

**AMERICAN CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF AUSTRALIA  
(NEW SOUTH WALES CHAPTER)**

**WHOSE SIDE WAS GOD ON?**

**a paper by Father Dave  
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It has been said that at the end of the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg, God passed over the battlefield to see that the right side was victorious, just as He had done nearly fifty years before after the Battle of Waterloo. Throughout the ages, religion and war have been inextricably related with many wars being fought in the name of religion or being conflicts in which one or both sides believed their cause was righteous with God firmly on their side.

In this paper, the issues of “Whose side was God on?” and “Is God only on the winning side?” are discussed with reference to America’s Civil War of 1861-1865. In addressing these issues, consideration will be given, first, to the place of religion, in particular, the Christian tradition, in Antebellum America noting both the differences and the common features of the Northern and Southern sub-cultures. In addition, the impact is noted of the breakdown of a number of the social institutions, including the established churches, resulting from differences to the issues of slavery and the effect this had in setting a scene for the forthcoming War. Next, the religious practices that troops on both sides of the conflict throughout the War are discussed together with the impact that these practices had on the outcome of some of the critical battles. The importance of religious beliefs after the War is then examined both from the perspective of the North and, importantly, from the defeated South where the powerful and persuasive “Lost Cause” mythology took hold of American history for over a century.

The final part of the paper presents a personal view of the question of which side did God take in the Civil War. This view certainly challenges some of the traditional views of the mainstream Churches but looks for a biblical basis to establish a defensible position on the issues raised, particularly as it relates to the apparent pacifist teachings of Jesus to *‘turn the other cheek’*. In doing this, a distinction is drawn between *violence* and *vengeance* and this provides a rationale for the personal position taken. Much is left unsaid in relation to the philosophical and values issues and, in particular, the “thorny” question of whether there are positive societal values that are more evident in times of war than in peacetime and, if such values exist, should we as a free society be searching for a “moral alternative to war”. These are matters for another paper at another time in another context.

This paper is not likely to be without controversy and readers might well find their values and beliefs being challenged by what is asserted in the following pages. Such an approach is quite intentional, however, for it is considered that without such challenges to values and beliefs, their worthiness remains untested and problematic. The issues raised in the paper have an application, also, to the present world situation and may help clarify one’s personal position to the crises of recent times that have brought the world to the brink of war.

It is our hope that in reading this paper you will be challenged to examine not only the situation that existed during the Civil War but be able to clarify and articulate your position in today’s times of crisis.



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## INTRODUCTION

As is it often the practice before presenting a new book, to present the reviews first, so I would like to begin this paper, entitled *'Whose Side Was God On?'* with a review.

The review is from a man named John Lambert – a man that I do not know, but who moves in all the right circles, having apparently been recently at work for the Anglican Church in Sydney developing school systems in the Western suburbs. Moreover, he is a man who clearly professes Christian religious belief, and so is suitably qualified, I think, to make comments of the following nature. Writing to John Cook, he says:

*"Whose side was God on? If you will forgive me providing a personal answer, God was not on either side!*

*I could elaborate but that is more for Father Dave. There would have been, as you point out, many good Christians on both sides. I rather think God would have been greatly saddened by the conflict – so much suffering caused by man's frailty and inability to find peaceful solutions. For much the same reasons, God is not necessarily on the winning side. In the case of the Civil War, the outcomes of no slavery, and a united nation, would be seen as highly valuable outcomes by most people and therefore appear to support a victory of good over evil. It is easy to argue for God supporting such an outcome but I think that oversimplifies the issues."*

So says our learned friend, John Lambert, and I thought it was worth quoting his reflections here at the beginning of the paper, as I suspect that Mr Lambert's position would probably represent the typical position taken by the Protestant mainstream in Sydney, if not the broader Christian community in this country.

Is Mr Lambert correct in his assessment? You must be the final judge of that. One thing we can say unequivocally though is that his position would not have found much support in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America and next to none at all amongst members of the Protestant mainstream during the American Civil War. Let's be clear about this. The Protestant Evangelical mainstream was mainline America during the Civil War.

At the time of the American Revolutionary War, Catholics made up only 1% of American society. By the time of the Civil War the number had grown in the North, due mainly to immigration from Ireland, but even then, and even taking into account Jewish immigrants, immigrants from non-Christian countries, and persons professing no religion whatsoever, it remained the case that by the time of the outbreak of the American Civil War, the vast majority of Americans were professing Protestant Christians. More surprisingly still, perhaps, it appears that the vast majority of these professing Protestant Christians were regular church attenders!

Indeed, the figures would suggest that of the 27 million people living in the United States at the beginning of the War, as many as 4 million were registered members of Protestant churches. Moreover, given that 'membership' was something entered into primarily by adults and, in the tradition of the time, often entered into only after a lengthy period of regular church attendance as a 'seeker', it is quite likely that the number of regular church attenders was considerably higher. Indeed, Steven Woodworth goes so far as to suggest that if all the regular church-goers had turned up to church on any given Sunday, Protestant churches could have contained more than two-thirds of the country's population!<sup>1</sup>

All this points to the fact that America in the 1800s was a profoundly religious society, deeply influenced by the Protestant tradition and, hence, by the Bible. To understand the reasons for this, one only needs to look at the history of white settlement on the American East Coast and the

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Woodworth, *While God is Marching On – The Religious Life of Civil War Soldiers*: University of Kansas Press, USA, 2001. p.26

key role played by the 'Pilgrim Fathers'. These white colonists, very self-consciously Puritan and Protestant, came to America in search of religious freedom, and determined from the outset to establish their 'new world' as a spiritual Utopia in a repressive and corrupt world.

The point of this prelude is to say that, by the time of the Civil War, America was a highly Christianised society, certainly unique in its day, if not in the history of civilisation. One might ask, has there ever been a society, before or since, in which the teachings of the Bible were so well known by so many of its citizens and not only well-known, but deeply respected.

These teachings included, of course, the commandment "*Thou shalt not kill*", and indeed included the radical teachings of Jesus about '*turning the other cheek*' to the one who strikes out at you, and praying for your enemies. This inevitably leads us to raise a number of questions:

1. How is it that people who believed in the apparently pacifist teachings of Jesus were able to butcher each other in such extraordinary numbers as they did in the American Civil War?
2. How is it that so many persons who had as the foundation of their identity their membership of the Christian community, able to raise their hands so violently against persons they surely must have considered to be their Christian brothers?
3. What did these people think that God was doing while the war was raging, and, perhaps even more significantly, after the war had been won and lost? In other words, 'whose side did they think God was on?'

It will be my goal in the next part of this paper to try to address these questions from the perspective of the participants in the American Civil War. After having done this I will turn, in the final section of this paper, to giving a personal response to that final question that lends the title to this paper. I will offer my own analysis of what I believe the Bible has to say on the matters under consideration and will offer my own perspective as to whose side God was on. In so doing I will, of course, be reflecting critically on my clerical peers from 19<sup>th</sup> Century America, but even more so on Mr Lambert, whose views were given at the outset of this discussion.

## **WHOSE SIDE DID THEY THINK GOD WAS ON?**

The first thing that needs to be said in this regards is that the Christians of 19<sup>th</sup> century America did not suspend their religion or their religious belief during the great War between the states. On the contrary, not only did religious activity thrive during the years of the War, it was noticeably found to be on the increase in the camps of both Northern and Southern soldiers, if not on the home front as well.

It has generally been accepted that during the War there was, what is termed, a 'great revival' sweeping through the military camps. Certain writers of Confederate sympathies, such as Rev. J. William Jones in 'Christ in the Camp', might have had us believe that this spiritual reawakening during the war was fundamentally a Southern phenomenon. But more recent scholarship, such as that of Steven E. Woodworth, suggests that the 'great revival' was as powerfully felt in the camps of the Federal soldiers as it was amongst the rebels.

In his recent book, "*While God is Marching On*", Woodworth suggests that while due attention has been given to the great Confederate spiritual reawakening, insufficient weight has been given to the equally startling signs of spiritual renewal that were taking place amongst the Northern soldiers, particularly during the years of 1863 and 1864. Woodworth accounts for the imbalance in scholarship by the influence of the 'lost cause' mentality, but also suggests that because the

North was actually more heavily *Christianised* before the War, the effects of the resurgence in spiritual activity were less noticeable.

However we consider it, it is clear that Protestant religious fervour was on the increase throughout the period of civil conflict. Far from being relegated to the existential back shelf, religious matters seem to have been at the forefront of the minds of an extraordinary number of men on the front line. The letters from these men to their families back home repeatedly reflect this:

James G. Theaker, of the Fiftieth Ohio, wrote from the outskirts of Atlanta in July 1864,

*"I do not put my trust in any arm of flesh nor in heavy battalions of men, but in Him who rules the armies & holds the destiny of the nation in His hands."*<sup>2</sup>

Or as one Mississippi soldier put it,

*"God does all things right, and there is some hidden Providence in it. It may be a sorrowful one. It may be a more pleasant one. 'My times, my times are in thy hand, O Lord'."*<sup>3</sup>

This theme of God's providential control of all circumstances resounds again and again throughout the diaries of men in the trenches from both the North and the South, and such beliefs undoubtedly nerved them for battle.

Stonewall Jackson's well-known statement on God's providential care is a case in point. He claimed that he was:

*'as safe on the Battlefield as he was in his bedroom'*

As God had fixed a time for his demise and, so far as Jackson could figure it, nothing he could do would have the slightest effect on God's decision on the matter.

*"If all men believed this" Jackson surmised, "all men would be equally brave."*

We should note that not all religious utterances from Civil War soldiers were concerned with God's providential care of the combatants. Equally prolific were pious utterances that extolled the cause for which the combatants fought. One warrior preacher wrote that his people were determined

*"to perish rather yield to the oppressor, who, in the name of freedom, yet under the prime inspiration of an infidel horde, seeks to reduce eight millions of freemen to abject bondage and subjugation."*<sup>4</sup>

One might have supposed that the Northerners held a distinct rhetorical advantage over their Southern counterparts in terms of depicting the war as a 'crusade', as they were able to appeal to the moral issue of slavery as a basis for the divine approval of their cause. Yet these words just quoted come from Leonidas Polk – the Southern Bishop General – in his manifesto to the people of the Mississippi Valley!

As Woodworth notes, it is not obvious who these '*eight millions*' of free people he referred to were, as the South at the time had a population of around five and a half million free white folk, and another three and a half million black slaves. It is hard to imagine that Polk could have envisaged the Northerners as threatening the Negro population of the South with '*bondage and subjugation*' in any way, shape or form, but his words are indicative of that time-honoured principle amongst us preachers, that you shouldn't let a few matters of fact get in the way of good homily!

The northern case for God's support of their war effort was certainly expressed with an equal amount of pious passion by its proponents:

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<sup>2</sup> Woodworth, Op Cit., p.29

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.31

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.121.

*“What a fearful load of guilt the band of traitors who caused this calamity have to meet at the bar of justice, when the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widow calls them to their final account. If there is a pit in hell deep enough to receive them then it must be one very deep indeed.”<sup>5</sup>*

So wrote Wilbur Fisk of the Second Vermont.

We note again that the utterance of pious patriotic fervour is made without any reference to what we might think would be the most obviously ‘spiritual’ issue of the war, yet it is clear enough that abolitionism did play an increasingly important part in the religious thinking of Northern soldiers towards the end of the war.

Not atypical was the statement of one Union naval officer, who wrote:

*“slavery is such a horrible blot on civilisation, that I am convinced that the war will exterminate it and its supporters, and that it was brought about for that purpose by God.”<sup>6</sup>*

The most well known statement linking the course of the War to God’s judgement upon slavery came from Lincoln himself of course in his Second Inaugural Address. Lincoln, by no means a Protestant Christian himself (much to the embarrassment of his supporters), was nonetheless certainly a student of the Bible:

*“Yet, if God wills that it [the war] continue, until all the wealth piled by the bondman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said ‘the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.’”*

And only slightly behind this statement, in terms of its popularity, must be the words of Julia Ward Howe in her famous hymn:

*As he died to make men holy,  
let us die to make men free  
Our God is marching on!*

Allow me to pull up a little at this point and refocus upon the questions I initially raised.

How was it that people who believed in the Bible, and hence would have been familiar with the apparently pacifist teachings of Jesus, were able to butcher each other in such extraordinary numbers as they did during the American Civil War? The answer has to be that these disciples of Jesus saw themselves as being on a crusade, and that the significance of the righteous cause for which they fought forced them to suspend obedience to the normally mandatory Biblical exhortations to live at peace with one another.

*“We are fighting for our homes, our wives, and our families and all that is sacred, and all we want [is] to be let alone. Our enemies are fighting for conquest and plunder.”<sup>7</sup>*

So wrote Alfred Fielder of the Twelfth Tennessee.

Or to take a Northern perspective, one Pennsylvanian officer wrote,

*“Every day I have a more religious feeling, that this war is a crusade for the good of mankind ... I [cannot] bear to think of what my children would be if we were to permit this hell-begotten conspiracy to destroy this country.”<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.105.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.113.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.128

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.110

We should note, mind you, that not every believer in the ranks was persuaded that the rightness of his cause gave him just grounds for suspending obedience to the commandment 'thou shalt not kill'.

At the battle of Chickamauga, Val C. Giles of the Fourth Texas

*"saw a fellow shooting straight up in the air and praying as lustily as ever one of Cromwell's Roundheads prayed ... When Lieutenant Killingsworth remonstrated with him about it he paid no attention to him whatever. Captain Joe Billingsley threatened to cut him down with his sword if he didn't shoot at the enemy, for the woods in front were full of them. He retorted to the Captain: 'You can kill me if you want to, but I am not going to appear before my God with the blood of my fellow man on my soul.'" And so the soldier kept steadfastly to his resolve, "exposed to every volley of the enemy's fire" but never firing back!<sup>9</sup>*

This pious attitude was, of course, not the norm. Far more common was that taken by James Pierson, who wrote in January of 1862,

*"Let the unholy and base legions of Lincolndom pour forth their rage in all its power – we will meet them. We will defeat them or perish upon the soil of our loved and cherished southern republic."<sup>10</sup>*

This quote also helps us to answer our second question, namely 'how did persons who saw themselves fundamentally as Christians, raise their hands so violently against their believing brothers?' The answer here of course is that they did not see the enemy as their spiritual brethren.

Despite the fact that evangelical fervour was well known to be high in both camps, and despite the fact that in both doctrine and in form, Protestant Christianity was virtually identical in both North and South, the enemy could nonetheless be thought of to as 'the unholy and base legions of Lincolndom' or, to quote Polk again, 'the infernal horde'. Parallel statements from the Northern perspective can, of course, be found in equal abundance.

Again, there were exceptions to this pattern. Lee, we know, resisted all temptation to refer to 'those people' in dehumanising terms. An Episcopal priest, come artillery general, William Pendleton was well known for his prayers for his enemies, as evidenced in his order given at the opening of the battle of 1<sup>st</sup> Manassas:

*"God have mercy upon their poor souls – Fire!"*

Others, it seemed, struggled to come to terms with the fact that their enemies were of the same faith. Chelsey Mosman, one of Sherman's troops outside Atlanta in August 1864, heard the Southern soldiers singing,

*"Come thou fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing they praise."*

Mosman wondered "how could he [God] tune their savage 'hearts to sing thy praise'?"<sup>11</sup>

The vast majority though, both on the field and off the field, seemed to have far less respect for the religious faith of their foes. As one pious Virginian woman wrote to her beloved on the front line,

*"Shoot them, dear husband, every chance you get ... They are devil furies who thirst for your blood and who will revenge themselves upon your helpless wife and children. It is God's will and wish for you to destroy them. You are his instrument and it is your Christian duty."<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.216.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.138.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.242.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.281.

The answer then to our third question, *'which side did these people believe God to be on?'* is reasonably straightforward. For the armies of both North and South, God was clearly on their side.

For the Northerners, the cause of national unity always provided their spiritual spokespersons with an apparent plot of moral high ground, and as the War continued, the abolitionist cause gave them an increasingly clear basis for pointing to the Divine rightness of their cause.

For the Southerners, their case was a little more complicated. They justified their cause by depicting themselves as victims in the War of Northern Aggression. They could point to a number of prominent Christian men in both political and military leadership. And they could point to the number of spectacular victories in 1862 and 1863. All such signs seemed to confirm what, to the Southern mind, common sense suggested, that their cause was right and that God was behind them.

It seems extraordinary, looking back, to see so many people of almost identical faith coming to totally opposite conclusions on this all important issue. Of course we must acknowledge that not every religious spokesperson from North or South unreservedly granted the divine imprimatur to his country's cause. There was a strain of patriotic self-criticism running through the religious pronouncements of the time, to the effect that not only did some spiritual leaders doubt the complete integrity of their country's cause, but they actually saw the war as divine judgement upon their country's shortcomings.<sup>13</sup>

This topic of patriotic self-criticism could easily become the basis of another paper. Let me pursue it no further here, except to make two brief points. First, that when the Southern Church did raise such questions about their country's spiritual record, the question of slavery was, surprisingly perhaps, not the basis for their critique! Second, that those who did criticise their country's spiritual record nonetheless saw their respective causes as still being ultimately just, and therefore as still divinely sanctioned.

I believe that we have answered the initial questions I raised as to how Christian soldiers came to terms with the violence of the Civil War and where they believed God to be in the process, with the exception of one area. The issue that remains unaddressed thus far is:

### **'Which side did 19th Century America believe God to be on once the war was over?'**

In other words, did the Southerners change their minds about God's angle on the War once they realised that they had lost.

This is an important question, worthy of extensive independent discussion, for there is no doubt that the Protestant religious mindset of 19<sup>th</sup> Century American very much equated divine approval with success. For the Northerners, of course, this presented no problem. Their victory over the South was indeed proof of the divine rightness of their cause. For the Southerners though, did they, in faith, come to accept the seemingly inevitable conclusion that God had not been behind their war efforts, and that therefore they had been in the wrong in the first place, once it became clear to all that they had lost the war? The short answer to this question is, of course, 'NO'!

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<sup>13</sup> Ironically perhaps, this strain of self-criticism seems more prevalent in the North than in the South! At the beginning of the war, in June 1861, representatives of the United Presbyterian Church of North America's General Assembly petitioned Lincoln to proclaim a day of national fasting, saying *"we do not think all the sin which has involved us, as a nation, in this terrible calamity has been committed by the South. Far from it. We would see the hand of God in our troubles. He alone can deliver us out of them, and he will, if we repent of our sins and humble ourselves before him in the name, and in humble dependence on the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Woodworth, Op Cit. p.102).

I refer you, at this point, to the work of Thomas Connelly and Barbara Bellows, who pursue this question rather brilliantly in their seminal book *“God and General Longstreet”*<sup>14</sup>. Connelly and Bellows argue that the whole *‘myth of the lost cause’* was the solution that the South came up with in order to solve the spiritual dilemma caused by the loss of the War. If, as they had supposed, God had been on their side, how could they have possibly lost? The answer, to quote the above-mentioned authors was:

*“...that the Confederacy was not defeated, but was overrun by northern hordes... The South had better generals, who were worn down eventually by endless waves of soldiers in blue, many of them accused of being European mercenaries. Even Gettysburg would be transformed from a Rebel disaster into a drawn battle.”*<sup>15</sup>

According to Connelly and Bellows then, the *lost cause myth* would hold that the South never really lost the War. Whatever it might have lost, in a political sense, should be seen against the moral and spiritual victory of individual southerners, who always showed themselves to be *‘better men’* through the conflict. From here Connelly and Bellows trace an increasingly *inward* movement in Southern religion, such that God’s concerns are equated almost entirely with the individual person and his or her personal salvation. In this realm, the South was unconquerable.

This solution to the problem does carry with it inherent contradictions, and, thus, I imagine that its grip on the popular imagination of the post-war South is more emotional than intellectual. One could argue, I suppose, that this element of inconsistency in religious logic has left ripples of anti-intellectualism in the culture of Southern Protestantism, the effects of which can still be seen today. But that is definitely the topic of a different paper.

Let it suffice to say at this point that what could not be justified by the religious logic of the time was held in place by religious passion. While the zealots of the North retired from the field satisfied that God had indeed proven Himself once again to be true to the cause of justice, the pious folk of the South could only see themselves as the humbled and persecuted righteous remnant of what was once God’s own nation.

## WHOSE SIDE DO I THINK GOD WAS ON?

In offering my own spiritual perspective on the *War Between the States*, I am conscious of the fact that I will need to tackle more than one issue.

Before I can suggest that God was on anybody’s side, I will need to address the apparently pacifist teachings of Jesus? If Jesus’ exhortation to *‘turn the other cheek’* is absolute, then perhaps, as Mr Lambert suggested, God was on neither side, but was simply disgusted with the entire scenario. If we can get past this objection, we will then need to deal with the question of whether God is always on the side of the winner, or whether winning and losing are irrelevant to God’s involvement in such a conflict.

In addressing these issues I will restrict myself to a discussion on how these matters are addressed in the Bible. I will not look at the role of pacifism in the history of the church or examine it from different philosophical perspectives. This may restrict the relevance of my conclusions for some people, but it also helps to restrict the length of this paper, and it reflects a dogmatic approach that reflects not only my own position, but that of Civil War America as well.

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<sup>14</sup> Connelly, T.L., & Bellows, B.L., *“God and General Longstreet”*, Louisiana State University Press, August 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.25

No one, in my view, has argued more powerfully for the case of Christian pacifism than has John Howard Yoder, in his award-winning book *“The Politics of Jesus.”*<sup>16</sup> Yoder (no relation to the ‘Star Wars’ character) is a Mennonite Christian man, and Mennonites have always held to the pacifist tradition, which can indeed be traced back to the early church. Yoder’s argument though for Christian pacifism is from a Biblical rather than a historical perspective. The pacifist teachings of Jesus, Yoder argues, are unambiguous in their content, but His actions are even more significant than His words.

Jesus is the sacrificial lamb who offers no resistance to the violent powers that swoop down upon him to persecute him, crush him, and crucify him. Moreover, in the teachings of the New Testament, the path of non-resistance to aggression demonstrated by Jesus is very clearly singled out as an example for the rest of us to follow. Yoder turns to the writings of the apostle Peter, as he exhorts Christians under persecution not to hit back against their aggressors.

*“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly.”* (1 Peter 2:21-23)

Yoder suggests that the apostle’s use of Jesus as our proper pattern and example in this instance is highly significant, for it is in fact the only point in the entire Bible where the life of Jesus is ever pointed to in this fashion!

Jesus did not marry, yet nowhere in the Bible is this used as a basis for suggesting that his followers should not marry. Jesus had twelve disciples. Yet nowhere in the New Testament is it suggested that this should be a model for the church in any way. Indeed, there is only one point in the entirety of Scripture where the lifestyle of Jesus is ever pointed to as a specific illustration of the way in which we are supposed to live, and it is here – in the example Jesus left us of non-resistance to violence.

I find, as I say, Yoder’s argument to be very powerful and, as younger man, I found it convincing. My subsequent reflections though have led me to the conclusion that Jesus’ concern was more specifically with *vengeance* than it was with *violence*, and that there is an important distinction to be made between the two.

When I teach young boys to box, one of the first things I teach them to do is not to take *vengeance* in the ring. It is the natural tendency of anyone, I think, when they are hit, to want to hit back. Becoming a skilled fighter requires moving beyond this natural tendency to hit back and instead to make a rational response (albeit a *violent* one [of sorts]).

As in the ring, so in all of life: when we are hit, we want to hit back. When someone swears at us, our natural tendency is to swear back. When someone slaps us in the face, our natural tendency will be to slap back. This is where the *‘turn the other cheek’* teaching of Jesus is so radical. It exhorts us to not hit back in kind, but rather to make a rational response to our aggressor – if appropriate, simply to *‘offer the other cheek’* rather than repay evil for evil.

Jesus’ teachings and actions are consistent with this distinction. As St Peter put it, *“When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten.”* Jesus never hit back in kind, taking vengeance, yet on the other hand, He was quite capable of being rough with people, and the incident in the temple, where he drove out the money-changers with a whip, is a case in point.

Yoder has difficulty with the story of Jesus in the temple, as he does with the plethora of battles that compose the storyline of the Old Testament. The real difficulty for Yoder though, in my view, and for Christian pacifism in general, is that genuine love sometimes seems to demand violence.

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<sup>16</sup>

Eerdmans Publishing, 1972.

I have only ever been involved in one encounter that I would really term 'violent' in my life – a street fight with another man that involved blood and the breaking of bones. It was one of the most horrible experiences that I have ever had, and yet it came about because I found my assailant in the middle of an attempted rape.

To have fought the man was a *violent* action, no doubt, and I do not suppose it was a particularly loving thing to do to him. But to have not used force in that situation to free the girl would have been a very loveless course indeed. And a failure to love, in the Biblical view, is a failure to keep to the most fundamental commandments.

If love can sometimes demand violence on a small-scale scenario such as this, then perhaps love can demand war when the abuse takes place on a national level. This was of course exactly the way that a number of our 19<sup>th</sup> Century spokespersons depicted the Civil War. "*Shoot them, dear husband.... It is your Christian duty!*" Why? Because they:

*'thirst for your blood and will revenge themselves upon your helpless wife and children' (if you let them).*

If love can sometimes demand violence, then it is true, as the Book of Ecclesiastes says that there is '*a time to fight*'. For most pious people of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the War Between the States was such a time.

To say that war can be religiously justified is not, of course, to say that all acts of violence that take place in war are necessarily justifiable. Hence, the development of the '*just war*' theory in Christian tradition, that goes back to St Augustine.

We won't discuss the 'just war' theory further here, except to note that it made a strong distinction between moral and immoral ways of waging war, and that statements such as '*we make war only against armed men*' (as made by Lee) were very deliberate attempts to keep the practice of war within the parameters of the 'just war' tradition.

Having cleared the issue of Christian pacifism out of the way, at least to my own satisfaction, let us now return to the question with which we began – 'whose side was God on?'

As was reflected in the letter of Mr Lambert at the beginning of this paper, it is popular amongst evangelicals nowadays to believe that God is on neither side in a war – that God is somehow above entanglement in such mundanely human affairs. This was not the perspective of 19<sup>th</sup> Century America. Neither was it the perspective of the Biblical writers. Indeed, the Bible, as we have mentioned, is full of wars. The history of Israel, as outlined in the pages of the Old Testament, is a history of almost constant warfare, and God is seen by the authors as being involved, in one way or another, in every battle that takes place.

From a Biblical perspective then, is working out whose side God was on a simple matter of taking a look at who won? In short, 'yes!' God is always depicted as being on the side of the winner. The '*Lord of battles*' never loses a fight. This is not to say that it is always '*God's own people*' that win each fight. On the contrary, very often God is depicted as siding against His favoured people, for the sake of teaching them a lesson of some sort, or as a simple act of punishment for disobedience. Even so, God's will is always done, and in the long run this means that justice will always ultimately triumph. This is the Biblical perspective.

Stonewall Jackson was well known to be a fan of Napoleon. When asked though how it was that Napoleon was beaten at Waterloo, he replied that '*God decided to stop him there*'. In a similar vein it was said of Jackson many years later that '*when God decided that the Confederacy should lose the War, it was first necessary that he should remove his servant Thomas Jackson*'. I accept this perspective. I accept that God ended Jackson's career at Chancellorsville in order to ensure a Federal victory at Gettysburg, and that God ordained a Federal victory at Gettysburg in order to ensure a Federal victory in the war. And I accept that God chose to ensure a Federal victory because it was God's will to free the slaves. Some may see this as a reflection of a simplistic faith combined with a naive reading of history on my part. My only defence to this is to suggest that the Biblical writers were, for the most part, equally unsophisticated.

To say that God was ultimately on the side of the Federal army is not to say that the Southerners were not better fighters with better generals, nor even to deny that they were '*better men*'. It is to

say that the cause for which they stood was ultimately tarnished by their adherence to the institution of slavery, to such a point that God sided against them!

What fascinates me is the question of why more Southerners, who started the War with the same unsophisticated faith that I have, did not come to the same conclusion as I have after the War was clearly lost. Connelly and Bellows would say that the *'myth of the lost cause'* gave them a more convenient way of coming to terms with the spiritual dilemma. Maybe they are correct.

If Connelly and Bellows are correct, then I suspect that the highly personalised nature of the Christian religion that we see in modern evangelicalism quite possibly owes a lot to the Civil War. I suspect that part of the unfortunate legacy of the Civil War is an understanding of the Christian religion where God's sole concern is for the salvation of the individual, and where the political and social affairs of the world are more or less irrelevant to the divine agenda. It may be, indeed, that while Mr Lambert, whose comments we began with, confesses no great knowledge of the American Civil War, he may in fact have inherited more from this period of history than he realises.

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