

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Journal of Biblical Literature* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jbl-01.php

THE BASIS OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ANTIMILITARISM

HENRY J. CADBURY

HAVERFORD COLLEGE

I

There has always been something romantic and impressive in the plain spoken opposition to war of the early Christian writers.¹ Their position has been set in bold relief by its contrast to the attitude of the church from the time of Constantine to the present day. But its chief distinction, as is perhaps clearer now than ever before, lies in its sane and wholesome basis and in its purity of motive and freedom from sentimentalism or dogma. The reasons for the antimilitarism of the early church were of course manifold and mixed. Some of them were perhaps temporary or insufficient. But viewed in the light of the environment in which they rose, and particularly of the militarism and of the pacifism of the present day, they offer many aspects of great interest and considerable weight.

So far as now appears from our records no precedent for the pacifism of the early church existed in the background of Christian origins. The Jewish nation as a whole, in spite of the prophetic dreams of peace, had resorted to the sword as quickly and as often as any ancient people, and in the second Christian generation had fought one of the bloodiest wars of history. Though frequently prudence dictated submission, and parties like the Pharisees for long intervals opposed and controlled the revolutionary violence of *sicarii* and zealots, there was no fundamental element of conscience or of religion in their attitude.

The apocalyptic of Judaism also led sometimes to a pacific quietism. Emphasizing the divine control of history and the inevitableness of the appointed times and seasons, apocalypse

¹ The extent to which early Christianity accepted or condemned war has been frequently estimated, though with rather different results. See, e.g., Harnack, *Militia Christi* (1905), Bigelmair, *Beteiligung der Christen am öffentlichen Leben*, pp. 164-201. The purpose of this study is not to estimate the numbers but to investigate the reasons of the antimilitarists in the first three centuries.

tended to discourage human efforts to secure the wished for blessings. The hand of Providence could not be wrested by force. At the same time wars both celestial and terrestrial were part of the furniture of apocalypse, and it was not difficult for the fanatical leaders of revolt to persuade their followers that the appointed time for action had come and that they were merely fulfilling the predictions of the prophets by leading out the forces of Judaism to new victories. Though the logical result of apocalypse was resignation and quiet waiting, its practical result was not infrequently the fanatical fatalism of violent and fruitless revolt.

The doctrine of non-resistance as a philosophy antedates the Christian era in many quarters. In China there was the philosophy of Lao Tze, with its clear advocacy of non-resentment. The Stoicism of the Hellenistic age taught the same philosophic calm. Only the second of these can have influenced directly the early Christians, and even that influence is most uncertain, as far as war is concerned. For the Christian, antimilitarism is not merely a policy of personal dealing, but is an established attitude of public affairs. It is not philosophic non-resistance nor religious quietism, it is a well-defined opposition to war as a system and to participation in war in any form. And the basis of this opposition is not to be found in any historic precedent or inheritance—it is, historically speaking, original with Christianity.²

II

It is well to recognize at the outset how far the early Christian attitude differed from the more superficial types of pacifism. In the first place it was not a mere regret or dislike for war. Most persons who approve of war or of certain wars or at least of one side of certain wars regret and abhor warfare keenly. Ancient times, like modern, regarded war as a calamity—along with earthquakes and plagues. But antiquity usually considered it equally unavoidable. The early church believed that wars were of human causation, and took its stand against them on that ground. This is all the more remarkable when we consider that

² Professor C. M. Case considers the early Christian church the first organized expression of passive resistance. He explains its origin "through the unconscious logic by which the mind seeks mental and moral consistency."

the New Testament not only failed to give any specific teaching on war, but even retained the apocalyptic prediction of wars and rumors of wars as part of the expected future. But live conscience always neglects fatalistic pessimism. As the early Christians were eager for the relief of poverty whenever opportunity offered, in spite of the Lord's statement "The poor ye have with you alway," so their opposition to war was undaunted by predictions of future wars. Necessity—whether divine or human—was never recognized as an excuse for engaging in war. Sharing with all men the sentiments of pity and regret for suffering and death, they boldly acted on these sentiments and refused at the risk of their own lives to share in inflicting such penalties upon others. Though with little influence in shaping the affairs of state, they insisted that their own personal conduct should clearly and consistently express their complete condemnation of the military system. As Tertullian says:

"A state of faith admits no plea of necessity, they are under no necessity to sin whose one necessity is that they do not sin. . . . For if one is pressed to the offering of sacrifice and the sheer denial of Christ by the necessity of torture or of punishment, yet discipline does not connive even at that necessity; because there is a higher necessity to avoid denying and to undergo martyrdom, than to escape from suffering and to render the homage required."³

Even the fact that other Christians felt no scruples at military service did not shake the pacifists' position. Each man must obey his own conscience. "They know what is expedient for them," replied Maximilian when reminded of the Christians in the armies of the emperors, "but I am a Christian, and I cannot do evil."⁴

It has been popularly assumed of these ancient as well as more modern Christian antimilitarists that their avoidance of war is a personal taboo of some kind; that they refuse to take part in the actual bloodshed, but otherwise can sanction and participate in the military system; that their conscientious objection is a matter of individual preference and of individual action only. Such an error easily arises in the case of objectors whose most obvious and striking objection is made in their own personal actions or refusal to act; but at least the early Christians were

³ Tertull., *De corona*, 11.

⁴ Ruinart, *Acta martyrum*, p. 341.

not limited to this form of protest. Although in many matters their habits and practices were only slightly removed from the type of abstinence that we call taboo, their opposition to war was much more thoroughgoing. For the objection of the early Christians was not merely to combatant service but to all participation in war. "We deem," writes Athenagoras of the gladiatorial games, "that to see a man put to death is much the same as killing him."⁵ Lactantius says of the just man that he considers it unlawful "not only himself to commit slaughter but to be present with those who do it, and to behold it."⁶ Tertullian takes the position of an absolutist. "When a man has become a believer," he says, "and faith has been sealed, there must either be an immediate abandonment (of military service), which has been the course with many, or all sorts of quibbling will have to be resorted to in order to avoid offending God."⁷ In his treatise on idolatry he distinguishes between the soldier becoming Christian and the Christian becoming soldier, and also between the officer, who had numerous idolatrous accessories, and the private "to whom there is no necessity for taking part in sacrifices and capital punishments." But his condemnation of war includes all:

"There is no agreement between the divine and the human sacrament, the standard of Christ and the standard of the devil, the camp of light and the camp of darkness. One soul cannot be due to two masters—God and Caesar."⁸

Again it must be observed that the pacifism of the early Christians was not due to mere self-interest or cowardly prudence. Repeatedly they referred to their numbers and the possibility of securing their ends by insurrection and violence,⁹ and repeatedly they proved their courage, a courage more difficult than the sacrifice of battle, in the sacrifice of patient endurance in martyrdom, that a little violence might have averted. As Tertullian says:

"Banded together as we are, ever so ready to sacrifice our lives, what single case of revenge for injury are you able to point to, though if it were held right among us to repay evil by evil, a single night, with a torch

⁵ *Suppl.*, 35.

⁶ v. 18.

⁷ *De corona*, 11.

⁸ *De idol.* 19.

⁹ Athenagoras, *Suppl.* 34. Tertull., *Ad Scapular* 9

or two, could achieve an ample vengeance? But away with the idea of a sect divine avenging itself by human fires, or shrinking from the sufferings in which it is tried. If we desired, indeed, to act the part of open enemies, not merely of secret avengers, would there be any lacking in strength, whether of numbers or resources? . . . For what wars should we not be fit, not eager, even with unequal forces, we who so willingly yield ourselves to the sword, if in our religion it were not counted better to be slain than to slay.'¹⁰

It may also be supposed that the position of the early Christians was due to their negative, passive and ascetic tendencies. It is true that the early Christians did lay much emphasis on the negative and passive virtues. Patience is one of the favorite themes of the fathers. Indeed Lactantius deplors the overpraise of brute strength¹¹ and explicitly complains that the common standards of his day did not do justice to the self-control of non-resistance:

“Thus it comes to pass that a just man is an object of contempt to all; and because it will be thought that he is unable to defend himself, he will be regarded as slothful and inactive; but if anyone shall have avenged himself upon his enemy, he is judged a man of spirit and activity—all honor and reverence him.”¹²

There is on the other hand abundant evidence that the Christians also appreciated the positive and active qualities of courage, initiative and discipline.¹³ The terms of military service are constantly on their lips in metaphorical use, as Harnack has clearly shown in his monograph on the subject,¹⁴ and they are eager to emulate the martial virtues in their fight against sin and temptation. Indeed, such thoughts and phrases are particularly abundant in those very passages which condemn and contrast carnal warfare.¹⁵

“If,” says Justin Martyr, “the soldiers . . . prefer their allegiance to their own life and parents and country and

¹⁰ *Apolog.* 37.

¹¹ i. 18.

¹² vi. 18.

¹³ e.g. 2 Tim. 2: 3 f.; Clem. Rom. 37.

¹⁴ *op. cit.*

¹⁵ E.g. Lact. vi. 20: “It shall not be lawful for the righteous man to engage in warfare, whose warfare is righteousness itself.” Marcellus (in Ruinart, *Acta martyrum*. p. 344): “It is not becoming for a Christian to serve in secular engagements who is a soldier of Christ himself.”

all kindred, though you can offer them nothing incorruptible, it were verily ridiculous if we, who earnestly long for incorruption, should not endure all things, in order to obtain what we desire from him who is able to grant it."¹⁶

That the early Christians did not construe non-resistance as a purely negative and passive virtue is also evident from many passages. "It is not limited," says Lactantius, "to this—that (a man) should not inflict injury, but that he should not avenge it when inflicted on himself."¹⁷ Indeed, it is not limited to refraining from revenge but expresses itself in deeds of active love, repaying in kindness. It means, Athenagoras explains, for men "instead of speaking ill of those who have reviled them—to abstain from which is, of itself, an evidence of no mean forbearance—to bless them and to pray for those who plot against their lives."¹⁸ The Christian, says Lactantius, "must diligently take care lest by any fault of his he should at any time make an enemy."¹⁹

Further we must observe that the objection to war of the writers we are quoting was not the superficial kind of pacifism that exists only in time of peace, that believes in peace only in the future, that justifies a present war by special pleading while condemning war in general. They did not even believe that a good cause justifies a war. They refused to draw distinctions between wars of aggression and wars of defense or revenge.

"What difference," asks Tertullian, "is there between provoker and provoked, except that the former is detected as prior in evil doing, but the latter as posterior? Yet each stands impeached of hurting a man in the eye of the Lord, who prohibits and condemns every wickedness. In evil doing there is no account taken of order, nor does place separate what similarity conjoins. And the principle is absolute—that evil is not to be repaid with evil. Like deed involves like merit. How shall we observe that principle, if on our loathing we shall not loathe revenge?"²⁰

III

Before considering more positively the grounds of early Christian antimilitarism, it is worth while to examine the way in which

¹⁶ *Apol.* I. 39.

¹⁷ vi. 18.

¹⁸ *Suppl.* 11.

¹⁹ vi. 18.

²⁰ *De patientia*, 10.

they met their opponents both within and without the church. For it is evident that they were criticised on many grounds, practical, religious and moral. Though their references to the whole subject are almost exclusively incidental comments, their extant writings provide nevertheless a remarkably clear impression of the spirit and tenor of the Christian replies to the vindicators of war.

The arguments from Scripture in favor of war sometimes used today were heard by the Christian pacifists of the third century, and they were answered by the forms of argument that were most usual and most cogent to the men of their time.

Chief among these were the arguments from the military history of the Old Testament where God is represented as commanding ruthless warfare and as participating in it himself. The old Jewish nationalism was so fully accepted by the early Church that the patriotic militarism of the Old Testament very nearly prevailed over Christian standards, as it did in such later eras as the crusades and the English commonwealth. Several methods were used to counteract it.

One was the extreme method of the Marcionites. Their standpoint is described by Harnack: They took issue with the Old Testament and rejected the God of Israel because he was warlike and therefore contradicted the Gospel. The God of the Old Testament, they explained, could not possibly be the father of Jesus Christ, for the latter was gracious and merciful, he brought peace and forbade strife, but the former was warlike, implacable and ruthless. Marcion showed by a series of contrasts between the Old Testament and the Gospel how different were the God of the Jews and Jesus Christ, and in these contrasts the chief point was the comparison between the acts of war of the God of the Jew and the gentleness of Jesus. "Without doubt," continues Harnack, "Marcion rightly grasped in its essentials the Christian conception of God. The idea of a development of the Jewish conception of God into the Christian conception was as remote from him as from his opponents, and so he was compelled to break with the antecedents of Christianity, and his catholic opponents were compelled to pervert the Christian conception of God with outgrown material. Both went astray, for no other solutions presented themselves. It will, however, forever remain a credit to the Marcionite church, which long survived, that it

preferred rather to reject the Old Testament than to obscure the conception of the Father of Jesus Christ by inserting characteristics of a warlike God."²¹

The orthodox Church followed less heroic methods of reconciling the Old Testament with Christianity. One was the allegorical method, so usual in all Scripture exegesis, and specially applicable to such stories because of the stereotyped use of the metaphor of Christian soldiers. The wars of the Jews against the heathen were symbols of the Christian fight against sin.

Origen illustrates this method, especially in his commentaries on Numbers and Joshua. The wars there described are types of the battles against sin. The wars which the Old Testament relates, from which the heretics infer that the God of the Old Testament was a warlike and cruel God, must be understood spiritually, like Matthew 11:12.²² Origen says:

"Unless they had waged those carnal wars as a figure of spiritual wars, never, I believe, would the books of Jewish history have been handed down by the apostles for reading in the churches to the disciples of Christ, who came to teach peace. Therefore the apostle, knowing that carnal wars were no longer to be waged by us, but contests of the soul were to be carried on against spiritual adversaries, like a captain of the army gives his command to the soldiers of Christ, saying, 'Put on the whole armor of God,' etc. (quoting Eph. 6: 11 ff.)."²³

This is the method of Tertullian in meeting the arguments of Marcion himself. Referring to such passages as Psalm 45: 3, he tells him that Christ's sword is a spiritual one, and that he "was to wage a spiritual warfare against spiritual enemies, in spiritual campaigns, and with spiritual weapons." From the story of the "Legion" of demons in the gospels "you learn that Christ must be understood to be the exterminator of spiritual foes, who wields spiritual arms, and fights in spiritual strife."²⁴

A second orthodox correction of Old Testament militarism was on the basis of priority and subsequent annulment. This attitude also was easily accepted by the Church which had come to believe that many laws and customs of the old dispensation were supplanted by the new covenant of Christ. This too is the

²¹ *Militia Christi*, 25.

²² Orig., in *Jesu Nave*, homil. 12, cf. homil. 11.

²³ *Ibid.* homil. 15.

²⁴ *Adv. Marc.* iii. 14, iv. 20.

method of Tertullian, who is evidently meeting citations of Old Testament warriors and even of soldiers and centurions mentioned in the New Testament, when he says:

“Moses carried a rod, and Aaron wore a buckle, and John (the Baptist) is girt with leather, and Joshua the son of Nun leads a line of march; and the People warred: if it pleases you to sport with the subject. But how will a Christian man war, nay, how will he serve even in peace, without a sword, which the Lord has taken away? For albeit soldiers had come unto John and had received the formula of their rule; albeit likewise a centurion had believed, still the Lord afterward (*postea*) in disarming Peter unbelted every soldier. No dress is lawful among us, if assigned to any unlawful action.’²⁵

In Celsus Origen also met practically the Marcionite position.²⁶ His answer is along much the same line. For the Jews wars were right and proper; now however the same Providence has arranged other laws and provisions for the safety of Christians, abolishing the whole Jewish state:

“There is no discrepancy, then, between the God of the Gospel and the God of the Law, even when we take literally the precept regarding the blow on the face.” (See Lam. 3:27, 28, 30.) “So then we infer that neither Jesus nor Moses taught falsely. The Father in sending Jesus did not forget the commands which he had given Moses: He did not change his mind, condemn his own laws, and send by his messenger counter instructions.’”

“In the case of the ancient Jews, who had a land and form of government of their own, to take from them the right of making war upon their enemies, of fighting for their country . . . would be to subject them to sudden and utter destruction whenever the enemy fell upon them. And that same Providence which of old gave the law and has now given the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not wishing the Jewish state to continue longer, has destroyed their city and their temple . . . And as it has destroyed these things, not wishing that they should continue longer, in like manner it has extended day by day the Christian religion, so that it is now preached everywhere with boldness, and that in spite of the numerous obstacles which oppose the spread of Christ’s teaching in the world.’”²⁷

The New Testament also contains a few passages which the defenders of war could use to their purpose. The soldiers who

²⁵ *De idol.* 19.

²⁶ *C. Cels.* vii, 25: “There is reason to believe that Celsus produces the objections which he has heard from those who wish to make a difference between the God of the Gospel and the God of the Law.”

²⁷ *C. Cels.* vii, 25, 26.

interviewed John the Baptist and the centurion whom Jesus commended were mentioned by Tertullian in the passage just quoted. They have been used repeatedly since. Another passage is Christ's command to buy a sword.²⁸ It evidently caused no little difficulty to literalist interpreters of Scripture. Origen comments on it thus:

"If any looking to the letter and not understanding the will of the word shall sell his bodily garment and buy a sword, taking the words of Christ contrary to his will, he shall perish; but concerning which sword he speaks, it is not proper here to mention."²⁹

The saying of Christ, "I came not to send peace but a sword,"³⁰ when removed from its context could serve a similar purpose, but its true emphasis on sufferings undergone rather than inflicted evidently was too clearly realized in the persecutions of the early Church to permit of misunderstanding.³¹

Of course more far-fetched sanctions of war from the Scriptures were invented. One of these would be the argument from silence. Tertullian mentions those who did not share his opposition to the gladiatorial games, because the Scriptures did not plainly say in so many words, "Thou shalt not attend the games."³² The same argument could be used for war.³³

IV

The unpracticalness of the Christian position was vigorously urged by Celsus, the famous anti-Christian writer of the second century, and Origen deals with this point fully at the very close

²⁸ Lk. 22: 36.

²⁹ *In Matt.* xix.

³⁰ Mt. 10: 34.

³¹ Cf. Tertull., *Ad. Marc.* iii. 14.

³² *De spectac.* 3.

³³ As passages like the parable of the shepherd's sacrifice are used to-day to justify military force (Canon Wilson, *Hibbert Journal*, xiii, July 1915, pp. 839 ff.; H. E. Fosdick, *The Challenge of the Present Crisis*), so in antiquity. Referring to such use of Zech. 9:16 Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* iv. 39) says: "And that you may not suppose that these predictions refer to such sufferings as await them from so many wars with foreigners, consider the nature (of the sufferings) . . . No one gives the name of sheep to those who fall in battle with arms in hand, and while repelling force with force; but only to those who are slain, yielding themselves up in their own place of duty with patience rather than fighting in self-defense."

of his great reply. Celsus evidently believed that civilization rests on force, and that kings rule by divine right, and he challenged the Christians with the question as to "what would happen if all the Romans were persuaded to adopt the principles of the Christians" and show the same indifference to the military requirements of the government and the same refusal to worship the monarch. "For," he says, "if all were to do the same as you, there would be nothing to prevent his being left in utter solitude and desertion, and the affairs of the earth would fall into the hands of the wildest and most lawless barbarians; and then there would no longer remain among men any of the glory of your religion or of the true wisdom."³⁴ To this Origen replies in part as follows:

"Would that all were to follow my example in rejecting the maxim of Homer, maintaining the divine origin of the kingdom, and observing the precept to honor the king! In these circumstances the king will not 'be left in utter solitude and desertion,' neither will 'the affairs of the world fall into the hands of the most impious and wild barbarians.' For if, in the words of Celsus, 'they do as I do,' then it is evident that even the barbarians, when they yield obedience to the word of God, will become most obedient to the law, and most humane; and every form of religion will be destroyed except the religion of Christ which will alone prevail. And indeed it will one day triumph, as its principles take possession of the minds of men more and more every day."³⁵

And again:

"But if all the Romans, according to the supposition of Celsus, embrace the Christian faith, they will when they pray overcome their enemies; or rather they will not war at all, being guarded by that divine power which promised to save entire cities for the sake of fifty just persons. For men of God are assuredly the salt of the earth: they preserve the order of the world; and society is held together as long as the salt is uncorrupted."³⁶

Replying further to those whom Origen calls the "enemies of our faith who require us to bear arms for the commonwealth and to slay men," he writes:

"None fight better for the king than we do. We do not indeed fight under him, although he require it; but we fight in his behalf, forming a special army—an army of piety—by offering our prayers to God."

³⁴ Origen, *C. Cels.* viii. 68.

³⁵ *Ibid.* viii. 68.

³⁶ *Ibid.* viii. 70.

“And if Celsus would have us lead armies in defence of our country, let him know that we do this too, and that not for the purpose of being seen by men, or vainglory. For ‘in secret,’ and in our own hearts, there are prayers which ascend as from priests in behalf of our fellow citizens. And Christians are benefactors of their country more than others. For they train up citizens, and inculcate piety to the Supreme Being; and they promote those whose lives in the smallest cities have been good and worthy to a divine and heavenly city.”³⁷

Celsus also believed that wars were inevitable. Of the suggestion “that all the inhabitants of Asia, Europe and Africa, Greeks and barbarians, all to the uttermost ends of the earth, were to come under one law,” he says, “Anyone who thinks this possible knows nothing.” Origen’s reply here is a brief statement of his faith in God and in men. The problem is not one of biological necessity, but it is a psychological or spiritual problem. He says: “We hold that in the mind there is no evil so strong that it may not be overcome by the Supreme Word and God.”³⁸

The same objection is met repeatedly with the answer from experience. In the first place, the Christians themselves had illustrated the possibility of freeing frail human characters from all the seeds of war. Their own transformation is their greatest evidence. Justin writes:

“We who hated and destroyed one another and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavor to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ.”³⁹

“And we who formerly used to murder one another, do not only now refrain from making war upon our enemies, but also, that we may not lie or deceive our examiners, willingly die confessing Christ.”⁴⁰

Even the lowest classes of society, according to Athenagoras, had proved such conversions were genuine and possible:

“Among us you will find (even) uneducated persons and artisans, and old women, who if they are unable in words to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their deeds exhibit the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth; they do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works;

³⁷ *Ibid.* viii. 73, 74.

³⁸ *Ibid.* viii. 72.

³⁹ *I Apol.* 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 39; cf. *Dial.* 110.

when struck, they do not strike again; when robbed, they do not go to law; they give to those that ask of them, and love their neighbors as themselves."⁴¹

In the second place the Christians in arguing that wars were not inevitable pointed to the general growth of peace in the empire. Transformation was not merely attested in a few cases. According to the Christians the cases had been so numerous as to affect the whole average of society and to be already reducing the spirit and influence of militarism. Irenaeus says:

"The law of liberty, that is, the word of God, preached by the apostles throughout all the earth, caused such a change in the state of things, that these nations did form the swords and war lances into plowshares, and changed them into pruninghooks for reaping the corn, that is, into instruments for peaceful purposes, and that they are now unaccustomed to fighting, but when smitten offer also the other cheek."⁴²

"It is," says Tertullian, to the emperors, "the immense number of Christians which makes your enemies so few—almost all the inhabitants of your various cities being followers of Christ."⁴³ Arnobius not only makes the same statement but draws a lesson from it:

"It would not be difficult to prove that after the name of Christ was heard in the world, not only were [wars] not increased, but they were even in a great measure diminished by the restraining of furious passions. For since we, a numerous band of men as we are, have learned from his teaching and his laws that evil ought not to be requited with evil, that it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it—that we should rather shed our own blood than stain our hands and our consciences with that of another,—an ungrateful world is now for a long period enjoying a benefit from Christ, inasmuch as by his means the rage of savage ferocity has been softened, and has begun to withhold hostile hands from the blood of a fellow creature."

"But if all, without exception, who feel that they are men not in form of body, but in power of reason, would lend an ear for a little to his salutary and peaceful rules, and would not, in the pride and arrogance of enlightenment, trust to their own senses rather than to his admonitions, the whole world, having turned the use of steel into more peaceful occupations, would now be living in the most placid tranquility and would unite in blessed harmony, maintaining inviolate the sanctity of treaties."⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Suppl.* 11.

⁴² *Adv. haeres.* iv. 34, 4.

⁴³ *Apol.* 37.

⁴⁴ *Adv. Gentes*, I. 6.

In fact according to Origen the whole Roman empire was a league of nations divinely planned for the elimination of international war:

“In the days of Jesus, righteousness arose and fulness of peace; it began with his birth. God prepared the nations for his teachings, by causing the Roman emperor to rule over all the world; there was no longer to be a plurality of kingdoms, else would the nations have been strangers to one another, and so the apostles would have found it harder to carry out the task laid on them by Jesus, when he said, Go and teach all nations. It is well known that the birth of Jesus took place in the reign of Augustus, who fused and federated the numerous peoples upon the earth into a single empire. A plurality of kingdoms would have been an obstacle to the spread of the doctrine of Jesus throughout all the world, not merely for the reasons already mentioned, but also because the nations would in that event have been obliged to go to war in defence of their native lands . . . How then could this doctrine of peace, which does not even permit vengeance upon an enemy, have prevailed throughout the world, had not the circumstances of the world passed everywhere into the milder phase at the advent of Jesus.”⁴⁶

While claiming that the elimination of war was a human possibility, the Christians did not fail to appreciate that their standards were both new and difficult. The thought of revenge is instinctive and the limitation of good will to those who love us is natural and universal. As Christ said, Even sinners do good to those that do good to them.

“Our religion,” says Tertullian, “commands us to love even our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us, aiming at a perfection all its own, and seeking in its disciples something of a higher type than the commonplace goodness of the world. For all love those who love them; it is peculiar to Christians alone to love those who hate them.”⁴⁶ And elsewhere, he declares, “Christ plainly teaches a new kind of patience, when he actually prohibits the reprisals which the creator permitted in requiring an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”⁴⁷ And again, “God certainly forbids us to hate even with a reason for our hating; for he commands us to love our enemies.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Origen, *C. Cels.* ii. 30 (quoted from Harnack, *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*, i. 20).

⁴⁶ *Ad Scap.* 1.

⁴⁷ *Adv. Marc.* iv. 16.

⁴⁸ *De spectac.* 16.

Another charge made against the Christians was that of disloyalty. This applied not only to their pacifism but to their whole opposition to idolatry and to participation in civil duties. In spite of Paul's words about obedience to rulers and Jesus' famous saying about rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, they did not interpret their duty as being unqualified obedience to the emperor—whether he was right, or whether he was wrong. For, as Tertullian puts it, "if all things are Caesar's, what will belong to God?"⁴⁹ The precepts of loyalty to state they applied only to cases where conscience showed no conflict with loyalty to God. In other cases they preferred to obey God rather than men,⁵⁰ and to take the consequences.

The plea of national patriotism Lactantius meets fairly and squarely. Referring to the saying of a pagan writer, "Reckon the interests of our country as having the first place," he writes:

"When the concord of men is taken away, virtue has no existence at all; for what are the interests of our country but the inconveniences of another state or nation? That is, to extend the boundaries which are violently taken from others, to increase the power of the state, to improve the revenues—all which things are not virtues but the overthrowing of virtues. For, in the first place, the union of human society is taken away, the abstaining from the property of another is taken away; lastly justice itself is taken away, which is unable to bear the tearing asunder of the human race, and wherever arms have glittered, must be banished and exterminated from thence. This saying of Cicero is true: 'But they who say that regard is to be had to citizens but that it is not to be had to foreigners, these destroy the common society of the human race; and when this is removed, beneficence, liberality, kindness and justice are entirely taken away.' For how can a man be just who injures, who hates, who despoils, who puts to death? Yet they who strive to be serviceable to their country do all these things; for they are ignorant of what this being serviceable is, who think nothing useful, nothing advantageous, but that which can be held by the hand; and this alone cannot be held, because it may be snatched away.

"Whoever then has gained for his country these 'goods,' that is, who by the overthrow of cities and the destruction of nations has filled the treasury with money, and has taken lands and enriched his countrymen—he is extolled with praises to the heaven; in him there is said to be the greatest and perfect virtue. And this is the error not only of the people and the ignorant, but also of philosophers, who even give precepts for injustice, lest folly and wickedness should be wanting in discipline and

⁴⁹ *De idol.* 15.

⁵⁰ *Ac.* 5: 29; *Orig. C. Cels.* viii. 26; *Tertull. Apol.* 45: *Decum non proconsulem timentes.* Of such views Celsus (*apud Orig., op. cit., viii. 2*) says, "This is the language of sedition, and is only used by those who separate themselves and stand aloof from all human society."

authority. Therefore, where they are speaking of the duties relating to warfare, all that discourse is accommodated neither to justice nor to true virtue."⁵¹

Thus Lactantius challenges that materialistic and militaristic philosophy that interprets national interest in terms of so-called "military necessity."

Even the plea of justice in retaliation or self-defense was heard and answered by the Christians. Lactantius says: "It is not less the part of a bad man to return an injury than to inflict it . . . For he who endeavors to return an injury, desires to imitate the very person by whom he has been injured."⁵² "In evil doing," says Tertullian, "there is no account taken of order nor does place separate what similarity conjoins."⁵³ "It is not enough," writes Athenagoras, "to be just—for justice is to return like for like—but it is incumbent on us to be good and patient of evil."⁵⁴

V

In treating now the reasons for the Christians' opposition to war considerations of space prevent any elaborate examination of those objections which were not to war itself but to its accessories. Its objectionable associations were numerous and serious. They are well summed up in Harnack's list, which after naming as the first objection which military service presented to early Christians that it was war service and that Christianity rejected entirely war and bloodshed, adds the following:

2. The officers had occasionally to pronounce capital sentences, and the common soldiers had to perform all that was ordered them.
3. The unconditional military oath conflicted with the unconditional obligation to God.
4. The emperor worship nowhere was more prominent than in the army and was almost unavoidable for each individual soldier.
5. The officers had to offer sacrifice, and the common soldiers had to participate in it.
6. The military standards seemed heathen *sacra*; honoring them was therefore like idolatry. Likewise the military honors (the chaplet, etc.) appeared idolatrous.

⁵¹ vi. 6.

⁵² vi. 18.

⁵³ *De patientia*, 10.

⁵⁴ *Suppl.* 34.

7. The conduct of soldiers in peace (extortion, lack of restraint, etc.) was opposed to Christian ethics.

8. Also the traditional rough play and jests in the army (the Mime in the army, etc.) were offensive in themselves and were associated in part with idolatry and heathen festivals.⁵⁵

The first ground for Christian opposition to war itself was the very obvious likeness of war to murder. Not only the commandment of the decalogue but the universal conscience of mankind was the ground on which the early Christians based this objection.⁵⁶ The current bimetalism of morals which condoned wholesale slaughter, but condemned individual murder, was frequently commented on. "The whole world," writes Cyprian to Donatus, "is wet with mutual blood, and murder, which, in the case of an individual, is admitted to be a crime, is called a virtue when it is committed wholesale. Impunity is claimed for the wicked deeds, not on the plea that they are guiltless, but because the cruelty is perpetrated on a grand scale."⁵⁷ Lactantius says: "If anyone has slain a single man he is regarded as contaminated and wicked, nor do they think it lawful for him to be admitted to this earthly abode of the gods (i. e. the temples). But he who has slaughtered countless thousands of men, has inundated plains with blood and infected rivers, is not only admitted to the temple but even into heaven. If this is the virtue that renders us immortal," declares Lactantius, "I for my part should prefer to die, rather than to become the cause of destruction to as many as possible."⁵⁸ And again:

"When God forbids us to kill, he not only prohibits us from open violence, which is not allowed even by the public laws, but he warns us against the compulsion of those things which are esteemed lawful among men. Therefore, with regard to this precept of God, there ought to be no exception at all; but that it is always unlawful to put a man to death whom God willed to be a sacred animal."⁵⁹

Another cause of early Christian pacifism was their strong sense of brotherhood, not with their fellows only but with

⁵⁵ *Militia Christi*, pp. 46 ff.

⁵⁶ The association of war and murder is found as early as the Epistle of James (4: 1, 2) and the address of Tatian to the Greeks (10): "You wish to make war, and you take Apollo, the counsellor of murder."

⁵⁷ *Ad Donatum*, 6.

⁵⁸ i. 18.

⁵⁹ vi. 20.

foreigners and aliens. They rose above national divisions. "We acknowledge," writes Tertullian, "one all-embracing commonwealth,—the world."⁶⁰ The *Letter to Diognetus* says:

"Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. For they dwell not somewhere in cities of their own, neither do they use some different language, nor practice an extraordinary manner of life . . . They dwell in their own countries, but only as sojourners. They bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign."⁶¹

This cosmopolitanism had in the Christian Church a deep religious basis. It was the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. In Christ, declares Paul, there is no difference. And the philosophic democracy of his sermon at Athens rings out again in such a passage as this from Lactantius:

"For if we all derive our origin from one man whom God created, we are plainly of one blood: and therefore it must be considered the greatest wickedness to hate a man, even though guilty. On which account God has enjoined that enmities are never to be contracted by us, but that they are always to be removed, so that we soothe those who are our enemies, by reminding them of their relationship. Likewise if we are all inspired and animated by one God, what else are we than brothers? And, indeed, the more closely united, because we are united in soul rather than in body. Accordingly Lucretius does not err when he says: In short we are all sprung from a heavenly seed—all have that same father. Therefore, they are to be accounted as savage beasts who injure man; who in opposition to every law and right of human nature, plunder, torture, slay and banish. On account of this relationship of brotherhood, God teaches us never to do evil, but always good."⁶²

Tertullian in one of the few passages where pacifists appeal to sentiment reminds the soldier of what his victory means:

"Is the laurel of triumph made of leaves, or of corpses? Is it adorned with ribbons or with tombs? Is it bedewed with ointments or with the tears of wives and mothers?—it may be of some Christians too; for Christ is also among the barbarians."⁶³

A further ground of antimilitarism was practical. The Christians were well aware of the relative inefficiency of the methods

⁶⁰ *Apol.* 38.

⁶¹ *c.* 5.

⁶² *vi.* 10.

⁶³ *De corona*, 12.

of force. This was clear to them from experience in personal relations—a doctrine that they inherited from the Stoics and even Socrates,⁶⁴ and particularly from their own special experience in persecution.

In many passages Lactantius expounds the futility of force and the invincibility of non-resistance and good will. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good," is the burden of his message. He says:

"Let us suppose that this duty of defending the goods belongs only to the good man. Yet to undertake it is easy; to fulfil it is difficult: because, when you have committed yourself to a contest and an encounter, the victory is placed at the disposal of God, not in your own power. And for the most part the wicked are more powerful both in number and in combination than the good, so that it is not so much virtue which is necessary to overcome them as good fortune. Is anyone ignorant how often the better and the juster side has been overcome?"⁶⁵

"If you meet injustice with patience . . . it will immediately be extinguished as though you should pour water upon a fire. But if that injustice which provokes opposition has met with impatience equal to itself, as though overspread with oil, it will excite so great a conflagration that no stream can extinguish it but only the shedding of blood."⁶⁶

"Therefore it is not the part of a wise and good man to wish to contend, since to conquer is not in our power and every contest is doubtful, but it is the part of a wise and excellent man not to wish to remove his adversary, which cannot be done without guilt and danger, but to put an end to the contest itself, which may be done with advantage and with justice."⁶⁷

Especially striking is the statement Lactantius makes about spreading religious ideas by force; for he evidently recognized that the more just and noble and spiritual are the ideals which we would maintain and defend, the more the use of force not only fails to spread them to others but even denies and destroys them in ourselves. Writing of the teachers of non-Christian philosophy, he says:

"There is no occasion for violence and injury, for religion can not be imposed by force; the matter must be carried on by words rather than by blows, that the will may be affected. Let them unsheathe the weapon of their intellect; if their system is true, let it be asserted. . . . For they are aware that there is nothing among men more excellent than religion, and that this ought to be defended with the whole of our power; but as

⁶⁴ E.g. Xen., *Mem.* I. 2. 10.

⁶⁵ vi. 6.

⁶⁶ vi. 18.

⁶⁷ vi. 18.

they are deceived in the matter of the religion itself, so also are they in the manner of its defense. For religion is to be defended, not by putting to death, but by dying; not by cruelty, but by patient endurance; not by guilt, but by good faith; for the former belong to evils, but the latter to goods; and it is necessary for that which is good to have place in religion, and not that which is evil. For if you wish to defend religion by bloodshed, and by tortures, and by guilt, it will no longer be defended, but will be polluted and profaned. For nothing is so much a matter of free will as religion."⁶⁶

But to prove the effectiveness of their doctrine of collective non-resistance and to meet the objections of all who called it unpractical, the Christians had the best argument in their own experience. When they were few, they did not fear annihilation but rather throve under persecution, and when they became numerous and able to resist they still found the same to be true.

"It is evident," writes Justin in the second century, "that no one can terrify or subdue us who have believed in Jesus over all the world, . . . but the more such things (persecutions and deaths) happen to us, the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshippers of God through the name of Jesus."⁶⁷

Cyprian writes:

"The adversary (persecution, or the persecutor) had leapt forth to disturb the camp of Christ with violent terror . . . but he perceived that the soldiers of Christ are now watching, and stand sober and armed for the battle; that they cannot be conquered, but that they can die; and that by this very fact they are invincible, that they do not fear death; that they do not in turn assail their assailants, since it is not lawful for the innocent even to kill the guilty; but they readily deliver up both their lives and their blood."⁷⁰

And Origen says:

"Since it was the purpose of God that the nations should receive the benefits of Christ's teaching, all the devices of men against Christians have been brought to nought; for the more that kings and rulers and peoples have persecuted them everywhere the more have they increased in number and grown in strength."⁷¹

From its very beginning Christianity had been the assurance of an idealist minority. Jesus himself had lived and died for

⁶⁶ v. 20.

⁶⁷ *Dial.* 110.

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 56. 2.

⁷¹ *C. Cels.* vii. 26.

ideals that few could understand. When tempted to rely on political or military force he sternly refused, and died apparently in hopeless defeat. His followers were outnumbered and hated. Their standards of conduct seemed too ideal and unpractical, yet they had the courage to live them out in a world not ready to receive them. The inner and outer promptings to compromise they refused to obey and became to a striking extent an oasis of righteousness and peace in a world of iniquity and discord. And however unpractical their pacific and ideal method may have seemed to their contemporaries, few would venture to assert that it had not been justified.

While the success of this method was not so patent to them as it is to us in the light of a longer historical perspective, there can be no doubt that in their patient endurance of persecution they were not merely taking counsel of their fears. They were aware of the moral power and influence of unflinching passive resistance. "And I, if I be lifted up, shall draw all men unto me," was the experience of their founder. The blood of the martyrs is indeed the seed of the church. As Tertullian says, "Dying we conquer. The moment we are crushed, that moment we go forth victorious."⁷²

VI

An important basis of the early Christian renunciation of warfare was in the sayings of Jesus. The familiar proof texts of non-resistance, of love of enemies, appeared plain and indisputable arguments to literalists and to many Christians who though not bound by literal texts believed these texts expressed the true standards of Christ's conduct. They did not regard them merely as counsels of perfection, nor as unpractical ideals, nor as standards for personal conduct as contrasted with national policy. Military efficiency requires actual killing. How can one love his enemies as Christ commanded and at the same time strive to destroy them! "In disarming Peter," says Tertullian, "Christ unbelted every soldier."

But the early Christians had more than a few literal sayings of Jesus to depend on. The whole spirit of his teaching appeared to them as of the same tenor and temper as the non-resistance

⁷² *Apol.* 50.

which he commanded. There is clear and decisive evidence of the emphasis which the early Church placed on this phase of his teaching and character in the writings of the second century. It is here probably that the fundamental basis of early Christian antimilitarism is to be found,—in the almost unconscious influence of certain pacific qualities in Christ's character, and in the conscious effort to secure these traits in themselves and to make them fundamental in their conception of God. Beneath the controversies on the basis of expediency or popular morality there lay embedded in the Christian church an intuitive spirit—pacific without being quietistic, patient but not from cowardice, generous but not self-conscious, kind but not indifferent to justice.

In the Gospels themselves, even in the earliest collection of Jesus' sayings (commonly called Q), there is abundant evidence that the first custodians of evangelic tradition appreciated this element. They have preserved many evidently authentic sayings of Jesus in which the usual standards of self-seeking, self-assertion, resentment and violence are explicitly reversed. The revolutionary principle of the primacy of service is announced. No subject of conduct in all the Gospel sources receives more emphasis than forgiveness. Especially in the Gospel of Luke both the teaching and the actions of Jesus are focused on the revelation of his good will. Giving is emphasized rather than receiving.⁷³ Forgiveness is repeatedly emphasized by parable and by example—even by Jesus himself upon the cross. To emphasize the importance of conciliation and good will, Jesus appeals to common prudence and the fear of consequences and above all to the example of God himself. With a boldness and definiteness that are sometimes astonishing Jesus bases these ideals of character on the character of God as he knows it. Men are to be like God—that is the simple theological basis of Jesus' ethics. It is worth while to notice the one subject in connection with which Jesus makes this appeal to the imitation of God. It is indiscriminate love:

“But I say unto you, love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you, in order that ye may become sons of your father in heaven, for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and rains upon the just and the unjust.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Compare the striking logion of Acts 20: 35 from the same evangelist.

⁷⁴ Mt. 6: 44 ff.

“But love your enemies and do *them* good and lend hoping for return from none, and your reward will be great, and ye shall be sons of the Most High, because he is good to the ungrateful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful as your father is merciful.”⁷⁶

The only other passage where the phrase “sons of God” is so used is strangely enough the *beati pacifici*: “Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the sons of God.”⁷⁶

The letters of Paul are notoriously lacking in reference to the ethical teaching or standards of the historical Jesus. At the same time the few that there are all point in the same direction:⁷⁷

“For Christ also pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me.”⁷⁸

“Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich.”⁷⁹

“Existing in the form of God, (he) counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.”⁸⁰

Paul elsewhere refers to tolerance and concord “according to Christ Jesus” (Ro. 15:5-7), to the meekness and gentleness of Christ (2 Co. 10:1), to the arbitrating “peace of Christ” (Col. 3:15), and possibly (1 Tim. 1:16) to his “longsuffering,” to his forgiveness (Col. 3:13), and love.⁸¹ Even among the manifold and usually formal theological explanations of Christ in Paul’s letters, at least one important group of passages dwells upon the same quality of Divine love and forgiveness which is prominent in the Gospels. The key-word of these passages is *καταλλαγῆ*, usually translated “reconciliation.” The meaning of this word is more appropriately expressed by “conciliation.”

⁷⁶ Lk. 6:35 f.

⁷⁷ Mt. 5:9.

⁷⁸ Cf. Morgan, *The Religion and Theology of Paul*, p. 40: “When he appeals to Christ’s example, it is invariably those central traits of humility, unselfishness and self renunciation that he has in view.”

⁷⁹ Ro. 15:3; cf. 1 Co. 10:33; 11:1.

⁸⁰ 2 Co. 8:9.

⁸¹ Phil. 2:5 ff.

⁸² Eph. 5:2: “Walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for an odor of a sweet smell.”

It is an attribute of God, and applies to the self-giving, spontaneous, winning love of God—such as pictured by Christ in the portrait of the prodigal's father. It is a love full of the highest ethical qualities and with supreme moral power. The passages read thus:

“The love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us. For while we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . . If while we were enemies we were *reconciled* to God through the death of his Son, much more being *reconciled* shall we be saved by his life; and not only so but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the *reconciliation*.”⁶²

“But all things are of God, who *reconciled* us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of *reconciliation*; to wit, that God was in Christ *reconciling* the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of *reconciliation*.”

“We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ be ye *reconciled* to God.”⁶³

This simple Christological and soteriological thought of Paul's agrees with the ethical principles of Jesus. But here Jesus himself is made a third term in the equation of character between men and God. Here once more is the spontaneous, self-giving love of God not only for the good, but for the unthankful and the evil. It is a love for enemies and not for friends. As another writer puts it, its merit is in its priority; “he first loved us,” while we were yet sinners. It is an uncalculating love, indifferent to past trespasses. At the same time the love is both effective and concrete. Its embodiment is in Christ and the cross. “God was in Christ,” and he wins men to God and to righteousness. The love of Christ constrains us to a life not lived for ourselves.

Further it is the standard for men. God commends his own love to us. He has given to us the ministry of such loving reconciliation. We are now ambassadors on behalf of Christ as though God were entreating by us.

When we pass from the Gospels and Paul to the later Christian

⁶² Ro. 5: 6-8, 10, 11.

⁶³ 2 Co. 5: 18-20.

literature the emphasis becomes even more clear and definite. The allusions to Jesus' character and the quotations from his sayings are as in Paul quite few, but they are significant. They have chiefly the same themes—patience, forgiveness, love, kindness in judgment and treatment of others, freedom from resentment, resistance and reproach.

We have already quoted freely from the apologists and later writers. It must suffice now to confine ourselves to the few earliest records and not pass beyond the limits of the Apostolic Fathers. There is only one saying of Jesus recorded as such in the New Testament outside the Gospels. It is Acts 20:35: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." There are only three formal quotations from Jesus' ethical teachings in the Apostolic Fathers. They all have an introductory formula similar to that in Acts. One of them is the familiar saying, "Woe to that man [by whom offences come]. It were better for him if he had never been born than that he should make one of my elect stumble," etc. Clement of Rome uses it to condemn those who are responsible for "the strifes and tumults and divisions and schisms and wars" among the Corinthians.⁸⁴ The other two are similar to each other and to familiar parts of the sermon on the mount: "Be ye merciful, that ye may obtain mercy;
Forgive, that it may be forgiven you;
As ye do, so shall it be done to you;
As ye judge, so shall ye be judged;
As ye are kind, so shall kindness be shown to you;
With what measure ye mete, with the same it shall be measured to you."⁸⁵

And:

"Judge not, that ye be not judged;
Forgive, and it shall be forgiven you;
Be merciful, that ye may obtain mercy;
With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. . . .
Blessed are the poor, and those that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God."⁸⁶

Other ethical sayings of Jesus are echoed though not quoted in the Apostolic Fathers,⁸⁷ but they too emphasize the same

⁸⁴ Clem. Rom. 46.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 13.

⁸⁶ Polyc. 2.

⁸⁷ See *The New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers*, by the Oxford Society of Historical Theology.

theme. Thus Ignatius warns Polycarp to be "wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove,"⁸⁸ while Polycarp writes to his friends at Philippi, "If we entreat the Lord to forgive us, we ought also ourselves to forgive."⁸⁹ and he commands them, "Pray for those that persecute and hate you, and for the enemies of the cross."⁹⁰

The appeals to the example of Christ are almost exclusively to his humility and patience. He became, says Polycarp, the servant of all. This is why Isaiah 53 is a favorite description of him.⁹¹ It is quoted in full in Clement's epistle⁹²—the longest quotation in the letter—as the Holy Spirit's declaration concerning him. It was the text form which Philip in Acts preached Christianity to the Ethiopian eunuch. It is quoted in Barnabas⁹³ together with the similar passage in Is. 50: 6-9. It is in the mind of the writer of 1 Peter in describing as an example for men the sufferings of Christ:

"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed."⁹⁴

This last passage appears in turn to be used by Polycarp when he writes:

"Let us then continually persevere in our hope, and the earnest of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ, who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, but endured all things for us, that we might live in him. Let us then be imitators of his patience; and if we suffer for his name's sake let us glorify him. He has set us this example in himself, and we have believed that such is the case."⁹⁵

Similar in effect, though without the Scripture reference, is the passage of Ignatius:

⁸⁸ Ign., *Polyc.* 2.

⁸⁹ Polyc. 6.

⁹⁰ Polyc. 12.

⁹¹ Cf. Mt. 20: 28.

⁹² 1 Clem. 16; cf. Mt. 8: 17; 12: 18 ff.

⁹³ 5: 6.

⁹⁴ 2: 21-24.

⁹⁵ Polyc. 8.

“Be ye meek in response to their wrath, humble in opposition to their boasting; to their blasphemies return your prayers; in contrast to their error, be ye steadfast in the faith; and for their cruelty, manifest your gentleness. While we take care not to imitate their conduct, let us be found their brethren in all true kindness; and let us seek to be followers of the Lord (who ever more unjustly treated, more destitute, more condemned?).”⁹⁶

And finally these writers base their argument for pacific virtues on the very nature of God. Men are to be imitators of him. This thought occurs clearly in Ephesians:

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and railing be put away from you with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you. Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children.”⁹⁷

Clement of Rome after enumerating many examples of saints and heroes concludes:

“Wherefore, having so many great and glorious examples set before us, let us turn again to the practice of that peace which from the beginning was the mark set before us; and let us look steadfastly to the Father and Creator of the universe, and cleave to his mighty and surpassingly great gifts and benefactions of peace. Let us contemplate Him with our understanding, and look with the eyes of our soul to his longsuffering will. Let us reflect how free from wrath He is towards all his creation. The Heavens, revolving under his government, are subject to him in peace. Day and night run the course appointed by Him, in no wise hindering each other . . . The very smallest of living things meet together in peace and concord. All these the great Creator and Lord of all has appointed to exist in peace and harmony; while he does good to all.”⁹⁸

But the *imitatio Dei* is most beautifully and fully described by the anonymous writer of the letter to Diognetus. God

“did not, as one might have imagined, send to men any servant, or angel, or ruler, or any one of those who bear sway over earthly things, or one of those to whom the government of things in the heavens has been entrusted, but the very Creator and Fashioner of all things . . . Him he sent to them. Was it then, as one might conceive, for the purpose of exercising tyranny or inspiring fear and terror? By no means, but under the influence of clemency and meekness. As a king sends his son who is also a king, so sent he him; as God he sent him; as to men he sent him, as a

⁹⁶ Eph. 10.

⁹⁷ 4: 31, 32; 5: 1.

⁹⁸ Clem. 19 ff.

saviour he sent him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us; for violence has no place in the character of God. As calling us he sent him, not as vengefully pursuing us, as loving us he sent him not as judging us.'⁹⁹

"For God, the Lord and fashioner of all things, who made all things, and assigned them their several positions, proved himself not merely a friend of mankind but also longsuffering [in his dealings with them]. Yea, he was always of such a character, and still is, and will ever be, kind and good, and free from wrath, and true, and the only one who is [absolutely] good."¹⁰⁰

"How will you love him, who has first so loved you? And if you love him you will be an imitator of his kindness. And do not wonder that a man may become an imitator of God. He can, if he is willing. For it is not by ruling over his neighbors, or by seeking to hold the supremacy over those that are weaker or by being rich, and showing violence towards those that are inferior that happiness is found; nor can anyone by these things become an imitator of God. But these things do not at all constitute his majesty. On the contrary he who takes upon himself the burden of his neighbor; he who, in whatsoever respect he is superior, is ready to benefit another who is deficient; he who, whatsoever things he has received from God, by distributing these to the needy, becomes a god to those who received [his benefits]: he is an imitator of God."¹⁰¹

"Violence has nothing to do with the character of God." That sentence of this, the earliest of the apologists, is the theological basis of Christian antimilitarism. It is also a foundation of every philosophy, that escaping the autocracy of determinism and fatalism, would explain life in terms of liberty—the liberty not merely of outward government, but the freedom of the human will. God in Christ did not use force but love. He wins and persuades men, he does not compel. He leaves men the freedom to reject him if they will. And God's method is to be ours, if we are to be imitators of him. God commends his own love to us—the method of loving enemies. And by loving them we shall become the children of God.

VII

In summary we may say that the basis of Christian antimilitarism was not ritual, tradition, fatalistic *laissez faire*, sentimentalism or stoicism: it was a new ethical conscience, created

⁹⁹ c. 7.

¹⁰⁰ c. 8.

¹⁰¹ c. 10.

apparently by the influence of Jesus' teaching and character as emphasized and interpreted by the early Church. As usual with such convictions its origin in the last resort cannot be completely traced or explained. We know that the reasons given by those who hold high ideals, especially in controversy, fail to touch the real foundation. But their assurance and fidelity even to death are sufficient evidence that they were really conscientious objectors. That they met or ignored the more natural objections and resisted temptations due to compromise, hope of immediate success, or to ridicule and fear of misunderstanding, further proves the strength of their faith's foundation.

They did not succeed in demilitarizing the Roman empire. Instead, the Church itself was ultimately militarized—and Christian pacifism was left to the dissenting sects—Cathari, Waldenses, and Quakers—of the later generations. Under Constantine Christianity was accepted as a state religion, and the official recognition was first made in the army. Church councils now condemned not the man who served in the army but the man who proved a deserter¹⁰² or perhaps the man who served in the army of the enemy.¹⁰³ But for the spread of Christian character, ideals and influence the sword has never been more effective than was the non-resistant faith of the ante-Nicene church. In their patience they won their souls, those that lost their lives found them, “not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.”

¹⁰² Arles (314 A. D.), Canon iii.

¹⁰³ Nicea (325 A. D.), Canon xii. The military regulations as well as the ecclesiastical experienced striking changes. Before Constantine Christians were sometimes expelled from the army and sometimes refused permission to leave the army. A century later (415 A. D.) only Christians were allowed in the army (Cod. Theodos., xvi. 10, 21, cited by Bigelmair, *op. cit.*, p. 173). The whole subject is very complicated and obscure. In addition to earlier literature see the discussion of W. M. Calder in *The Expositor*, Seventh Series, vi (1908), pp. 394 ff. in connection with an interesting inscription from Laodicea.