

THE BIBLE AND WAR IN AMERICA: AN HISTORICAL SURVEY

Alan Johnson*

War is a terrible trade; but in the cause that is righteous, sweet is the smell of power.

—Miles Standish

Christian attitudes toward war have a long, complex and unfortunately ambiguous history in the Christian Church. This ambiguity has led to diametrically opposed moral viewpoints on the questions of war and the Christian means to peace in the world. My interests for sometime now have been in the area of theological ethics. While I do not believe that Scripture supplies direct answers for most of our modern moral questions, as an evangelical I assume that the Bible is the primary source and final authority for moral guidance on any issue that calls for a specific moral judgment. Christian attitude toward war is just such a moral judgment. How directly has the Bible affected the Christian attitude in America about war? Has the Bible ever shaped and does it now significantly shape the moral views of the Church on this important issue? In this paper I have chosen to limit the investigation largely to the major wars of America. The goal is to explore whether the Bible actually has significantly affected the Christian attitude toward war in American history. Modern nuclear arms have intensified for this generation the Christian's need for moral clarity vis-à-vis the issue of war as never before. Toward this end the present study is directed.

I. THE PACIFIST AND JUST-WAR ROOTS

The Christian Church, represented by the various colonists at the onset of the Revolutionary War, brought with it from Britain and Europe the Christian traditions about war that had descended to them from the earlier periods. Bainton has given us a threefold typology to fit these views: pacifist, crusade, and just war.¹

James T. Johnson in his recent foundational studies convincingly suggests, probably correctly, that Bainton's analysis is misleading and that the crusade and just-war views are in principle virtually identical. Accordingly he argues there are only two basic Christian positions in history: pacifist and just war.²

The classic Christian just-war doctrine, Johnson argues, though it has roots

*Alan Johnson is professor of New Testament and Christian ethics at Wheaton College in Illinois.

¹R. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace* (Abingdon, 1960).

²J. T. Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War: Religious and Secular Concepts 1200-1740* (Princeton: University Press, 1975) 10-11, 134-149.

that go back to Augustine, did not emerge until the sixteenth century. The classic doctrine must be distinguished from the modern just-war concept. Classic just-war adherents blended the *jus ad bellum* (a statement on the right to make war), which derived from ecclesiastical sources and included among others the cause of defending the true religion, with the *jus in bello* (a statement on what is allowable in the course of war), which came from the secular sources of the knightly chivalric code and civil law. In the post-Reformation century this unified just-war doctrine of the late middle ages divided along a line between the religious and the secular. The split was over two divergent readings of the *jus ad bellum* (just cause for war). One line took war for religion as the purest, holiest, most just reason for conflict imaginable. Contrariwise, others consciously ruled out war for religion and instead emphasized as just causes for war those that could be put in secular (natural law) or political terms. This latter view, which strongly disallows war for religion but retains most of the other features of classic just-war doctrine including the emphasis on the *jus in bello*, is the modern just-war viewpoint.³

The other tradition that derives from the same classic just-war viewpoint is the more controversial crusade or holy-war emphasis. This view, unlike the modern just-war doctrine, believes—like the classical and preclassical views—that the cause of true religion is the most worthy reason for fighting a war. As one Puritan preacher put it: “Whose cause is juster than God’s?”⁴ The ideological unity called Christendom that existed within the boundaries of Europe made the classic just-war doctrine a manifestation of community of law. When the unity of Europe split into two opposing factions the ideological character of just-war doctrine shifted. In the hands of the secularizer the doctrine became mainly a set of limits on the way war was waged; in the hands of the holy warriors it became an ideological weapon to stir up the faithful against the infidel. In any event, some echoes of these two just-war strands may be identified in the attitudes toward war in the history of America that we will turn to shortly.

The other major viewpoint in the Church concerning war is that entitled pacifist. Christian pacifism must be distinguished from other types of pacifism, both religious and secular. The failure to do this has created unnecessary confusion about the origins, tenets and credibility of the long-standing position within the Church. Brock and Yoder have dealt more than adequately with this problem, and it is not our purpose to develop these distinctions.⁵ The subject of pacifism in the early Church has been the subject of numerous studies in this century.⁶

³Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁴Ibid., p. 16.

⁵P. Brock, *Pacifism in the United States from the Colonial Era to the First World War* (Princeton: University Press, 1968); *Twentieth-Century Pacifism* (Von Nostrand Reinhold, 1970); J. Yoder, *Nevertheless: The Varieties of Religious Pacifism* (Herald, 1971).

⁶J. C. Cadoux, *The Early Christian Attitude to War* (Seabury, 1919, 1982); Bainton, *Attitudes*; A. Harnack, *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries* (Fortress, 1981 [1963 reprint, 1905 original]); L. J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (M. Glazier, 1983); J.-M. Hornus, *It is Not Lawful for Me to Fight* (Herald, 1980); see the excellent annotated bibliography by D. M. Scholer, *TSF Bulletin* (September-October 1984) 23-24.

While some uncertainty attaches to the question as to what extent Christian soldiers are to be found in the military prior to the third century, the two chief problems seem to be the question regarding the motives as to why the early Church in the main was pacifist and whether the Constantinian watershed was a fall from a purer former position.⁷ Some argue that the chief reason the early Church condemned military service was the idolatrous practices of the Roman army, which required pagan rites and oaths.⁸ Others emphasize that though pagan rites were repugnant to Christians the deeper reasons for their rejection of the military lay in the direction of war being opposed to loyalty to Christ and to basic Christian values such as loving the enemy and not harming and hence not killing other human beings (bloodshed).⁹ Louis Swift's carefully documented recent work, though leaning slightly toward a nonpacifist viewpoint, nevertheless concedes that "the feeling that bloodshed and killing are fundamentally opposed to love runs deep in the Christian conscience, and any claim that is made for the legitimacy of force has to be reconciled with this conviction."¹⁰

One's answer to this first question about early Christian motives for refusal to bear arms will determine how one answers the other problem with regard to the moral and theological change that took place in Christian attitudes toward war in the time of Constantine. The great reversal is seen by some as consistent with the interpretation that understands that prior to Constantine, Christians refused because they stood against the idolatry of the state. This opposition, it is argued, was dropped when the state adopted Christianity. Others, who stress broader reasons for pre-Constantinian Christian nonparticipation in the military other than paganism, argue that the Constantinian synthesis was a fall from the Church's original position. It seems difficult on the basis of present studies to argue conclusively for either of these interpretations.

The pacifist tradition after the time of Constantine survived as a minority view in the Church and is reflected in America largely by the peace churches, such as the Quakers, Moravians, Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren. There are, however, numerous expressions of the Christian pacifist conviction

⁷Bainton, *Attitudes* 66-84.

⁸J. Helgeland, *Christians and Military Service, A.D. 173-337* (doctoral dissertation briefly summarized in "Christians and the Roman Army, A.D. 173-337," *CH* 43 [1974] 149-163); J. Leclerc (d. 1736), cited by R. Bainton, C. P. Lutz and J. L. Folk, ed., *Peace-Ways* (Augsburg) 189; Harnack, *Militia Christi*; A. Holmes, "The Just War," in *War: Four Christian Views* (ed. R. G. Clouse; InterVarsity, 1981) 117-135, who cites Tertullian and concludes that military service is to be avoided because of "idolatrous acts and pagan symbols associated with military service for Rome, rather than to the government's use of force" (p. 126). Holmes does not, however, cite other statements in Tertullian and in most of the Church fathers up to and even after the time of Constantine to the effect that they also objected to the military because of the requirement to use violent and lethal force upon human beings, whom Christ commanded them to love. See n. 9 for the studies that refute this reductionism.

⁹H. H. F. von Campenhausen, *Tradition and Life in the Church* (Fortress, 1968) 160-170; Hornus, *Not Lawful*; Bainton, *Attitudes*; J. Ferguson, *War and Peace in the World's Religions* (Oxford, 1978); and especially S. Gero, "Miles Glorious: The Christian and Military Service according to Tertullian," *CH* 39 (1970) 198.

¹⁰Swift, *Early Fathers* 79.

expressed by individuals in a wide variety of churches from Roman Catholic to Baptist.¹¹

This brief background to Christian attitudes toward war may furnish a backdrop from which to understand the broad strokes of American Christian response to war.

II. THE REVOLUTIONARY-WAR

In many respects the Revolutionary War set the tone for America's further response to war. Historian George Marsden comments on this importance:

The American Revolution is a pivotal instance for understanding how modern nations have transformed supposed "just wars" into secular crusades. It is pivotal for considering other wars of America, since the patterns of nationalism and civil religion established at the time of the Revolution became important elements of the mythology that determined America's behavior in subsequent wars. It is also important in terms of the wider picture of the development of the modern nation state, since the United States was in many respects the model for modern nations built on popular support that was characterized, among other things, by the citizens' army.¹²

The Christian response to the Revolutionary War varied depending upon the ecclesiastical affiliation and the particular political interpretation of the colonies' relationship to Britain. Mark Noll identifies four types of responses: (1) the patriotic response, which viewed America as the chosen nation and Britain as either Babylon or Egypt; (2) the reforming response, which attempted to separate the cause of the gospel from the cause of the states (this position was held largely by the minority Roman Catholic Church); (3) the Anglican loyalist response, which advocated that the colonies remain loyal to Great Britain on the basis of such passages as Rom 13:1-2; Titus 3:1 (Paul's great text on freedom, Gal 5:1, "Stand fast, therefore, in the freedom wherewith Christ has made you free," was interpreted by this group not as political but as spiritual freedom); and (4) the pacifist response, represented by the Mennonites, Quakers, Church of the Brethren, and Moravians (they opposed the war on the basis of loyalty to Christ and used such Biblical texts as Matt 5:39, 44; 10:23; 1 Pet 2:17; 3:9; Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3—passages that emphasize peace, nonretaliation, and obedience to the governing authorities).¹³

The dominant Christian response of the time rested on three assumptions that controlled the understanding and use of the Bible for the patriots: (1) America was God's chosen people, elected to a divine role among the nations; (2) the

¹¹For example, Roman Catholic G. Zahn, "Afterward," in *War or Peace?* (ed. T. Shannon; Orbis, 1980) 230-245; Baptist evangelical V. Grounds, "A Peace Lover's Pilgrimage," in *Perspectives on Peace-Making* (ed. Bernbaum) 161-175; Methodist S. Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Seabury, 1985).

¹²G. Marsden, "The American Revolution: Partisanship, 'Just Wars' and Crusades," in *The Wars of America: Christian Views* (ed. R. A. Wells; Eerdmans, 1981) 12.

¹³M. A. Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* (Eerdmans/Christian University, 1977) 126.

OT imagery of Israel and her experiences of deliverance from Egypt and Babylon formed the typological counterpart to America and her deliverance from British tyrannical oppression; (3) American nationalism became the grid to interpret the whole Bible. A few illustrations may help us to appreciate the reality of these assumptions.

Apocalyptic imagery was revived. The woman in the wilderness of Revelation 12 was America and was under attack from the British red dragon. In 1776 the theologically liberal army chaplain Samuel West of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, and the conservative Samuel Sherwood of western Connecticut both described the British as the "horrible wild beast" of Revelation 13.¹⁴ Tyranny in any form was the embodiment of the antichrist. West concluded that "we must beat our plowshares into swords, and our pruning hooks into spears."¹⁵ During the Revolution the patriot victory at Saratoga became the triumph of Hezekiah over the Assyrians.¹⁶ So much so was the preaching of OT typology related to American nationalism that the only consistent preaching from the NT was done by loyalists and pacifists who tried in vain to overcome the power of OT narratives about setting captive Israel (America) free. Revolutionary Christianity tended to visualize oppression as the greatest enemy and liberty as the highest good. Chaplain West exhorted his congregation to "strive to get victory over the beast and his image, over every species of tyranny God has planted a vine in this American wilderness which he would never suffer to be plucked up, or destroyed."¹⁷ In 1777 Cyprian Strong remarked: "There is no one (I trust) whose mind is not at once struck with the description of Israel, as being a most perfect resemblance of these American colonies: almost as much so, as if spoken with a primary reference to them."¹⁸

Liberty themes from Scripture such as Gal 5:1 became wed to the defender of the true religion as a sacred cause. Pastor Keteltos stated: "The cause of liberty, united with that of truth and righteousness, is the cause of God."¹⁹ Liberty was the "first born of heaven" and heaven was seen joyously awaiting those who lost their lives in the cause of freedom.²⁰

Noll, after citing numerous such examples, points to what was apparently happening:

The end result of this identification of Israel and the colonies was that the war against Britain could be fought for country and for God at one and the same time.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 51; see also N. Hatch and M. A. Noll, *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (Oxford, 1982) 61.

¹⁵Hatch and Noll, *Bible* 55.

¹⁶Noll, *American* 43.

¹⁷Hatch and Noll, *Bible* 59-60.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 64.

²⁰Ibid.

The relative character of the conflict, or doubts about its rectitude or necessity, could be set aside if it were perceived as an ultimate struggle between the people of God and the hosts of darkness.²¹

Likewise, Marsden traces how a good cause, the virtues of which were overestimated by the patriots because of their partisanship and their political preconceptions, became vastly overinflated by sanctifying it with Biblical imagery and was eventually turned into idolatry. Out of the process was born a new religion, the now-famous American civil religion, in which the state is the object of worship but the imagery used to describe its sacredness is borrowed from Biblical Christianity.²²

Finally, Noll observes several additional factors occurring at the same time alongside this holy-war attitude of the patriots, which if not balancing these excesses at least needs to be noted. Jonathan Edwards, for one, had taken the OT imagery to be not a typology of America but of spiritual realities. And there were others who supported the revolution but who found their highest allegiance to God and his kingdom and not the American cause. Also, the American slave experience during the Revolutionary years was indifferent to the holy-war images of the patriots and instead saw the Bible as their book of freedom, Moses their deliverer from the Egypt of American institutionalized slavery, Jesus as the second Moses, and the elect as those who suffer unjustly among all peoples.²³ These views were unhappily in the minority.

In subsequent American military conflicts the patterns found in the American Revolution reappear. Thus it is not difficult to identify the patriot or holy-war stance, the reforming view that attempts to keep the cause of the gospel separate from the cause of the country, and the pacifist response. These stances can be seen particularly in the Civil War and in World War I.²⁴

III. THE CIVIL WAR

The northern Protestants saw the struggle for the Union as a decisive religious battle. Again, apocalyptic symbolism from the Bible of warring hosts and final eschatological defeats and victories could easily be transformed into more earthly crusading. James Moorehead affirms that "militant apocalyptic imagery was shared by most American Protestants."²⁵ For example, an obscure northern Methodist minister, L. S. Weed, used Revelation 12, where Satan is cast out of heaven, as a reference to the "Confederacy" being defeated by God. He also applied the Gog and Magog invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38-39 to the coalition against the Union, the American Israel. As the "stone" in Daniel 2 would destroy

²¹Noll, *American* 72.

²²Marsden, "American Revolution" 24.

²³Hatch and Noll, *Bible* 46-51; Johnson, *Ideology* 21.

²⁴William Griffin has also identified these same attitudes and themes in the War of 1812; see *The Churches Militant: The War of 1812 and American Religion* (Yale, 1973).

²⁵J. H. Moorehead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War 1860-1869* (Yale, 1978).

all pagan opposition among the nations, so would America have dominion over every nation. The Civil War was the last great stride of providence toward the goal of humanity's final and high destiny. Others, however, opposed Weed and offered more moderate interpretations of prophecy.²⁶ Nevertheless, such an attitude is reminiscent of the earlier crusading mentality of the immediate post-Reformation period in Europe. Johnson says:

In all these [post-Reformation] conflicts holy war advocates on either side sprayed streams of invective against their opponents as being in league with the Devil—and therefore without a just cause for fighting—and cast themselves as children of righteousness who implicitly possessed true justice in all that they did.²⁷

The theme of America as Israel is also widespread in the Civil War conflict. During the period Edward McNall Barns stated that “no truth is more patent in American history than the fact that this nation is an OT people.”²⁸ Author Herman Melville added his voice to the millennial myth when he roused his fellows with the affirmation that “we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world.”²⁹

This identification of the cause of liberty with a righteous cause and then with the divine cause against the Devil can be seen in some of the classic hymns of the period. Julia Ward's *Battle Hymn of the Republic* deftly blends the apocalyptic, millennial Biblical imagery with the secular war cause. George Duffield's 1858 hymn does the same as it states: “Stand up, stand up for Jesus . . . the strife will not be long. This day the noise of battle; the next the victor's song.” The reforming and the pacifist views were evident also during the Civil War period, but they were not the prevalent views that captured the American spirit in either the north or the south. While the pacifist groups continued to draw up formulations of their historic positions, they were often met with bitter resistance from those who were wholly committed to the war effort. Childress documents the efforts of Francis Lieber, who constructed an elaborate defense of the just-war viewpoint that became embodied in the Union army's General Orders No. 100. Lieber had little patience or understanding of the pacifist position, and the war document usually refers to the Bible only to refute Christian pacifist texts.³⁰ As in the Revolutionary period, the Civil War years did not appear to produce any serious Biblical reflection for shaping in any significant manner the Christian attitude toward war.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 58-62.

²⁷Johnson, *Ideology* 21.

²⁸Moorehead, *Apocalypse* 43.

²⁹Ibid., p. 44.

³⁰J. F. Childress, *Moral Responsibility in Conflicts: Essays on Nonviolence, War, and Conscience* (Louisiana State University, 1982) 112-113.

IV. WORLD WAR I

During the period between the Civil War and World War I (WWI) no important just-war Biblical discussion appeared. However, at that time the first attempt on the part of the pacifist churches to reflect on the Biblical materials about war was produced. John Holdemann, a Mennonite, in 1878 published *Ein Spiegel der Wahrheit (A Mirror of Truth)*. He argued against all war. He did not, however, build his case on the sixth commandment, which after lengthy discussion he rejects as a nonresistance text. Rather, Holdemann argued, the pacifist should base his position wholly on the love command of Jesus and the separation of God's kingdom from the kingdoms of the world. Biblical citations and discussions are numerous.³¹

WWI discloses the same continuing traditional responses to war that have been present in the previous periods in America. A milestone study of the period is Ray Abrams' *Preachers Present Arms* (1969). While Abrams is Mennonite and thus pacifist by orientation, his analysis is generally recognized as objective and thorough. The bulk of the study concerns Christian attitudes toward war in WWI. The work also contains a briefer study of WWII and some materials on the Korean and Vietnam conflicts.

Abrams documents how the American government prepared the American people for entrance into WWI by describing the impending American involvement in the war as a struggle of light against darkness, virtue against sin, humanity against autocracy, civilization against chaos, and God against the Devil. This psychological process necessary in America to secure enough popular support for war is well expressed by Harold Lasswell:

The churches of practically every description can be relied upon to bless a popular war, and to see in it an opportunity for the triumph of whatever godly design they choose to further. Some care must, of course, be exercised to facilitate the transition from the condemnation of wars in general, which is a traditional attitude on the part of the Christian sects, to the praise of a particular war. This may be expedited by securing suitable interpretations of the war very early in the conflict by conspicuous clericals; the lesser lights twinkle after.³²

In keeping with this Randolph H. McKim proclaimed from the pulpit the holy-war idea:

It is God who has summoned us to this war. It is his war we are fighting. . . . This conflict is indeed a crusade. The greatest in history—the holiest. It is in the profoundest and truest sense a Holy War. . . . Yes, it is Christ, the King of Righteousness, who calls us to grapple in deadly strife with this unholy and blasphemous power [Germany].³³

And Billy Sunday inveighed: "The man who breaks all the rules but at last dies fighting in the trenches is better than you God-forsaken mutts who won't en-

³¹P. Brock, *Pacifism in the United States from the Colonial Era to the First World War* (Princeton: University Press, 1968) 896.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 56.

³³Cited by R. Abrams, *Preachers Present Arms: The Role of the American Churches and Clergy in World Wars I and II, with Some Observations on the War in Vietnam* (Herald, 1969) 55.

list."³⁴ Lyman Abbott preached: "In this hour every Christian Church should be a recruiting office for the Kingdom of God. . . . The Christian Church and the Christian ministry should hear the voice of the Master saying, 'I have come not to send peace but a sword.' And they should lead Christ's followers forth, his cross on their hearts, his sword in their hands."³⁵ In sermons the Kaiser was identified with Beelzebub and with the Beast of Revelation 13.³⁶

Attacks also were made on the pacifists. Syrian author A. M. Rihbany mounted an elaborate attempt to refute each NT text used by the peace churches. Methodist minister Lynn Harold Hough referred to the two-edged sword in Christ's mouth in the book of Revelation as the sword of the government against the Germans.³⁷ The Bible easily became the greatest book about war known to man. Thus General Foch stated: "The Bible is certainly the best preparation that you can give an American soldier about to go into battle to sustain his magnificent ideal and his faith."³⁸

Once the government had declared war on the basis of Romans 13, Christians were admonished to submit to the state.³⁹ Those who advocated "peace" rather than war were suspect as unworthy citizens or spies.⁴⁰ George W. Downs characterized the conscientious objector as "a man who uses his religion to cloak a yellow streak."⁴¹

Surveying the materials of this period as well as the post-WWI years witnesses the close alliance between the Church and state in time of war. Surprisingly, this period is noted for the virtual absence of any serious Biblical and theological reflection on the Christian and war. With the exception of the pacifist churches the Bible seemed to be used as a rationalizing aid to support the government in whatever war it declared to be a just cause.

V. WORLD WAR II

Prior to the entrance of America into WWII there was a hopeless division over the morality of the war being fought in Europe. Before the Pearl Harbor bombing, many churches supported pacifist sympathies to stay out of the war. The *Christian Century* was decidedly outspoken in its noninterventionist point of view. Perhaps to counter this influence, a new religious periodical was initi-

³⁴Ibid., p. 83.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 103, 252.

³⁷Ibid., p. 65.

³⁸Ibid., p. 252.

³⁹Ibid., p. 73.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 131.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 137.

ated entitled *Christianity and Crisis* with Reinhold Niebuhr as its chief editor. In its pages was expounded the interventionist position. Before America's entrance into the WWII conflict, over 2000 ministers from every state in the Union signed a statement affirming "unalterable opposition to America's present threatened belligerency" and pledged themselves never to use their ministry to "bless, sanction or support war."⁴² Curiously both interventionists and noninterventionists appealed to the Bible and Jesus to support their position.

After December 7, 1941, and America's entrance into the war, the following trends can be noted. There was less of the wild-eyed patriot than in former wars, and sermons in general reflected little comparative interest in the war, which was seen more as a grim necessity and something to be gotten over as soon as possible. While some identified Hitler as the antichrist, there was less of the radical application of apocalyptic symbolism to the enemy than in previous wars. Furthermore there was a greater toleration for diverse opinions, including those of the pacifist preachers, which at the time may have numbered several thousand.

Nevertheless it was still important to demolish the pacifist Biblical arguments as much as possible. The classic case of this attempt in connection with WWII came from the pen of a former liberal pacifist, Reinhold Niebuhr. His now-famous 1940 essay was entitled "Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist."⁴³ Niebuhr became disillusioned with the current liberal idealism along with its pacifistic stance. He and others of his day developed the viewpoint of what is known as "Christian realism." Niebuhr's brief article did not really attempt to argue a Biblical foundation for his realist theory. Rather, he developed the categories of "perfection" or "ideal possibility" to refer to his understanding of the Christian law of love. According to Niebuhr, when we try to apply Christ's ideal law of love in a sinful world we discover that we can only approximate the ideal.

Important to Niebuhr is the concept that the ideal law of love not only pronounces an indiscriminate judgment upon all human attempts at social and international justice, but love also is a principle of discriminate criticism between various forms of community and various attempts at justice. A balance of power, while different from and inferior to the harmony of love, is a basic condition of justice, given the sinfulness of man. Niebuhr then argued for the justice of the so-called democratic nations over against the tyranny being established by Hitler in Europe. The pacifist, Niebuhr charges, either refuses to make these discriminate judgments or by his pacifism gives an undue preference for tyranny in comparison to the momentary anarchy necessary to overcome tyranny. The grace of God frees the Christian, Niebuhr says, to "give his devotion to the highest values he knows; to defend those citadels of civilization of which necessity and historic destiny have made him the defender; and he is persuaded by that grace to remember the ambiguity of even his best actions."⁴⁴

Still Niebuhr could agree with the pacifist that Jesus taught nonresistance to

⁴²Ibid., p. 265.

⁴³Reprinted in Holmes, "Just War" 301-313.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 312.

evil, that human life ought not to be taken, and that the law of love is the law of life. Yet he concluded, against the pacifists, that this position of Jesus was not to be the Christian stance in terms of securing justice in a sinful world. The pure ethic of Jesus is not relevant to our real life situation; it must only have proximate value.

George Edwards, a Presbyterian pacifist, wrote somewhat critically of Niebuhr: "What Augustine was to the Roman emperorship, in providing a theology of just war to cope with the political exigencies of the fourth and fifth centuries, Reinhold Niebuhr was to President Roosevelt in the undergirding of WWII with churchly sanctions in 1941."⁴⁵

VI. THE MODERN PERIOD AND NUCLEAR WAR

As we approach the most recent era of American history, three principal factors shape the current discussions about Christian attitudes toward war. At the close of WWII the United States exploded two atomic bombs on Japanese population centers. The nuclear age was born with all its moral ambiguity. Secondly, America went through a painful, socially divided war in Vietnam, which seriously challenged the assumption that all wars the American government sanctions are just causes, let alone righteous or divine causes against the Devil. Thirdly, the rise of expansionist international communism has created the possibility once again of a holy-war mentality within the Christian Church.

The literature that addresses the moral questions of war and nuclear war that has been produced in the last twenty years is staggering. Our purpose here allows only a brief glimpse at the Church's activity in this area, including current evangelical attempts to address these problems.

From the nonpacifist viewpoint the most influential work is that of Princeton ethicist Paul Ramsey, who reflects the trend toward the rediscovery of the just-war tradition in the Church in the twentieth century. He is consciously developing his view of the just use of force from Augustine's concept of love. The use of force in defense of the innocent, Ramsey argues, is not an exception to charity but a requirement of it. He argues that Christian love must protect noncombatants, and therefore, from a moral point of view, nuclear weapons may only be directed at strategic military targets and not cities. Nevertheless a limited nuclear war is justifiable with limitations if it is at the same time a defensive war.⁴⁶

Ramsey does not, unfortunately, engage in any serious way the Biblical materials in his extensive discussions. Much the same can be said of the important recent just-war contributions of James T. Johnson, James F. Childress and Bryan

⁴⁵G. R. Edwards, *Jesus and the Politics of Violence* (New York: Harper, 1972) 110; see also the fine critiques of Niebuhr's "realism" in Childress, *Moral* 29-61; J. T. Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton: University Press, 1981) 330-338.

⁴⁶P. Ramsey, *War and Christian Conscience* (Duke, 1961); *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (Scribner, 1968); see evaluations of Ramsey's views in Johnson, *Just War* 347-357; J. F. Childress, "Just-War Theories: The Bases, Interrelations, Priorities, and Functions of their Criteria," *TS* 39 (1978) 427-445; B. Hehir, "The Just War Ethic and Catholic Theology: Dynamics of Change and Continuity," in *War and Peace?* (ed. T. Shannon) 15-39.

Hehir. It is not until we come to the very recent Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* (1983), that we find an attempt within the just-war tradition to reflect seriously on the Biblical materials and their implications for modern nuclear war and nuclear deterrence doctrine. As brief as the treatment is, it is a thoughtful attempt to lay a Biblical and theological foundation for the remainder of the discussion. The Bishops' Letter has not been universally accepted by just-war advocates, even within the Catholic tradition, because it condemns current American and Soviet nuclear deterrence policy. Michael Novak, a Catholic critic of the Letter, has written a detailed refutation entitled *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age* (1983). Unfortunately there are only three pages that deal with Biblical materials. Novak refers mostly to anti-pacifist texts in the OT and the NT. While Jesus is seen as a nonviolent example, his model is only for some Christians and his example should never be offered as the Christian way of life for all believers.

Evangelicals in the just-war tradition have hardly performed better in developing a serious Biblical case for their position. The Francis Schaeffer-Bukovsky-Hitchcock book, *Who Is For Peace?* (1983), in over a hundred pages has virtually no Biblical materials. Jerram Barrs' *Who Are the Peacemakers?* (1983), which argues the case for peace through military strength, while containing more Biblical references than the Schaeffer book offers no serious Scriptural case or reflection. The one exception among evangelicals is the excellent study by Canadian OT scholar Peter Craigie entitled *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1978). He has developed for us a serious Biblical and theological reflection on the nature and assessment of war in the OT. Craigie's conclusions, however, do not fit either the standard just-war or pacifist viewpoints.

On the other hand, one does not have to accept the pacifist position to recognize that the most serious reflections on Scripture and war in recent years have come from this tradition. One of the first classic discussions was written in 1954 by G. H. C. MacGregor entitled *The New Testament Basis of Pacifism*. Besides the detailed examination of NT texts and themes it also contains an admirable attempt to respond to Reinhold Niebuhr's Christian realism. To this should be added the 1962 work by the French pastor Jean Lasserre, *War and the Gospel*, which has greatly influenced a number of American pacifists such as John Yoder. In 1972 Yoder's own detailed study of the Biblical materials in the NT, especially the gospel of Luke, appeared. More recently a serious study of the OT and war was published in 1980 by Millard Lind entitled *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel*. To these could be added the 1981 work by Vernard Eller, *War and Peace from Genesis to Revelation*, and Dale Aukerman's *Darkening Valley: A Biblical Perspective on Nuclear War*. Whatever be the ultimate truthfulness of these works, they do represent extensive reflections on the Biblical materials not generally found in the writers of the just-war tradition.⁴⁷

⁴⁷An exception to this general conclusion has recently appeared in England. D. Atkinson's *Peace in our Time? Some Biblical Groundwork* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985) attempts to carefully develop systematic and then theological argument in support of a critical just-war viewpoint, which is then applied to the nuclear deterrence and nuclear war issue. Atkinson has sketched the main lines of investigation that ought to be developed more in detail by those arguing the just-war position. Whether the book will be published in America and to what extent it will affect Christian attitudes here remains to be seen.

VII. SUMMARY AND CHALLENGE

It is time to summarize and ask where this brief survey of the Bible and war in America has led us. In the first place it has been evident that with few exceptions the American just-war tradition has not produced any serious works of Biblical reflection related to the Christian moral attitude toward the issue of war. Instead there has been, with some exceptions, a great temptation to use the Bible as a tool for partisanship and nationalistic crusades. The perceived "just" cause has often become the "righteous" cause, and this has led altogether too easily to the "divine" cause of the United States against the Devil with the antichrist identified as the national enemy.

Furthermore, this paper has argued that in recent years most of the serious Biblical reflection in this country on a theology of war has come from the pacifist tradition. This does not as such mean that this tradition is correct or more Biblical, but the fact of this imbalance remains. As evangelicals we believe that ethics must be significantly rooted in Biblical exegesis and theology. To date we do not have a first-rate, thorough, exegetical and theological Biblical study on the question of war from the viewpoint of either the just-war or pacifist tradition. I believe that this relatively quiet decade is the time for American Biblical and ethical scholars to address this deficiency and grant the Church a firmer basis upon which to build a clearer position with respect to what some feel is the greatest moral issue of the twentieth century.