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The Christian at War

Marc A. Clauson

Cedarville University, clausonm@cedarville.edu

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'THE CHRISTIAN AT WAR

BY MARC CLAUSON, PH.D.



DoD photo by Tech. Sgt. William Greer, U.S. Air Force. (Released)



A low-lying intellectual fog covers these United States as we plod toward the 2008 election. It is a mist created by war ... and thickened by the question of a Christian's place within one. Should we join the military? Should we engage? Should we even support it? These questions do not only divide globally, but within the Christian faith. And although it's certainly not a new debate, the answers continue to carry significant implications for all of society.

Consider that even the early church chose sides. Some denied that a genuine Christian could join the army, since fighting involved killing and killing is murder. Others argued just as vehemently that it was not a sin to go to battle, so long as the order to kill was part of the legitimate military objective. Intentionally killing civilians was, and always will be, wrong. In time, Christians became a regular part of the Roman army ... and continued to fight with the armies of the Germanic kingdoms from the fifth century on. Still, the question of war remained.

And then Augustine (354–430) entered the picture. He became the first Christian to develop a theory of a just war, with relatively simple tenets rooted in his interpretation of Scripture.



He stated that:

- A war should only be waged to prevent a future war;
- There must be an underlying cause, such as a defensive stance;
- An attitude of compassion on the part of those engaged in battle must prevail;
- The conflict must be declared by a legitimate authority, or under legitimate law;
- The actual conduct of the war must be just — avoiding, for example, the intentional killing of civilians.

Augustine's theory was refined by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century and adapted by

those were different times, and we have to read them in context as such. These specific commands came from God for specific situations. It does not necessarily permit us to tacitly allow any war to proceed without question. Nor does it imply that nations cannot wage war at all or that believers must be pacifists.

Though I respect the pacifist viewpoint as well-argued, it contains some flaws. First, it fails to take the whole Bible seriously. While it is true that the narrative of the Old Testament was written, initially, for the Jewish people, Christians are obligated to study it with a mind toward discerning

Mount (Matthew 5:38-39).

On the other hand, Matthew 26:52 is often used to justify pacifism. "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword." Not only is it perfectly legitimate for Jesus to command as He did, but the general principle that those who live by the sword will die by it is proverbially true. What is illegitimate is leaping from this general command to a full-out moratorium on war.

In studying Scripture, we find that through it all — even war — God's character is expressed. His nature is such that He has given combat its place in His "economy" of justice.

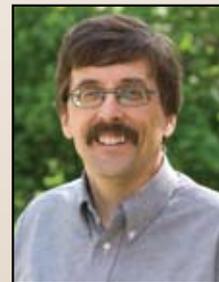
Our responsibility, as Christians, is to be ready to stand for a just war while, at the same time, recognizing when a government has chosen to violate God's law by its

actions. When the latter occurs, we as individuals and as the body of Christ are obligated to oppose these actions. The church must always "speak truth to power."

Want to cut through the fog of confusion surrounding this war? Look to the light of God's Word and the knowledge He gives. It is the only way to clearly see what lies ahead. **T**

Dr. Marc Clauson, associate professor of history, joined the Cedarville faculty in 2002. He earned his B.S. and M.A. from Marshall University, J.D. from West

Virginia University, M.A. and M.Th. from Liberty University, and Ph.D. from the Universiteit van die Vrystaat, Bloemfontein, South Africa.



“THERE IS NOT ONE NEUTRAL ATOM IN THE UNIVERSE.” —ABRAHAM KUYPER

Protestant Christians after the Reformation. It remains the dominant view today.

I believe Augustine's conclusions, and those of later writers who followed his lead, were, for the most part, rooted in the Bible. Still we must, in our own study, return to Scripture, our final authority on the matter. The Old Testament abounds with stories of men — and women — called to kill, or be killed, in combat. But we have to be careful to discern why God chose to work through the world in this way at that time. Yes, He not only allowed but sanctioned bloody battles, often ordering His warriors to kill every man, woman, and child in the villages He told them to take. (See Joshua 2ff.) Nevertheless,

God's will for the church today. And so we could argue that, in certain instances, God allows war. Our next task, then, is to wisely determine whether a particular war is one of those instances. Is it defensive or preventive? A just war must be initiated to defend others from attack or to protect innocents from brutal or aggressive regimes. This stance makes it difficult to argue, especially from a classical Christian point of view, that Afghanistan or Iraq did not fall into this category.

Moving to the New Testament, we find the texts that support a pacifist position do so from the context of individual action rather than state action, such as Christ's commandment to turn the other cheek in the Sermon on the

