

Fundamentalism and War

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SUMMARY

The New Testament asserts non-violence. Consequently, the early Church was characterized by non-resistant pacifism. From the fourth century onward, just war theory became the main current in Western Christianity. The problematic points of contemporary American Christian fundamentalism are nationalism, a simplistic dualism between good and evil, and a secularized eschatology. In order to deal successfully with these problems it is necessary to take a fresh look at the self-identity of those who have eternal heavenly citizenship. The Japanese church should continue to cooperate with historically pacifist churches, should return to the original Biblical faith, and should walk the road of non-violence.

INTRODUCTION: APPROVAL OR DISAPPROVAL OF THE IRAQ WAR

Sixty years after our defeat in the Second World War, we are standing at a historical crossroad. Since the war, we have continued to persist in making a strong appeal for peace. But with the Gulf War in 1991, the 9/11 incident in 2001, the bombing of Afghanistan in 2002, and the Iraq War in 2003, we have seen the situation change significantly during the past approximately ten years. The trend of this generation is toward increasing military strength and toward reinforcing the US/Japan military alliance. During this ten year period the Japanese government has passed about 30 laws related to war, the Japanese Self Defense Force has been deployed to Iraq, laws regarding the export of weapons have been eased, the development of a Japan/US mutual missile defense has been decided, the “Kimigayo” (anthem) and the “Hinomaru” (flag) are being enforced, and in addition the revision of the Japanese peace constitution and the move of the US military headquarters to Zama are proceeding. Can these be good things?

The Afghanistan War was for “unlimited freedom” and the Iraq War was for “Iraqi freedom”—both were accomplished in the name of “freedom and democracy.” But the injustice of the Iraq War can be seen in that the weapons of mass destruction which were the excuse for going to war in the first place did not actually exist. The preemptive attack which was contrary to international law, the disregard for the United Nations Security Council reasoning, the countless number of civilian casualties, and the inhumane abuse of prisoners of war, etc., highlight many problems and have caused mounting criticism within America.

Within the Christian world the Pope has sternly criticized the Iraq War and the worldwide Catholic Church has opposed it. Declarations of opposition have come from the Church of England, known for its liberalism, from the World Council of Churches, and from many people who are affiliated with the Japanese National Council of Churches. The Evangelical Fellowship of Asia has issued a statement in opposition and the chairperson of the Social Committee of the Japan Evangelical Association has issued an opposing declaration in his own name, but in America the National Association of Evangelicals has generally affirmed the Iraq War. Because of the Iraq War the World Evangelical Association has been split in two.

How is it that this situation has arisen among those who stand in the same evangelical faith? Why is it that American Christian fundamentalists even now continue to offer strong support for the Iraq War? Along with strong doubts about the Iraq War many Japanese Christian churches are also developing a feeling of loathing toward it so that the issue is becoming a stumbling block to evangelism in Japan. We are currently asking ourselves “What is the Church? What is the gospel? What is peace? What is true cooperation between Japanese and American churches?”

I. CHRISTIANITY AND WAR

I.A. SCRIPTURE AND NON-VIOLENCE

I.A.1. THE OLD TESTAMENT AND NON-VIOLENCE

Christian fundamentalism often quotes the Old Testament as the Biblical basis for the “just war” position. Certainly the Old Testament seems to affirm war, even seemingly supporting it positively. God is the “Lord of hosts/armies,” the God of war. He orders the annihilation of his enemies.

But that kind of interpretation of the Old Testament is problematic. First, the purpose of Old Testament war was to train the people of God in their faith. The purpose of battle was to test the obedience of the people of God, not to take revenge or commit murder.

Second, in Old Testament war the absolute sovereignty of God is made clear. This purpose is vividly shown in the battle with Pharaoh’s army where victory was won by means of ocean and darkness, in the battle of Jericho where victory came by the sound of horns and shouting, and in the battle of Gideon where victory came through 300 men. War in the Old Testament was for these purposes, limited by the parameters given by God, so that war itself was not generally approved. The major principle from the decalogue, “You shall not murder,” penetrates the Old and New Testaments (Craigie, 2001).

I.A.2. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND NON-VIOLENCE

When interpreting the Bible, the New Testament always takes priority over the Old Testament because of the progress of revelation. The Old Testament must be read in light of the New Testament and in light of Christ. Therefore we cannot deduce doctrinal principles (e.g., just war) from only the Old Testament.

The New Testament asserts pacifism and non-violence. In contrast to the Old Testament, the New Testament never describes victory over the world by means of the military power of the people of God. The life of Christ and his teachings repudiate violence. Jesus said, “All who draw the sword will die by the sword” (Mt. 26:52), and he died on the cross. The Lord taught that we should die for others; he did not teach that we should murder for our own purposes. As the king who was the “slain lamb,” Christ showed us the essential non-violent form of the new kingdom. Therefore the disciples, convinced of non-resistant pacifism, were martyred in the persecution of the Roman Empire.

I.B. CHURCH HISTORY AND VIOLENCE

I.B.1. THE EARLY CHURCH AND NON-VIOLENCE

As a persecuted minority under the powerful militaristic Roman empire the church held to the position of non-violence until the third century. Though the Jewish independence liberation movement in the last half of the 60’s and the ensuing destruction of Jerusalem in

70 A.D. ended in the destruction of the nation, Christians did not participate in military fighting. The early church could die for their testimony of faith, but because of their testimony they could not commit murder.

When comparing this kind of early church pacifism with contemporary Christian fundamentalism it becomes clear how different they are. To positively affirm war is to distort Christianity by integrating it with nationalism.

I.B.2. THE VIOLENCE OF THE WEST

This degeneration began after the official recognition of Christianity as the state religion by the fourth century Emperor Constantine. The result was that the church in union with secular political power affirmed military power and began to advocate “just war” theory. The “conversion” of Constantine becomes a parting of the ways and presents a fundamental problem. In the middle of a battle he saw a heavenly vision of the shining cross with the engraved words, “Conquer through this.” In following this vision, he became the Emperor who conquered nations by using as his vanguard in battle a treasure adorned with a golden “cross.” What needs reexamination is whether this “conversion” resulted in the transformation of the state by Christianity as a “state religion” or whether it resulted in the degeneration of the church by the authority of the state.

After the fourth century, in the post-Constantine era, just war theory became the viewpoint of the main faction of Christianity. Through an edict of the Roman Pope in the twelfth century the Crusaders were organized and they were commanded to bring glory to God by destroying pagans and Muslims. This kind of trend has continued until the modern age and present age (Yamauchi, 2003). At the beginning of the Iraq War, the U.S. President called his country’s troops “Crusaders,” but after strong protest withdrew the comment.

The violence of Western Christianity is clear in the fifteenth century era of the great ships when the inhabitants of Central and South America were killed on a massive scale. At that time the Pope divided the world by giving Central and South America to Spain, and Africa and Asia to Portugal, such that colonialism was promoted by Western Europe. Such “justice” was certainly only “a mechanism of suppression and disguise” (Takeda, 2000).

In the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation, both Luther and Calvin followed the just war theory of the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages and the modern era there has been no major change in the theology of war. The seventeenth century Puritans held to a strong sense of being an elected people who were the new Israel. Because of their immigration to North America, the genocide of the indigenous “Indians” occurred. The design of White Christians to destroy the pagans of colored races amounts to the indiscriminate killing of three million people: the twelfth century Crusades; the seventeenth century massive killing of the former inhabitants of Central, South, and North America; the twentieth century Philippine atrocity, the bombing of Tokyo, the killing of many Japanese civilians with atomic bombs, and the Vietnam war. The twenty-first century bombing of Afghanistan and Iraq is consistent with this.

II. CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM AND WAR

II.A. THE DOCTRINE OF AMERICAN SUPREMACY

II.A.1. NATIONALISTIC CHRISTIANITY

Why do present day American Christian fundamentalists unconditionally affirm their own country's wars? Three reasons can be given. First is the principle of American supremacy. America has a strong sense of being a "chosen people." America is considered to be established by God, guided by God, and blessed by God. It is considered to be absolutely the greatest nation in human history because it has received a special calling. God has blessed all America and American people (God bless America).

Christian fundamentalism holds firmly to an exceedingly rigid conservative position which does not compromise with other positions which are liberal. In other words, they are intolerantly exclusive. But when it comes to the country's wars, they project American supremacist patriotism, emphasizing unified conformity in which doctrinal differences are not a problem.

For example, deism runs counter to fundamentalism. Deism esteems reason and denies original sin. That position is severely criticized by fundamentalists who hold to salvation only through the atonement of Christ. But "civil religion" based on this deism and Christian fundamentalism become unified in times of war, spurring the people of the country toward victory in war.

Civil religion is religion which has as its purpose the integration of the people of a nation, particularly religion that unifies for the purpose of bringing about a war. The religion of the American President is not Christianity, but rather "civil religion" (Mori 1966). In presidential speeches, the word "God" is used, but the word "Christ" is not used. Also, human original sin, the redemption of the cross, the resurrection, and the second coming, etc., are not touched upon. God is the one who leads the world with great strength and is the one who gives the state religious authority, purpose, and value. Pierard and Linder in their analysis of the presidential speeches of Washington, Lincoln, Wilson, Roosevelt, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton, narrow their focus to the religious content of the speeches, discourse about the connection of the speeches to Christianity, and offer the severe critique that the religion of these presidents is not Christianity.

"The faith of American civil religion is a different faith than that of Christianity. In fact, if civil religion's equating of God with the fate of the state reduces the universal God seen in the Bible to a tribal American deity, then American civil religion comes close to being a dangerous desecration" (Pierard and Linder 2003:364).

Civil religion and Christian fundamentalism, despite their differences in belief, are bound together by nationalism and thus mobilize the nation for war. When only the supremacy of one's own country is emphasized, all religious differences vanish within the great cause of loyalty to the nation.

II.A.2. HONORING THE WAR DEAD

Because of their sacrifice for the nation in war, honoring the war dead is indispensable. It is not possible to continue war without honoring as heroes those who died for the nation and without producing new war dead (Takahashi 2005). Therefore civil religion praises the war dead as martyrs. In the case of "Christian nationalism," the

significance of the “sacrifice” of death for the nation, patterned after the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, is emphasized.

Concerning these points about emphasis on the supremacy of one’s own country—justified aggression toward invasion of other nations, encouragement of the nation toward war, honor accorded to the war dead as martyrs for the nation—there is essentially no difference between American nationalistic Christianity and Japanese nationalistic Shinto. As civil religions, both are qualitatively identical. During the past war, being a Japanese took priority over being a Christian, and war for the sake of the nation was positively affirmed. Likewise, currently in America, being an American takes priority over being a Christian, and sacrificing life for the sake of the nation is pursued. Religion (civil religion) unifies the people of a nation for the sake of the state. In Japan it was nationalistic Shinto which was Shinto fundamentalism. Similarly, in America it was nationalistic Christianity which is Christian fundamentalism. “Nationalistic Shinto” of the Meiji government was originally polytheistic Shinto, but in order to unify the nation it was monotheistically reconstructed. Similarly, “nationalistic Christianity” was originally a non-violent, pacifist Christianity, but was jingoistically distorted for the sake of waging war.

II.B. SIMPLISTIC DUALISM BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL

The second reason Christian fundamentalism affirms war is its extremely simplified dualism of good and evil. In war, enemy and friend, evil and good, are clearly divided and the scheme in which good destroys evil is emphasized. This is an indispensable method of argumentation for waging a victorious war. Civil religion gives religious significance to that worldview.

In the case of nationalistic Christianity, the country of the enemy is a dark empire ruled by Satan, and one’s own country is a kingdom of light blessed by God. The mission given by God is to destroy the evil empire and to expand the good kingdom. In the Second World War it was emphasized that the fight was against fascism which suppressed “freedom and democracy” and against the Satanic empire of totalitarianism. In the 1960’s the Vietnam War was a fight against the Satan of communists, and the 21st century Iraq War is a fight against the Satanic existence of terrorists.

The idea that God’s kingdom expands through the destruction of evil by the military might of the good is consistent in Western Christian society. In comprehensive terms, this is American Christian fundamentalism. But there is no path of peace or resolution in this simplified dualistic thinking.

In order to make this kind of schematized worldview pervasive, various regulated reports and managed intelligence information are circulated. In order to emphasize the great purpose of the war, phrases such as “freedom,” “democracy,” “liberation from oppressive governments,” etc., are published, and the war is widely talked about as a just war and a holy war.

But the real reason is the lust to dominate and control other countries, and the greed to acquire concessions from them. James proclaims: “Where does fighting come from? Where does the fighting among you come from? Does it not come from the heart, from the lust of fighting which is within your body?” (James 4:1, personal translation). Evil does not come from outside. It is within us. The simplistic dualism of good and evil which understands

one's own country as absolutely good and other countries as absolutely evil is nothing less than self deception.

II.C. DISTORTED ESCHATOLOGY

The third reason Christian fundamentalism spurs the church on toward war is eschatology. According to the right wing of American religion, before the eschatological tribulation Jesus will return in the sky to gather Christians together. After that there will be seven years of great tribulation on the earth, but the church will have been removed to heaven so will not encounter tribulation. After the tribulation Christ will return and will set up the one thousand year kingdom.

Based on this kind of eschatology, the recently published *Left Behind* series which has sold more than sixty million copies, depicts the seven years of tribulation experienced by those who have not been raptured and who have been left on the earth. During the seven years of tribulation the temple in Jerusalem is rebuilt and the Old Testament sacrificial system is revived. The nation of Israel plays a central role in the thousand year kingdom which comes after the return of Christ.

II.C.1. POLITICIZED ESCHATOLOGY

The first problem with this eschatology is that it is exceedingly this worldly, politicized, and secularized. Originally, the characteristic pretribulational rapture understanding of this eschatology was formed by a strong desire to have a purified church separated from the fallen world. Therefore, as can be seen in the original Brethren churches which were influenced by this eschatology, there is a strong tendency toward separatism and warnings were given against political involvement. So when this eschatology became widespread in America during the 20th century there was only passive direct participation in politics.

The situation dramatically changed in 1980 when the Reagan administration came into power. During the presidential election fifty million people were introduced to politics by working for the Republican party as ballot box observers. In the *Left Behind* novel, the anti-Christ becomes the United Nations General Secretary and introduces a single worldwide currency. The political position, the anti-U.N., anti-E.U., and pro-Israel thinking of Christian fundamentalists are read into the eschatological prophecies of the Bible.

Christian fundamentalists take the premillennial position which holds to the return of Christ before the millennium. In this there is a doctrinally sharp confrontation with postmillennialism which holds to a the return of Christ after the millennium. In taking the latter position, Evans of the religious right wing Promise Keepers believes in "authoritarianism" and "Christian reconstructionism." It may be a strange phenomenon that eschatologically conflicting positions can together support the Republican party administration, but in the context of a secularized American supremacist eschatology, doctrinal differences become insignificant.

II.C.2. SALVATION OF THE NATIONS

Extreme Israeli centeredness is another problem. Regarding the Palestinian problem, Christian fundamentalists have a strong tendency to support Israel unconditionally.

Certainly according to Romans 9-11 the salvation of the nation of Israel in the end times and the special plan of God are noted, but this is not central to New Testament eschatology. In Revelation, the most important book dealing with eschatology, reference to this issue is hardly found. (The twelve tribes of Israel in Revelation chapter 7 are shown to be, according to chapter 14, the entire redeemed people of God.)

Israel and the Gentiles are the one people of God under the headship of Christ “the Lamb,” moving as one toward the completion of history. Through the second coming of Christ the kingdoms of the world will become God’s redeemed people, among the nations perfect reconciliation will be realized, and Isaiah’s prophecy will be fulfilled.

“On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage’” (Isa. 19:23-25).

In the new heaven and the new earth, hostility between nations will be taken away. Israel and the Gentiles will be one in Christ, and they will become the people of the new Jerusalem. So on the twelve gates of the city will be written the names of the “Twelve tribes” (Rev.21:12) and on the twelve foundation stones of the wall will be carved “the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev 21:14). In the eschaton “Israel” has a unique role to fulfill, but in the glorious city Israel will worship God as one among many nations.

II.C.3. THE FINAL WORLD WAR

The emphasis on an eschatological war is also a problem. Christian fundamentalists have a great interest in Armageddon, the final world war, which according to some is identified with a nuclear war. And because the final world war will occur before the return of Christ there is a tendency to perceive war on earth positively as an eschatological sign. Certainly there are warnings recorded in the Bible about an eschatological war, but those passages are not about the destruction of the earth by means of nuclear war.

In the reconstructionism of postmillennial theory this kind of final world war was not a central theme. Rather, war was emphasized from a different perspective. Prior to the return of Christ, the good Christian kingdom will gradually destroy the evil pagan empire, all the world will be Christianized, and the golden age of the church will come. Consequently political reformation was proactively undertaken. Seventeenth century Puritans idealized a theocracy like that of Calvin’s Geneva. They had a sense of election and calling as the new Israel, and a feeling of strong continuity with Israel of the Old Testament. Therefore in the “new continent” the Puritans conquered the indigenous peoples of North America in order to build the kingdom of God, just as Israel had captured the land of Canaan. Already secularized in the eighteenth century, deism influenced by the Enlightenment had become authoritative, even as it is today. The idea that God’s kingdom can be built by this worldly implementation of military domination is now considered coherent.

But according to Revelation 16 and 19, Christ by means of the sword which comes from his mouth, the word of God, is the one who will be victorious at the battle of Armageddon. The weapons and arms of the countries of this world will have no meaning.

When Christian eschatology is secularized in such a way that the kingdom of God conquers by means of this worldly military power, various distortions are produced. If we

grasp the magnificent plan of God concerning the return of Christ, then we can transcend narrow minded nationalism, simplistic dualism of right and wrong, and this worldly eschatology. Beginning at that point in time then, the church of God will be able return to the radical truth, and will be able to walk in the path of the peace of Christ.

II.D. HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

So how can this narrow minded nationalism be subjugated? The solution lies in the eternal nature of heavenly citizenship. The people of God have dual citizenship on earth and in heaven. Often these two citizenships, especially in circumstances of war, come into sharp confrontation.

Top priority ought to be given to heavenly citizenship and only secondary priority to earthly citizenship. This is because earthly citizenship lasts only while nations endure but heavenly citizenship continues eternally.

In God's eternal city there is no self-righteous nationalism or narrow minded patriotism. In an age which strongly seeks belongingness and loyalty to earthly nations, we who have received citizenship in the eternal heavenly city must above all else renew our self-consciousness.

In the final age, in the conflict between nations, when people who are caught up in the enthusiasm of nationalism begin to praise war, it is those who have acquired this heavenly eternal perspective who can survey the entire trend and continue to make pointed proposals rather than being swallowed up in the muddied waters.

III. THE PACIFIST CHURCH AND WAR

III.A. THE PACIFIST CHURCH AND NON-VIOLENCE

Because war is the "beginning of birth pangs" (Mt. 24:8) of Christ's return, wars will not cease, and along with that various deceptions will continue. Therefore by means of true discernment we must perceive the essence of the situation.

The theology of war and the eschatology of Christian fundamentalism evidences a form of secularized, this worldly Christianity. By contrast, "historical pacifist churches" have attained a position of pacifism and non-violence. Their roots are in the rebaptizers (Anabaptists) of the 16th century Radical Reformation who lived by the principle of non-resistance and absolute pacifism. Repudiating all violence, they refused military service, were persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants, were persecuted, moved to various European countries, and immigrated to North America in the 18th century but displayed a genuine refusal to bear arms in the American Revolution and the 19th century Civil War.

In the second half of the 20th century their pacifism was rehabilitated and recognition was granted to their claim that pacifism is Biblical. J. H. Yoder, professor at Notre Dame University, published *The Politics of Jesus* and was very influential as chairman of the American Society of Christian Ethics. Both S. Hauerhaus, who visited Japan in 2000, and R. Sider, both of Duke University, were influenced by Yoder.

As the servant of Christ, the church in Japan should continue to cooperate with these kind of churches, should return to the starting point of Biblical faith, and should walk the path of non-violence.

III.B. THE JAPANESE CHURCH AND PACIFISM

Just war theory is not only not Biblical, in the context of contemporary international law it is also not feasible. Since World War II, wars have become wars of annihilation and of total destruction, with massacre of many civilians, so that the primary condition of just war, “not killing non-combatants,” has become impossible to fulfill. At this moment when just war theory cannot be established, the church should recognize again the importance of “pacifism.”

Even though in Japan Kanzo Uchimura of the non-church movement criticized the Western churches for their “gospel of brute strength” faith, in the First Sino-Japanese War (the Russo-Japanese War) he held to just war theory. But despite Japanese victory in the First Sino-Japanese War and the First World War he later emphasized a Biblically based anti-war position and absolute pacifism. Even today the anti-war stance of Uchimura one hundred years ago is not out of date.

Kanzo Uchimura, by a careful reading of the New Testament, was convinced that “absolute anti-war” was certainly the Christian way. And Uchimura personally practiced a non-violent lifestyle. After the “disrespectful scandal” (he refused to participate in idolatry), even though his wife died of natural causes in the midst of persecution, he maintained the principle of non-resistance. On the basis of this kind of personal experience, at the national level he repudiated the use of force as well as attacks against other countries using military strength.

Moreover, his pacifism was based on astute historical insight. In the ten years from the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894 (Meiji 27) to the Russo-Japanese war in 1904 (Meiji 37), the world experienced major changes. Uchimura accurately analyzed the world situation during that time by reading English newspapers and he severely criticized the two wars that occurred in Christian lands. Those wars were the Spanish-American war of 1898 and the South African War (Boer War) of 1899. Because these wars were neither moral nor just but instead occurred because of desire for more national territory and because of greed, Uchimura called them “greed wars.” The fact that Western churches supported the invasion of South Africa by England and the invasion of the Philippines by America clearly showed deception. He criticized Japanese newspapers which insisted, “England is becoming the world’s most powerful country and we should not hurt its feelings.” He pointed out the “tendency toward an Anglo-American alliance.” And through the “cooperative movement of the Anglo-Saxon race” he warned that the entire world would be “Anglicized.” Truly this was an accurate prognosis. One hundred years later Anglo-American allied armed forces invaded Iraq with mighty military force and with disregard for international public opinion.

During World War II Tadao Yanaihara, a disciple of Uchimura, criticized the war and was dismissed from his teaching position at a university. But he was undaunted. Though a minority, the existence in Japanese history of these kind of Christians gives us great encouragement.

Since the time of Japan’s defeat in the war, the Japanese church has maintained a position of pacifism. Because of strong pressure from the United States, an alliance between the American military and the Japanese Self Defense Force is proceeding, so currently this position is strained by the changing situation which tends toward war.

In the midst of past war when military authorities led the nation down a destructive path, the Japanese church was not able to identify the danger and was not able to offer critical

insight. Moreover, if a country is possessed by the wild idea of conquering the world through its military might, and if that country leads the world toward destruction, we Japanese have the responsibility to point out its foolishness. The churches of Japan and America, as churches of the Lord which live by the same gospel faith, must establish a new cooperative relationship in the 21st century. In order to move in a constructive direction, it is necessary to accumulate arguments clarifying points of agreement and disagreement.

The reconciliation of all things will be realized by means of the return of Christ, and all creation will be filled with perfect rest and peace. At that time enmity between nations will vanish, nations “will turn their swords into plows and their spears into sickles, nations will not raise swords against nations, and they will not learn how to fight again” (Mic. 4:3). At that time heaven and earth will be made new, no weapons will be seen, and all evil will be destroyed. As we continue to eagerly await that day, let us seek to live as people of reconciliation and people of peace.

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