

ABSOLUTE PACIFISM?

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The Scriptural Picture

Introduction: The charge is made that Isaiah 2:1 contradicts Joel 4:10 (RSV = 3:10). For Isaiah says they will beat their swords into ploughshares, but Joel says: Beat your ploughshares into swords. There is really no contradiction if one takes the trouble to look - so many seem to want to find contradictions, and do not really try. Two different occasions are meant in the two texts. Isaiah speaks of the Messianic age, in a highly colored, poetically idealized picture, as we see from 11:6-9 which says the wolf will be the guest of the lamb, the lion will eat hay etc. Had the Jews accepted Christ, this picture, minus of course some poetic exaggeration, would have been fulfilled. But the picture in Joel is quite different, referring as we said, to a different occasion. A note in "New American Bible" on the passage of Joel says that the warlike weapons are made in response to God's call for armies, which He picked to expel forever the unlawful invaders from the promised land. After that, swords would no longer be needed, and could be turned into ploughshares. Certainly Isaiah is not forbidding all war. If one thought that, we could quote, in an equally simplistic way, the text of Joel.

1. Really, in the OT, God Himself not only permitted, but commanded many a war. So St. Augustine told Faustus (22.74): "And let no one wonder or shudder that wars were waged by Moses, for in them he followed divine commands. He was not raging, but obedient.... wars are undertaken against the violence of those who resist, at the order of God, or some legitimate authority."

In fact, God at times ordered even the extermination of the enemy. The purpose was to eradicate idolatry from the land, for fear the Jews would fall into it - which as a matter of fact they did. As a result of this divine command we read in 1 Sam 15:10-23 that God rejected Saul as king of the Jews not for not being pacifist, but for not executing Agag, conquered King of Amalek.

In general, of course, we would not exterminate an enemy. That can only be done by direct order of the Master of Life and Death, God. He did order it in some cases, as we said, to root out the danger of idolatry. Also, in Genesis 15:16 He promised to take the land away from the Amorites, but would not do it at once, "because the sins of the Amorites have not yet reached their fullness." When they did, the deaths were a punishment for extreme sinfulness.

2. Objection: That was the imperfect Old Testament. We should be better.

It is one thing to be less perfect, another to be evil. To say it is evil is to blame God Himself. It is the heresy of Marcion who rejected the entire OT, and much of the New as well.

3. Objection: Did not Jesus teach nonviolence? Turn other cheek; if your cloak is demanded give your shirt too?

1) He Himself at His trial before Annas was struck in the face by a guard. Instead of turning the other cheek, He rebuked them all (John 18:23): "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"

2) St. Thomas is right in quoting the interpretation given by St. Augustine to the nonviolent texts (Summa II.II.40.1.ad 2): "These precepts are always to be observed in attitude of mind, namely, that a man should always be prepared not to resist....but at times one must act otherwise because of the common good..... Hence Augustine says...nothing is more unhappy than the happiness of sinners, in that impunity is nourished, and an evil will is strengthened" (Augustine, "On the Sermon on the Mount" 1.19; Epistle 138.2.14).

3) While a private person should take the nonviolent attitude, and at suitable times act on it as well, a state is in a different case. It has no right to abandon its obligation to defend its citizens, using moral means of course.

4. Objection: Did not Jesus tell Peter (Mt 26:52): "Put your sword back into its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."

Jesus seems to be quoting a proverb. W. F. Albright in "Anchor Bible" on this text quotes an old Jewish Targum on Scripture with just such a saying. And if we tried to take the words of Jesus as an absolute prohibition of all use of the sword, then the Church for centuries would have taught error, and the promises of Jesus to protect the Church would be void. Rather, St. Thomas in II.II. 40.1 ad 1 quotes with approval the interpretation of St. Augustine on this point: To "take the sword" means to do so without proper authority.

Further, if we took Mt 26:52 simplistically it would contradict the words of Jesus in Luke 22:35-38: "Let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one." This seems to be a symbolic way of warning that persecution was coming. The Apostles, as so often, did not grasp it, and so replied: "Here are two swords." As if giving up on their dullness, Jesus just replied: It is enough.

5. Objection: In John 8:11 Jesus refuses to allow the death sentence even though the law of Moses called for it: He did not permit the adulteress to be stoned.

We must avoid the old mistake of ignoring the setting and context. The Pharisees were out to trap Jesus. If He told them to stone her, the Romans would arrest Him, for they had taken away from the Jews the right of capital punishment (cf. Jn 18:31). But if Jesus told them to release her, He would contradict the law of Moses. So He cleverly avoided both parts of the dilemma by saying: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

Also, St. Paul, writing under inspiration of the Spirit sent by Jesus, told the Romans (Rom 13:4): "If you do wrong, be afraid, for he [the civil authority] does not carry the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute His wrath on the evildoer." The chief civil authority then was Nero. Nero was not at his worst then (57-58 AD). But in Titus 3:1 we find: "Remind them to subject themselves to government officials, to obey." That was 65 AD when Nero was a mad tyrant. Of course it did not mean to obey immoral commands - but other things, yes.

Still further, in 1 Cor 7:17 St. Paul gave the general principle: Each one should so live as God has given to each one, as God has called each one [into the Church]." That is, stay in the same external form of life as you had when called into the Church. Even to slaves he said (7:21): "Were you called as a slave? Let it not concern you, but even if you are able to become free, rather use it." There was no mention that soldier converts must stop being soldiers. - This fits with the fact that St. John the Baptist (Lk 3:14) just told soldiers to rob no

one, to avoid false charges, to be content with their pay. - And the centurion who asked Jesus to cure his servant was not rejected or told to quit the army - rather, Jesus praised him highly (Mt 8:10): "I have not found such faith in Israel." And in Acts 10 God sent an angel to speak to the good centurion Cornelius to tell him what to do - the instruction did not include getting out of the army.

NON PACIFIST FATHERS OF THE CHURCH BEFORE THE CHRISTIAN EMPERORS

Introduction: Under pagan rulers, there were real dangers for Christian soldiers. Emperor worship was very strong in the army. Officers had to sacrifice, soldiers assisted. Even the military standards, eagles, were considered divinities. And soldiers could not legally marry. - It would not, then, have been strange if the Church had spoken against being a soldier. Yet it did not.

1. St. Justin Martyr

"Apology" 1.17: Speaking to the emperor: "Only God do we worship, but in other things we joyfully obey you." He made no exception for military service.

2. Tertullian while still Catholic: (When a Montanist, he changed)

"Apology" 42: "We are soldiers with you".

"Apology" 37: We are of just yesterday, and we have filled the world and everything: the cities, the islands, the fortresses, the towns, the marketplaces, the very camps...we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods."

"Apology" 30: "We ask for them [the Emperors - in prayers] long life, undisturbed power, security at home, brave armies."

"Apology" 5: Tells now the Legio Fulminata XII was in danger from the Marcomanni and the Quadi in Germany, on a campaign of Marcus Aurelius, but was saved when the prayers of the Christian soldiers brought a storm that scattered the enemy. (More in his "To Scapula" 4, on the same incident).

3. St. Cyprian

"To Demetrian" 3: "The farmer decreases and fails in the fields, the sailor on the sea, the soldier in the camps, innocence in the forum" (cf. also *ibid.* cap 17). This implies it is too bad the soldiers are few.

4. Eusebius of Caesarea

Church History 6.41.22: "A whole band of soldiers, Ammon and Zeno and Ptolemy and Ingenuus and with them an old man Theophilus had taken their stand before the court. Now a certain man was being tried as a Christian and...was tending towards denial, when these men standing by ground their teeth, and gave looks at him, and stretched out their hands, made gestures. And when everyone turned toward them, before anyone could seize them, of their own accord they went to the prisoner's dock, and said they were Christians." We see there were Christian soldiers then.

Church History 8.1: Tells that for a time under Diocletian Christians even got governorships of provinces, and were dispensed from offering sacrifice. But later (8.4) a persecution came: "Then one could see great numbers of those in the army most gladly embracing civil life, so that they might not prove renegades in their piety." (Easier to escape in civilian life).

5. Lactantius

"On the Deaths of the Persecutors" 10: Diocletian tried to learn the future by liver divination. "While he offered sacrifice, some attendants of his, who were Christians, stood by, and they put the immortal sign on their foreheads. At this the demons were chased away, and the holy rites interrupted. The soothsayers trembled, unable to investigate the usual marks on the entrails of the victims....Finally Tages, chief of the soothsayers...said: There are profane persons here who obstruct the rites." Diocletian was angry: "By letters to the commanding officers, he ordered that all soldiers be forced to the same impiety under pain of being dismissed from the army." So it is clear there were Christian soldiers in his army. Note: See text below from Lactantius, which is both pacifist and heretical.

PACIFIST HERETICS BEFORE CHRISTIAN EMPERORS

1. Marcion

He not only rejected war, but also rejected all of the Old Testament, and much of the New Testament. He kept only parts of Luke's Gospel, and ten Epistles of St.Paul.

2. Tatian

"Against the Greeks" 11: "I do not want to be a king, I do not desire to be rich, I refuse being a general, I hate sexual looseness...."

COMMENTS: Tatian is not explicitly rejecting all military service. In context, he is rejecting riches and honors, and being a general. It is likely, of course, that he would reject that, given his mental set. He ridicules everything Greek, e.g., in 26 he said to the Greeks: "Stop making a parade of sayings which you have taken from others.... Why do you divide time and say that one part is past, and another present, and another future?....Why do you handle the builder's tools without knowing how to build?" [The Greeks built the splendid Parthenon in Athens].

3. Tertullian as a heretical Montanist

"On idolatry" 19: "How will a Christian man make war, even, how will he serve even in time of peace, without a sword, for the Lord has taken that from him? For even though soldiers had come to John [the Baptist] and had received the formula of their rule...still the Lord afterward, in disarming Peter, ungirt every soldier."

"On the chaplet" 11:" Is it likely we are permitted to carry a sword when our Lord said that he who takes the sword will perish by the sword? Will those who are forbidden to engage in a lawsuit espouse the deeds of war? Will a Christian who is told to turn the other cheek when struck unjustly, guard prisoners in chains, and administer torture and capital punishment?"

COMMENTS: Tertullian also forbids a Christian to be a schoolmaster, a teacher of literature, a seller of frankincense, and condemns all forms of painting, modelling, sculpture,

participation in national festivals, and holding any state offices, since the state is the enemy of God--in "On idolatry," caps 9-24, passim.

4. Lactantius

"Institutes" 6.20: "It will neither be permitted for a just man to engage in war..or to accuse anyone of a capital charge, for it makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word or by the sword, since it is the act of putting to death which is prohibited."

COMMENT: This is heresy, since in Romans 13.4 St.Paul, as we saw above, affirms the right of the state to inflict capital punishment.

THE SPECIAL CASE OF ORIGEN

In "Against Celsus" 8.73, Origen wrote: "To those enemies of our faith who require us to bear arms for the state and to kill men, we can reply: Do not those who are [pagan] priests at certain shrines...keep their hands free from blood? ...If, then that is a laudable custom, how much more so that these [Christians] too should engage as priests and ministers of God...wrestling in prayers for those who are fighting in a righteous cause.... We do not indeed fight under him, even though he require it, but we fight on his behalf...by offering our prayers to God."

COMMENTS:

1) It is only a laudable custom - not a moral requirement - for pagan priests to avoid war. It is mere fittingness. So it is only fitting that Christians do the same. 2) Christians do pray for those who are fighting in a righteous cause. They could not pray for success if war were wrong - and he speaks of a righteous cause. 3) As to the fittingness we compare 1 Chronicles 22:8 where God tells David not to build the temple because his hands were stained with blood: You have shed much blood and have waged great wars; you shall not build a house to my name, since you have shed so much blood." But yet this is only fittingness as we can see from the words of God to David in 1 Kings 14:8 where God says David was a perfect man who "followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my eyes."

NONPACIFISTS UNDER CHRISTIAN EMPERORS

1. "Theodosian Code" 16.10.21, (from after 416 A.D.), excluded pagans from service as soldiers.

2. "Synod of Arles," Canon 3: "As to those who cast down their arms in time of peace, it is decided they should abstain from Communion." (Written in 314 A.,D.).

3. Eusebius of Caesarea

"Demonstratio Evangelica" 1.8 (written 316-22): He explains that there are two ways of life in the Church. One is, beyond nature and the ordinary human way of living, not accepting marriage, children, possessions." The other is "more human" and includes marriages and having children and "describes what is to be done for those who serve justly as soldiers."

4. St.Athanasius

"Letter to Amun" (before 356 AD): "For in other things that occur in this life, we find distinctions: such as, it is not permitted to murder, but to kill the enemy in war is both lawful and worthy of praise. So then those who perform in the best way in war are given great rewards, and monuments are erected to proclaim their deeds."

5. St.Basil

"First Canonical Letter, To Amphilocius" (c.374 A.D.): "Our Fathers did not reckon killings in war as murders, but granted pardon, as it seems to me, to those who were fighting in defence of virtue and piety. Perhaps however they should be advised that since their hands are not clean they should abstain from Communion for a period of three years."

COMMENTS: This is the same as the attitude shown in the case of David cited above in commenting on Origen, i.e., David was praised as perfect by God, yet told not to build the temple - out of fittingness. W. A. Jurgens ("The Faith of the Early Fathers," Collegeville, 1979, II. 11. n. 20 says that according to the canonists Balsamon and Zonaras the advice of this Canon was never put into practice.

6.St.Ambrose

"On Luke" II.77 (c.389 AD): "St.John the Baptist also gave a suitable reply to each class of men.... to soldiers, that they should not slander or plunder, teaching that there was pay for soldiering so there should be no plunder for gain."

"Duties of Ministers" 24.114 (c.391 AD): "David too was brave in war." Ibid 27.129: "For the fortitude which in war defends the fatherland from barbarians or defends the weak at home, or companions from thieves is full of justice."

7.St.Augustine

"Against Faustus" 22.74: "Let not anyone wonder or shudder that wars were waged by Moses, for in them he followed divine commands. He was not raging, but obedient.... wars are undertaken against the violence of those who resist, at the order of God, or some lawful authority.... Otherwise John, when the soldiers came to him to be baptized saying, 'What should we do' would have replied: 'Cast away your arms.' But since he knew that they, when they did these things, were not murderers, but ministers of the law...he replied...." [And, referring to the centurion asking a cure, *ibid*]: "He praised his faith, and did not command him to desert the military...." *Ibid*, cap.76: "If however they think God could not have ordered wars, because the Lord Jesus Christ later said, 'I say to you, not to resist evil,' let them understand that this attitude is not in the body but in the heart."

Epistle 138. to Marcellinus (411-12 AD): "So these precepts of patience are always to be kept in attitude of heart, and in the will. But many things must be done, even in striking the unwilling with a kind harshness [cf."tough love"]. Thought is to be taken rather for what is good for them than for what they want.... If Christianity blamed all wars, the counsel would have been given to the soldiers seeking salvation in the Gospel that they cast away their arms.... He who ordered them to be content with their pay, surely did not prohibit their being soldiers."

Epistle 189, to Boniface, a Soldier (AD 417/18): "Do not think that no one can please God who is a soldier in military arms. Holy David was among these, to whom the Lord gave such great witness [cf. 1 Kings 14.7, where God says David, "followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes:] and many just men of that time among them. Among these was Cornelius [Acts 10] to whom the angel was sent.... Among these were those who came to John for baptism.... Surely he did not forbid them to serve in arms, to whom he ordered to be content with their pay.Some therefore fight for you by praying against invisible enemies; you work for them by fighting against visible barbarians.... So think first of this, when you arm yourself for battle, that even your bodily strength is a gift of God...."

"Questions on the Heptateuch" 6.10 (AD 420): "Just wars are usually defined as those in which injustices are avenged if any nation or city, attacked in war, either neglects to avenge what was done wickedly by its own, or to recover what was taken away unjustly. But also this kind of war is without doubt just, which God commands...."

Conclusions

Origen and St. Basil say it is unfitting for a Christian to fight in war, but they also make clear it is not morally wrong.

It would certainly not be correct to speak of a tradition of pacifism in the Church. Our survey shows only four early writers - not all should be called Fathers - who are absolute pacifists. They are: Marcion, who is a formal heretic; Tatian, also a formal heretic, Tertullian, who expressed pacifism only after becoming a heretical Montanist, before that he was not pacifistic; and Lactantius who in the passage in which he expressed pacifism also contradicted St. Paul, which is substantially the same as heresy. So there is not even one respectable example of pacifism in the Fathers.