

*Homicide in war is not reckoned by our Fathers as homicide; I presume from their wish to make concession to men fighting on behalf of chastity and true religion. Perhaps, however, it is well to counsel those whose hands are not clean only abstain from communion for three years. [Quoted in Martin woods, The Morality Of Peace And War, Santa Barbara: Intelman Books (1974), p. 89]*

and from St. Athanasius:

*In war it is lawful and praiseworthy to destroy the enemy; accordingly not only are they who have distinguished themselves in the field held worthy of great honors, but monuments are put up proclaiming their achievements. [Ibid.]*

Nevertheless, there are a number of statements against participation in war from several leading lights of Christianity from A.D. 180 until Constantine. Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Lactantius are included among them. The fact is that there was diversity of Christian conviction on the subject and this diversity had something to do with situations. Bainton observes:

*Pacifism best flourished within the interior of the PAX ROMANA and was less prevalent in the frontier provinces menaced by barbarians. The section most disinclined to military service appears to have been the Hellenistic East. . .*

*The Christians in northern Africa were divided. The Roman church in the late second and third centuries did not forbid epitaphs recording military profession. The eastern frontier reveals the most extensive Christian participation in warfare, though concurrently we find there a protest against it among groups tending to ascetic and monastic ideals. [Ibid., Bainton, pp. 69-72]*

Well might it be surmised that those whose families were not threatened by barbarians were more easily seduced by the allure of pacifism. How lovely it would be if no ravaging savages (or abortionists) were loosed upon the countryside.

The summary judgment on the question of whether there was consensual "pacifism" in the early church must be answered in the negative. There were pacifists and non-pacifists. In reply to the purported absence of Christians in the military until the late second century, the usual replies are noteworthy; namely: 1) military service was objectionable because of Rome's oppression of Christianity, 2) any true pacifism was a product of heresy (e.g. Montanist and gnostic influences), 3) eschatological expectations (the Lord was due to return imminently, no need to fight), 4) idolatry demanded of military soldiers (by the cult of the deified emperor).