sense the battle was lost in 313: the battle, I mean, to be in the world, yet not of it” (Geoffrey Nuttall, *Christian Pacifism in History*, p. 5-6).

“We have no direct or reliable evidence for the existence of a single Christian soldier...[until] 173 AD...The tendency to refuse [military] service continued to be, even towards the middle of the third century, still very strong in the Christian Church” (*Ibid.*, p. 7).

“In the first century there is no evidence of any Christian taking part in political life; and even in the third we still have a profession of entire unconcern in the matter of political ambitions and interests. The idea of a Christian civilization, of a spirit which should penetrate, mould, and renew the common life, was entirely absent” (*Ibid.*, p. 8-9).

“The early Christian attitude to war was more like that of the people who call themselves Jehovah’s Witnesses than it is comfortable for us to suppose. They ‘contracted out’ of all political responsibilities” (*Ibid.*, p. 12).

“The ‘sect-type’ Christian groups represent an awakened community of believers, living apart from the world. This presents in a very direct and characteristic way the essential fundamentals of Christianity” (Ernst Troeltsch, *Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, p. 725).

“Christianity was, in its earliest days, entirely unpolitical. The best representatives of the primitive tradition in our time are the Christadelphians, who...refuse to have any part or lot in secular affairs” (Bertrand Russell, *Power*, p. 83).

“If we are to obey in detail the injunctions that were given to the first Christians, we must put ourselves in the same position as the first Christians, and regard ourselves as a small band of believers, living in a world that as a whole has not accepted Christ, following the path of separation...This is the line actually followed by some of the smaller Christian sects, such as the Christadelphians and the Plymouth Brethren...I feel little doubt that their attitude is much closer to the attitude of the earliest Christians than that of the larger religious bodies” (Prof. G.C. Field, *Pacifism and Conscientious Objection*, p. 78).

B. Wherein lies Christian obedience?

Galatians 6:16: The Church is the international Israel of God without national distinctions (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28).

What sort of weapons are to be used? (Eph. 6:12, 2 Cor. 10:4)

“Unless we deny our Lord, our loyalty to Christ’s worldwide body of brothers and sisters must far exceed any loyalty to nation or country. ‘If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together’ (1 Cor. 12:26). Has not the long, tragic history of European wars made a mockery of this biblical belief in the unity of Christ’s body?...Over the centuries, European Christians have slaughtered their brothers and sisters in Christ by the millions” (Ronald Sider and Richard Taylor, *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope*, 1982, p. 84-85)

The Christian status as resident aliens:

John 17:16: Like Jesus, we “do not belong to this world system.”

John 18:36: “If my Kingdom belonged to this world system, my servants would fight.”

Matt. 5:44, 39: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Do not resist an evil person.”

Rom. 12:19: “Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God.”

2 Cor. 5:20: “We are ambassadors representing Messiah.”

1 Peter 2:11: “I urge you as foreigners and resident aliens to abstain from the lusts of human nature.”

Acts 5:29: “We must obey God rather than people.”

Matt. 26:52: “Everyone who picks up the sword will perish by the sword.”

Rev. 13:10: “If anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed.”

Luke 9:54, 55: “Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and burn them up? But Jesus turned and reprimanded them.”

Rom. 13:7: “Give to everyone what is due them: taxes, revenue, respect, honor.”

Rom. 16:20: “The God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet.”

Love is the identifying badge of the Christian community (John 13:35).

Questions:

Will God usher into His kingdom those who have the blood of their fellow Christians on their hands?

Would Jesus be prepared to push the nuclear button?

Should we make our position quite clear? (as on abortion)

Do world leaders display evidence of hope?

Where does our hope lie? (2 Cor. 1:9)

Can pressing the button or allying ourselves with those who are prepared to do this, be an expression of Christian love?

Can maiming and killing and irradiating unborn children be an expression of love?

To whom does vengeance belong?

“The world made a lovely beginning,
But was spoiled at the start by man’s sinning.
We know that the story
Will end with God’s glory —
But at present the other side’s winning.”

— Anonymous