

Christendom – A Betrayal of Christ and His Gospel

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I have greatly appreciated David Bentley Hart's essay No Enduring City in First Things. It has strongly resonated with much of what I have become convinced of. He captures the glory and tragedy that was Christendom, but his essay leads us to several questions we must answer. Before beginning, however, a personal note is needed.

Today the issues of church and state, and hence Christendom, a form of neo-Constantinianism, remain extremely important and are issues that have profoundly affected my life. For me, these issues are much more than ideas. I grew up in a nominal Protestant Evangelical home, and during a time of rebellion I became a serious nihilist, accepting the meaninglessness of life and ordered my life accordingly. Being agnostic, I was convinced that God had not spoken, and consequently there was no truth to be found. Under such beliefs there is no meaning, and in particular I realized there was no meaning to my life. It mattered not at all what I did with my life. After a time I despaired. I remember thinking that if I can't find truth, I am dead. Despite believing that truth could not be found, I never-the-less began a desperate search. I had been involved in Eastern religion for a short time and experimented in drugs and had not found truth in them. I thought that if truth could be found it was probably in the Christianity I had once believed in. I began to read the Bible and rethink things, and I found Jesus the Christ, the Way the Truth and the Life. I met Him in a way I had not known before. My life was completely changed. Professionally, I am a research scientist, a physicist by training, and for a short time worked in the defense industry. After encountering John Howard Yoder's the Politics of Jesus, I examined the ante-Nicenes, the nature of the state, and Jesus' commands and became convinced that if I were to call Jesus my Lord I could have nothing to do with violence in any way. I was 51 at the time. I could no longer work for one of the Merchants of Death. Leaving caused some financial hardship, but obedience is better than wealth. The real cost, however, was the conflict it caused in my paternal family, which was very militaristic. During that time of intense conflict I spent a lot of time in Matthew 10. Thankfully, my wife and two sons came right along with me.

The commitment to live nonresistantly had a profound impact on my life. My spiritual life deepened, my obedience increased, and the Word of God came alive in ways I had not experienced before. Something else happened: I fell in love with Jesus. My foundational Biblical commitments are orthodox. Along with the ante-Nicene church and Scriptures, I believe that several things must characterize the Christian life: moral purity, kindness, love and care for the brethren, forgiveness, nonresistance, love of enemies, to name several of the most important. Although I am not Amish, I am told that my fundamental theological commitments differ little from the Amish, even though I do not adopt their cultural distinctives.

I think that the important thing to take from my background is that what follows is not some intellectual exercise. Rather the commitments are deeply rooted in my life, and had been costly to live by. With that bit of background let us turn to the topic at hand.

Christians today live in the ruins of Christendom. As Hart rightly points out, Christendom reached the greatest heights of cultural excellence in music, art, literature, and gave us hospitals, universities and a multitude of private institutions that cared for the needy. It was the cultural womb from which modern science sprung. But all of these magnificent achievements are “alloyed with countless institutional betrayals of the Gospel.”

What are we to make of this? How should Christendom’s failure inform our lives today? We may also ask what is the central point – what is at the center of the failure of Christendom?

It seems to me that Hart’s unspoken conclusion must be: Christianity and the State do not mix and we Christians have nothing to do with power and violence. If this is true, then Christendom is certainly problematic for the Christian. Of crucial interest is, how are we to order our lives today in light of Christendom’s betrayal of Jesus?

Jesus establishes a new Kingdom instantiated in His church, a new Covenant, a new Kingdom law, and a new way of life. Jesus is a cosmic earthquake religiously, economically, culturally and ethically. We are the first fruits of those who beat their swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. We Christians are strangers and pilgrims—we have no enduring city. We really are citizens of another kingdom. We live in a monarchy, under the rule of a glorious King who set us free from the law of sin and death, and has given us a law far greater than Moses’ law. Our King has also given us the Spirit of God who, living in us, empowers us enabling us to live according to His law of freedom and blessing. Having no enduring city on earth, we look for a city made without hands.

Of Jesus’ law, the most extraordinary, is His command to not resist the evil person, and His charge to love enemies.

In His command to not resist the evil person, He provides several examples. When struck, we do not retaliate, but permit ourselves to be struck again. When sued we give what is demanded and then give more. When commanded to assist a soldier of an occupying army we do what is demanded and then do more. Christians do not retaliate. Of course, Jesus’ examples do not exhaust the possibilities, but gives us some concrete examples on which to develop the principle. Apart from God’s protection, Christians are defenseless in the face of the evil man. Why?

In His command to love enemies, Jesus again fleshes it out. We are to do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who spitefully use us. Why?

When explaining greatness in the Kingdom, Jesus explicitly forbids that we lord it over one another in the manner of the great ones in the world. Instead He tells us that servants are great, and that the one who has made himself the slave of all is the greatest. Why? Because this is how Jesus lived, and His people are to be conformed to His image. The Father commands His people to be perfect as He is perfect. We are to walk as Jesus walked. In these commands, Jesus is our example. Jesus demands nothing of us that He did not do as He walked this earth and suffered the cross. Jesus, as He goes to the cross and dies is our

exemplar in this. Peter explicitly states this in 1 Peter 2.

God's people have the ministry of reconciliation, we are a royal priests, a holy nation, and individually and corporately, the temple of God. We do not "war against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Although "we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God."

God's people fight the real war, the vitally important war, the war for God's glory and the souls of men and women. We fight on our knees and wield the Word of God which is "sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The wars of the kingdoms are a mere sideshow compared to the battle God's people fight.

Some charge that Jesus' Way is no way to run a state, and a state is necessary to establish order. Without the the threat and use of deadly force anarchy would ensue. Those who so charge are right, and they are right to affirm that the nonresistant way of Christ that demands love of enemies is no way to run a state.

So who employs the sword? Who employs violence to ensure anarchy does not reign? The Scriptures teach that the sword has been given to the governing authorities. Since the sword and its violence has been denied the Christian, its use is permitted for those outside the Body of Christ. Those outside the perfection of Christ have a legitimate, God-given task to protect the innocent and punish the evil with violence when necessary. However, their task is not redemptive in nature. God's people have a different task, the ministry of reconciliation, the most important task on earth. There is a division of labor between those in the Body of Christ and those outside.

Jesus Way is singularly revolutionary, shaking the wisdom of the world to its foundations. As Hart says, "the Gospel is announced as something essentially subversive of the accustomed orders of human power, preeminence, law, social prudence, religion, and government." Yes, the Gospel completely overthrows human custom and wisdom.

If we take Jesus at face value we find that Christians are forbidden to exercise the power of the state, or employ violence. Enemies are for loving, not killing. Jesus' commands are completely incompatible with Christendom and its exercise of power and violence. It is impossible to reconcile the power of the state with Jesus' Way.

The central failure of Christendom, is the failure to understand the nature of Jesus' kingdom and His kingship over His people, resulting in the belief that a Christian could make common cause with the state and employ its power and violence. This failure was largely enabled by the belief that with the arrival of Constantine, the eschaton had arrived and Christ, through the Emperor, was ruling with a rod of iron. Thus, God's people could now take up the sword.

This view is clear in the writings of Ambrose, Eusebius, and Augustine who explicitly states it in his letter to Boniface. We all know, however, that their belief that the eschaton had arrived was wrong, and changes to Christian theology and life made because of it were also wrong.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, includes within his masterwork a story, *The Grand Inquisitor*, in which he perceptively identifies the corruption and betrayal of Christianity in the Constantinian turn, when the church embraced Caesar, his sword, and state. It is a masterfully written monologue of a Roman Catholic inquisitor as he stands in condemnation of Jesus, the inquisitor's prisoner, who is to be burned at the stake. The inquisitor rails against Jesus, who silently stands before him. The inquisitor condemns Jesus for His rejection of Satan's offer of the kingdoms of the world:

It is now just eight centuries since we took from him that which you in indignation rejected, that final gift he offered you, when he showed you all the kingdoms of the world: we took from him Rome and the sword of Caesar and announced that we alone were the kings of the world, the only kings . . .

The inquisitor continued to condemn Jesus, insisting that Jesus failed, making a horrible choice:

And yet even back then you could have taken the sword of Caesar. Why did you reject that final gift? Had you accepted that third counsel of the mighty Spirit, you would have supplied everything that man seeks in the world. . . . Had you accepted the world and the purple of Caesar, you would have founded a universal kingdom and given men universal peace. For who shall reign over human beings if not those who reign over their consciences and in whose hands are their loaves?

In a moment of complete honesty, the inquisitor makes it clear what the church had done in accepting Caesar and his sword:

We took the sword of Caesar, and, of course, in taking it rejected you and followed him.

In truth, the state is chief among the fallen principalities and powers that oppress men and women, even if it has a legitimate role. I would certainly count the United States among the rebellious and oppressive powers.

The conclusions above follow naturally from their premises. However, is it really possible that Jesus can be taken at face value? Was the Imperial church of Christendom really that mistaken? Were there no real Christians before the radical reformation of the Anabaptists? Were there ever any Christians who took Jesus at face value? Are there any alive today who live this way? We may answer yes to all these questions.

Prior to the Constantinian turn there was a uniformity of thought on nonresistance. For three hundred years, across the entire Roman empire, the ante-Nicene writers were unanimous. In

the entire ante-Nicene writings, there are no exceptions. These writers take Jesus' commands at face value, and teach that a Christian may not resist the evil man and is to love his enemies. In application, they insist that a Christian could not be part of the majesterium, and could not be a soldier.

The reasons the ante-Nicenes give for their commitment to nonresistance and refusal to participate in the magesterium is not that while in government office or as a soldier one had to engage in pagan worship. The reasons they gave are Jesus' clear commands, and that the Christians are the first fruits of those who have beaten their swords into plowshares. Only one instance mentions pagan worship. Below are three quotes from the Ante-Nicene's. Many more could be cited.

"They comfort their oppressors and make them their friends. They do good to their enemies." Aristides, ANF 9.276

"Hippias (a pagan) is put to death for laying plots against the state. No Christian ever attempted such a thing on behalf of his brethren, even when persecution was scattering them abroad with every atrocity." ANF Tertullian, 3.51

"Men of old were used to requiring "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth" and to repay evil for evil, with usury! ... But after Christ has supervened and has united the grace of faith with patience, now it is no longer lawful to attack others even with words, nor to merely say "fool," without danger of the judgment. ... Christ says, "Love your enemies and bless your cursers, and pray for your persecutors." ANF Tertullian, 3.711

Now some will correctly assert that there are records of Christians in the military. This, however, is not surprising. As the Gospel moved through the empire, soldiers would have heard it, and some would have embraced it. Since there was no conscientious objector status, it was not possible to leave the military. Thus the risk to the soldier-convert was great. Should he be given an order that would violate Jesus' commands and refuse to carry out that order, he would likely be executed. However, the Gospel message flourished during the Pax Romana, a time when a soldier might not be called upon to kill or use violence. Thus, it would be expected to find Christians in the Roman military. This in no way supports the argument that military service was affirmed.

Despite the evidence that a Christian must live nonresistantly and love his enemies, many will insist that such a stance makes no sense in the face of horrific evil, such as that found in the Soviet Union, Communist China where as many as 100 million innocents were murdered over 70 years in order to bring in the Communist utopia. Other examples are the Nazis, Saddam Huessain, Assad, Qaddafi and so on. Many American Christians insist that they must take up arms to stop this evil.

Hart, in *The Beauty of the Infinite* expresses the necessity to fight evil with violence this way: "Where the justice of the kingdom is not present, and cannot be made present without any exercise of force, the self-adoring inaction of those who would meet the reality of, say, black

smoke billowing from the chimneys of death camps with songs of protest is simply violence by other means, and does not speak of God's kingdom, and does not grant its practitioners the privilege of viewing themselves as more faithful members of Christ's body than those who struggle against evil in the world of flesh and blood where evil works." For someone as brilliant as Hart to erect such a straw man in order to condemn those who follow Jesus' Way is disturbing. Following Jesus' commands is not "violence by any other means." Following Jesus' Way is the proper and only possible way a Christian may respond to evil. Jesus permits not other.

It seems that those holding such a position forget that Jesus, the Apostles, and the early church make no exceptions for Jesus' commands. For the Christian, they apply at all times, in all places, and all situations. Christians may certainly sacrifice themselves to protect the innocent from the evil, but we are forbidden the use of violence.

Those who insist that Christians must employ violence in a war against evil presuppose several things. First, they assume that there are exceptions to Jesus' commands. Second, they assume that violence is a viable option. Third, they assume that the peace after the war will be better than the conditions prior to the war. Fourth, they assume that they are competent to do what is necessary and not make things worse. Fifth, they assume that their country has no culpability in the conditions existing before the outbreak of war. Sixth, they assume that their cause is just. Seventh, they assume that they can fight the war in a just manner. In almost every case these assumptions are deeply flawed. They reveal a profound naivete about the real nature of war, its causes, how they are fought, and their outcomes.

Many Christians make an appeal to just war theory. Historically, just war theory was first proposed by the pagan Roman Cicero. Christians began to write about it at the time of the Constantinian turn. Ambrose is the earliest Christian writer, and Thomas Aquinas worked out a detailed system. It must be admitted that those who embrace just war sincerely desire to limit the violence in warfare. Despite the desire to do good, just war theory cannot be found anywhere in Scripture, and in application, it is a failure. Just war theory has never been applied, its requirements cannot be fulfilled, and we do not possess enough knowledge to apply the criteria. When has its application caused America not to fight a war or mitigated the violence of war? Some might argue just war theory has motivated the use of smart weapons resulting in fewer civilian deaths. It might have had some impact, but the precision destruction of infrastructure by these weapons kills civilians very effectively. The failure of just war theory is made abundantly clear when we number the millions of ruined lives and those killed in America's more recent wars.

So who fights the wars? Those outside the perfection of Christ may fight. In rare cases they fight in order to protect the innocent as in a defensive war, but the Christian may not fight even in that.

As for the reality that is war, the American Christian possesses a profound naivete of virtually all dimensions of war. First is the impact of war on soldiers. When a soldier enters the military, he begins an intense brainwashing to bring him into a cult of death. According to

those who favor this brainwashing, the methods employed are essentially the same as those used by religious cults. Their masters aggressively employ psychological methods that break down the natural human resistance to kill. Their success has been remarkable. Before WWII only 15

After destroying the soldier's moral compass, they destroy the rest of his mind in combat. A great many suffer from PTSD and moral injury, resulting in broken lives, broken families, and suicide. On average, twenty two veterans commit suicide every day. Add to this the destruction of their bodies and you have a horrific catastrophe.

To most, combat is much like it is presented in the movies. Real combat in a hot war is much worse. Shrapnel can rip a man in two, sever a limb, or cut a skull in half, covering comrades with brains and blood. Artillery and bombs reduce bodies to gelatinous mixtures of bone, blood and flesh. Civilians suffer and die in greater numbers than combatants. Many are killed outright. Infrastructure is destroyed, killing many, and making life virtually impossible. Refugees in great numbers are created and more lives are lost and ruined.

The demonic reality of all this suffering is that it is not done in the name of freedom, but money. Military historian A.J.P. Taylor puts it well when he writes: "No matter what political reasons are given for war, the underlying reason is always economic." Marine Smedley Butler knew first hand that "War is a Racket."

At their root, wars are fought to make rich men richer. Markets and access to them is increased, land and resources acquired, and control over people is greatly expanded. Most perverse is the money that pours into the bank accounts of the merchants of death that make the weapons that shatter life and limb. Many Christians work for these evil corporations: Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Northrup Grumman, Boeing, Raytheon, 3Com, and hundreds more. The bankers also find war exceedingly profitable, making money off of every transaction and even more on the interest in the astronomical sums that are lent to the warring governments. America spends over a trillion dollars every year on this orgy of death. Don't believe for a minute that all this is done to keep America safe.

The American Revolution was largely fought over taxes. Since when do Christians kill over taxes? I thought we were to obey the governing authorities. I guess we are until we're not. America's incursions and wars in South America were largely to secure land, and ensure favorable conditions for American corporations. America's entry into WWI was to bail out American bankers who feared that their loans to Britain and France would not be paid if Germany won the war. Don't be fooled, America's wars in the Middle East have been to secure control over energy resources. For that reason America destroyed Iraq, Libya, and helped destroy Syria. In order to put economic pressure on Russia, America helped get the revolution in Ukraine going, a revolution with a strong neo-Nazi component. The war in Syria also serves this purpose. America is ruthless in its pursuit of its interests. Consider for a moment the millions of innocent lives that have been destroyed to ensure American wealth and hegemony. The numbers and suffering are staggering.

World War II was anything but a good war, fought well. President Roosevelt and his cabinet desperately wanted into the war in Europe. When they failed to provoke Germany to war by attacking German vessels in the Atlantic, they developed a plan to completely cripple the Japanese economy, forcing them into war. Many will find this unbelievable; however, if you care to read communications between the President and the members of his cabinet, diplomatic communications, cabinet meeting minutes, and memoirs you will find that this was indeed the plan. This plan was known not only by the cabinet but by many generals and admirals. They believed that if they could back Japan into a corner by a complete embargo of all trade, they could force Japan to take actions against the United States. In other words, conduct war with Japan by other means. Unfortunately, they were wildly successful.

The incredible thing is that up until a few months before the war the Japanese government wanted to reach an accommodation with America to avoid war. The effort was sincere but completely ignored by America's leaders. Only after it was clear that the U.S. had no interest in reaching an agreement did the Japanese hardliners take over control of the government. Even at that point, however, the Japanese emperor insisted that they continue to find a way to avoid war. After intentionally forcing the war, America's leaders, generals and soldiers proceeded to murder several million Japanese in General Curtis LeMay's terror bombing of Japan.

Shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S., war plans for the invasion of Normandy and defeat of Germany were released to the press (Dec. 4, 1941). These same plans were what the U.S. actually followed a few years later. With war declared on Japan and the release of America's war plans against Germany, along with the undeclared war against Germany in the Atlantic, Adolf Hitler decided to admit what already existed. America was at war with Germany. Naturally he declared war on America, something he had taken considerable pains to avoid.

Many will argue that Germany had to be stopped, however, there was no need for the U.S., Britain or France to be involved in the war. Germany had made it clear that it did not want war with either of these countries. Everyone in the know understood that Germany and the Soviet Union were going to come to blows. Former President Herbert Hoover tried to persuade America's leaders to let Germany and the Soviets fight it out while the Western nations prepared an impenetrable defense against the victor of such a war. It was highly likely that at the end of such a war, both would be exhausted and unable to do anything.

Instead of following Hoover's wisdom, America went to war and allied with the Soviet Union, a far greater evil with global ambitions. By 1941, the Soviets had murdered approximately 20 million innocent people and had made it clear that they had international aspirations. In contrast, by 1941 the German government had certainly been brutal to many minorities and dissidents, but the really serious atrocities had not yet started. Between the two, the Soviets were a far greater threat to free Western nations. And yet, America and Britain made common cause with the most evil and barbaric nation on the planet, betraying their most dearly held principles. The Soviets were the antithesis of what was good in Western nations. The betrayal of decent Western commitments was complete. Lies, betrayal and

hypocrisy were the order of the day.

Some will insist that Japan and Germany had to be stopped because they were going to take over the world. This claim is utter nonsense. There is no proof for it in any documents. This was just one of the many lies the government told its citizens to get them into the war. There was not one military officer who believed such nonsense. One can read them in their own words. Furthermore, allying with the Soviets enabled communism to flourish, killing and enslaving untold millions in Eastern and Central Europe, China, and North Korea.

As the war in the Pacific and Europe progressed, America and Britain became just as evil as the powers they fought, committing horrific war crimes, specifically the terror bombing which directly, and deliberately murdered approximately 4 million innocent people and destroyed the lives of millions more. So I guess it was a crime for the Germans to kill innocent people at sea level in their concentration camps, but perfectly fine to kill millions of innocents if you dropped bombs on them from 30 thousand feet. On top of all this we employed two demonic atomic weapons to kill several hundred thousand innocents, an act that was completely unnecessary to end the war with Japan.

The aftermath of WWII was equally horrific. The war against Germany continued for another five years after they surrendered. It was the postwar destruction of Germany where as many as 14 million civilians died from forced expulsions from ancestral lands in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Many in Germany died of starvation and disease as the U.S. and Britain refused to let supplies enter war ravaged Germany. On top of this, several million German POW's were murdered by neglect in horrific conditions in Allied prisoner of war camps.

The geopolitical aftermath was even worse. As predicted by many and affirmed by more at war's end, the real winner was the Soviet Union that made enormous territorial gains, in which it enslaved millions. In China, the communists took control as a result of U.S. policies. China would have been better off under the Japanese, as brutal as they were. When the communists were done, about several million people were dead at the hands of the Chinese communists.

What I have said about WWII is certainly controversial, but it is true non-the-less. What American's are told about their wars is what the approved court-historians write, a tale made up of nothing but lies. The truth exists in many books written by highly regarded historians whose books are now essentially ignored by the court-historians who are the gate-keepers of academic historical studies. However, no one can refute the facts. Government documents, and memoirs tell the true story and it reads nothing like the story made for the American masses.

The official story of America's wars, especially WWII, is a central component of what I call "America's salvation story," a story with little to no truth. However, the story is used to deceive many, especially Christians who embrace the violence and power of the state. Such Christians are motivated to embrace neo-Constantinianism, a form of Christendom. In doing so, they betray Jesus and his gospel and give cause for those outside the Body of Christ to

blaspheme the fair name of our Lord and King.

Christendom, or neo-Constantiniansim, must not be built again. Those who name the name of Christ must have nothing to do with that betrayal.