

**Reinhold Niebuhr points out a second theological flaw of modern pacifism:**

*Most modern forms of Christian pacifism are heretical. Presumably inspired by the Christian gospel, they have really absorbed the Renaissance faith in the goodness of man, have rejected the Christian doctrine of original sin as an outmoded bit of pessimism. . . [Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christianity and Power Politics*, (1948), quoted in *War and Christian Ethics*, Arthur Holmes, ed., Baker (1975), p. 303]*

Accordingly, man is believed to be essentially good and may be entreated to show his innate kindheartedness toward the one who prostrates himself in passive self-exposure. On these two dead branches hang modern pacifist proclivities: 1) a false view of the nature of man, and 2) a false view of violence as a source, rather than a consequence (or a prevention against) sin.

We ought to take caution both against adopting pacifism as Christian doctrine and against the doctrine of self-defense which assumes the right to protect oneself in all situations. Historically, the Christian just war doctrine was developed not upon the assumption of self-defense, but upon the assumption that it is right and good to protect an innocent person. Clutching cluelessly to a doctrine of self-defense leaves one vulnerable to selfish self-preservation. There may well be times when it is good and right to sacrifice oneself to an aggressor for the glory of God.

What can be said, then, about the idea of Christian pacifism? Certainly such an animal has existed in history; namely, that pacifist doctrine which honors the man who will not take the life of an assailant (in war or peace) to defend himself. However, that form of pacifism which refuses to "war" in private in defense of ANOTHER is a beast seldom found in the long stretch of church history. What can be found scattered throughout the history of the church is a pacifism which prohibits participation in war between governments. However, this doctrine has never been subscribed to by the preponderance of church leaders and theologians.

It has been argued that the early church was pacifist and that this pristine, non-politicized church held to a more perfect view of Christian involvement in war and the use of force. By contrast, allegedly, in the fourth century with Constantine and the rise of Christianity in power, Christians were seduced by the ways of the world and began to indulge in warfare. The idea that the early church was primarily pacifist is one that has gained currency among evangelicals in recent decades. This perception is illustrated in an article featured in the premier evangelical periodical, *Christianity Today* in 1980. [Robert Culver, "Between War and Peace," in *Christianity Today*, 24 Oct., 1980] Robert Culver, taking a "neutral look at the positions and arguments