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## **THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR**

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## **THE CHRISTIAN AND WAR**

### **A SCRIPTURAL AND HISTORICAL STUDY**

AFTER the Crimean and American Civil wars, the English speaking peoples passed through half a century without experience of a major conflict. Since 1914 men have been stirred to the depths by the horrors and the sorrows of two world wars. The possibility of a third such catastrophe, together with the development of terrible instruments of mass slaughter, has roused conflicting emotions of resignation, frustration and determination. The nation may be suddenly threatened. What is a Christian's duty? Is he to resort to all possible means to defend his country, or is he to do nothing to aid his fellow men in their time of trial? Does the New Testament point to a course of action the Christian may adopt, and face God and his fellow men without shame?

Our purpose in this booklet is first to present the teaching of Jesus and of his apostles having a decisive bearing upon the subject, and also to consider carefully several matters arising therefrom; then to sketch and finally to discuss the, attitude of the Christian Church to the problem of military service from approximately the end of the first to the middle of the fourth century A.D.

## "NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS"

Here is the first point to note in the Lord's teaching: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon",<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Matt. 6 : 24.

In modern industry and the professions, service is subject to certain conditions. The servant may end his service if he is so disposed. This is not the kind of service relevant to our subject, for three reasons :

1. In ancient times, including the early Christian centuries, slavery was a widespread and familiar institution. A slave was absolutely bound to his master. This is the type of service in view in this Scripture, which may be properly rendered "No man can be a slave to two masters". No slave can give absolute obedience to two masters; it might be done for a time, but a clash is inevitable.
2. A Christian has pledged full and unqualified obedience to Jesus Christ. Often he fails to live up to his pledge owing to weakness of various kinds. When his weakness assumes a deliberate aspect, then he is despising his Lord and has in fact ceased to render true service. The service required of a Christian is absolute. He may not pledge himself to full and unqualified service to another or others.
3. Modern military service, combatant and non-combatant, is also of an absolute nature. Unqualified obedience is explicitly laid down and implicitly understood. No man can so serve two masters, especially when the nature of military service is seen to be incompatible with the commands and example of Jesus Christ.

Two matters lend themselves to exhortation here:-

1. The Lord's teaching is that no man can give full service to two masters. The particular rival to God in the text in Matthew is Mammon. Full service to God and to Mammon cannot be given. The diligence enjoined in Proverbs and the integrity required by the whole tenor of Scripture, often result in a Christian improving his position in this life, sometimes considerably so if he has a flair for commerce or is gifted in his profession. It is necessary to remember that service to Christ comes first. The pursuit of wealth and the love of money are as contrary to New Testament teaching as military service though they often receive less censure.

Imagine a Christian whose first love is his worldly career, but whose service to Christ is meagre. He has a son who is following in his father's disappointing footsteps. The son appears before a Tribunal desiring exemption on the ground that he cannot render allegiance to two masters; he has chosen Christ. If the family record were known to the Tribunal, some awkward moral questions might be asked. The home record is not known, and the son secures exemption. The circumstances, however, are known to God. It would be pleasing to complete the picture by supposing that while working on the land to fulfil the conditions of his exemption the son learns that there are other values than those to which his father has been a slave, and that he makes good in the sight of God.

2. Whilst the Christian chooses or is drawn fully to serve his Lord, some fine young men volunteer to serve in the armed forces. In time of war many of these young men display the utmost gallantry and self-sacrifice. If when Christians feel disinclined to undertake some reasonable service for the Lord they serve, there could be displayed a film of some of the brave deeds done on land, sea and in the air, they might feel deeply disturbed.<sup>1</sup> Now the soldier strives for a corruptible crown or for no crown at all, but the Christian for an incorruptible.

When, therefore, in refusing military service the sound reason is advanced that we cannot serve two masters, it is well to be sure we are fully serving the One. The declining of military service should not be a convenient tenet of the faith, but a logical outcome of complete devotion to Jesus Christ.

## **MILITARY SERVICE INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE COMMANDS OF JESUS CHRIST**

The second point in the teaching of Jesus is that its whole tenor is directly opposed to either resistance or injury to enemies: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: 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. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also . . . Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 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. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?"<sup>2</sup>

When his disciples were tempted to or actually did violate his teaching, Jesus rebuked them: "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, 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".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*They would at the same time be finally convinced of the complete incompatibility of participation in modern warfare with the Christian life.*

<sup>2</sup>*Matt. 5 : 38-46.* <sup>3</sup>*Luke 9 : 51-56.*

At the arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane, "behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword".<sup>1</sup>

Another saying of Jesus when he was before Pilate has considerable significance. He said: "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".<sup>2</sup> Here Jesus distinguished his kingdom from the kingdoms of men. Because of the obligations and anticipation of the divine kingdom to which he stood related, neither he nor his servants could take part in the strifes of the present world order.

Jesus knew that in the near future his disciples would find themselves in a situation in which the very existence of their own beloved nation would be at stake. What were they to do in such circumstances? "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto".<sup>3</sup>

In the face of enemies whom he could easily not only have defied but destroyed, Jesus exemplified his own teaching, thereby fulfilling the gracious prophetic word concerning him: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth".<sup>4</sup>

At his hearing before the high priest after his arrest: "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands".<sup>5</sup> "And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?"<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Matt. 26 : 51-52. <sup>2</sup> John 18 : 36. <sup>3</sup> Luke 21 : 20-21

<sup>4</sup>Isa. 53 : 7. <sup>5</sup>Matt. 26 : 67. <sup>6</sup>John 18: 22-23.

## **JESUS DID NOT USE FORCE TO ADVANCE HIS CAUSE**

The third point to be noted in the Lord's teaching is that although his land was ruled by foreign conquerors, he refused to resort to force to establish the most righteous cause the world has known. When he was tempted to take the kingdoms of this world and their glory, it is likely the means to gratify the temptation lay in the power he had to conquer by the aid of the heavenly legions which would have been at his command. This would have been a surrender to a wrong principle, however plausibly disguised. Again: "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone"<sup>1</sup>

## **THE TEACHING OF THE APOSTLES**

The teaching of the apostles follows similar lines to that of their Lord. There is no passage in their writings so explicit on the impossibility of serving two masters as the Lord's saying of Matt. 6:24. We are to be content with warnings that the Christian will not be able fully to please men: "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ".<sup>2</sup> "But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but

God, which trieth our hearts".<sup>3</sup> "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him".<sup>4</sup>

There is a remarkable passage in the Epistle of James: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts".<sup>5</sup>

Here is an exposure and condemnation of fighting and warfare. The epistle was addressed to Jews. It was written at a time when sedition and acts of violence were becoming common as the national temper rose against Roman domination. Once the spirit of aggression was roused, its scope was not limited to foreign tyranny, but vented itself in acts of private lawlessness and the conflict of Jew with Jew which did not cease until the last days of the siege of Jerusalem itself.

<sup>1</sup> John 6:15. <sup>2</sup> Gal. 1:10. <sup>3</sup> 1Thess. 2:4. <sup>4</sup> 1 John 2:15. <sup>5</sup> Jas. 4:1-3.

The law of love for all, including enemies, as set forth by Jesus, is directly confirmed: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not . . . Recompense to no man evil for evil . . . Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good".<sup>1</sup> "For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. I speak as concerning reproach . . ." <sup>2</sup> "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men, even as we do toward you".<sup>3</sup>

The apostles made no attempt to establish the rule of Christ by forcible means, by, for example, forming a determined band of men who might carve out a Christian domain or even sweep the East, as actually happened with the rise of Islam six centuries later; and some, at least, of the apostles, were men of strong passions. Instead, they followed the line of action laid down by their Master, as indicated, for example, in "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves".<sup>4</sup> At a time when public opinion was turning against the Church, Peter commanded all to remember the example of their Lord: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously".<sup>5</sup>

Having now set forth the main teaching and clear example of Jesus and the apostles, we now have to deal with certain matters relative to their testimony.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 12:14-21. <sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 11:20-21. <sup>3</sup> 1 Thess. 3:12. <sup>4</sup> Matt. 10:16. <sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 2:21-23.

## **THE QUESTION OF MILITARY SERVICE NOT BROUGHT UP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

There is no specific prohibition or approval of military service in the New Testament. This is sufficiently explained by it being pointed out: **1**-It was not the Lord's method to show precisely how his teaching was to be applied in practice to all possible spheres of life and activity. **2**,-All Jews were exempt from military service in the Roman armies. There was therefore no problem for the first believers, who were all Jews. **3**-Although, so far as Gentiles were concerned, the Roman government regarded conscription as its rightful prerogative, and not uncommonly exercised it among newly conquered barbarian tribes, partly to draw their teeth and partly to obtain first class fighting men for the Roman armies, it did not in fact conscript soldiers on any wide scale in the first two centuries except in times of crisis, which were rare. Normally there were ample volunteers, a military career was attractive and there was little warfare between 30 B.C. and A.D. 167. There was, therefore no immediate or early problem.

## **TWO SCRIPTURE TEXTS SOMETIMES USED TO SANCTION MILITARY SERVICE**

Two Scriptures are occasionally used to suggest that Jesus may have sanctioned fighting by his disciples:

1. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword".<sup>1</sup> The verses which follow make the Lord's meaning plain: "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household".<sup>2</sup> The Gospel is to bring division, even in families; it is to arouse antagonism. The text has nothing to do with the question of military service.
2. "And Jesus said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. 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. 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. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough."<sup>3</sup>

That the Lord's counsel was not meant to be taken literally is shown by his sad, slightly indignant dismissal of the disappointing, rather absurd way in which the disciples did at first take him literally. His teaching here is that henceforth the Gospel is to be strongly advocated and defended, the Truth's warfare to be waged strenuously and with determination. This interpretation is adopted by such acknowledged authorities as A.Harnack<sup>4</sup> and F. W. Farrar,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Matt. 10:34. <sup>2</sup>Matt. 10:35-36. <sup>3</sup>Luke 22:35-38. <sup>4</sup>In *Militia Christi*, page 4F <sup>5</sup>St. Luke (Cambridge Bible), pages 330 and 384

whilst Dr. Moffatt has well said that the text "cannot be set up against the other pacific sayings which are so characteristic of the teaching of Jesus".<sup>1</sup> In fact, on the very same occasion, Jesus explicitly forbade the use of the sword: "Then said Jesus unto him (Peter), Put up thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword".<sup>2</sup> At this moment in history we see, so far as the people of God and fighting are concerned, the old dispensation ending, for evidently Peter was carrying a sword, and the new beginning, for henceforth Jesus prohibited its use.

## NATURAL SCRIPTURAL USE OF MARTIAL METAPHORS

The apostles followed the Lord in the use of martial metaphors: "But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation".<sup>3</sup> In his letters to the Philippians and to Philemon respectively, Paul speaks of Epaphroditus and Archippus as his fellow soldiers. It is to be noted that in the well known passage in the letter to the Ephesians, where Paul makes full hortatory use of the military panoply, he specifically states he is not referring to literal warfare. It is, of course, obvious from the text that he is not: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 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. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God".<sup>4</sup> This is the only warfare the servant of Christ must know. Even clearer is "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every thing that exalteth itself

<sup>1</sup>*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* ii. 649b. <sup>2</sup> *Matt. 26:52.* <sup>3</sup> *1 Thess.5:8* <sup>4</sup> *Eph.6:10-17.*

against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ".<sup>1</sup>

## **THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS AND THE APOSTLES TO SOLDIERS**

The attitude of Jesus to soldiers, as individuals, is, as always, a model. In the record of his healing of the centurion's servant, his attitude is what today would be styled "correct": "And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him".<sup>2</sup>

When the centurion manifests faith, Jesus commends him: "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. 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. 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. . . 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".<sup>3</sup>

In his conference with Cornelius, there is no record of Peter hastening to tell that Roman centurion that he must now leave the armed forces. Nor when Paul conversed with the Philippian gaoler are we informed that Paul similarly instructed him. This does not mean to say that both men were not subsequently told, or did not shortly realize the incompatibility of their profession with service for Jesus Christ. It does, however, suggest that in the case of modern members of the armed forces accepting the truth and sovereignty of Jesus, whilst the impossibility of remaining in their present circumstances should be made clear, reasonable time and opportunity should be allowed them to secure the necessary release, more especially in time of peace.

## **DIVINELY PERMITTED OR ORDAINED WARS OF THE PAST**

The New Testament nowhere criticizes the patriarchs, judges or Jewish kings of the ages before Christ, for engaging in warfare. In fact in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews they are commended for the way in which their bravery bore witness to their faith. There is no consciousness of difficulty. The reason for this may be found by reflecting upon the position of ancient Israel in relation to the unfolding purpose of God.

<sup>1</sup>2 Cor. 10: 3-5. <sup>2</sup>Matt.8:5-7. <sup>3</sup>Matt.8:8-10, 13.

There came a time, approximately B.C. 2000 or a little later, when it was the pleasure of God to appoint a nation to be witnesses, in an indifferent or idolatrous world, to Himself, His Purpose and His Will. Abram, later called Abraham, a citizen of the famous old Mesopotamian city of Ur and a man whose life was to be marked by outstanding faith and integrity, was selected as the father of this nation. Gracious promises were made to him concerning its destiny. In due course his descendants multiplied. They endured over two hundred years of hard bondage in Egypt (perhaps as a schooling for the centuries of vicissitudes ahead) and were then guided to take possession of the promised land of Canaan. It is to be noted that in taking over this land they did not expel an innocent or progressive people, but a nation whose licentiousness had become almost unspeakable. <sup>1</sup> Israel occupied Canaan by military conquest under divine command. At one and the same time a thoroughly evil nation was judged <sup>2</sup> and God's people of witness established.

Certain wars Israel undertook in their subsequent history were also specifically commanded of God with a view to checking, punishing or occasionally exterminating peoples evil in His sight. When God commanded His people to wage war, it would have been wrong for any Israelite to disobey. Outstanding bravery in such wars of the Lord is recognized in both Old and New Testaments. Other wars in which Israel engaged were occasioned by their own ambition or the predatory designs of their neighbours. For given God's declared will in that age, that early stage of divine education, of revealing and developing His purpose through a nation, coupled with the possession by all men of freewill and the universal waywardness of human nature, it is clear that unless God had cast a miraculous charm over the entire area, warfare was inevitable.

Yet although war is often disciplinary whether from a divine or human point of view, the Old Testament confirms all human experience in regarding it as an evil. It is described along with famine, pestilence and noisome beasts as a sore Judgment of God in punishing the degeneration of Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> When David, greatest of

<sup>1</sup> Lev.18. <sup>2</sup> *But not until their case was irremediable. God did not permit Israel to inflict a premature judgment (Gen. 15:16).* <sup>3</sup> Ezek. 14 : 21.

Israel's kings, decided towards the end of his reign to build a temple to God, God forbade him on account of the wars he had waged and the bloodshed they had involved.<sup>1</sup> In His necessary judgments upon nations or individuals, whether by war or other visitation, God takes no pleasure.<sup>2</sup> War is one of the evils to be abolished when Messiah's Kingdom is finally established upon the earth.<sup>3</sup>

## **DIVINELY PERMITTED OR ORDAINED WARS OF THE FUTURE**

Both the Old and New Testaments inform us that at the end of the present age the Lord Jesus Christ will return to the earth, at a time of terrible distress and calamity, to save the world from destruction and to establish a universal and enduring Kingdom in which peace and righteousness will prevail. His people of every age and nation will be raised from the dead, granted the long promised gift of immortality, and will be associated with him in the work of establishing and perpetuating the Kingdom. Irresistible power and supreme authority will then be exercised by the Lord and his elect : "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel".<sup>4</sup> "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father".<sup>5</sup> "And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God".<sup>6</sup>

The position of the people of God will then be completely changed, not only in respect of life itself, but in respect of environment and duty. Instead of being required, in the midst of all pervading secular surroundings, to observe a careful. code of love with meekness, they will be called upon to exercise love with authority, and where that is despised, with judgment, over men whose lives and over nations whose destinies will be entirely in their hands. It is clear not only from Scripture but from a candid consideration of human nature in its historical and modern manifestations, that there will be resistance from those who see their own selfish power or godless ideologies in danger of destruction. This resistance will be dealt with by the rod of iron.

Yet just as the Old Testament preface to the New Testament dispensation was marked by warfare appropriate to the historical and moral limitations of ancient times, warfare which after Christ came ceased to be or never became a feature of the true Christian code, so the display of power which will in certain directions accompany the inauguration of the Kingdom when Christ comes will presently, apart from dealing with a final rebellious outburst, cease for ever, for at the last God will be all in all, and sin and even death will be no more. It may here be observed that neither Jesus nor the apostles ever countenance any Christian anticipation or imitation of future judgments, by strong or punitive action now.

<sup>1</sup>1 Chron. 22:8. <sup>2</sup>Ezek. 18:25, 32 and 33:11. <sup>3</sup>Micah 4:3. <sup>4</sup>Matt. 19:28. <sup>5</sup>Rev. 2:26-27. <sup>6</sup>Rev. 19:14-15.

## **THE QUESTION OF THE PRACTICABILITY OF THE TEACHING OF JESUS**

It is often objected that the teaching of Jesus and the apostles is impracticable in the real world; and that any attempt to put it into practice on a considerable scale would be merely to deliver civilization into the hands of either Communist tyrants or the next clique of ambitious men who happened to come along.

In the first place, it is debatable whether the teaching of Jesus is or is not practicable in the real world. If the Jewish nation had put it into practice in the first century - and they were in a favourable position for doing so - not only would hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives have been saved and the city of Jerusalem itself preserved from frightful siege and destruction, but it is likely that Rome would have granted special privileges to such model subjects.

In the modern world, it is not quite fair to take the twentieth century as a test without any reference to previous possibilities. If, for example, Germany, Tsarist Russia and Japan had all adopted the teaching of Jesus in the nineteenth century, it is questionable whether they would have suffered anything like the horrors each experienced during the first half of the twentieth century.

A good many things pronounced impracticable in the realms of science and history, have since been achieved or brought within the range of possibility. It is not asserted that the teaching of Jesus is practicable in the modern world, merely that it should not be taken for granted that it is purely idealistic.

In the second place, the event has shown that throughout history New Testament teaching has in fact only been seriously attempted by a tiny minority. This must have been divinely foreseen. The position is stated in another context thus: "And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets ".<sup>1</sup> The context here is that some Gentiles are called to the Faith. But the language of verse 14 makes it clear that only some Gentiles accept the call. Very few, in fact, judging from another clear statement of Jesus himself: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it".<sup>2</sup> The teaching of Jesus covering non-resistance and full allegiance to him only, is admittedly practicable for a small minority, for whom it was evidently intended.

### **IS OBJECTION TO MILITARY SERVICE A SELFISH CONVENIENCE?**

The complaint is then made that religious objection to fighting is very convenient to the minority who reap the benefit at comparatively little cost<sup>3</sup> of what others have safeguarded at the risk of their lives. This complaint deserves careful consideration.

1. It is true that, humanly speaking, New Testament Christians in countries victorious in war may owe their freedom, prosperity or even their lives to the skill and valour of their country's armed forces. As has been already stated, the New Testament, as well as a normal thoughtful gratitude, requires a Christian to respect many of his country's fighting men, who often kill reluctantly and sometimes exhibit the greatest bravery or self-sacrifice in the defence of their homeland.
2. But it should be remembered that the Christian has not asked his Government or its forces to fight for him. A government is glad of as righteous a cause or pretext as is possible, to strengthen the morale of its people. But in fact governments go to war to safeguard what they possess or gain what they would like to possess,<sup>4</sup> and these are not Christian motives. In the event of a genuine moral cause being at stake, the Christian does not ask that it shall be secured by fighting. He does not look to the government or its troops for his wellbeing, but to God. He is entirely in the hands of God, and if it should happen that his country is invaded or devastated, he is to submit to what God permits to take place, knowing that he has in heaven a far more enduring inheritance, and that in the end faith and obedience are better safeguards than steel and explosives.

The prosperous Christian with a considerable financial, industrial or landed stake in the country of his sojourning, may find this teaching difficult to accept. If so, a careful spiritual stocktaking may be timely; there may be some worldly shelves to write down or even clear.

3. When the New Testament Christian finds his fellow countrymen in stress and needing help, it is his duty to succour them as much as lies within his power, providing that in doing so he disobeys no law of his Lord. It is characteristically and constructively Christian to help to sustain fellow creatures in time of trial, by work on the land, in the mines, in hospitals, either voluntarily or wherever the authorities judge his services to be most useful or desirable. It brings evil report on the gospel for a Christian to make killing weapons at a high wage. Where an occupation is questionable a Christian should avoid it; if he accepts it, he should not be too hastily judged. .

In time of war, then, the true Christian helps as well as receives help from the land of his sojourning. But the greatest benefit given on either side in peace or war is the one the Christian offers his fellow men by the clear preaching of the gospel message, supported by a consistent and constructive life. Whilst he receives a varying degree of temporal safety, he is the minister to his fellows of the promise of permanent and perfect life. Again-although this may be said to be of secondary concern-by converting men and women to New Testament ideals, which include obedience to the government (except on the rare occasions where action contrary to New Testament injunctions is decreed), service to his fellow men and a high moral standard, the Christian is at one with the State in one of its chief aims-the creation of honest, industrious and benevolent subjects.

<sup>1</sup>*Acts 15:13-15.* <sup>2</sup>*Matt. 7:13-14.* <sup>3</sup>*In Britain, the British Commonwealth and the United States but not usually on the Continent.* <sup>4</sup>*In Britain's case, for example, by preventing the preponderance of one power in Europe.*

## **CHRISTIANS AND MILITARY SERVICE IN THE FIRST CENTURY**

The teaching of Jesus and the apostles, the conflict between their principles and the nature of a soldier's duties, the fact that much idolatrous ceremony was included in military routine, the exemption of Jews (including Jewish Christians) from military service, and the fact that conscription was rarely enforced except in newly subjugated barbarian lands, all these circumstances would combine to keep Christians out of the army during and for some time after the apostolic era. So far as documentary evidence is concerned, there is no specific prohibition, encouragement or even mention of Christians serving in the army, or otherwise, until A.D. 174. The Christian attitude to soldiering in the first century may be compared to our attitude to prize-fighting or bookmaking today. There is neither prohibition nor encouragement nor even allusion to these professions in the whole of our literature. A Christian's principles keep him out of them without the question being raised.

## **THE SUBSEQUENT POSITION OF SERVING SOLDIERS CONVERTED TO CHRISTIANITY**

The situation was, however, different with soldiers who whilst serving were converted to the Christian faith. The true evangelist of any age excepts none from his appeal. The truth as it is in Jesus must have been preached to many serving soldiers from the earliest days of Christianity. Peter and Cornelius, and Paul and the Philippian gaoler, provide apostolic examples. It is certain that like the Roman centurion and the Macedonian gaoler, at least a number of soldiers were baptized in the first three centuries. What happened to them? We propose to set forth what evidence is available, and finally to draw certain conclusions which we are satisfied cannot be far from the truth.

It is needful first to understand an important change in Roman imperial policy. In the first century B.C., great generals like Sulla, Pompey and Julius Caesar with powerful field armies at their call, extended the borders of the Republic-or Empire as it was fast becoming-to the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean in the west, and to the Red Sea and the River Euphrates in the east. Augustus (30 B.C.-A.D. 14) thought that this was quite enough for one man to look after; in his reign consolidation replaced extension as the order of the day. Some further conquests took place in succeeding reigns, but the policy of consolidation was finally confirmed by Hadrian (A.D. 117-136).

The army's main business now became that of defending existing frontiers. There was little major warfare during the two centuries 30 B.C. - A.D. 167, there was no real challenger to Rome's supremacy, and so the legionary camps of the frontier forces tended to become towns, with the soldiers' barracks life assuming to some extent the character of a semi-urban existence. These settlements or towns<sup>1</sup> were a legitimate object of Christian evangelical activity.

One of the most notable of these new military "towns" in the eastern half of the Empire was MELITENE, just to the west of the River Euphrates, and situated in the important eastern frontier province of Cappadocia. Here the 12th legion had its headquarters. Melitene lay only some 200 miles to the north of Antioch, which was an important Christian centre from A.D. 40, and as frontier defence requirements, and to a less extent the needs of the trade routes from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea and Central Asia, had produced a system of Roman roads in the area, and as Melitene itself was a comparatively attractive place with its olives and vines, it is possible that among the brethren and sisters to whom Peter addressed his first Epistle, there were some at Melitene: ["Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers](#)

scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. . ."2

<sup>1</sup>*The Latin for camp is CASTRA, and in England these camp-towns have come down to us in towns ending in -caster, -cester or -chester.* <sup>2</sup>*1 Peter 1 : 1-2.*

We do know (1) that by the second half of the second century, more than a few soldiers stationed at Melitene had been converted to the Christian faith, and (2) a number of them had stayed in the army, for when the emperor Marcus Aurelius was fighting on the River Danube hundreds of miles to the west about A.D. 173, among the troops under his command was a strong detachment from the 12th legion normally stationed at Melitene, and in this detachment were a number of Christians who were reputed by a miracle to have rescued the army of Marcus from a difficult situation.

Before considering this circumstance, necessary for a complete picture of the position, we proceed to set forth some further historical evidence. In the persecution of the Christians under Septimius Severus at the beginning of the third century, a certain heathen soldier Basileides, stationed at Alexandria, was given the duty of conducting a Christian girl to suffer a most appalling kind of martyrdom for her faith. The experience converted Basileides. He kept the fact secret for some time, but upon his refusing to take the heathen military oath, he confessed his faith and was beheaded.

In A.D. 211, under the emperor Caracalla, a Christian soldier in North Africa, declining to wear an idolatrous laurel wreath, was criticized by his fellow Christian soldiers as well as by local Christian civilians on the ground that his action was unscriptural and inexpedient. Next must be mentioned an inscription of A.D. 217, which mentions a Christian freedman "returning from the campaigns". There is evidence from Cyprian and Dionysius in the middle of the third century, that among Christian martyrs at that time were certain soldiers. In A.D. 260, under the emperor Gallienus, a Christian military officer, Marinus, was about to be promoted to the rank of centurion, when a rival heathen officer objected that such a promotion was illegal, as Marinus was a Christian and did not participate in emperor-worship. Official attention being thus drawn to the matter, Marinus admitted his faith and was martyred. There are, in fact, a number of records of Christian soldiers being martyred at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth centuries.

But there is another side to the picture. The days when there were plenty of troops for the Roman armies had gone. In A.D. 295, a North African Christian aged 21, named Maximilian, was brought before the local proconsul. Being fit for military service, he had refused to serve or to accept the military badge. He was a Christian, he said, and served Christ. He could not do evil. He could not serve in the armed forces. The proconsul drew his attention to the situation we have already outlined: there are Christians in the imperial armies and they serve. Why not you? The young man replied: "They know what is fitting for them; but I am a Christian, and I cannot do evil". "What evil do they do who serve?" asked the proconsul. "Thou knowest what they do", was the youth's sufficient reply, and he was put to death.<sup>1</sup> Maximilian was subsequently canonized by the church.

His case is important, partly because of its clarity, partly because there is no question of his refusing service merely because of the idolatrous practices associated with military ceremony.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account, see C. J. CADOUX, *The Early Church and the World*, pages 585-586.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge Ancient History XII*, page 663.

Some Christian soldiers were martyred mainly on that account, or often simply because their conscientious attitude drew attention to them publicly as being Christians. Some declined or discontinued service specifically because they could not serve two masters, as the centurion Marcellus who on the emperor's birthday in the year A.D. 298, "stripped off his military belt and declared that his loyalty to Christ did not allow him to serve another master", <sup>1</sup> He was brought before Aurelius Agricola, Deputy for the Prefect of the Guard, who condemned him to death. Whereupon there was a sensation in court, for the Deputy's staff secretary, Cassian, who was taking notes of the case, threw down his pen saying that the sentence was unjust, for he, too, was a Christian. Both Marcellus and Cassian were martyred. <sup>2</sup> Others suffered martyrdom because of the whole unchristlike military business of idolatry and bloodshed, as Nereus and Achilleus, who at the beginning of the fourth century, "suddenly laid aside their madness, leave the impious camp. . . cast down the bloodstained weapons". <sup>3</sup>

## **EARLY CHRISTIAN INJUNCTIONS REGARDING MILITARY SERVICE**

Now let us consider what was said about soldiering for Christians from Justin Martyr onwards. Bearing in mind that the famous work from which we now quote, Justin's Apology (A.D. 150) was a defence of the Christian faith addressed to no less a person than the emperor Antoninus Pius himself, Justin says:

"We, who hated one another, and slew one another and on account of customs would not share even common hearths with those not of the same tribe as ourselves, now since the coming of Christ become sociable, and pray for our enemies, and try to persuade those that hate us unjustly, so that they, living according to the fair precepts of Christ, may share our good hope of receiving the same (reward) from the God who rules all things . . . And we who formerly slew one another not only do not make war against our enemies, but, for the sake of not telling lies or deceiving those who examine us, gladly die confessing Christ". <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge Ancient History XII*, page 663 and note 3. <sup>2</sup> For a fuller account, see C. J. CADOUX, *The Early Church and the World*, pages 575, 581 and 487. <sup>3</sup> For a fuller account, see C. J. CADOUX, *The Early Church and the World*, pages 575, 581 and 587. <sup>4</sup> Apology 1:14. 3;39. 1-3.

Again:

"We, who were filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness, have changed each one our warlike instruments throughout the whole earth-the swords into ploughshares and the spears into farming implements, and we cultivate piety, righteousness, love for men, faith and the hope which we have from the Father through the Crucified one" <sup>1</sup>

Tatian, an educated man who if he had thought of joining the army would probably have been given a commission, writes about A.D. 150, "I decline military command" <sup>2</sup> - this in a list of earthly ambitions and indulgences to be eschewed, as riches, fornication and fame.

Athenagoras, writing about A.D. 177 to the emperor Marcus Aurelius, does not mention military service, but says this:

"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. How then, when we do not even look on, lest we should contract guilt and pollution, can we put people to death?" <sup>3</sup>

None of these testimonies is decisive, <sup>4</sup> but their practical application could not easily be diverted from the usual duties and features of a military campaign. Moreover Justin and Athenagoras were writing on behalf of Christians to the emperor himself. They could scarcely have been expected to go out of their way to rouse him by specifically stating that Christians would not or should not serve in his legions. In A.D. 178, when the emperor Marcus Aurelius was fighting hard to crush the barbarians threatening his northern frontier, the heathen protagonist Celsus appealed to the Christians to help the Emperor and to fight in his armies if called upon to do so, whether as soldiers or officers. If all were like them, he argued, the Empire would collapse. <sup>5</sup>

From third century testimonies, it is clear that some Christian leaders did not seriously object to Christians remaining in the army, whilst others thought it quite wrong. Of the first class, we may mention Clement of Alexandria, who, writing soon after A.D. 200, enjoined, on the basis of Luke 3:14, that those in military service should be content with their wages only. A Continental scholar has summed up Clement's position as "remain a soldier, but do not become one". <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dialogue 109. <sup>2</sup>Tat. II (48). <sup>3</sup>ATHENAGORAS, LEGAT. 35. <sup>4</sup>Justin, Tatian and Athenagoras may be read in full in the Ante - Nicene Christian Library, Vols. 2 and 3. <sup>5</sup>Origen viii. 68.

<sup>6</sup>DE JONG, *Refusal of Military Service among the Early Christians*, 7-9 (only in Dutch, Leiden, 1905).

Of the other school of thought must be mentioned three of the most notable of all the early fathers, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen. Dr. Cadoux informs us that there are two passages in the writings of Tertullian where the matter is treated. He says:

"The first of these is in *De Idololatria* written while the author was still a loyal Catholic. After concluding the chapter in which he has dealt with the idolatrous character of the garb of officials generally, he takes up the question whether a Christian may enter the army, or a soldier be admitted to the ranks of the faithful. Is not this possible at least for the common soldier and the lower ranks of officers, who are free from the necessity of sacrificing and passing death sentences? He answers 'No'; for 'there is no congruity between the Divine and the human sacramentum, the sign of Christ and the sign of the devil, the camp of light and the camp of darkness: one soul cannot be owed to two, God and Caesar'. He refuses to treat the appeal to Scripture precedents as serious. 'How shall he wage war, nay, how shall he even be a soldier in peacetime, without the sword which the Lord has taken away? For although soldiers had come to John and received the form of their rule, although even a centurion had believed, the Lord afterwards, in disarming Peter, ungirded every soldier."

"The second passage", Dr. Cadoux writes, "is in *De Corona*, written in A.D. 211, after the author had become a Montanist (Christian). He is arguing about the impropriety of Christian soldiers wearing garlands, and he touches on the prior question whether a Christian ought to be a soldier at all. Again, it is the impossibility of dual allegiance that determines his verdict. The military oath asks too much of a man who owes his allegiance to Christ. 'Is it right to occupy oneself with the sword, when the Lord proclaims that he who uses the sword shall perish by the sword? And shall the son of peace, for whom it will be unfitting even to go to law, be engaged in a battle? And shall he, who is not the avenger even of his own wrongs, administer chains and imprisonment and torture and executions? . . . The very act of transferring one's name from the camp of light to the camp of darkness is a transgression.

Of course, the case is different, if the faith comes subsequently to any who are already occupied in military service, as with those whom John admitted to baptism, and with the most believing centurions whom Christ approves and whom Peter instructs: all the same, when faith has been accepted and sealed, either the service must be left at once, as has been done by many, or else recourse must be had to all sorts of quibbling, lest anything be committed against God. . . or that which the faith of civilians has equally determined upon must be endured for God. For military service does not promise impunity for sins or exemption from martyrdom'. No plea of necessity or risk of death can justify wrongdoing: the case is similar with public offices; one must flee from them or endure martyrdom."

Apart from the unmistakable tenor of this testimony, it should be observed that Tertullian's case against military service for Christians is based at least as much on its complete incongruity with the Christian life, as on the idolatry closely associated with it in Roman times.

In the early decades of the third century there were published a number of sets of rules for church membership, some of the most important of which are associated with the name of Hippolytus. These rules, or canons, were subsequently revised and made less rigorous, but were not so treated throughout, with the result that the form in which they have come down to us is not without a number of inconsistencies. Here is a set on military service:

**1. THE EGYPTIAN CHURCH-ORDER (Latin, based on Coptic) :**

"The soldier, who is under authority, thou mayest not allow him to kill men: if he is ordered (to do so) thou mayest not allow him to thrust himself forward, nor to swear; if however he is unwilling (to comply), let him be rejected" (xi. 9).

**2. THE EGYPTIAN CHURCH-ORDER (Ethiopic version) :**

"A soldier of the prince they shall not receive, and if indeed they received him, if he was commanded to kill he shall not do (it); and if he does not leave off he shall be rejected" (Statute 28).

**3. THE HIPPOLYTEAN CANONS (according to Achelis):**

"A man who has accepted the power of killing, or a soldier, may never be received at all" (xiii. 71).

**4. THE HIPPOLYTEAN CANONS (according to Riedel) :**

"Persons who possess authority to kill, or soldiers, should not kill at all, even when it is commanded them, and should not utter any evil word" (13).

**5. The Testament of our Lord.**

"If anyone be a soldier or in authority, let him be taught not to oppress or to kill or to rob or to be angry or to rage and afflict anyone. But let those rations suffice him which are given to him. But if they wish to be baptized in the Lord, let them cease from military service or from authority, and if not let them not be received" (ii. 2).

In the ancient phase of the development of the purpose of God, some warfare was divinely directed, as for example the subjugation of degenerate Canaan by Joshua and the humbling of each other's pride by Syria and Israel. Later, the conquests of Alexander the Great and finally those of Rome, paved the way for the propagation of the Christian Gospel by the spread of the Greek language, the elimination of troublesome national frontiers, the facilitation of travel and an intellectual development undermining old crudities which would have impeded the acceptance of the Christian ethic.

Origen (185-254) recognized the establishment (by force) of the Roman dominion as a preparation for the preaching of Christ. He approved certain violent deeds in Old Testament times as relatively justified in the circumstances of those times. The ordaining by God of the powers that be, who do not bear the sword in vain<sup>1</sup> and the command that prayer be rendered for kings and all in authority<sup>2</sup> has resulted in New Testament Christians of all ages offering prayer for the rulers of their lands in order that believers "[may lead a good and peaceable life in godliness](#)". But Tertullian and Origen felt it right that prayer should be offered not only for the emperor, but for his armies, which might be used of God to protect peaceful citizens, including believers, or to put down forces hostile to the truth or will of God. It may here be added that it is also part of the Christian's duty to pray for his enemies and persecutors, even when on the point of death at their hands, as exemplified by the Lord himself and Stephen. Prayer for the imperial armies no more required a Christian also to serve in them than prayer for his foes required a Christian actively to assist the enemies of Rome.

<sup>1</sup>Rom. 13:1-4. <sup>2</sup>1 Tim.2: 2.

Origen regarded it as wrong for a Christian to kill a man under any circumstances.

"If a revolt had been the cause of the Christians' combining, and if they had derived their origin from the Jews, to whom it was allowed to take arms on behalf of their families and to destroy their enemies, the Lawgiver of the Christians would not have altogether forbidden the destruction of man, teaching that the deed of daring against a man on the part of his own disciples, however unrighteous that man may be, is never right -for he did not deem it becoming to his own Divine legislation to allow the killing of any man whatever."

"To those who ask us whence we have come, and who is our leader, we say that we have come in accordance with the counsels of Jesus to cut down our warlike and arrogant swords of argument into ploughshares, and we convert into sickles the spears we formerly used in fighting. For we no longer take 'sword against a nation' nor do we learn 'any more to make war', having become sons of peace for the sake of Jesus, who is our leader, instead of the ancestral customs in which we were strangers to the covenants."<sup>1</sup>

In reply to the complaint of the heathen champion Celsus, that if all followed the example of the Christians the empire would collapse, Origen observed that a reasonable interpretation of "all" would include Rome's barbarian neighbours. Moreover, united and fervent Christian prayer would overcome more enemies than even Moses' effective prayer when the Egyptians were destroyed in the Red Sea, in fact warfare at all would be unnecessary; although the mode of "overcoming" their enemies might be by the example of faithfulness unto death rather than miraculous overthrow.

In the actual complete absence of "all" obeying the laws of Christ, the prayers of Christians for the Emperors and their forces are more effective (as well as far more acceptable to God) than their joining in personal killings. Origen does not omit to explain that the more perfect a Christian's character, the more effectual his prayers are likely to be.

After all, he remarked, the priests and temple wardens of heathendom are exempt from military service, so why should not the servants of the true God? He then proceeds to set forth the benefits Christians render to their country, and to explain how the sphere of Christians' service to God prevents their serving in public (i.e. political or magisterial) office.

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account of the testimonies of Tertullian, Church Orders and Origen, see C. J. CADOUX, *The Early Church and the World. Tertullian, pages 422-430; Church Orders, pages 430-433; Origen, pages 424, 434-437.*

Lactantius (A.D. 260-340), another Christian father whose literary style admittedly excelled his knowledge, though not necessarily his sincerity or his piety, followed his tutor, the Christian apologist Arnobius, in commending Christian abstention from warfare:

"When God prohibits killing, He not only forbids us to commit brigandage, which is not allowed even by the public laws, but He warns us not to do even those things which are regarded as legal among men. And so it will not be lawful for a just man to serve as a soldier-for justice itself is his military service-nor to accuse anyone of a capital offence, because it makes no difference whether thou kill with a sword or with a word, since killing itself is forbidden. And so, in this commandment of God, no exception at all ought to be made to the rule that it is always wrong to kill a man, whom God has wished to be a sacrosanct creature."<sup>1</sup>

Lactantius subsequently became tutor to the son of the emperor Constantine, but no breath of criticism has come down to us to suggest any expedient change of views which a less honourable Christian might have thought fit to consider.

<sup>1</sup> *LACTANTIUS. Inst. VI. XX.15-17*

## **THE FINAL ABANDONMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING IN THE FOURTH CENTURY**

The victory of Constantine over his imperial rivals early in the fourth century marked at the same time the triumph of Christianity over paganism and the triumph of the world over Christianity. Not that a hitherto strictly separate community suddenly became a worldly organization. In the decades preceding the accession of Constantine, the Church had begun openly to court the world, with Christians entering public life, becoming magistrates and even accepting the now mainly social honour of being local priests of the emperor-worship. Their first and second century predecessors had suffered martyrdom rather than offer, much less preside over, such worship. Christian soldiers were found in the armies of Diocletian and Galerius, both of whom had trouble with them on account of their principles, and more still were found in the forces of Constantine in his successful bid for supremacy.

The growing stream of Christian worldliness had hitherto been held in check by the pagan imperial power, whose tolerance might at any time change into persecution, as did happen for the last time in the early years of the fourth century. When, shortly after this final savage outbreak, the supreme imperial power became pro-Christian with the accession of Constantine, then the worldly stream became a flood and the new power and wealth now bestowed on the Church stifled many Scriptural scruples, among them refusal or reluctance to undertake military service.

## **NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING CHERISHED BY BIBLE BELIEVERS DOWN THE AGES**

In A.D. 314 the Synod of Arles in S. France (attended by Adelphius, Bishop of London) in a canon variously interpreted,<sup>1</sup> left military service open to Christians, whilst at various times in the fourth century first Athanasius, then Ambrose and finally Augustine justified the killing of enemies in war. The student of Christian doctrine will recollect the major responsibility of the first and last of these fathers in establishing upon a firm basis creeds and teachings remote from New Testament simple truth. Yet just as there were to be found small and great who resisted the doctrinal departures of the Church, so there were those in the fourth century who continued to uphold their Master's teaching respecting the killing and maiming of fellow men. The Church orders of the previous century, with their virtual prohibition of military service, were not as yet superseded by the ruling of Arles; men like Theogenes of Phrygia were martyred for refusing military service, whilst others such as Martin of Tours and Victrix, who left the army for reasons of conscience, were only saved from death by their piety and eminence. The influential late fourth century eastern fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom, both criticized military service for Christians, whilst Basil the Great held that those who had killed in war should abstain from communion for three years.

<sup>1</sup> Canon 3. See HEFELE, *History of the Christian Councils to A.D. 325*, pages 185-186.

But officially and in practice the question had been settled. Christians could now freely fight. The position of the Church has been well summarized as follows:

"Her joy at the deliverance Constantine had wrought for her was so great that it put her off her guard. She found herself compelled by the eagerness with which she had welcomed him, and by her own immaturity of thought and inconsistency of practice, to make his standards of righteousness in certain respects her own. Henceforth it was out of the question for her to insist on an ethical view and practice, on which her own mind was not clearly made up, and which her great protector would naturally regard as dangerous disloyalty to himself. Official Christianity was now committed to the sanction of war so far as the practical conduct of Christian men as citizens was concerned - whenever the State chose to wage it. Further than that, the decision not only settled the practical question for the moment and doomed the dissentient voices-many as they still were-to ultimate silence, but it tied up the freedom of Christian thought, and made any unfettered discussion of the problem on its merits next to impossible for centuries to come,"<sup>1</sup>

But just as the doctrinal decision at Nicaea did not for ever blind all to the fact that the Christian Church had forsaken New Testament simplicity and reserve, so sixteen centuries of warfare waged by professedly Christian nations have not prevented Bible believers in many lands from following the example of their fourth century predecessors in courageously renouncing all participation in the destruction of their fellowmen. The Poor Men of Lyons (or Vaudois) originating in France in the twelfth century, the Franciscan Tertiaries in Italy in the thirteenth century, the Lollard in England in the fifteenth century, the Mennonites originating in Switzerland in the sixteenth century and afterwards found in considerable numbers in Holland, Germany, France, Russia and North America, the Socinians in Poland in the seventeenth century, the Quakers in England from the seventeenth century, all are examples of men and women who have seen that the New Testament law of love prohibits injury to another in any form.

<sup>1</sup> C. J. CADOUX, *The Early Church and the World*, page 592.

## **THE EARLY EXPERIENCE OF THE BRETHERN IN CHRIST (CHRIST ADELPHIANS)**

In the nineteenth century a small body of Bible believers in America renounced the use of arms as contrary to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. When in 1861 the American Civil War broke out between the Confederate South and the Federal North, they numbered adherents in at least two of the eleven Confederate states and in several of the twenty-two Federal states. At first there was no practical problem, for the general enthusiasm in both North and South was such that there was no lack of troops on either side. But as the war dragged on and heavy losses were suffered by both sides, these brethren felt they might be required to suffer for their conviction. At the end of 1864 John Thomas, their leader, after safeguarding the interests of the brethren in the Confederate states, arrived at Freeport, Illinois, in the North, and reminded the brethren that a Federal law exempted religious conscientious objectors to warfare on certain reasonable conditions. He records the position as follows:

"They feared that in the brow-beating presence of a Provost-Marshal's Court they might not be able to stand successfully against the taunts and ridicule which were sure to be brought against them. They wished, therefore, that I would write something that they could put into Court as the ground of their claim to exemption according to the law. It would be necessary to give the name a denominational appellative, that being so denominated, they might have wherewith to answer the inquisitors. This seemed the most difficult part of the affair, although not altogether insurmountable. The crisis had come, and something had to be done . . . I did not know (wrote Dr. Thomas) a better denomination that could be given to such a class of believers than 'Brethren in Christ'. This declares their true status, and as officials prefer words to phrases, the same fact is expressed in another form by the word 'Christadelphian'. This matter settled to their satisfaction, I wrote for them the following certificate:<sup>1</sup>

"This is to certify that A,B,C, etc. (the names of ten male members in full here) and others, constitute a religious association denominated herein for the sake of distinguishing them "Brethren in Christ" or in one word "Christadelphians"; that the said brethren are in fellowship with similar associations in England, Scotland, the British Provinces, New York, and other Cities of the North and South. . . This is also to certify that the denomination . . . conscientiously opposes and earnestly protests against "Brethren in Christ" having anything to do with politics or arms-bearing . . . under any conceivable circumstances or conditions whatsoever, regarding it as a course of conduct disloyal . . . to their Lord and King and perilous to their eternal welfare.

"This being individually and collectively the conscientious conviction of all true "Christadelphians", they claim the rights and privileges so considerately accorded by the Congress of the United States in the Statute made and provided for "the exemption of members of a denomination conscientiously opposed", etc.

"This certificate seemed exactly to meet their wishes, and I was requested to go with them before a public notary and affirm to my signature and to the truth of the certificate in substance and fact. To this I consented, and the county seal was then affixed to it, and the document placed in safe keeping until an emergency should arise demanding its production. . ."<sup>2</sup>

The matter was not put to the test, as in May, 1865, the Civil War came to an end with the surrender of the Confederate forces.

Just as the earlier Mennonites in Europe and the Quakers in England had been recognized by the governments of more than one country in respect of their convictions relating to military service, so now the conviction of the Christadelphians was allowed for by the government of America in the nineteenth century, and later recognized by the British, Dominion and American authorities during two world wars in the twentieth century.

<sup>1</sup>*Extracts only are given here.* <sup>2</sup> *The Ambassador, Jan. 1865.*

## REVIEW OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN POSITION

From this modern epilogue we revert to a summing up of the position of the Christian Church on military service during the first four centuries.

In the first century the law of love so characteristic of the teaching of Jesus and his apostles, on the one hand; and on the other hand the historical circumstances of the age, the "exemption of Jews (including Jewish Christians) from military service, the general peacefulness of the times and the circumstance that the Roman government experienced little difficulty in recruiting sufficient soldiers—all these factors enabled Christians to refrain from entering the army without grave issues being raised.

The gospel was preached to many serving soldiers. Of these, many left the army, as Tertullian explicitly testifies in A.D. 211. Others, probably many others, remain in the forces in spite of the difficulties they encountered from idolatrous military ceremony (worship of the Emperor and gods of war and veneration of military standards), and the nature of their characteristic duties.

In all probability the two main reasons for their action or inaction, were human weakness or natural dullness. As regards the first, it was highly dangerous to draw attention to one's being a Christian by leaving the army because of Christian convictions; there was not much warfare, the idolatrous ceremonies could be winked at, especially by the ranks but not so easily by the officers who would have charge of them; and when their time was expired, they might try and make up for any compromising conduct when in the forces.

As regards the second reason, it is likely that many soldiers, long inured to the service, would not, at first at any rate, experience any strong stirring of conscience, especially in time of peace. Remembering the part played by the American Civil War in strongly confirming the brethren's convictions at the very outset of their corporate witness, we may say that had there been a civil war from A.D. 61 to 65 between, shall we say, Ephesus and Antioch, with the probability of brethren being expected to fight and slay brethren, it is likely that the issue of military service would have stood out in sharper relief than it did. No such crisis came to clarify and confirm the convictions of the adolescent Church. A further comparison may be drawn by pointing out that in the later history of the Brethren in Christ the making of direct munitions of war was for long not regarded as wrong by many zealous adherents. It took time to clarify the conscience of the community.

Nevertheless, there were always in the early centuries many who stood fast for a course of conduct based upon the teaching and example of their Lord. In the dangers that beset the Empire during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), the heathen writer Celsus angrily complained that if all citizens acted as Christians the Empire would be lost. In connection with the greater dangers that imperilled the Empire's very existence in the middle of the third century, an eminent modern ecclesiastical historian bitterly remarks: "**The great corporation of the Church even yet maintained its selfish isolation. Not a hand would they lift to save a sinking world**".<sup>1</sup> This in justification of the persecutions of the Emperors Decius (249-251) and Valerian (253-259), who felt that in such a crisis all sources of weakness should be eliminated from the empire. Clearly the Christian law of love, as emphasized at the beginning of the third century by Tertullian and more calmly and philosophically expressed a little later in the same century by Origen, together with the canonical rejection of those who shed blood, exercised a strong influence in the Church. Striking instances of martyrdom on account of a refusal to undertake or to continue military service, have come down to us.

Another factor now made its presence felt in the Church, that of moral decline. We have seen how in the closing decades of the third century, worldliness came to infect the Church; military service was not now looked upon by so many in so severe a light as hitherto. With the triumph of Constantine, the first so-called Christian Emperor, moral convictions were tacitly abandoned and the acceptance without question of the occupation of the shedding of blood on behalf of the State became one of many features of a general falling away from New Testament ideals.

<sup>1</sup>*H. M. GWATKIN, Early Church History II. 267.*

## **THE CALL TO CHRISTIAN DUTY**

The example of faithful brethren in the first four centuries of the Christian era, often at the cost of life itself, inspires us to maintain the teaching and to follow the example of their Lord and ours; and that not only in the refusal to inflict injury or death upon fellow men, but in respect of other not unrelated but more subtle divergences from his rule of life, in particular the Christian attitude to love of wealth and the world. The fourth century, that time of official triumph for Christianity and most marked departure from New Testament truths and ideals, provides the lesson that whatever opportunities and blessings may be granted in this life to Christian disciples, in no circumstances and no matter what the consequences may appear likely to be, are they to prefer considerations of present expediency, advantage or even life itself, to faithfulness to the commands of the One to whom they have pledged devoted and lifelong service, who has also said:

*" Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" .*