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Pacifism and Biblical Interpretation **Robert C. Newman**

Introduction

One of the more persistent and controversial topics of discussion in the history of Christendom has been the Christian attitude toward war. This area is certainly an important one, as it vitally affects the Christian's relationship to the state in which he lives, to its social and cultural life, and to many phases of national and international politics.

Several questions of exegesis and hermeneutics also arise when this problem is considered. For example: What is the nature of the Old Testament? What is its relationship to the New Testament? What is the range of application of the Sermon on the Mount? In fact, one's exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount and one's view on war tend to go hand-in-hand.

In this paper we shall attempt briefly to sketch the history of pacifism in Christendom to date. Then we shall examine three important forms of such pacifism, considering each view and the arguments used to support it. We shall call these views Historic Pacifism, Liberal Pacifism, and Neo-Orthodox Pacifism. Finally we shall attempt a brief critique of each view.

History of Pacifism in Christendom

Pacifism seems to have had its ups and downs in the history of the church. Before about AD 170, very little is known about Christian attitudes toward war beyond the teaching of Scripture, which we will discuss later. It is true that several statements from the Didache (AD 60-130), Ignatius (about 110) and Polycarp (about 130) have been cited to support the view that the primitive church was pacifist,¹ but these passages seem to be nothing more than warnings against hatred and vengeance. I am not aware of any Christian theologian, whether pacifist or not, who has approved of either hatred or vengeance.

With more justification, the statement of Justin Martyr has been cited as pacifist:²

We who were filled with war, and mutual slaughter, and every wickedness
... have changed our warlike weapons – our swords into ploughshares, and
our spears into implements of tillage ...³

¹ G. F. Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 58-59.

² *Ibid.*, 59.

³ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (Edinburgh: T & t Clark, 1867), 2:237.

However, Justin gives no detailed discussion by which we can learn just what his view was. The pagan Celsus, living about this time (late second century), wrote against Christianity, charging Christians for not taking part in government and refusing to serve in the army.⁴ While this might have been a false accusation, or one applicable only to some Christians at the time, Origen's later response accepts the charge as true.

After AD 170, our information begins to increase. Tertullian (about 200) teaches that a Christian should not continue as a soldier after conversion. Hershberger claims the idea that Christians could be soldiers was a new one which Tertullian sought to oppose.⁵ This seems to be an assumption, without clear evidence either way, for we know Tertullian disagreed strongly with many Christians of his day in other areas, and his doctrine paralleled that of the pietistic Montanists.

Origen (about 250), answering Celsus, admits that Christians do not serve as magistrates or soldiers; rather they fight by prayer. They refuse public office in order to keep themselves "for a diviner and more necessary service ... the salvation of men."⁶ But while Origen felt that Christians should not be in the army or government, yet he commends "wrestling in prayer 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!"⁷

Hershberger gives pacifistic statements by Cyprian and some fathers of lesser note, yet he admits that there were many Christians in the Roman army in AD 313, before Christianity was tolerated.⁸ Following toleration, the old state religion of Rome soon vanished, and paganism *per se* had almost disappeared from the Imperial cities by AD 400.

Augustine was one of the first to develop a detailed view on the relation of church and state. He claimed both were appointed by God for different spheres of activity, so Christians should obey both. Augustine also recognized the possibility of just wars.⁹

In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas developed what became the Catholic view. As opposed to Augustine, Thomas saw the church and state united. He also taught a double standard in regard to war: ordinary Christians could fight in wars, but monks and clergy could not.¹⁰ However, this was not the only view held in the medieval church, as there were military monastic orders, such as the Knights Templar, which fought in the Crusades.

The Reformation brought changes in many areas of doctrine. Luther's view of church and state was close to Augustine's: church and state are not to interfere with each other.

⁴ Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*, 59.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷ Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Library*, 4:668.

⁸ Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*, 61-62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

The individual is both a Christian and a citizen. As a Christian he follows the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount; as a citizen he obeys the state.¹¹

According to Hershberger, Calvin's position was somewhat different. The state was to be under the church or at least under Christian principles. Even wicked people were to be compelled to be righteous in their outward actions. Hershberger claims that Calvin got his moral and ethical principles from the Old Testament instead of the New Testament.¹² I am inclined to question the accuracy of Hershberger's understanding of Calvin here, but a thorough examination of this area is beyond the scope of this paper. In any case, it is clear that the Lutherans and Calvinists were not pacifists.

However, the sixteenth century also saw the rise of the Anabaptists in Germany, Switzerland and Holland. Some of these, particularly those continuing after the Münster episode, were strongly pacifist. Among their theologians, Pilgram Marpeck saw the old covenant as merely a shadow of the new. Hans Pfistermeyer thought the New Testament was better than the Old Testament, teaching a higher and more perfect doctrine. Similarly, Menno Simons' dictum, "All Scripture ... is interpreted according to the spirit, teaching, walk and example of Christ and the apostles,"¹³ provided a hermeneutical basis for discounting the Old Testament in dealing with the Christian attitude toward war.

Another pacifist group arose in seventeenth century England. This was the Society of Friends (or Quakers), founded by George Fox. The following century saw the rise of the Brethren (or Dunkers) in Germany, started by Alexander Mack.¹⁴

All three of these groups are today represented in the United States, and especially here in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. These three groups represented nearly all of the Christians holding a pacifist position until the twentieth century. Their views on pacifism have been sufficiently similar for them to cooperate with each other, as we see from the joint statement given here:

We, Friends, Brethren, and Mennonites, assembled in the Conference of the Historic Peace Churches, at Newton, Kansas, October 31 – November 2, 1935, remembering in gratitude to God the historic war testimony of our churches, desire, in absolute renunciation of war for the wholehearted practice of peace and love, to state the basis of our Committee's position.

1. Our peace principles are rooted in Christ and his Word.
2. Through Jesus Christ, who lived among men as the incarnation of the God of love, we become partakers of the spirit and character of our Lord, and thereby are constrained to love all men, even our enemies.

¹¹ Ibid., 67-68.

¹² Ibid., 68-69.

¹³ Ibid., 22-23.

¹⁴ Ibid., 69.

3. Christ has led us to see the value of human life and personality, and possibilities in all men, who by a spiritual birth from above may become sons of God.

4. The spirit of sacrificial service, love, and goodwill, promotes the highest wellbeing and development of men and society, whereas the spirit of hatred, ill will, and fear, destroys, as has been demonstrated repeatedly in human experiences.

5. Since good alone can overcome evil, the use of violence must be abandoned.

6. War is sin. It is the complete denial of the Spirit, Christian love and all that Christ stands for. It is wrong in spirit and method, and destructive in results. Therefore, we cannot support or engage in any war, or conflict between nations, classes or groups.

7. Our supreme allegiance is to God. We cannot violate it by a conflicting lesser loyalty, but we are determined to follow Christ in all things. In this determination we believe we are serving the interests of our country, and are truly loyal to our nation.

8. Under God we commit ourselves to set forth in this true way of life this statement of position and assume the obligations and sacrifices attending its practice.¹⁵

The last hundred years have witnessed the growth of pacifism within churches outside these three groups. This new pacifism is of a different sort. It grew up from the soil of old liberalism with its social gospel, and it was based on a view of mankind as basically good.¹⁶ Since the 1920s, this view of man has gradually been replaced in Protestant circles by neo-orthodoxy, which views man as basically sinful (though sin is not defined in the usual way). This has led to a third formulation of pacifism from the theological basis of neo-orthodoxy.¹⁷

These recent forms of religious pacifism differ from the historic form in their view of the Bible, as we shall see later, and in their view of what pacifism means. The historic form may be called "nonresistance." Here, no compulsion or coercion of others is allowed, even by non-violent means. In practice, this view usually leads to a withdrawal from all political activity.¹⁸ The more recent forms borrow their tactics from Mahatma Gandhi, and may be called "nonviolent resistance." In contrast, this latter position rules out violence by its proponents, but it does not rule out the compulsion or coercion of others.

¹⁵ Rufus D. Bowman, *The Church of the Brethren and War, 1708-1941* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1944), 268.

¹⁶ Cuthbert G. Rutenber, *The Dagger and the Cross* (New York: Fellowship Publications, 1950), 20-22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Methods of coercion employed include non-cooperation, strikes and sit-ins.¹⁹ Needless to say, this approach is more likely to provoke a violent response than is nonresistance.

Let us now turn to a consideration of the Biblical support claimed by each of these three pacifist positions. Though some of their arguments are the same, it is important to keep distinctive features in mind.

Historic Pacifism

For the position of historic pacifism, let us take the Mennonites as representative. By their traditional position (some current Mennonites are more liberal), the Bible is absolutely reliable and is the infallible Word of God given to men by inspiration. Thus the 1921 Mennonite General Conference stated:

We believe in the plenary and verbal inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God; that it is authentic in its matter, authoritative in its counsels, inerrant in the original writings, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.²⁰

As the Scriptural foundation for their doctrine of nonresistance, the Ten Commandments are first cited. The sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," is understood in the sense is "kill" is synonymous with murder.²¹ Apparently this is felt to include warfare and all violent resistance. Next, the distinctive title of Christ as "prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6; Luke 2:14) is noted. The Mennonites claim that Jesus taught nonresistance in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:36-45). In Jesus' statement in Matt 26:52, "... all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword," they place great emphasis on the word "perish."

Other passages cited in support of their claim that Jesus taught nonresistance are John 14:27, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you..." and John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." They deny that Jesus used physical violence on *men* when He cleansed the temple.²² This will be discussed in more detail under Neo-Orthodox Pacifism.

Not only did Jesus teach nonresistance, so did the apostles. Examples of Paul's teachings are Romans 12:17-21 (Don't repay evil with evil; don't avenge; live peacefully with all men; do good to enemies; overcome evil with good), 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 (Don't go to law against a brother; it is better to be defrauded), and 2 Cor 10:4, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal..." Peter's teaching is similar, as seen in 1 Peter 2:20-23 (We are called to suffering on account of our well-doing; don't revile or threaten, but commit

¹⁹ Ibid., 15-17.

²⁰ Daniel Kauffman, ed., *Doctrines of the Bible* (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1952), 141-42.

²¹ Ibid., 505.

²² Ibid., 505-07.

yourself to God). Likewise James 4:1-2 describes lust and covetousness as the source of wars and fightings.²³

To answer the charge that nonresistance ignores the Old Testament, it is pointed out that "Thou shalt not kill," and "Love your enemies" are as clearly taught in the Old Testament as in the New Testament (Gen 4:9-11; Ex 20:13; Deut 5:17; 2 Kings 6:13-23; Prov 25:21-22). It is admitted that the Old Testament emphasis is more on violence, but this is because the OT period was preeminently the dispensation of justice while the NT period is the dispensation of mercy. While God used His people to dispense justice in the OT, they are allowed to dispense *only* mercy in the NT.²⁴

What are we to say about the OT wars? They are ascribed to Israel's sin:

We have every reason to believe that had the Israelites been absolutely true to God at all times they would have had one unbroken record of victory without having to shed a single drop of blood or taking the life of a single enemy.²⁵

Thus the mightiest victories of the OT were won without the people of God shedding anyone's blood (Red Sea; Syrians and Elisha; 2 Kings 6:13-23; Sennacherib).²⁶

But this raises two questions. Why did God order Israel to kill on several occasions? How do we understand the wrath of God? To answer the first question, one Mennonite designates the lower level of human conduct produced by the fall as "sub-Christian."²⁷ When men move to a sub-Christian level of action, God deals with them on that level. Thus, he claims, although God promised to give the Israelites the land peacefully (Ex 23:20-33), they disobeyed the original plan, and therefore were later required to fight. Those commandments by God to kill the Amalekites, Agag and Goliath "were permissive commandments give to a sinful, lean-souled people who had chosen to live on the lower 'sub-Christian' level."²⁸

According to the historic pacifist view, the wrath of God is only manifested in three ways. God may punish a sinner directly (miraculously); He may punish him by the natural results of the sinner's own actions; or, He may let him be punished by sinful men. Thus even a state official violates the will of God for His people when he takes the life of an offender.²⁹

Thus the Mennonite view makes a rather large distinction between the Old and New Testaments. The Anabaptist view mentioned above (page 3) is refined by Hershberger by taking the civil law of the Old Testament as a concession to the "sub-Christian" level of

²³ Ibid., 507-08.

²⁴ Ibid., 509.

²⁵ Ibid., 510.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance*, 15.

²⁸ Ibid., 24-31.

²⁹ Ibid., 17-20.

conduct, which concession ends with the coming of Christ. Thus Christ abolished both the civil and ceremonial portions of the OT law, but not the moral part.³⁰

Liberal Pacifism

Not all theological liberals are pacifists, but we are here concerned with those who are. The pacifistic views of those designated "old liberals" in recent theological parlance are based on a very different view of the Bible than that described above for historic pacifism. John Rider Coates, the translator and editor of the first four volumes of *Bible Key Words*, is a good example of a liberal pacifist. In his book, *War – What Does the Bible Say?* we learn that most of the OT has been compiled by editors whose faith is often quite different from that of their sources.³¹ He accepts the JEDP theory,³² finds more than one Isaiah,³³ and dates Daniel from the Maccabean period.³⁴ There are mythological elements in the OT,³⁵ the words of later prophets are ascribed to earlier ones,³⁶ great miracles only *seem* miraculous,³⁷ and God's control of history is only known by a "luminous intuition" of the prophets.³⁸

The liberal attitude toward OT wars is well summarized by Charles E. Raven, former Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge:

Until lately the OT stood alongside the New as inspired, authoritative, inerrant; and large portions of the OT glorify the God of Battles rather than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. A people brought up at home and in Sunday School to reverence Jael, the murderess of Sisera, and Samuel hewing Agag in pieces, and David "the bloodthirsty and lascivious brigand," absorbed the outlook of these savageries and failed to realize that they represent a time and a faith utterly remote from that of Christ. Protestantism has not yet outgrown its bibliolatry; Catholicism still professes it. If Scripture as a whole is infallible, then warfare has its sanction.³⁹

Following Wellhausen's development hypothesis, the old liberals see a development through the Scriptures regarding the proper attitude toward war. The earliest primitive view is that war is a command of God. Later it is seen merely as a duty to one's nation. Then it becomes a problem, later a judgment for sin, and finally something to be abolished.⁴⁰

³⁰ Ibid., 15-16.

³¹ John Rider Coates, *War – What Does the Bible Say?* (London: Sheldon Press, 1940), 4.

³² Ibid., 5, 7, 53.

³³ Ibid., 13.

³⁴ Ibid., 51.

³⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁶ Ibid., 18.

³⁷ Ibid., 20.

³⁸ Ibid., 33.

³⁹ Charles E. Raven, *War and the Christian* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 52.

⁴⁰ Coates, *War*, vii.

Having an optimistic view of human nature, the old liberals saw in the "most advanced" parts of the Bible "hints of the possibility that the human race might outgrow its barbarism" and actually succeed in abolishing war.⁴¹ According to them, Christ had produced the church as an army to fight with spiritual weapons to overcome the states and turn them into churches. The goal of history, the coming of the city of God, would occur when the united Church succeeded in doing the same thing on a world scale.⁴²

Neo-Orthodox Pacifism

Neo-Orthodoxy is that more recent form of liberalism which accepts the results of Biblical criticism, but still finds religious value in the Bible as it becomes the Word of God to an individual by an existential encounter. As with old liberalism, not all proponents of neo-orthodoxy are pacifists. Neither Reinhold Niebuhr nor Emil Brunner are pacifists, for example.⁴³

What is the basis of neo-orthodox pacifism? Unlike the historic pacifist position, it is neither a literalistic interpretation of the sixth commandment and the Sermon on the Mount, nor the repudiation of all use of force between individuals or communities. Instead the basis of pacifism is found in the first principles of the Christian ethic as seen in Jesus' own teachings and life. These principles are love of one's neighbor and "belief in a Father God who loves all men impartially and sets an infinite value on every individual human soul." Furthermore, all the teachings of Jesus are to be understood in the light of his life and his death. In all cases the "final court of appeal is the New Testament."⁴⁴

This last statement again raises the problem of the relation of the OT to the NT. The neo-orthodox view is basically a combination of the historic and liberal pacifist views. Thus while Jesus accepted the OT as the word of God for its own time, this was "superseded by the fuller truth he came to bring." The OT was a "stepping stone" which prepared people for the NT. It taught them absolute justice, but gradually brought them to recognize true "love that does not even seek just retribution."⁴⁵ The NT is also pitted against the OT when the Sermon on the Mount is interpreted as correcting misconceptions held by the OT writers themselves. The problem of the Biblical attitude toward war is thought to be insoluble if both testaments are taken as a unity on the same level. Instead, we have progressive revelation ascending to Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ In fact, we may go further. "We have Jesus' warrant, too ... for the conviction that certain aspects of truth, only implicit even in Jesus' own teaching, are bound to become more and more explicit to the Christian conscience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (He cites John 16:12ff).⁴⁷

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

⁴² Ibid., 59-61.

⁴³ Rutenber, *Dagger and Cross*, 18.

⁴⁴ George H. C. Macgregor, *The New Testament Basis of Pacifism* (London: The Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1953), 11-12.

⁴⁵ Rutenber, *Dagger and Cross*, 63-64.

⁴⁶ Macgregor, *NT Basis of Pacifism*, 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 65.

Perhaps because neo-orthodoxy has more interest in exegesis than did old liberalism, George H. C. Macgregor, Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow, seeks to deal with a large number of New Testament passages urged against pacifism. Let us look at his treatment of a few of these.

Does not Jesus' statement in Matt 10:34 – "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" – say that Jesus sends war? Macgregor feels that this purpose clause is not actually Jesus' purpose for coming to earth, but it is a Semitic idiom for some tragic consequences of His ministry. However, these consequences are not wars but (cp. Luke 12:51) divisions between friends, the persecution of the Christian by his former friends.⁴⁸

In Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, the so-called Olivet Discourse, and in the book of Revelation, we see the Messiah fighting His enemies. Surely if Jesus fights, it cannot be sinful *per se*. Macgregor, however, questions the authenticity of the Olivet Discourse as an actual speech by Jesus or even as reflecting his sentiments. Similarly, Revelation is viewed as an apocalyptic constructed from Jewish materials and therefore not Christian.⁴⁹

Does not Jesus' commendation of the centurion at Capernaum (Matt 8:5-10, Luke 7:1-10) indicate His approval of the military? Macgregor notes that Jesus commends the centurion's faith, not his occupation. Jesus commends a sinner woman and Zacchaeus also. In fact, His marveling at such faith may be due to its unlikely source. In any case the argument is one from silence. Besides, the Roman army in Palestine was a police force. To speak against it would encourage violence, which is against the principles of Christian pacifism.⁵⁰

Macgregor admits that Luke 22:36-38 has a "perplexing martial note":

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.

Macgregor suggests several possible solutions: the words may be the work of the Lukan editor and so not authentic; they may be literal and so against pacifism; they may be metaphorical (meaning trouble is coming), so that Jesus breaks off the conversation when the disciples take Him literally; they may be ironic, pointing to the futility of armed resistance against the might of Rome. W. A. Curtis treats the words as instructions to the disciples for their missionary travels beyond the reach of the law and armed protection,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 18-20.

where weapons for defense would be necessary. But this ignores the context of Jesus' coming arrest.⁵¹

When Jesus cast the money changers out of the temple (in all the Gospels, but especially see John 2:13-17), didn't He use force? Macgregor answers that the scourge (mentioned only in John) is, according to the Greek, used on the animals, not on the men. The verb εκβαλλω means "send forth" as well as "cast out," so violence is not necessarily implied. In fact, as violence would have provoked retaliation, Jesus probably only used His moral authority to remove the men. In any case, the passage has no relevance to war. Instead, as the animals were probably filling the Court of the Gentiles and interfering with their worship, Jesus' action can be seen as a "protest ... on behalf of international goodwill."⁵²

What can be said about Jesus' denunciations against the Pharisees (Matthew 23), Herod (Luke 13:32) and one who offends children (Matt 18:6)? Macgregor claims these statements have been strengthened from their original form. They must also be qualified by Jesus' rebuke against censoriousness (Matt 7:1). There is also a difference between words and force. The intent of these denunciations is to turn the wrongdoers back from their deeds.⁵³

Passing on to the positive position of neo-orthodox pacifism, Macgregor identifies Matt 5:38-48 as the key passage for pacifism. The primary reference here is to *personal* enemies, and Jesus is laying down a *new* principle which is distinctively Christian. Negatively the principle calls for nonresistance (but not passivity); positively, for love. Macgregor notes several attempts to "water down" this interpretation. Some (more or less liberal) persons have seen this as an interim ethic due to Jesus' eschatological outlook. Others see this as applicable only to His coming kingdom. Thus both of these would deny an application for today. Still others limit the application to a particular individual in a particular situation (like Jesus' instructions to the rich young ruler). But there is no support for this in the context. If anything Jesus taught is to have universal application, surely this must! Another view of this passage is that it is an exaggeration for effect (as in Matt 5:29-30, Luke 14:26), but Macgregor feels there is no evidence for this in the context.⁵⁴

While Macgregor does not think that nonresistance abrogates the function of law in society or the moral use of force, yet he sees Jesus' method of dealing with evil as something quite different.⁵⁵ The cross was Jesus' supreme demonstration of His method:

For Jesus the cross meant risking everything on His conviction that God's way of overcoming evil would work. Therefore we see in the cross ... the inevitable climax, under the conditions which confronted Him, to a consistent life-practice of meeting evil not with violence, not even by

⁵¹ Ibid., 22-24.

⁵² Ibid., 17-18.

⁵³ Ibid., 38-39.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 32-36.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 39.

invoking law, but by the way of forgiving and reconciling love. Jesus died rather than betray that love method.⁵⁶

Yet even though the key passage for nonresistance is primarily individual in application, Macgregor feels that it has larger implications. Following this principle, a nation might feel it necessary totally to disarm, not to seek its own destruction, but because it is convinced that this is the best way to end provocations. Macgregor admits this act would be dangerous, that the nation might be destroyed, yet perhaps the world will not be redeemed from warfare until a nation has courage enough to do this.⁵⁷

A Critique of Pacifism

Having examined these three forms of pacifism in Christendom today, we can see both similarities and differences between them. All apparently concede that if the OT and the NT are put on the same level, then the Bible does not teach pacifism. All three, therefore, put the NT on a higher level, so that certain OT provisions are no longer in force. Liberal and neo-orthodox pacifists do this by means of a concept of "progressive revelation" akin to Wellhausen's evolution of religion theory, so that earlier ideas about God in the Bible are actually mistaken. Historic pacifism avoids this method, but uses a kind of "dispensationalism" which cuts us off from all the OT civil law, and/or makes the morality of the OT a concession to sinful man.

As Bible-believing Christians, we repudiate those views which reject the inerrancy of Scripture. We recognize a legitimate use of the term "progressive revelation," by which later books of the Bible contain information about God, man and morality (among other subjects) not specifically stated or perhaps not even mentioned earlier. But this does not make the NT higher than the OT any more than the tenth commandment is higher than the first. I believe it is impossible for God ever to command anything as a concession to man's "sub-Christian" level of action, though He doubtless permitted such actions. While we may concede that the United States is not a theocracy established by revelation as was Israel, it does not follow that the principles revealed to them are to be ignored by us. All NT statements related to civil government seem to be in accord with the OT statements, so there is no reason to suppose that the latter have been rescinded. Likewise individual ethics do not change from OT to NT, though they are more clearly spelled out.

The pacifists agree in laying great weight upon the Sermon on the Mount as the source of their ethic. As we accept the whole Bible as God's word, we must be careful not to ignore or disparage any parts of it because they are misused or overemphasized by others. I personally feel some dispensationalists have made a terrible mistake in assigning the Sermon on the Mount to the millennial kingdom so that it has no force today. The basic principles of this sermon, however, can be found throughout Scripture. Therefore as Bible-believers, we must not ignore this passage.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 74-75.

What, then, does the Sermon on the Mount say? A careful reading of chapters 5 through 7 of Matthew should convince anyone that the major emphasis is that true religion is a characteristic of the heart (or attitudes) rather than just the outward actions. Now Jesus, it would appear, clearly indicates that He is not intending to destroy or even alter the OT in this sermon (5:17-19), but rather He is seeking to correct misapplications of the OT, such as: restricting sin to the deed and not the attitude (5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32), taking a concession as a command (5:31-32, 33-34), and using legal sanctions to justify vengeful attitudes (5:38-39), or playing with words to do something similar (5:43-44).

The particular concern of the pacifists is verses 38-48. Here Jesus is saying that the sinful attitude of another *never* justifies our sinful attitude toward them. We are never excused from blessing, doing good to, and praying for, our enemies, no matter how nasty they are to us. Yet this does not excuse us from our duty as citizens to seek the welfare of the community. Nor are we encouraged here to help another do evil, to drive the getaway car, to refuse to testify in court, to stand by while wrong is done to another, or to refuse to serve in the police force or army.

It is true that coercion is a concession to sin in one sense. Namely, if there were no sin, there would be no need for coercion. But there are many things not sinful in themselves which would not have existed without sin. Men neither wore clothes nor lived in cities before the fall, yet both will exist in the eternal state (Rev 3:5; 21:1-2). Faith and hope will apparently not continue when sin is gone (1 Corinthians 13).

But God Himself ordained capital punishment (Gen 9:6), set up at least one human government directly (Israel), and all governments providentially (Daniel 4), and Himself wars with and inflicts capital punishment on men (Rev 9:11ff). Nor is there any Scriptural indication that it is impossible for human government to be righteous and involve coercion. On the contrary, we see that the saints will reign with Christ in the Millennium, using force (Rev 20:6, 3:26-27; Zechariah 14).

It thus appears that governmental use of force may be righteous, both when used internally (in police action) or externally (in war). It does not follow that all or even most such uses have necessarily been righteous. Thus the OT explicitly forbids wanton killing in wartime, with the specific exception of those peoples on whom God used Israel to bring a judgment of destruction (Deut 20:10-18). As Christian citizens we should use our influence, small though it might be, to support the righteous use of force and to condemn its unrighteous use, both at home and abroad.

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