FIGHTING AGAINST WAR: PACIFISM WITHIN CHURCHES OF CHRIST

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PACIFISM PRIOR TO WORLD WAR I

Pacifism among American restorationists reaches back to the movement's inception. Modern advocates of primitive Christianity, who are overwhelmingly pro-war, may be surprised by the pacifist positions of restoration leaders such as Bart W. Stone and Alexander Campbell. Stone's "biblical vision of the Kingdom" and recognition that it "ought to control not just our beliefs but, in addition, every commitment in our lives" led to his opposition to war and slavery. He denied the claim that America was a Christian nation.

But what shall be said of the nation which seeks to injure another, and in fact makes a trade of it--yet

¹Gallup Poll, "Support For War Higher Among More Religious Americans," February 17-19, 2003, http://www.gallup.com/poll/7888/Support-War-Modestly-Higher-Among-More-Religious-Americans.aspx?version=print (accessed March 19, 2013). The data shows that 70% of the "religious right" supported the Iraq war. Among "born again" or "evangelicals" the support was slightly lower at 63%.

²Michael Casey, "Pacifism And David Lipscomb," Gospel Advocate (December 1993): 46. Casey also identifies Tolbert Fanning and J. D. Tant as pacifists.

³Richard Hughes, "How Barton Stone Led Me To Christ Anew: An Autobiographical Essay," Stone-Campbell Journal 11 (2008): 173. Hughes unveils his personal journey toward pacifism. The Anabaptists and Stone were major influences in his development. Their similar approach to Scriptural principles convinced him that war and Christianity do not mix. He provides further detail on Stone's beliefs.

professing Christianity? The answer is easy. They are leagued with the powers of darkness, and shall share of their pains. 4

Similarly, Campbell argued in his Address On War against a nations "divine right" to wage war. Attempting to undermine the propaganda of "holy war," he stated, "But we must inquire into the appropriateness of the term 'Christian' prefixed to nation," and then asks "In what font were they [nations] baptized?" Campbell appealed to Old Testament prophecy, the example and teaching of Jesus, and the words of Jesus' apostles as proof that men cannot support war. He criticized the exaltation of warriors that existed in all areas of society, and believed it promoted violence.

Behold, too, the young mother arraying her proud boy with cap and feather, toyed with a drum and sword, training him for the admired profession of a man killer....The pulpit, too, must lend its aid in

⁴Barton W. Stone, "Ninth Interview," in Works of Elder B. W. Stone, 2nd ed., ed. James M. Mathes (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys & Co., 1859), 241; Hughes, 174.

⁵Alexander Campbell, Address on War (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1937): 5. Campbell admits that the phrase "Christian nation" can be used in the same sense that a building is called a "college" or "church." He then points out that any nation that contains communities of believers could rightfully be called "Christian" in this sense.

⁶Campbell, Address On War, 12. It is hard to reconcile a pro-war position with the scriptures Campbell appeals to. One who believed in the arrival of God's Kingdom would find it difficult to refute Campbell's use of Micah and Isaiah, who both explain God's kingdom being defined by peace.

cherishing the delusion. There is not infrequently heard a eulogium on some fallen hero, some church service for the mighty dead, thus desecrating the religion of the Prince of Peace by causing it to minister as the handmaid of war.⁷

Following the horrors of the Civil War, and Campbell's death in 1866, David Lipscomb⁸ became the voice of pacifism via the *Gospel Advocate*. His influence was strong in the south, but Lipscomb's pacifist beliefs "were tolerated rather than adopted with any degree of enthusiasm by most church members..."

The reality was that Stone, Campbell, and Lipscomb were not successful in convincing restorationists that God did not approve of war. Many were

⁷Campbell, Address On War, 15. The delusion he refers to is human inclination to "gaze with admiration on the tinselled trappings, and embroidered ensignes, of him whose profession it is to make widows and orphans by wholesale!" Campbell's emotion pours off the page as he strongly appeals to the false glory of war.

^{*}Bobby Valentine, "Lipscomb of Texas vs. Lipscomb of Nashville: R. L. Whiteside's Rejection of David Lipscomb's Pacifism." In And the Word Became Flesh, edited by Thomas H Olbricht and David Fleer, 124-139 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009),130-132. Valetine describes Lipscomb and Harding as "Apocalyptic Pacifists." Pacifism was a result of their theological world view in which they consider any alliance with kingdom's of men to be evil.

⁹Peter Brock, Pacifism In The United States: From The Colonial Era To The First World War (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968): 911-915. In his section on the Disciples, Brock places primary focus on Lipscomb. He claims that the amount of COs from churches of Christ during WWI were likely due to Lipscomb's efforts.

¹⁰Brock, 914.

against war in times of peace, but their views changed whenever war threatened. Harrell suggests, "If one could abandon his pacifist principles at every national crisis, there was little principle in his pacifism." 11

By the time the America entered the first World War the general public was convinced that it was their patriotic and Christian duty to defeat the Germans. "Like Israel of old, America did not go into battle without the God of hosts," said one Gospel Advocate writer. 12

It is puzzling that pacifism exists "only in the margins of the tradition"¹³ given the substantial Stone-Campbell influence that remains in Churches of Christ today. Pacifism was a heavily debated issue during the

¹¹David Edwin Harrell, Jr., The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ 1865-1900, Vol. 2 of A Social History of the Disciples of Christ (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 246. On page 251 Harrell quotes a church leader who complained that arbitration was often discussed, but never used when it was needed most.

¹²Michael Casey, "From Pacifism to Patriotism: The Emergence of Civil Religion in the Churches of Christ During World War I." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 66 (July 1992): 382.

¹³Michael Casey, Warriors Against War, 159. From here forward "WAW." Many have written on the subject of pacifism within the churches of Christ; however, Casey's work, for which I am greatly appreciative, is extensive on this subject and will be used often in this paper.

early restoration years¹⁴; however, it is rarely mentioned today. What prompted the change to today's overwhelmingly pro-war mentality? The evidence suggests that the impetus for pro-war sentiments during the World Wars was not careful Bible study but successful propaganda and social pressure.¹⁵

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The church was "overwhelmingly pacifist prior to 1860."¹⁶ Therefore, the Civil War marked a major turning point for pacifism and the Disciples in general. Many Disciples fought in the Civil and Spanish-American Wars, but the pro-war mentality was not pushed by church leaders until the 1900's.¹⁷ "Periodical articles praising war and

 $^{^{14}}$ Harrell, 244-25. Moses Lard spoke out against war in 1866, and Debates were published on the issue.

¹⁵Casey, From Pacifism to Patriotism, 382. Government Threatening was also involved, and will be discussed in the next section, but Casey notes that most believers adopted pro-war positions willingly prior to any government pressure.

¹⁶David Edwin Harrell, Jr., The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ 1865-1900, Vol. 2 of A Social History of the Disciples of Christ (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 243. Harrell notes that church leaders were more supportive of alternatives to war than Christian communities in general.

 $^{^{17} \}mathrm{Brock,~914.~As}$ was quoted earlier, most "tolerated" the pacifists views even if they did not adopt them.

America or encouraging Christians to involve themselves in the political process were rare until America's entry into World War I."¹⁸ When America entered the war the majority of Disciples supported the war effort, and Lipscomb's view of Civli Government was rejected. Most of those who did not reject it were closely associated with the Gospel Advocate or the Nashville Bible School.¹⁹ The just motive for war was to defend Christianity. Christianity hung in the balance as long as democracy and Americanism were threatened. Hicks states,

Long before America officially entered World War I the government had been priming the pump. Government propaganda described the impending conflict as a struggle of light against darkness, virtue against sin, civilization against chaos, and God against the Devil. By the time the United States entered the war there was "xenophobic hatred of anything German." 20

¹⁸Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 378. This section will run heavy with Casey's article on Patriotism. Many fought in the wars previous to WWI. The Civil War marked a change in action among churches of Christ, but World War I marked the development of war becoming Christian duty. The fight against Germany was now a matter of defending the faith. Thus Casey remarks on page 383, "Patriotism was equated with Christianity and true piety."

¹⁹John Straiton, "The Great War's Effect Upon The Church," Gospel Advocate 58 (January 1916): 3. Straiton's article is rather mild but it represents the maintained position of the Gospel Advocate against War based on Kingdom principles.

²⁰John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine, Kingdom Come: Embracing the Spiritual Legacy of David Lipscomb and James Harding (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2006), 147.

Disciples believed the U.S.A. was God's agent for justice. God had elevated America because it "would usher in His reign on earth."²¹ It was America's duty to crush the Germans who sought to disprove the inspiration of Scripture and historicity of Jesus as Christ.²² America was righteous, and the German government was evil. "Kaiserism is a fact, a great, black, menacing, Satanic fact..."²³, said a church of Christ writer. Pacifism was no longer tolerated once it was accepted that Germany was a great evil. Supporting America and the war--fighting for freedom and justice--was pure and undefiled religion, and pacifism was false doctrine.²⁴

Pacifists members of churches were verbally attacked by both the government and their own brethren. The government was not interested in the free speech of pacifists. ²⁵ Pacifists were placed under surveillance and

²¹Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 382. It's ironic that Americans criticized Germany for considering themselves superior to other nations, when American superiority was the basis, and justification, for entering the war. They failed to consider, as early restorationists pointed out, that God's agents in the Old Testament were often wicked and received retribution in the end.

²²Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 388.

²³Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 388.

²⁴Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 383, 385.

²⁵Casey, From Pacifism to Patriotism, 386.

interrogated by government agents. The Gospel Advocate, and the editor J. C. McQuiddy, was accused of sedition for running pacifists articles and forced to stop publishing them. Laws were put into place that allowed stiff penalties and jail time for those who were "disloyal."²⁶ Young men were forced into the draft. They were hounded to change their views, and were subject to physical violence and psychological torture. Hicks records,

But when some Cordell students were drafted and took noncombatant status the local draft board and defense council decided to investigate. Two students, Ben Randolph and Levi Kindrick Wilmeth, were sent to Ft. Leavenworth. They were "brow-beaten," warned they would be shot, blind folded, placed before a firing squad" if they did not give up their foolishness.²⁷

Cordell College closed its doors following accusations
against President Armstrong and the college of sedition and
"pro-German sentiments." 28 Some were placed in prison for
sedition, while others were publicly humiliated and "even

²⁶Hicks, 147.

²⁷Hicks, 148.

²⁸Hicks 148; Casey, WAW, 462; Casey, WWI, 47. The story of Cordell College can be found in various sources. This story illustrates the willingness of the government and "pro-war activists" to suppress the right to free speech among their fellow citizens.

killed in violent confrontations."²⁹ According to Casey, the attorney general during the war boasted "it is safe to say that never in its history has this country been so throughly policed."³⁰

Church of Christ pacifists found little sympathy from their brethren. G. H. P. Showalter, the editor of Firm Foundation, condemned war in 1914. Three years later, he believed the World War was justifiable. Eventually he proclaimed conscientious objectors were "aiding the enemy." This illustrates the change in perspective among many church members. Pacifists were considered heretics and called "slackers." Church members felt so dedicated to the war cause that they turned in their own brethren to the

²⁹Casey, "Pacifism In The Restoration: WWI," Gospel Advocate (January 1994), 47. Hereafter cited as "WWI." The stories and details are too numerous to provide here, but the aggression against pacifism was intense.

³⁰Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 381; WWI, 46. He also notes that "the constitutional rights of most conscientious objectors were violated."

³¹Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 379, 380.

³²Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 389.

³³Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 386. Lipscomb's view of war, and the NBS, came under great pressure. An editor of Firm Foundation proclaimed "Nashville, Tennessee is the headquarters of that character of slackery. These sanctimonious fanatics claim that their 'citizenship is in heaven' in such an exclusive sense as will not admit of their being citizens of any nation..."

government for treason.³⁴ "For the first time in the Churches of Christ," suggests Casey, "the fate of America was intertwined with the fate of Christianity."³⁵ The connection between Americanism and Christianity is what set the first World War apart from the Civil War. Christians had been involved in war before, but had never so closely attached it to defending Christianity and the church.

BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

When the first war ended many were left unsatisfied.³⁶
"The hope of the millennium and the end of the world was
bound up in the hope that American democracy would spread
to all nations and that World War I would end all wars."³⁷
Calls for peace resounded, but by 1941 the effort proved
superficial. Casey notes that pacifism in the church
"coincided a similar rise in the peace movement in the
United States."³⁸ It is easy to call for peace in times of

 $^{^{34}\}text{Casey, WWI, 46; WAW, 462; From Pacifism to}$ Patriotism, 385.

³⁵Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 384.

³⁶Casey, "Between The World Wars," Gospel Advocate (March 1994):30-31. Hereafter "BWW." Casey chronicles significant events during this time period.

³⁷Casey, From Pacifism To Patriotism, 389.

³⁸Casey, BWW, 30.

peace, and justify war in times of war. Church leaders of this kind were influenced more by society than Scripture. This was not a new pattern. Talk of peace often follows days of war, but history reveals this does not last.³⁹

David Lipscomb, H. Leo Boles, J. N. Armstrong, and a few others remained committed to peace. "Lipscomb courageously held to his views through the Civil War until the end of his life in 1917." Boles pacifist beliefs were published in his book *The New Testament Teaching on War* in 1923. In the 1930's, A. B. Lipscomb and R. F. Duckworth took steps to aid conscientious objectors in the future. Their efforts were beneficial when the second World War began.

Despite a brief turn toward peace following World War I, civil religion strongly re-emerge as America prepared to enter World War II. Church leaders began to cast off pacifists positions and declare their support of war-again. One notable exception, at least in the pages of Firm

³⁹Harrell, 244, 247, 252. Harrell traces the movements from war to peace and back to war up until 1900. The cycle is that people proclaim peace until war threatens, and then they jump into battle with both feet.

⁴⁰Casey, Pacifism and David Lipscomb, 47.

 $^{^{41}}$ Casey, BWW, 30.

 $^{^{42}}$ Casey, BWW, 31.

Foundation, was G. H. P. Showalter. His editorials from 1941 and 1943 made a conscious effort to encourage Christians to focus on work in the kingdom of God rather than supporting war or human governments. A clear change of focus took place from his position in the midst of World War I. 43

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The rhetoric leading into World War II was an extension of the propaganda preceding, and during, World War I. An anonymous writer in Bible Banner, over a year before Pearl Harbor was hit, concluded his article "Casualties of War" by saying, "just remember their are inevitable innocent casualties of war which cannot be avoided. But in the main the fight will save the church."44 God, once again, needed his people to rise to His salvation

⁴³G. H. P. Showalter, "The Christian's War," Firm Foundation 58 (September 9, 1941): 4; "The Dying Year," Firm Foundation (December 23, 1941): 4. In this editorial a few weeks after Pearl Harbor Showalter states, "The antidote for all this bloodshed and misery is the life and character of Christ our Lord, and this must become effective through his followers." The horror of World War I must have changed Showalter's persepctive.

 $^{^{44}}$ Anonymous, "Casualties of War," Bible Banner 3 (September 1940):13.

and deliver Christ's church from the wicked forces of Satan--Germany and Japan.

T. B. Wilkinson's article "The Christian and Carnal War $^{\prime\prime}{}^{45}$ is a good example of the pro-war argument. The arguments are emotionally based, and hinge on turning subjection to authorities in Romans 13 into participation with authorities. The pro-war use of Romans 13 completely misses the context of Paul's point. Paul cautioned Christians not to rebel against the government. He did not promote participation in their wars! Beyond that, Paul offered support for one nation to fight another. Bringing justice on a home intruder -- a criminal -- is not the same as killing soldiers. Soldiers, some of them boys, who are fighting their governments war are not criminals. According to the pro-war polemic soldiers of any nation are properly subjecting themselves to their authorities. How can they be evil? This pro-war argument is full of inconsistencies. 46 Wilkinson and others stretch the application of Romans 13 well beyond Paul's point. After describing the evils of the

⁴⁵T.B. Wilkinson, "The Christian and Carnal War," Bible Banner 6 (1944): 14-15.

⁴⁶Cled E. Wallace, "The Christian And The Government," Bible Banner 4 (June 1942): 4-5. Wallace said "Jesus never taught anything to aid a criminal." Of course, his application was that our enemies are criminal and our nation must war with them.

enemy and the threat of such evil coming to America he states,

There is only one possible thing to keep it from happening, and that is the sword which God placed in the hands of our nation. Pacifism will not stop them, we tried that too long before Pearl Harbor. Prayers will not stop them...I like the words of that song, Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition...⁴⁷

Objective readers of the war debates will come away with the reality that many pro-war arguments during the World War years lacked good scriptural exegesis. 48 They were heavy

⁴⁷Wilkinson, 14. It is a sad day when Christians believe prayer is powerless! He claimed "informed" people agreed with him. The "uninformed" people, those who don't agree with Wilkinson, should not publish their opinions.

⁴⁸Hugo McCord, "Justifying Combatant Service," Bible Banner 4 (October 1941): 13. McCord exposes some of the misuses of passages of ideas to justify killing; Fanning Yater Tant, "Are You A Conscientious Objector?" Bible Banner 4 (February 1942): 10-11. I include this contribution simply to be fair to Bible Banner. They published Tant's article a few months after Pearl Harbor, despite being in opposition to the typical Bible Banner position. John T. Lewis ran an article in the previous months edition entitled "Who Is A Consistent Conscientious Objector?" in which he called a congresswoman "incongruous" and labeled her vote against going to war "pathetic" and "absurd."

in supposed logic (based on poor assumptions)⁴⁹, sarcasm, and criticism of the "slackers." The arguments appear more like bullying than proof. Further, the pro-war crowd had for years turned the war question into a war on premillennialism.⁵⁰ This diverted from the substance of the pacifist argument and cast it in a negative light. Pacifism does not require a premillennial eschatological view.⁵¹ Pacifist appeal to the teaching of Christ and the nature of his Kingdom. Hughes points out that pro-war advocates had

⁴⁹Cled and Foy Wallace and R. L. Whiteside are highly regarded for their pro-war arguments. While I admit that I have not read everything they say on the subject, I have yet to come across anything that used Scripture well and was more than proposing what they believe to be logical conundrums to objectors of war. The Bible Banner devoted half a page to congratulate themselves in their pro-war stance following W. E. Brightwell's article on the subject. So its clear they thought highly of their position. Bible Banner 4 (July 1942): 5-7.

⁵⁰Foy Wallace Jr., The Christian and The Government (Nashville: F. E. Wallace jr., Publications), 34-35; Richard T. Hughes, Reviving The Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America (Abilene: ACU Press, 2008), 146-147. Hereafter "Reviving." Hughes draws the clear connection between premillennial beliefs and pacifism. John T. Lewis. "Brother J. N. Armstrong's Letters," Bible Banner 4 (August 1941): 4-7. This is merely an example of the battle over premillennialism. There are many more related articles in the pages of the Bible Banner.

⁵¹Hughes, Reviving, 150-51. Boles was a pacifists, yet debated Boll on premillennialism. Hughes notes that their is a difference between the NBST apocalyptic worldview and Bolls premillennialism; however, brethren mainly interested in justifying war. There was a generally caving to social pressure to accept war, and avoid further marginalization.

to adopt a "theology far more progressive, far more amenable to militarism, far more centered on the concerns of this world, and far less focused on the coming kingdom of God."⁵² These views held through both World Wars, and up to the present. Christlikeness took second place to saving Americanism.⁵³ Wilkinson concluded by saying,

Christians don't fight wars of aggression, and they do not rob, and murder, and burn down homes ruthlessly, or ravish innocent women, and kill their children like rabbits just to watch them kick. They don't bomb hospitals, and hospital ships, and sink them with wounded soldiers, or commit any of the horrors unnecessary to the winning of the war, and the restoration of peace to the world.⁵⁴

A year later, the righteous Americans bombed two civilian filled cities in Japan exterminating 250,000 people in a matter of days (including thousands of innocent women and children).

CONCLUSION

Early restorationists believed war to be incongruous with Christianity. To these men the appropriate question

⁵²Hughes, Reviving, 146. Churches adopted Campbell's eschatological view; however, as was mentioned earlier Campbell was a pacifists. Therefore, this view does not exclude pacifism. It merely opened the door for a pro-war position.

 $^{^{53}}$ Casey, BWW, 31.

⁵⁴Wilkinson, 15.

was will I put my faith in the kingdom of God or the kingdoms of men? If our view toward carnal warfare is the product of social influence, and not Scripture, it lacks substance, and most importantly, faith in God. "Could we live on earth in safety without civil governments...would not the wicked part of the world continually bring upon us tribulation and distress?", asked the young preacher. The old preacher's response should be considered by Christians today as they consider the how carnal warfare corresponds to their faith.

We may imagine a thousand difficulties; but have we not a king in Zion, who is jealous for the glory of his Church upon earth? Is he not almighty? Can he not check and restrain opposing powers? Will he not hear prayer, and interpose in time of need? To these queries our enlightened judgment answers in the affirmative; but where is our faith? Can we trust in this king?⁵⁵

⁵⁵Barton W. Stone, "Lectures on Matt. V, VI, and VII," in *Works of Elder B. W. Stone*, 2nd ed. James M. Mathes, (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys & Co., 1859): 219-220.

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