

*irremissible sins as idolatry, adultery, and homicide. Augustine testified that many regarded these three as Crimina Mortifera. [Ibid., Bainton, p. 78]*

The strength of pacifism in the early church is explained by the several factors above, not the least of which is an erroneous text. Whether it was the oppression of Christians by the Roman government (including its prohibition of Christian soldiers), or the idolatry practiced in the army, or gnostic heresy (which shunned the affairs of the physical world), or an expectation of the imminent eschatological conclusion of the world, pacifism figured prominently in the early centuries of the church. However, it never reached the stature of church dogma. On the contrary, it soon fell into disrepute as the Church progressed from its subcultural birth place into a position of dominion in the earth.

A case is easily made for the positive development of Christian theology. The Arian controversy was resolved after a few centuries of conflict, as was the trinitarian controversy. The Pelagian error was not laid to rest until the Council of Orange in the early sixth century. These controversies may rise again, whether Christological in the form of the Jehovah's Witnesses; or anthropological in the forms of Arminianism or secular humanism.

Similarly, the error of pacifism may recur from time to time, even though the just war doctrine has been maintained from Augustine to Aquinas to Calvin to the Federal Council of Churches of Christ. [1943 statement on "The Relation of the Church to the War in the Light of the Christian Faith"]

The biblically and historically prevailing doctrine of the just war is predicated upon the principle of defense of the innocent. If full fledged war is justified for the purpose of conquering an enemy of one's countrymen, the argument for the forceful defense of one's family or neighbor is prior. It is arguable, afortiori, for the greater legitimacy of defending one's family and neighbors over the duty to defend one's country.

The point is illustrated in the writings of Lactantius, who on the one hand can't go as far as to approve of war. He says:

*God in prohibiting killing discountenances not only brigandage, which is contrary to human laws, but also that which men regard as legal. Participation in warfare therefore will not be legitimate to a just man . . . [Ibid., Bainton, p. 73]*

However, on the other hand, Lactantius tolerates the private, forceful defense of an innocent person:

*I ask, therefore, of those who do not think it the part of a wise man*