

## PART II

### FORMS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN DISAPPROVAL OF WAR

THE CONDEMNATION OF WAR IN THE ABSTRACT.<sup>1</sup>—The conditions under which the books of the New Testament were written were not such as to give occasion for Christian utterances on the wrongfulness of war. The few New Testament passages expressing disapprobation of 'wars' and 'battles'<sup>2</sup> probably refer in every case, not to military conflicts, but to strife and dissension in the more general sense. Reflection is, however, cast on the incessant wars of men in 'The Vision of Isaiah': the prophet ascends to the firmament, "and there I saw Sammael and his hosts, and there was great fighting therein, and the angels of Satan were envying one another. And as above, so on the earth also; for the likeness of that which is in the firmament is here on the earth. And I said unto the angel who was with me: 'What is this war, and what is this envying?' And he said unto me: 'So has it been since this world

<sup>1</sup> No purpose would be served by retailing to the reader passages in which war is cited simply as a calamity or as a mere historical incident, without any direct hint of moral blame or of divine visitation.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor vii. 5 ("wrangling all round me"—Moffatt); Jas iv. 1 f (even if the proposed substitution of *φθονεῖτε* (ye envy) for *φονεῖτε* (ye kill) in verse 2 be rejected, and the latter given its literal meaning (so Mayor), the reference can hardly be to warfare as usually understood); 2 Tim ii. 23 f; Tit iii. 9.

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was made until now, and this war will continue till He whom thou shalt see will come and destroy him.'"<sup>1</sup> Aristеides attributed the prevalence of war—chiefly among the Greeks—to the erroneous views of men as to the nature of their gods, whom they pictured as waging war: "for if their gods did such things, why should they themselves not do them? thus from this pursuit of error it has fallen to men's lot to have continual wars and massacres and bitter captivity."<sup>2</sup> He specially mentions Ares and Herakles as discredited by their warlike character.<sup>3</sup> Justinus said that it was the evil angels and their offspring the demons who "sowed murders, wars, adulteries, excesses, and every wickedness, among men."<sup>4</sup> Tatianus equated war and murder, and said that the demons excited war by means of oracles. "Thou wishest to make war," he says to the gentile, "and thou takest Apollon (as thy) counsellor in murder" (σύμβουλον τῶν φόνων). He refers to Apollon as the one "who raises up seditions and battles" and "makes announcements about victory in war."<sup>5</sup> Athenagoras instances the usages of unjust war—the slaughter of myriads of men, the razing of cities, the burning of houses with their inhabitants, the devastation of land, and the destruction of entire populations—as samples of the worst sins, such as could not be adequately punished by any amount of suffering in this life.<sup>6</sup> He also says that Christians cannot endure to see a man put to death, even justly.<sup>7</sup> In the apocryphal Acts of

<sup>1</sup> Charles, *The Ascension of Isaiah* (vii. 9-12) p. 48, cf 74 (x. 29-31).

<sup>2</sup> Arist 8 (104).

<sup>3</sup> Arist 10 (106 and—Syriac—43).

<sup>4</sup> Just 2 *Ap* v. 4. When the martyr Karpos at Pergamum accused the devil of preparing wars (*Karp* 17), he was referring to the persecutions carried on against the Christians.

<sup>5</sup> Tat 19 (849).

<sup>6</sup> Athenag *Res* 19 (1013).

<sup>7</sup> Athenag *Legat* 35 (969). We shall discuss later the qualification 'even justly.'

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John, the apostle tells the Ephesians that military conquerors, along with kings, princes, tyrants, and boasters, will depart hence naked, and suffer eternal pains.<sup>1</sup>

Clemens of Alexandria casts aspersions on the multifarious preparation necessary for war, as contrasted with peace and love, and on the type of music patronized by "those who are practised in war and who have despised the divine fear."<sup>2</sup> He likens the Christian poor to "an army without weapons, without war, without bloodshed, without anger, without defilement."<sup>3</sup> In the Pseudo-Justinian 'Address to the Greeks,' the readers are exhorted: "Be instructed by the Divine Word, and learn (about) the incorruptible King, and know His heroes, who never inflict slaughter on (the) peoples."<sup>4</sup> Tertullianus says that when Peter cut off Malchus' ear, Jesus "cursed the works of the sword for ever after."<sup>5</sup> He criticizes the gentiles' greed of gold in hiring themselves out for military service.<sup>6</sup> He objects to the literal interpretation of Psalm xlv. 3f as applied to Christ: 'Gird the sword upon (thy) thigh . . . extend and prosper and reign, on account of truth and gentleness and justice': "Who shall produce these (results) with the sword," he asks, "and not rather those that are contrary to gentleness and justice, (namely), deceit and harshness and injustice, (which are) of course the proper business of battles?"<sup>7</sup> "Is the laurel of triumph," he asks elsewhere, "made up of leaves, or of corpses? is it decorated with ribbons, or tombs? is it besmeared with

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of John* 36 fin (ii. 169; Pick 148).

<sup>2</sup> *Clem Paed* I xii. 99, II iv. 42.

<sup>3</sup> *Clem Quis Dives* 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Tert Pat* 3 (i. 1254): itaque et gladii opera maledixit in posterum.

<sup>5</sup> *Tert Pat* 7 (i. 1262).

<sup>6</sup> *Tert. Marc* iii. 14 (ii. 340), *Jud* 9 (ii. 621).

<sup>7</sup> *Ps-Just Orat* 5 init.

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ointments, or with the tears of wives and mothers, perhaps those of some men even (who are) Christians—for Christ (is) among the barbarians as well?"<sup>1</sup> Hippolotos, in his commentary on Daniel, explains the wild beasts that lived under the tree in Nebuchadnezzar's dream as "the warriors and armies, which adhered to the king, carrying out what was commanded (them), being ready like wild beasts for making war and destroying, and for rending men like wild beasts."<sup>2</sup> One of the features of the Roman Empire, when viewed by this writer as the Fourth Beast and as a Satanic imitation of the Christian Church, was its preparation for war, and its collection of the noblest men from all countries as its warriors.<sup>3</sup> The Bardesanic 'Book of the Laws of the Countries' mentions the law of the Seres (a mysterious Eastern people) forbidding to kill, and the frequency with which kings seize countries which do not belong to them, and abolish their laws.<sup>4</sup> Origenes spoke depreciatively of the military and juridical professions as being prized by ignorant and blind seekers for wealth and glory.<sup>5</sup>

Cyprianus declaims about the "wars scattered everywhere with the bloody horror of camps. The world," he says, "is wet with mutual blood(shed): and homicide is a crime when individuals commit it, (but) it is called a virtue, when it is carried on publicly. Not the reason of innocence, but the magnitude of savagery, demands impunity for crimes." He censures also the vanity and

<sup>1</sup> Tert Cor 12 (ii. 94 f). In *Pudic* 10 (ii. 999), he groups soldiers with tax-gatherers as those to whom, besides the sons of Abraham, the Baptist preached repentance.

<sup>2</sup> Hipp *Dan* IV viii. 7, ix. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Hipp *Dan* III viii. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *ANCL* xxiib. 101, 108.

<sup>5</sup> Greg *Thaum Paneg* vi. 76 f. On the low idea entertained of the soldier's calling in the third century, and particularly by philosophers and Christians, see Harnack *MC* 69 f.

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deceitful pomp of the military office.<sup>1</sup> "What use is it," asks Commodianus, "to know about the vices of kings and their wars?"<sup>2</sup> Gregorios censures certain Christians for seizing the property of others in compensation for what they had lost in a raid made by the barbarians: just as the latter, he says, had "inflicted the (havoc) of war" on these Christians, they were acting similarly towards others.<sup>3</sup> The *Didaskalia* forbids the receipt of monetary help for the church from "any of the magistrates of the Roman Empire, who are polluted by war."<sup>4</sup> The Pseudo-Justinian *Cohortatio* censures the god Zeus as being in Homer's words "disposer of the wars of men."<sup>5</sup> In the Clementine Homilies, Peter asks, if God loves war, who wishes for peace?<sup>6</sup> speaks obscurely of a female prophecy, who, "when she conceives and brings forth temporary kings, stirs up wars, which shed much blood,"<sup>7</sup> and points his hearers to the continual wars going on even in their day owing to the existence of many kings<sup>8</sup>; Zacchaeus depicts the heretic Simon as 'standing like a general, guarded by the crowd'<sup>9</sup>; and Clemens tells the Greeks that the lusts of the flesh must be sins, because they beget wars, murders, and confusion.<sup>10</sup> Similarly in the *Recognitions*, Peter pleads that a decision by truth and worth is better than a decision by force of arms,<sup>11</sup> and says: "Wars and con-

<sup>1</sup> *Cypr Donat* 6, 10f. In *Ep* 73 (72) 4 he calls heretics *pestes et gladii*.

<sup>2</sup> *Commod Carm* 585f; cf *Instr* i. 34 (l. 12), ii. 3 (ll. 12f), 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Greg Thaum Ep Can* 5 (τὰ πολέμου εἰργάσαντο).

<sup>4</sup> *Didask* IV vi. 4 (omni magistratu imperii Romani, qui in bellis maculati sunt). We are left uncertain as to whether all—or only some—magistrates are spurned as bloodstained: but probably the latter is meant.

<sup>5</sup> *Ps-Just Cohort* 2 (*Hom II* xix. 224): ἀνθρώπων ταμίης πολέμου. Cf 17 (wars etc. represented by Homer as the result of a multiplicity of rulers).

<sup>6</sup> *Clem Hom* ii. 44.

<sup>7</sup> *op cit* iii. 24, cf 25 fin, 26.

<sup>8</sup> *op cit* iii. 62; cf ix. 2f.

<sup>9</sup> *op c.t* iii. 29.

<sup>10</sup> *op cit* iv. 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Clem Recog* ii. 24.

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tests are born from sins ; but where sin is not committed, there is peace to the soul,"<sup>1</sup> "hence" (i.e. from idol-worship) "the madness of wars blazed out"<sup>2</sup>; and Niceta remarks that implacable wars arise from lust.<sup>3</sup> Methodios says that the nations, intoxicated by the devil, sharpen their passions for murderous battles,<sup>4</sup> and speaks of the bloody wars of the past.<sup>5</sup>

The treatise of Arnobius abounds in allusions to the moral iniquity of war. Contrasting Christ with the rulers of the Roman Empire, he asks : " Did he, claiming royal power for himself, occupy the whole world with fierce legions, and, (of) nations at peace from the beginning, destroy and remove some, and compel others to put their necks beneath his yoke and obey him ?"<sup>6</sup> " What use is it to the world that there should be . . . generals of the greatest experience in warfare, skilled in the capture of cities, (and) soldiers immoveable and invincible in cavalry battles or in a fight on foot ?"<sup>7</sup> Arnobius roundly denies that it was any part of the divine purpose that men's souls, " forgetting that they are from one source, one parent and head, should tear up and break down the rights of kinship, overturn their cities, devastate lands in enmity, make slaves of freemen, violate maidens and other men's wives, hate one another, envy the joys and good fortune of others, in a word all curse, carp at, and rend one another with the biting of savage teeth."<sup>8</sup> He rejects with indignation the pagan idea that divine beings could patronize, or take pleasure or interest in, human wars. Speaking of Mars, for instance, he says : " If he is the one who allays

<sup>1</sup> *op cit* ii. 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Method Symp* v. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *id* ii. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *op cit* iv. 31.

<sup>5</sup> *op cit* x. I, 4.

<sup>8</sup> *id* ii. 45.

<sup>3</sup> *op cit* x. 41.

<sup>6</sup> *Arnob* ii. I.

the madness of war, why do wars never cease for a day? But if he is the author of them, we shall therefore say that a god, for the indulgence of his own pleasure, brings the whole world into collision, sows causes of dissension and strife among nations separated by distance of lands, brings together from different (quarters) so many thousands of mortals and speedily heaps the fields with corpses, makes blood flow in torrents, destroys the stablest empires, levels cities with the ground, takes away liberty from the freeborn and imposes (on them) the state of slavery, rejoices in civil broils, in the fratricidal death of brothers who die together and in the parricidal horror of mortal conflict between sons and fathers.”<sup>1</sup>

Lactantius also, in his ‘Divine Institutes,’ again and again alludes to the prevalence of war as one of the great blots on the history and morals of humanity. I quote three only of the numerous passages. Speaking of the Romans, he says: “They despise indeed the excellence of the athlete, because there is no harm in it; but royal excellence, because it is wont to do harm extensively, they so admire that they think that brave and warlike generals are placed in the assembly of the gods, and that there is no other way to immortality than by leading armies, devastating foreign (countries), destroying cities, overthrowing towns, (and) either slaughtering or enslaving free peoples. Truly, the more men they have afflicted, despoiled, (and) slain, the more noble and renowned do they think themselves; and, captured by the appearance of empty glory, they give the name of excellence to their

<sup>1</sup> Arnob iii. 26. Rhetorical allusions to this and other aspects of the wrongfulness of war occur in ii. 39, 76, iii. 28, v. 45, vi. 2, vii. 9, 36, 51.

crimes. Now I would rather that they should make gods for themselves from the slaughter of wild beasts than that they should approve of an immortality so bloody. If any one has slain a single man, he is regarded as contaminated and wicked, nor do they think it right that he should be admitted to this earthly dwelling of the gods. But he who has slaughtered endless thousands of men, deluged the fields with blood, (and) infected rivers (with it), is admitted not only to a temple, but even to heaven."<sup>1</sup> "They believe that the gods love whatever they themselves desire, whatever it is for the sake of which acts of theft and homicide and brigandage rage every day, for the sake of which wars throughout the whole world overturn peoples and cities."<sup>2</sup> In criticizing the definition of virtue as that which puts first the advantages of one's country, he points out that this means the extension of the national boundaries by means of aggressive wars on neighbouring states, and so on: "all which things are certainly not virtues, but the overthrowing of virtues. For, in the first place, the connection of human society is taken away; innocence is taken away; abstention from (what is) another's is taken away; in fact, justice itself is taken away; for justice cannot bear the cutting asunder of the human race, and, wherever arms glitter, she must be put to flight and banished. . . . For how can he be just, who injures, hates, despoils, kills? And those who strive to be of advantage to their country do all these things."<sup>3</sup> Eusebios ascribed the incessant occurrence of

<sup>1</sup> *Lact Inst* I xviii. 8-10; cf II-17.

<sup>2</sup> *Lact Inst* II vi. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Lact Inst* VI vi. 18-24. The words quoted are taken from 19f. 22. For other passages dealing with the subject, see *Inst* I xix. 6, V v. 4, 12-14, vi. 6f, VI v. 15, xix. 2f, 10, VII xv. 9ff.



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furious wars in pre-Christian times, not only to the multiplicity of rulers before the establishment of the Roman Empire, but also to the instigation of the demons who tyrannized over the nations that worshipped them.<sup>1</sup> He refers to Ares as "the demon who is the bane of mortals and the lover of war"<sup>2</sup> and remarks that "the din of strife, and battles, and wars, are the concern of Athena, but not peace or the things of peace."<sup>3</sup>

This collection of passages will suffice to show how strong and deep was the early Christian revulsion from and disapproval of war, both on account of the dissension it represented and of the infliction of bloodshed and suffering which it involved. The quotations show further how closely warfare and murder were connected in Christian thought by their possession of a common element—homicide; and the connection gives a fresh significance for the subject before us to the extreme Christian sensitiveness in regard to the sin of murder—a sensitiveness attested by the frequency with which warnings, prohibitions, and condemnations in regard to this particular sin were uttered and the severity with which the Church dealt with the commission of it by any of her own members. The strong disapprobation felt by Christians for war was due to its close relationship with the deadly sin that sufficed to keep the man guilty of it permanently outside the Christian community.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eus *PE* 10b-11a, 179ab.    <sup>2</sup> Eus *PE* 163b.    <sup>3</sup> Eus *PE* 192c.

<sup>4</sup> I have not attempted to quote or give references to the numerous allusions to murder in Christian literature. The attitude of condemnation is, as one might expect, uniform and unanimous.

Archdeacon Cunningham's summary statements on the early Christian attitude to war are completely at variance with the facts we have just been surveying; thus, "there was not in primitive times any definite protest against this particular symptom in society of the evil disease in human