

# The Wickedness of War



Hitler meets Pope Pius XII

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*I first posted this article on Aug. 26, 2009. Now because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, I thought Christians might appreciate this message and stand against the spirit of war. The only justifiable war according to the Bible and in my opinion, is one of self-defense when an enemy attempts to invade one's nation.*

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The war spirit is so wrought into the texture of governments and the habits of national thinking, and even into our very festivals and pomps, that its occasional recurrence is deemed a matter of unavoidable necessity. Setting aside the matter of a defensive war for now, it is our intention to offer a few thoughts to show how utterly at variance the spirit of war is with truth and righteousness.

1. It contradicts the genius and intention of Christianity. Christianity requires us to seek to amend the condition of man. But war cannot do this. The world is no better for all the wars of five thousand years. Christianity, if it prevailed, would make the earth a paradise. War, where it prevails, makes it a slaughterhouse, a den of thieves, a brothel, a hell. Christianity cancels the laws of retaliation. War is based upon that very principle. Christianity is the remedy for all human woes. War produces every woe known to man.

We may always trace it to the thirst of revenge, the acquisition of territory, the monopoly of commerce, the quarrels of kings, the intrigues of ministers, or some other source, equally culpable; but never has any war devised by man been founded on holy tempers and Christian principles.

**“War is the greatest plague that can afflict humanity. It destroys religion, it destroys states and it destroys families. Any scourge is preferable to it.”-Martin Luther**

2. War sets at nought the example of Jesus. One of Christ's primary laws is, "Learn of Me, for I am meek" His constant declaration was that He "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save."

He drove men from the temple, but it was with "a scourge of small cords," and a gentle doom it was, compared to their just deserts. He expressly said His servants would not fight, because His kingdom was not of this world. He was the Prince of Peace.

Do we forget that Christ is our example? Imagine the Redeemer laying a country waste, setting fire to cities, storming fortresses, and consigning tens of thousands to wounds and anguish, death and damnation, just to define some point of policy, to decide some kingly quarrel, or to enlarge some boundary. Could "meekness and lowliness" be learned from Him thus engaged? It is most certain that we gather no army lessons from Him who "came to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to comfort all that mourn." It is most certain that no man who makes fighting his profession can find authority in the example of our Lord.

3. War is inconsistent not only with the general structure and nature of Christianity and the example of Jesus, but it violates all the express precepts of the New Testament. Even the Old Testament does not sanction war, as a custom. In each case of lawful war, it was entered on by express command. It should be remembered that in no case, even under the Old Testament, was war appointed to decide doubtful questions or to settle quarrels. Wars were intended to chastise nations guilty of provoking God. Such is never the pretext of modern war.

As to the New Testament, a multitude of precepts might be quoted: "Ye have heard, an eye for an eye, but I say unto you, resist not evil." "Follow peace with all men." "Love one another." "Do justice, love mercy." "Love your enemies." "Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace." "Return good for evil." "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one toward another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you." "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

All know how much these passages abound in the New Testament. There they stand. In any sense the words will bear, they forbid war. If language has any force at all, these words equally forbid retaliation. Yet retaliation is always advanced as the very best pretext for war and is more frequently the avowed reason than any other!

Rehearse all the catalogue of graces, and mark how we are enjoined to be meek, lowly, peaceable, easy to be entreated, gentle, thinking no evil, merciful, slow to anger, given to quietness, knowledge, patience, temperance, prayer. War sets them all at nought.

Of the sermon on the mount, five benedictions are upon the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers. Two others are upon the persecuted and reviled. The professed warrior, therefore, shuts himself out from all these benedictions! The discourse expressly revokes the

law of retaliation, and, exploding the [practice] of loving our neighbor and hating our enemy, requires us to love our enemies and do good to them which despitefully use us. Afterward, in presenting a form of prayer, it not only teaches us to say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us," but adds, "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you." What a peace sermon is here!

The regular soldier ... makes war a trade, and is ready to fight any nation, or any part of his own nation, as he is sent. He is to wheel, march, load, fire, advance or flee, just as he is bidden, and because he is bidden. The nearer a soldier comes to a mere machine, the better soldier he makes. Is this right for a Christian? Is it compatible with his duty to "examine all things, and hold fast that which is good?"

What gospel precept is there, which he who makes war a profession is not at times compelled to violate? He must cast away meekness, and fight. He must cast away forgiveness, and revenge his country. He must not return good for evil, but blow for blow, wound for wound.

Look at an army in the hour of battle. See attacks and retreats, battalions annihilated, limbs flying in the air; suffocating smoke, thundering artillery, thousands smarting in the agony of death, and none to administer a cup of water. Do the precepts of Christianity authorize such a scene? Look at the field when all is over. The harvest trampled and destroyed, houses smoking in ruin, the mangled and slain strewed among dead horses and broken gun-carriages! Prowlers stripping booty even from the warm bodies of the dying! Jackals lurking around, and birds of prey wheeling above. Here and there a wretched widow, or an anxious wife, seeking her loved one among the dead and dying. Does all this look as if Christians had there been serving their Master, the God of mercy?

But nowhere does war wear such horrors as in a siege. The inhabitants are straitly shut up. Business, pleasure, education and intercourse are checked; and sorrow, poverty, terror, and distress are spread abroad. The bombardment begins. Shells explode in the streets, or penetrate the roofs. Citizens are killed in the streets, and soldiers on the ramparts. Women and children retreat to cellars and live in all discomfort. Day by day the gloom thickens. All news is of houses burnt, persons killed, and scarcity increased, At length, famine is threatened. Everything is sold to buy a little food.

Anon, breaches are made in the walls. All must work, amid galling fire, to repair them. Mines are sprung, blowing houses and the occupants into the air. No relief comes. Hundreds perish in desperate sorties. All are miserable. The widow, the bereft mother, the disappointed bride, and the tender orphan, mourn continually.

Pestilence succeeds to famine. Thousands, who have escaped violence, die of disease. At length, the city is taken by storm; pillage, and perhaps an awful conflagration, succeed; a brutal soldiery raven among the virtuous; and the indescribable scene ends in permanent poverty, lamentation, and dishonor. Is this Christianity?