

LSN 2:
Just War Theory and Developments: Pre-Augustine
21 September 2008

I. SCRIPTURAL OVERVIEW

What Does the Bible Say About War? Two Running Themes:

The ideal that we should strive for in national and international affairs is *peace and justice*.

1) *Lament over war and violence*

- I Chron. 22:7-10
- Ps. 46:8-11
- Ps. 120
- Lamentations

2) *Messianic hope*

- Isa. 2:1-5
- Isa. 9:1-7
- Isa. 11:1-9

3) *Condemnations of unbridled warfare and excessive violence:*

- Deut. 20:10-20
 - There is a *code* to war, and that code must be followed
 - Enemy cities within confines of Israel were subject to extermination, but if they were situated beyond the borders and would submit, they were to be incorporated as tributaries.
 - If they refused to submit, only males were to be put to the sword.
 - Women, children, cattle, and goods were not subject to the ban, but might be enjoyed as spoils
 - Even if the city lay within the confines of Israel, though the people were to be killed, the fruit trees should be spared

- Amos 1

4) *Summation of O.T. ethics in the N.T. law of love*

- Matt. 5:9, 21-26, 38-48
- Rom. 13:8-10

War remains a *tragic fact* of human history

1) *Wars and rumors of wars:*

- Matt. 24:6-8
- 2) *Eschatological passages:*
 - Isa. 11
 - Rev. 19-20

II. THE PAGAN CONSCIENCE

A. Greeks- Plato/Aristotle:

- *Aristotle-*
 - First to coin the phrase “just war”
 - Any war, to be just, must further “the moral ends of peace and justice”
 - War is not an end in itself but only a means to secure peace
- *Plato’s Republic:*
 - Conduct Toward Enemy Soldiers*
 - Soldiers should spare their enemies, recognizing that to *make friends* with the enemy and *bring them into the state* is better than to annihilate them and hence turn them against the state
 - *Always fight with an eye toward reconciliation- peace as the object of war*
 - Don’t rob corpses, don’t spoil the dead or hinder their burial
 - Conduct Toward the Innocent*
 - Don’t burn homes or destroy enemy territory
 - Only take the harvest crop, if soldiers need it
 - “And as they are Hellenes themselves they will not devastate Hellas, nor will they burn houses, nor even suppose that the whole population of a city- men, women, and children- are equally their enemies, for they know that the guilt of war is always confined to a few persons and that the many are their friends. And for these reasons they will be unwilling to waste their lands and raze their houses; their enmity will only give them to last until the many innocent sufferers have compelled the guilty few to give satisfaction.”
 - *LIMITED VIOLENCE (Proportionality/Military Necessity)*
 - *Idea that indiscriminate destruction would harm the innocent b/c in any conflict the whole population, consisting of men, women, children, should never be regarded as an enemy.*

- *Here Plato verges on the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, but uses terms instead of guilty and innocent and does not suggest that they can be segregated during the course of the conflict*
- Plato's *Laws*:
 - "War, whether external or civil, is not the best, but peace with one another, and good will, are best."
 - *Last resort/peace as the ultimate objective*

B. Romans- Cicero:

- Lived in the century prior to Christ
- Built upon Aristotle, adding the concept of "just cause"
- Gigantic influence on early church fathers, especially Augustine

- *The Just War (from De Republica)*
 - "A war is never undertaken by the ideal state, except in defence of its honour or its safety."
 - *Competent authority*
 - *Just cause*
 - "Those wars are unjust which are undertaken without provocation. For only a war waged for revenge or defense can actually be just."
 - "No war is considered just unless it has been proclaimed and declared, or unless reparation has first been demanded."
 - *Interesting- do we see this principle in JWT? (declared war)*
 - *Formal declaration of hostilities*

- *Natural Law and Just War (from De Officiis):*
 - "There is a limit to retribution and to punishment; or rather, I am inclined to think, it is sufficient that the aggressor should be brought to repent of his wrongdoing, in order that he may not repeat the offence and that others may be deterred from doing wrong."
 - *Jus in Bello- PROPORTIONALITY*
 - "We must resort to force only in case we may not avail ourselves of *discussion*. The only excuse, therefore, for going to war is that we may live in peace unharmed; and when the victory is won, we should spare those who have not been blood-thirsty and barbarous in their warfare."
 - *Last resort; peace as ultimate aim; what else?*
 - "We must also ensure protection to those who lay down their arms and throw themselves upon the mercy of our generals, even though the battering ram has hammered at their walls."
 - *Jus in bello- DISCRIMINATION*

- *Soldiers who cease from hostile actions should be accorded certain immunity from punishment*
- “The man who is not legally a soldier has no right to be fighting the foe.”
 - *Special moral status of soldiers? Remember this when we come to Augustine, who argues about what citizens are allowed to do when they are acting as agents of the state (taking of human life)*
- “But when a war is fought out for supremacy and when glory is the object of war, it must still not fail to start from the same motives which I said a moment ago were the only righteous grounds for going to war.”
 - *Early, but underdeveloped, idea of right intention?*
- “If under stress of circumstances individuals have made any promise to the enemy, they are bound to keep their word even then.”
 - *What is this?*
 - *GOOD FAITH with the enemy- of paramount importance in the conduct of a just war*
 - *Cicero forbids deceptions of the kind that arise when truces, etc., are used in a dishonest way*
 - *Remember this when we come to Augustine- Augustine shares with Cicero this emphasis on intent as it applies to maintaining good faith with the enemy—however, Augustine is willing to allow the propriety of deliberately deceptive practices in a way that Cicero seems to refuse*
 - *Cicero seems well ahead of his time on this- Geneva Conventions Protocol I (1949)*

C. Questions to Consider:

- In these pagan philosophers, what criteria of today’s just war theory do we see?
- What criteria here do we no longer see, or positively condemn?
- Why do you think we see such criteria?
- What does the pagan conscience (Plato and Cicero) assume in their criteria? (e.g., that a universal moral code exists? Strict utilitarianism?)

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. The Gospels:

- *What was the attitude of the Gospels to the calling of Soldiers?*
 - Centurion- commended for his faith rather than for his profession, but was not called upon to abandon his profession

- John the Baptist- baptized soldiers, did not order them to lay down their weapons
- “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s...”
 - We know that Jesus paid tribute, because this is what Peter informed the tax collectors.
- Gospel of Luke
 - Recognition of legitimacy of Roman empire, and synchronizing it with the gospel, in making the point that Christ was born under Augustus Caesar and that John the Baptist began his ministry under Tiberius
 - Soldiers coming to John the Baptist
 - Story of the king who prepared for war
 - Enigmatic statement about “he who does not have a sword should go out and buy one”
- Any objection in the early Church to Christians serving in the military was derived not from any N.T. explicit passages, but rather from an attempt to apply the “mind of Christ.”
 - **Beatitudes**
 - “Turn the cheek”
 - “Go the extra mile”
 - “Love your enemy”

B. The Acts of the Apostles/the Epistles:

- Paul’s use of armed Roman soldiers when traveling on his missionary journey from Jerusalem to Caesarea (availing himself of the protection of the Roman government)
- Question never specifically raised/addressed as to whether Christians could take arms in defense of Rome
- Romans 13: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers...”

Questions to Consider:

- Vis-à-vis the New Testament, what do we rely on or go back to for a just war theory philosophy? e.g.:.
 - Basic principles laid out by Christ and his apostles?
 - Understanding of protection of others? Protection of state?
 - What does the **incarnation** itself say about, and mean for, human nature and just war theory?

- What might a just war theorist say to a pacifist's interpretation of the beatitudes?
 - o Constricting the circumstances under which they apply?
 - o Protection of others is NOT covered in the Sermon on the Mount- it deals with "thy" cloak, if someone strikes "thee", etc.?
- What should the Good Samaritan have done had he arrived 10 minutes earlier?

IV. THE EARLY CHURCH: Reality, Writers, and Why

A. Introduction

Unlike Cicero and Plato, the focus of the Early Church was more upon the *legitimacy of military service* and the *potential conflict of loyalties* in serving the state and God

- This is a mistake that many contemporary theologians and pacifists make when they write about the early Church fathers' view on war: they impute *pacifism* to them when that was not the issue they addressed.
- Question was **not**: Is war morally justifiable, and if so, when?
- Rather, the main question was: May a *Christian* serve as a *soldier*?
 - o Keep this in mind when we discuss conscientious objectors in week #7

No early Church father to our knowledge approved of Christian participation in battle.

- But this position was not absolutist!
- Many Christians did serve in the military from the time of Christ to 313 A.D., and were not explicitly condemned (*see below*)
- In fact, in at least some cases, the church fathers used them as examples of how well Christians were integrated into society and what good citizens they were (e.g., Tertullian)

B. Reality: Christians in the Army Prior to Constantine

- Exact numbers unknown
- End of N.T. to about 170 A.D., no evidence of Christians in the army (perhaps participation was assumed, perhaps it was taken for granted)

- After 170 A.D., the references to Christian soldiers continue to increase
- 170 to 180 A.D.: *Mixed Signals!*
 - o *Origen, Against Celsus*
 - Written in response to Celsus, the pagan critic of Christianity, who claims that Christians did not contribute to the welfare/success of the state
 - Origen responds that you Christians DO contribute to the state and its welfare, but by prayer, not military service
 - *Implying he agrees with Celsus about no Christians in the army*
 - o *Marcus Aurelius* (the Thundering Legion Commander) (173 A.D.):
 - A known Christian commander
 - o From this time forward, evidence of Christians in the ranks continued to increase
- *Tertullian* (197 A.D.)
 - o Refuted charge of misanthropy leveled against Christians by *pointing to their presence* in the palace, senate, forum, *army*
 - o “We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every palace among you- cities, islands, *fortresses*, towns, marketplaces, *the very camp*, tribes, *companies*, palace, senate, forum— we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods.”
- 250 A.D.: Reference to *two Christian soldier martyrs* during the persecution of Decius (Cyprian mentions these)
- 278 A.D., Paul of Samosata- first Christian bishop to host the post of civil *magistrate* and to employ a *body guard*
- We find pre-Constantinian inscriptions throughout the empire mentioning Christian soldiers
- Christian numbers in the army continued to increase, as evidenced by *Galerius*, around 300 A.D., *attempting to weed Christians out* of his forces
- *Pacifism* best flourished within the interior of the *Pax Romana* and was less prevalent in the frontier provinces nearer the barbarians

Questions to Consider:

Given the location of where pacifism did best (interior of Rome), what might this say about reasons for pacifism or even for military service?

C. Writings: The Church Fathers

Up to 180 A.D.:

- ***Athenagoras (ca. 177 A.D.)- very general:***
 - o Early Christian apologist from Athens
 - o Christians “do not strike back, do not go to law when robbed; they give to them that ask of them and love their neighbors as themselves.”
 - o *But nothing specific about soldiers and war*

- ***Justin Martyr (100 to 165 A.D.)- more specific:***
 - o “We who were filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness have each of us in all the world changed our weapons of war...swords into plows and spears into agricultural implements.”
 - o “We who formerly murdered one another now not only do not make war upon our enemies, but that we may not lie or deceive our judges, we gladly die confessing Christ.”

180 A.D. to time of Constantine:

East

- ***Origen (185-254 A.D.)- Against Celsus***
 - o Outstanding apologetic work; responds at length to Celsus’ charge that Christians are rebellious because they refuse military service
 - o Argues against military service from Christ’s silence on the subject
 - “The Christian Lawgiver [Christ] would not have altogether forbidden the putting of men to death; and yet He *nowhere teaches* that it is right for His own disciples to offer violence to anyone, however wicked.”
 - o But at the same time *prays for* the success of the army, exhorting Christian to “wrestle 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!*”
 - I.e., goes farther than just “praying for the troops” in a general sense!

- If men do fight, they should imitate the bees in observing the rules of the just war
 - One of the *few* time we see just war talk in early Church fathers
- ***Clement of Alexandria (150 to 211 A.D.)- less precise than Origen:***
 - When his plea for an equal code of conduct for women and for men was met with the objection that women, unlike men, are not trained for war, he preserved the equality by denying men military exercises.
 - “In peace, not in war, we are trained.”
 - These Soldiers of peace were part of a bloodless army that Christ had assembled by blood and by the word
 - Yet we see in Clement the notion that a soldier who is converted while in the Army may remain in the Army, but with a higher Commander:
 - “Were you a soldier on campaign when the knowledge of God laid hold on you? Then listen to the Commander who signals righteousness.”
 - And he commends humane conduct in war- specifically commends the humanity of the code of war in Deut. 20
 - Again, just war touched upon briefly

West

- ***Tertullian (160-220 A.D.):***
 - Most unambiguous
 - “Christ in disarming Peter ungirt every soldier.”
 - “For albeit soldiers had come unto John [the Baptist], and had received the formula of their rule; albeit, likewise, a centurion had believed; still the Lord *afterward*, in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier. *No dress is lawful among us, if assigned to any unlawful action.*”
 - *But* recognizes (and rebukes!) Christian soldiers as existing, when he says that Christians are sufficiently numerous to offer successive resistance to persecuting emperors did they not count it better to be slain than to slay
 - Says that those who become believers while in the army must abandon it immediately (“there must be either an immediate abandonment of it...or all sorts of quibbling will have to be resorted to in order to avoid offending God, and that is not allowed even outside of military service.”)
 - *Unlike Clement above*
 - “Shall the Son of peace, for whom it is unlawful to go to law, be engaged in battle?”

- “If we are enjoined to love our enemies, whom have we to hate? If we are injured we are forbidden to retaliate. Who then can suffer injury at our hands?”
 - But note that he prays that prays for the emperor “without ceasing,” prays that the imperial armies might be “brave-” and encourages other Christians to do the same
 - Prayer not just for *welfare*, but for *victory!*
 - He states that the empire protects everyone, including Christians, and thus we should pray for the emperor, empire, army
- **Lactantius (240-320 A.D.):**
- “The Christian Cicero” - wrote on the cusp of Constantine
 - Argues against violence and war from natural law and from the image of God in man
 - “God in prohibiting killing discountenances... that which men regard as legal. Participation in warfare therefore will not be legitimate to a just man whose military service is justice itself.”
 - “We are all sprung from a heavenly seed; all have that same father. Therefore they are to be accounted as savage beasts who injure man; who, *in opposition to every law and right of human nature*, plunder, torture, slay, and banish.”
 - Society came together in order to allow all men protection- to violate that compact (*through war?*) is the “greatest impiety.”

Questions to Consider:

1) Tertullian deeply objects to Christians serving in the military. Yet he prays for “brave armies” and approvingly tells of other Christians who do the same. In other words, the Army is good, but not for Christians. Origen asserts that the Christian joins the warrior by praying for him; he even prays for the *success* of the Army.

- *How can you reconcile this position? Is it consistent? If not, why not? If so, how?*
- *What does this mean about the relationship between the praying Christian and the soldier?*
- *How might Tertullian or Origen have reconciled the two?*

2) Tertullian: “For albeit soldiers had come unto John [the Baptist], and had received the formula of their rule; albeit, likewise, a centurion had believed; still the Lord

afterward, in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier. *No dress is lawful among us, if assigned to any unlawful action.*"

- What is "unlawful action"?

3) Origen argues against military service from Christ's silence on the subject. I.e., because Christ does not explicitly condone military service, it's not permitted.

- What are your thoughts on this approach to taking a position on Christians in military service? What are the pros and cons of this approach?

4) In Origen's prayer for the success of the Army, he exhorts fellow Christian to "wrestle 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!*"

- What just war hints do we see here?

- What tension do we see here? (i.e., between loving peace and essentially "supporting" righteous warfare)

5) Lactantius: "We are all sprung from a heavenly seed; all have that same father. Therefore they are to be accounted as savage beasts who injure man; who, *in opposition to every law and right of human nature*, plunder, torture, slay, and banish."

- How, if at all, does the fact that we now have *jus in bello* criteria allay this concern/objection?

6) Lactantius: "Since men entered into and contracted fellowship with men for the sake of *protection*, either to violate or not to preserve that compact which was entered into among men from the commencement of their origin, is to be considered as *the greatest impiety*...It is part of a *human being*, and of a brave man too, to preserve one who was on the point of perishing.."

- What are your thoughts on this statement?

- How consistent is this with Lactantius' opposition to war?

- What exactly does this seem to allow for? (duty to protect issues? Defense of others vs. self-defense?)

D. Why?: On What Grounds Might These Writers Have Repudiated Christian Participation in Warfare?

- *Danger of idolatry in military service?*
 - o Officers were called upon to sacrifice to the emperor who was considered deity
 - o Privates participated at least by their attendance
 - o *Acts of Saint Marcellus, Centurion and Martyr:*
 - “I serve Jesus Christ the everlasting King...I cease to serve your emperors, and I disdain to worship your wooden and stone gods, who are deaf and dumb idols. *If such be the conditions of service that men are compelled to sacrifice to the gods and emperors, then behold, I throw away the staff and belt; I renounce the standards and refuse to serve.*”

- *Hostility toward Rome as a persecuting power?*
 - o But we also see that many Christian writers did not wish to see the empire overthrown
 - o Although there may be a link between the strength of the pacifism and the hostility toward Rome (Tertullian)

- *Indifference toward Rome due to expectation of the Lord’s speedy return?*
 - o But some of that belief was waning, even in the beginning of the 2nd century (but still perhaps there to some extent)

- *Indifference due to influence of Gnosticism?*

- *Asceticism/monasticism?*

- *Love versus bloodshed?*
 - o Incompatibility between love and killing?
 - o Exhortation to love, not hate, as Christ laid out in the Beatitudes, was a running theme among early Church fathers (Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Dionysius of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, etc.)
 - o Idea that “taking of blood” included not just murder, not just capital punishment, but *any* bloodshed for *any* reason- to include killing in war

E. Questions to Consider:

- Several of the reasons listed above are situation-based and change once Constantine legalizes Christianity. This will later raise the issue of conscientious objection:
 - o When can a person be a conscientious objector [CO]?

- Can you be a CO to a specific war, or must you go all out and oppose all war?
 - What do you think of the US military's policy of "all or nothing"? (discussed in week #7)
 - What would our country's military be like if individuals could individually choose the morality of individual wars?
 - Must we rely on the goodness of our state to make that decision for us? What are the dangers of that?
- Review Saint Marcellus' statement above.
 - What if the conditions were different? Would that cut at the merits of his position?

V. CONCLUSION

A. Varieties of Opposition to Christian Service in the Military:

1) *Legalistic/Eschatological (Tertullian)*

- Doesn't matter whether the barbarians overcome the empire; that is not the Christian's concern

2) *Pragmatic/Redemptive (Origen, Justin Martyr)*

- Objection to war because now there is "a more excellent way"
- Christian warfare should supplant political warfare
- Note that we eventually see this work out in practice- in part at least- with the formation of monasteries and the prohibitions against clergy taking up arms

B. Resolution?

- The Christian Church was in the end (prior to Constantine) to find a vocational resolution by way of monasticism, involving differing levels within the Church itself.
- Eusebius, writing in 313 A.D., posits two grades of Christian conduct:
 - One for the *laity* who may participate in pure marriages, in just wars, in trade and farming;
 - One for the *clergy* requiring celibacy, poverty, aloofness from the world

