

Christians and War

To Fight or Not to Fight?

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Outline

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- **Objectives**
- **The Problem**
- **The NT view**
- **Early Christian View**
- **Constantine**
- **Augustine**
- **The Nature of World Powers**
- **Historical Examples**
- **Common Objection (OT)**
- **So What?**

Introductions







Assumptions

- The Bible is the authority on Christian teaching
- Christians closer to the apostles are a better model than later Christians in general
- We all have some degree of error, so respectful discussion is required
 - N.T. Wright: “20% of what I teach is wrong...I just don’t know which 20%!”

Objectives

- Examine the issue of Christians and war from a biblical and historical perspective
- Pay attention to how Christianity moved from pacifism to support for war
- Lessons learned...

The Problem

- Jesus taught we must love our enemies (Lk 6:27), neighbours (Mk 12:31), and especially our fellow Christians (Jn 13:35) and not return evil for evil (Ro 12:17)
- All countries today have at least some Christians in them
 - China: estimated 70,000,000+ in house churches
 - Iran: 300,000 in registered churches (add: house church)
 - Iraq: 800,000 before invasion; many have since died or fled
 - Syria: 1,000,000 – 2,000,000 (5-10% of population)
- When we go to war, we kill our enemies, our neighbours and our brethren in violation of Jesus' commands
- “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (Jn 14:15)



Enemies



Neighbours



Brothers & Sisters

The New Testament View

- Jesus' Kingdom is no part of the world. If it was, his disciples would have fought (Jn 18:36)
- Jesus taught we must love our enemies (Lk 6:27), neighbours (Mk 12:31), and especially our fellow Christians (Jn 13:35) and not return evil for evil (Ro 12:17)
- We are not to respond to violence with more violence (Mt 5:39)
- We are to be peacemakers (Mt 5:9)
- Our warfare is spiritual, not carnal (2Cor 10:3-5)

Some Questions...

- Shouldn't we defend our country?
- What about the Old Testament wars?
- Shouldn't we fight evil in the world?
- Isn't pacifism impractical in today's dangerous world?
- Does pacifism mean non-engagement?

Christianity before Constantine

- “The Christians felt and confessed, that such institutions [governments] might be necessary for the present system of the world, and they cheerfully submitted to the authority of their Pagan governors. But while they inculcated the maxims of passive obedience, they refused to take any active part in the civil administration or the military defense of the empire. Some indulgence might perhaps be allowed for persons who, before their conversion, were already engaged in such violent and sanguinary occupations; but it was impossible that the Christians, without renouncing a more sacred duty, could assume the character of soldiers, of magistrates, or of princes.” - Edward Gibbon, in *The Christians and the Fall of Rome*, p.50

Christianity Before Constantine

- **Justin Martyr** (150 A.D.): “...we who formally killed one another... refuse to make war on our enemies...” - *First Apology*, 39.2-3
- **Athenagoras** (c.175 A.D.): “We have learned not to return blow for blow...” - *Plea for the Christians*, 1.4
- **Tertullian** (c. 160–c. 220 A.D.): “...the Lord, by taking away Peter’s sword, disarmed every soldier thereafter. We are not allowed to wear any uniform that symbolizes a sinful act.” – *On Idolatry*, 19.1-3
- “...once a man has accepted the faith...he must immediately leave the service...” – *On the Crown*, 11.1-7

Christianity before Constantine

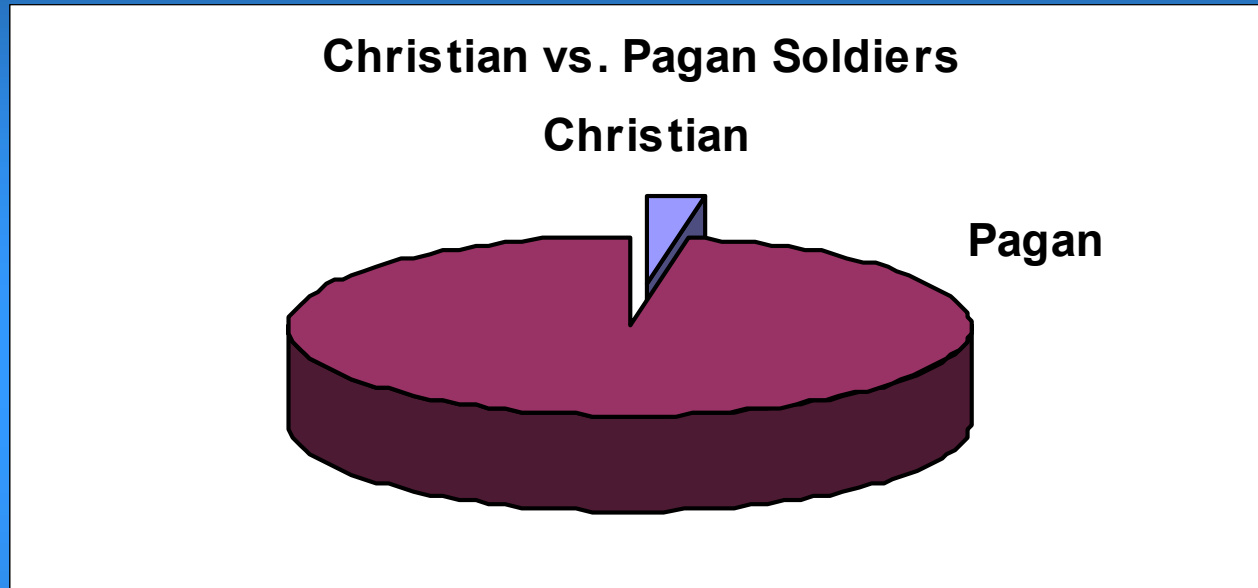
- **Hippolytus of Rome** (early 3rd c.): “A [converted] soldier...shall kill no one. If ordered to do so, he shall not obey... a member of the faithful who wants to join the army should be dismissed [excommunicated]...” – *Apostolic Tradition, XVI*
- **Cyprian** (died 258 A.D.): “When individuals slay a man, it is a crime. When killing takes place on behalf of the state, it is called a virtue.” – *To Donatus, 6*
- **Origen** (c. 185–c. 254): “For we no longer take up the sword against any nation...” – *Against Celsus, 5;33*
- **Lactantius** (c. 240–c. 320 A.D.): “...there must be no exception to this command of God. Killing a human...is always wrong - *Divine Institutes, 6.20.15-17*

Christianity Before Constantine

Were there Christians in the Army?

- From *It Is Not Lawful For Me To Fight*, by Jean-Michel Hornus, 1980:
- Christian funeral inscriptions: Edmond Le Blant (1869) found 27 soldiers among 4734 inscriptions, or .57% (5.42% for pagan inscriptions)
 - “...evidence of extreme repulsion that Christians felt for the military profession. – p.118
- Leclercq (1933) challenged this conclusion
 - “...massive evidence...irrefutable proof...”
- Hornus: “If one looks at this evidence more closely, its ostensibly massive quantities begin to shrink...**to a grand total of seven!** [0.15%]” – p.119

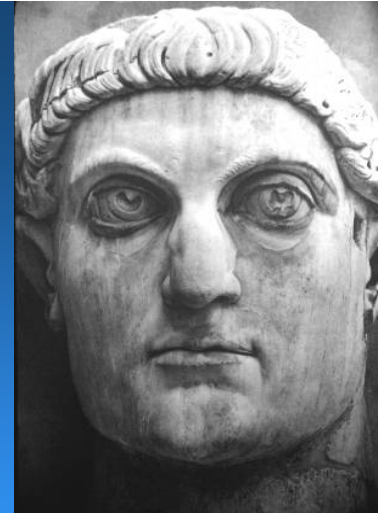
Christianity Before Constantine



Conclusion: Christians prior to Constantine (early 4th c.), were overwhelmingly pacifist

Roman Emperor Constantine

Reigned from 306-337 A.D.



- Pagan Sun worshipper; killed his wife and son
- Was not baptized until on his death bed
- Eusebius: Constantine saw a vision of a cross in the sky: “...in this you shall conquer”
- Lactantius: Constantine had a dream, not a vision
- Edict of Milan (313 A.D.) – persecution ends, church becomes favourable to Rome and vice versa
- Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) – Constantine helps write the creed (“...of the same substance [homoousios]”)
- Constantinople founded in 330 A.D.
- Era of church-state partnership begins
- Church saw God’s hand; State saw ‘empire glue’
- Many Christians saw “compromise”

Christianity After Constantine

- **Eusebius of Caesarea** (ca. 260 – ca. 340 A.D.): “...the Saviour’s friend [Constantine], armed...against his foes with the standards given him by the Saviour...subdues in battle and chastens the visible enemies of the truth.” - In *Praise of Constantine*, 2.3)
- **Athanasius** (ca. 296-373 A.D.): “One is not supposed to kill, but killing the enemy in battle is both lawful and praiseworthy...when the time and conditions are right, it is both allowed and condoned.” – *Letter to Amun*

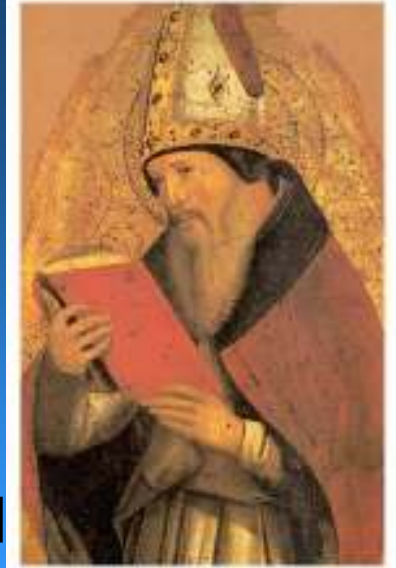
Christianity After Constantine

- **Ambrose** (ca. 339-397 A.D.): “Everyone believes it is much more commendable to protect one’s country from destruction than to protect oneself from danger...” – *Duties* 3.3.23
- **Augustine** (354-430 A.D.): “When victory goes to those who have fought in the more upright cause, who would doubt that such a victory should be celebrated.” – *City of God*, 15.4
- “Peace should be your aim; war should be a matter of necessity so that God might free you from necessity and preserve you in peace.” – *Letter* 189.6

Augustine of Hippo

354-430 A.D.

- Probably single greatest influence on post-Constantine church
- Professor of Rhetoric; saturated in Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought
- Converted to Christianity at 32 years old
- Integrated Greek philosophy with NT teaching
 - Confession: Paul builds on Greek teaching!
- Developed Just War Theory
 - Later refined by Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274)
- ➔ Provided a rationale for Christians to fight
- Most churches now support war



A Recent Example

The American Civil War (1861–1865)

- According to *A History of Christianity*, by Paul Johnson:
- Churches split along North/South lines
- Wesleyans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, etc., divided and slaughtered one another – *p.437*
- “Thus Christianity on both sides contributed to the million casualties and 600,000 dead.” – *p.438*
- After the war, the churches reunited, demonstrating the shallowness of their faith

The Nature of World Powers

- Dan 7, Rev 13: World powers are vicious beasts fighting each other for more power



The Nature of World Powers

- Nations are concerned about self-interest
- Nations are in competition with one another for resources, power and influence
- Nations are run by the elite, even in 'democracies'
- Most nations think they are special and better than other nations; some think they have divine blessing
 - Daniel teaches otherwise
- The elite use the media to indoctrinate citizens into a particular worldview, and to distract them from the essential issues (Noam Chomsky)

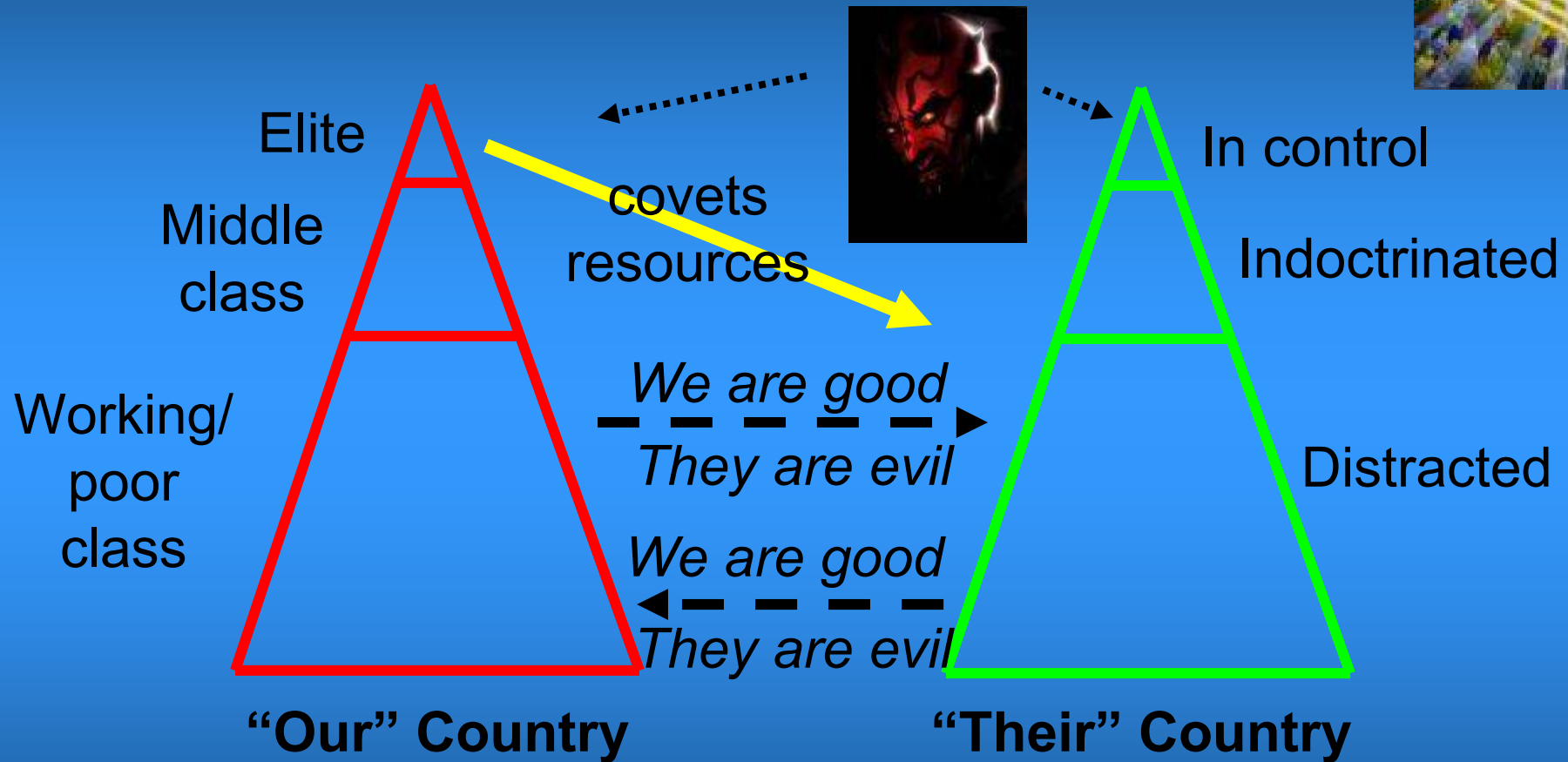
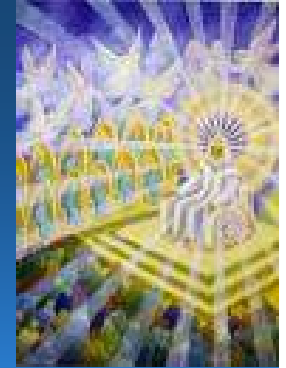
Daniel's Battle of the Beasts



- Note: No “good” beasts appear
- The 10 horned world power lives until Messiah returns

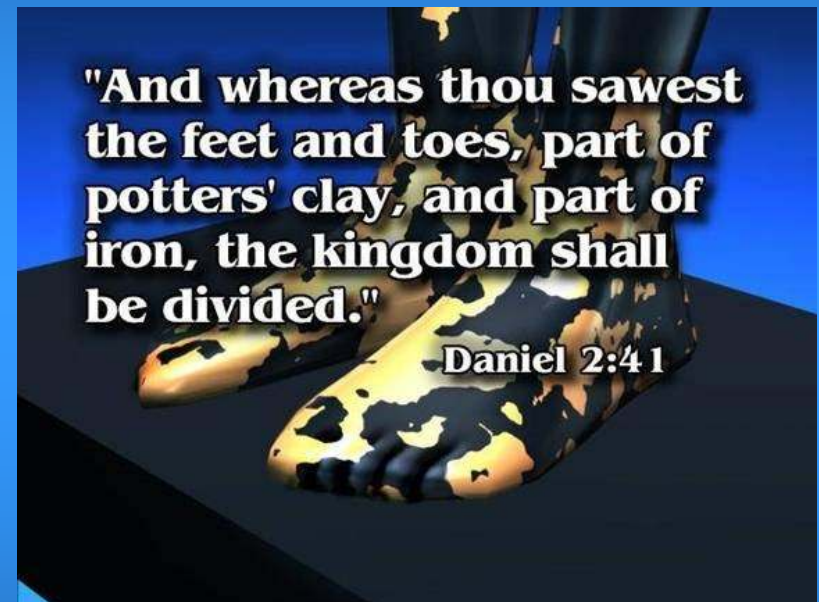
How World Powers are Ruled

The god of this world - 2Cor 4:4, cf. Jn 12:31, 16:11



- The Elite hide their true intentions by controlling the media
- Wars are generally fought for “good reasons” on all sides
- Are the Elite all authentic Christians? No! So is our country Christian?

Daniel's Statue: Feet of Clay and Iron



- Clay = Liberal/Socialist?
- Iron = Conservative/Capitalist?

“My Kingdom is No Part of this World”

God’s Kingdom is our Country

**Christ, not
Caesar, is
our King**



**Christians
“love one
another” –
Jn 13:34**



Holy Spirit



Historical Examples

Peace Churches

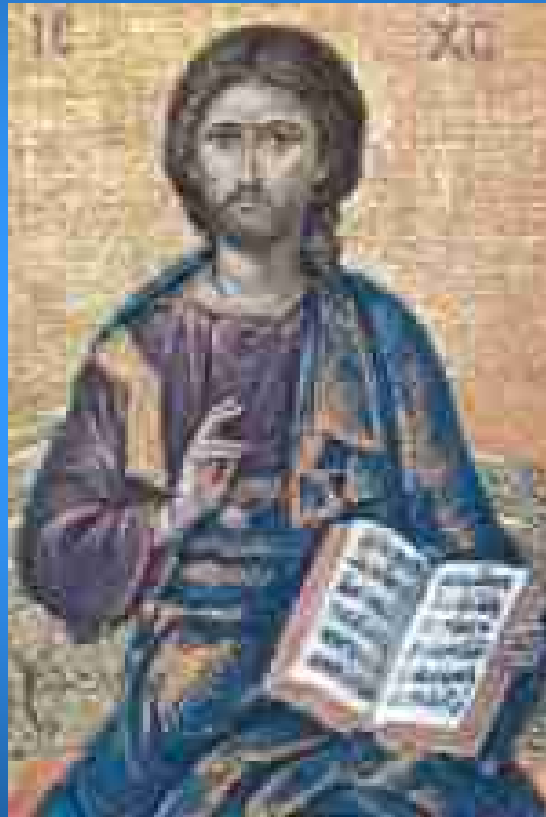
- Christians of the first 2-3 centuries
- The Waldenses – founded by Peter Waldo (1140?-1218?)
- Unity of Brethren (1467 -)
- Swiss Brethren (Anabaptists), early 1500's
- Meno Simmons (Netherlands), 1520+
- Hutterites, founded by Jacob Hutter (d. 1536)
- The Polish Brethren (1562 – 1658)
- Quakers (George Fox), 1652
- Church of the Brethren (Alexander Mack), 1708

Modern Examples

Peace Churches - Wikipedia

- Amish, Hutterites, Old German Baptist Brethren
- Old Order River Brethren
- The Brethren in Christ
- Doukhobors, Dunkard Brethren, Molokans
- Bruderhof Communities, Schwenkfelders
- Moravians, the Shakers
- Some groups within the Pentecostal movement
- We could add:
- 7th Day Adventists, Mennonites
- Christadelphians, Church of God-Faith of Abraham
- Bereans!!!

The Polish Brethren (1552 – 1658)



Do they still exist?

The Polish Brethren

(1552 – 1658)

- Bible contains divine wisdom, but needs to be understood reasonably and rationally
- Biblical Unitarians
- Rejected Hellfire doctrine
- Pacifists - carried wooden swords
- Church/State separation; declined political office
- Very strong on education and equality of all
- Persecuted by the Catholic church
- Expelled from Poland in 1658

Objection – OT Argument

Argument: The OT allowed war, and God does not change, so Christians can make war also

1. We must interpret the OT in light of the NT (i.e., we don't stone adulterers)
2. Even in the OT, a time of peace was prophesied (e.g. swords into ploughshares – Isaiah 2:4 cf. Is 9:5-7; 11:6-8; Mic. 5:4-5; Zech 9:10;)
3. The NT does not allow killing
4. How can we reconcile these views?

Objections – OT

Old Testament



New Testament



Warfare in the NT

- For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:3-5)

Warfare in the NT

- Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
- Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. – Eph 6:10-13

OT Argument: Summary

- The OT taught war was temporary; a time of peace and justice was coming...
- “A journey toward nonparticipation” – Brensing
- Yahweh enters the world through Israel, promises them land, and plays by the world’s rules (for now)
 - Establishes patterns looking forward to the NT
- The NT teaches war and violence is wrong
- Jesus’ peaceful example (“Peter, put away the sword”)
- Christians prior to Constantine were pacifist
- ➔ We must not support war if we are to obey Jesus Christ

Questions?



Thank You for your Time
and Attention!

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall
be called sons of God...” – Mt. 5:9*

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