

Preface

Every generation must have those who defend Christianity from attacks from without and within. The attacks come from many directions and attack different aspects of the Christian faith and life. At present there is no aspect of authentic Christianity that is not under attack from multiple directions, and it can be argued that the internal attack is the more dangerous attack.

One could talk about the attack on moral purity, or the pressure to become materialistic, consuming more and more, insisting that we must have the newest smart phone or the latest MP3 player. One could speak at length of the inroads that socialism has made into the church. Perhaps most insidious is the extreme anthropocentrism that infects all the church does; God and Jesus are here to make us feel good, be happy, fulfilled, self-actualized, and to reach our full potential. Just pray the sinner's prayer and all will be fine and Jesus will pour into your lap all the goodies. Repentance, suffering and the necessity of obedience to remain in Christ aren't even whispered. At the root of much of this is postmodernism that sets the individual adrift from any fixed points, making the individual the center of the universe.

All these dimensions of the Christian life that are now under attack are worthy of defense, but I have chosen to defend the Christian principles of nonresistance and nonviolence, both a consequence of God's commands, and His love for His enemies in this age of grace under the New Covenant. Furthermore, nonresistance and love of enemies are not suggestions but commanded, and if we refuse to live by them we are lawless with respect to Jesus' law and will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 7:21-27). How is it that we understand lawlessness with respect to moral purity, adultery, theft, and so on, but not with respect to Jesus' commands to live nonresistantly and love enemies? Those who determine that nonresistance and love of enemies are not necessary choose to disobey some of Jesus' clearest commands. Personally choosing which commandments to keep is the

very definition of heresy. Clearly, a great deal is at stake, namely, God's glory and our eternal destiny.

As I defend nonresistance and separation I will range far and wide theologically, philosophically and historically and show that the church, for three hundred years, uniformly believed that Jesus and the apostles believed and taught them. In other words, I will not introduce anything new or novel. Instead I will reaffirm the ancient Way taught by Jesus, the apostles and the early church. In the defense I will examine the truth that Jesus is King over His people, that He has established His kingdom among them and given them a new law of blessing and freedom that governs a radically new way of life enabled by the Spirit of God. And on this journey we will find that being citizens of another kingdom with a different way of life, we may not participate in the rebellious principalities and powers of this world, principalities and powers among which the state is numbered.

Also moving me to defend these commands of Jesus is that nonresistance and nonviolence are uniquely descriptive of Jesus' life and work, and to deny that Jesus commands that we live by them rips the heart out of Christianity and makes Jesus' life incomprehensible in light of His teachings, and the writings and witness of the apostles and early church. Essentially, it is a denial to love enemies and is thus a denial of Jesus' entire work for Jesus came to love His enemies, to bless them, pray for them and do them the greatest good, that is, to fulfill God's redemptive plan to reconcile man to God and restore obedience.

What Jesus commands us, He Himself practices as He walks the earth and as He goes to the cross. Jesus is the very picture of God's non-coercive and nonviolent ways. Jesus resists not the evil man and He loves His enemies, for Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of God's nature. Commanded by Jesus and at the heart of the Father's and Son's activity, nonresistance and nonviolence, rooted in love of enemies, are the wisdom of God and at the heart of Christianity. Thus, to embrace resistance and violence is to lose the real Christ, deny God Himself and worship an idol.

We who obediently follow these commands of Jesus' live in the *real* world and affirm the new creation He has provided for those who have confessed Him as Lord. We are not fools believing in the neatness of theory while denying the messiness of reality. On the contrary, the fool is the so-called Christian who insists that resistance and violence are perfectly legitimate activities for a follower of Christ.

This first volume¹ of my defense primarily addresses the theologi-

¹If God permits, volumes two and three will address philosophical and historical

cal dimension with some mention of the philosophical and historical considerations. Careful considerations of philosophical and historical dimensions must wait for later volumes.

As I develop my theological defense many will notice a conspicuous absence of Mennonite sources. I have done this intentionally for two reasons. First, I believe that nonresistance and nonviolence and nonparticipation in the principalities and powers is firmly founded on the Scriptures and affirmed by the life of the early church. Making an appeal to Mennonite precursors is unnecessary even if it is helpful. Second, the modern Mennonite church has diverged significantly from its early Anabaptist roots. The divergence has taken two distinct paths which I will call conservative and liberal in the following sense.² The conservative path is characterized by Protestant evangelicalism which ignores nonresistance and nonviolence and embraces state violence. Those on the liberal path generally embrace nonresistance and nonviolence and embrace the socialist state. In doing so they also effectively abandon their commitment to nonviolence, since they rely on the power and violence of the state to implement socialist policies which they believe are Christian. In reality, with regard to nonviolence and participation in the state, little separates the conservative and liberal Mennonites.

I believe the reason that the Mennonites have strayed so far from biblical practice, especially in light of their unshakable commitment to these principles at their inception, is their general disregard for biblical scholarship and hence theology. What many inside and outside the Mennonite tradition fail to understand is orthodoxy is essential for orthopraxy. If we fail to preserve our theological foundations, our understanding of how God commands us to live will also be lost, and then, as night follows day, we will fail to live as God commands. Theology properly understood defines a way of life and determines Christian ethics. Thus, I have first addressed the theological foundations of nonresistance, nonviolence and nonparticipation in the state.

The exposition of the original Christian foundation of nonresistance and separation is the constructive part of this project. However, there also exists a destructive part to this effort. To effectively defend Christian nonresistance, nonviolence and nonparticipation in the state, we must also destroy the state's competing metanarrative that claims that the state saves by its violence and that violence has a redemptive dimension. Unfortunately, the state's metanarrative is massive and multifaceted and told over and over by many institutions, and is heresy

considerations.

²Of course, there remains an authentic Mennonite witness, but I have found it rather muted.

of the highest degree. But question it we must, for the story the state tells of its benevolence, goodness, fairness, and purity of motives is a fairy tale at best and a blasphemous lie at worst.

This metanarrative must be destroyed for it stands in direct opposition to the biblical narrative of God's redemptive plan recounted by the Prophets, Jesus and the Apostles. This destructive task is accomplished with the tools of theology, philosophy and historical analysis.

The tone and style of this volume are mixed. A few parts of this work liberally employ sarcasm and diatribe while most of the rest is more subdued. Other sections read as pastoral pleas for repentance. This mixture of tone and style is deliberate as well as a result of my professional background. I am a scientist by training, receiving my Ph.D. in physics in 1987. However, I have always been intensely interested in theology, philosophy and history. At one time I had declared a classics major and toyed with political science and economics majors. However, being of a very analytical mind I settled on physics. Not surprisingly I am employed as a research scientist. Uncharacteristically, I am also very passionate, especially about my Lord and King, and am given to the use of a sharp tongue from time-to-time. Thus, at times I find dispassionate, scholarly discourse limiting and distasteful. I also believe that the issues involved and the consequences that result from our failure to follow our Lord in obedience are so serious that stronger language is demanded.

In this I find several authoritative examples. The sources include Jesus, Paul, Peter, Jude and some of the early church theologians, especially Tertullian. In no way do I place myself among them, but I don't believe that I need to be an apostle or a great historic defender of the church to use these literary tools. Some, however, will find the tone offensive and probably put the book down. This is unfortunate, but unavoidable because I believe that more violence would be done to the message to use dispassionate language. As Jesus, Paul and others show, some things are important enough to get worked up about. Sometimes, sarcasm and diatribe are the only proper response to error and evil.

However, if my literary style does not offend you rest assured that you will have other opportunities for offense. I believe that neither conservative nor liberal politics comprise Christian politics and I strongly condemn them both. The patriotic Protestant Christian and liberal anti-American Christian are both seriously mistaken. Nor do I believe that socialism, capitalism or any other human economic system accurately reflects Christian economic principles and practice.

All this will become clear should you read this book. Thus, I expect that both ends of the spectrum, religious, economic and political, will find equal opportunity for offense.

The reader will also notice that the views presented here are decidedly premodern. Some argue that we must recast the Christian message into a postmodern form to reach postmodern man. This is nonsense; it is like the arsonist after having set the house on fire ensuring us that he can put the fire out if we give him one more gallon of gas. The answer to our postmodern prison is premodern Christianity.

Most assert that it is impossible to recover a premodern view of the world, especially in light of scientific advancement. I think not. As I pointed out I hold a doctorate in physics and am a practicing research scientist, and believe that without a doubt a premodern view of the world can be and must be maintained by those who follow King Jesus. However, we must be careful how we define premodernism and postmodernism.

Postmodernism, an ever-changing response to the failures of modernism, asserts at least the following. First it affirms that the individual may define himself as he may. The individual is in complete control of who and what he is. No one or thing may define him. Second, it affirms that there are no absolutes, especially no objective truth. Hence there are no real overarching metanarratives, philosophical or theological. There are only stories we tell in order to exercise power over others. It is very much like Nietzsche's will to power. Third, teleology does not exist - there is no ultimate purpose. And fourth, authority is frowned upon and suspect, if not rejected outright. Do you notice that science and technology do not logically entail any of these assertions?

Christianity is incompatible with all of these postmodern assertions. First, God defines man. Man is made in the image of God and He conforms those who confess Jesus as Lord into the image of His Son. We do not define ourselves, God does. Our response to God is obedience to His commands as we labor with the Spirit to conform us to the image of King Jesus.

Second, King Jesus affirms that there are absolutes, namely, His absolutes that mark out a unique way of life, and if we refuse to affirm Him as Lord and live in obedience to His law we will suffer eternally in the lake of fire. As a consequence of the existence of absolute truth there is a true overarching metanarrative that accurately describes man's condition and God's redemptive plan, and it is found in the Scriptures from Genesis to the Revelation of Christ.

Third, teleology does exist, for we have been made for a purpose; we are all here to glorify God as we affirm His sovereignty over us and live in obedience to His commands, doing the good works that He has determined for us. All things were created by Christ and for Christ.

Fourth, the Father has given to Jesus all authority both in heaven and earth. Jesus is a king and the truth is that Christians live in a monarchy. Lockean democratic republics and socialist or communist socioeconomic systems are several forms of government implemented by the rebellious principalities and powers.

The argument employed here to argue that nonresistance, non-violence and nonparticipation in the state are normative Christian behaviors and commanded by our Lord and King is fairly simple, even if it takes many pages to develop.

The argument is developed in this manner: Jesus is a real king of a real kingdom existing now in the world. Its citizens are those who have affirmed Jesus as Lord and live according to His law. King Jesus' law marks out a way of life so radically different from life in all other kingdoms that His citizens cannot participate in any significant way with these other kingdoms. In fact, these other kingdoms are at war with King Jesus and His subjects.

Obviously, Jesus' kingdom is not now in its final glorious form, but it is here and consists of kingdom colonies dispersed all over the earth.

The way of life in this kingdom established by Jesus' law and enabled by the Spirit is the very picture of freedom and blessing. His law is not burdensome. To live in Jesus' kingdom is to live in a world created anew.

God has established a division of labor between His citizens and the citizens of all other kingdoms. To His kingdom citizens Jesus has given the ministry of reconciliation. We are the temple of God and priests of a holy nation, strangers and pilgrims in the midst of a perverse world that lies in the power of the evil One. In this world we will have tribulation, but we fear not for Jesus our king has overcome the world.

To the rebellious kingdoms God has given the sword to protect the innocent and punish evil. It is a concession to evil men who refuse to live under Jesus' rule. Refusing to enter Jesus' kingdom, they are given the means to establish some measure of order. Unfortunately, they who rule over these rebellious kingdoms seldom fulfill this task and instead employ the sword to enrich themselves and oppress others.

My argument follows a plain reading of Scripture, a reading that is in concert with the early church. It is a reading that assumes that Jesus and the apostles meant what they said.

Jesus, our divine Lord and King occupies center stage as He must. Since we must affirm and know Jesus as Lord and King, there should be little difficulty in understanding that He has established a kingdom and rules over His people whose lives are marked by kingdom life. Having our own Sovereign we need no other king, kingdom or law. We live in the kingdoms of this world as foreigners. Our citizenship is in Jesus' kingdom and it is His kingdom we build as we obey His commands and fulfill the ministry of reconciliation.

Necessarily then we do not participate in the kingdoms of this world. We may possess passports and the nations in which we live may consider us citizens, but the truth of the matter is our citizenship in these kingdoms is of the weakest sort. We are citizens by birth, or some other event, but our true citizenship and loyalty lie elsewhere. We pray for these kingdoms and we obey their laws if they do not subvert our King's law, but we do not support or build them for the poison of asps is under their lips, deception and lies are commonplace and coercion, power and violence are their methods. They are swift to shed blood, they do not know the way of peace, self-interest informs all they do and they are all at war with king Jesus. This is how all the kingdoms of this world operate, there are no exceptions. History unequivocally confirms it.

Furthermore, the means and ends of the kingdoms of this world are the very inversion of the means and ends of Jesus' kingdom and the life His citizens live, and they cannot participate in them in any significant way. Yes, they engage in economic activity, they develop genuine friendships with the citizens of these other kingdoms and urge them to leave their kingdom, affirm Jesus as Lord and King and enter God's kingdom, but they do not build these other kingdoms or employ their means or seek their ends.

All these claims imply an extraordinary Christian life, at least that's what many will claim. However, it claims nothing of the sort, for the life described here is a normal Christian life, a life empowered by the Spirit who now dwells in those who affirm Jesus as Lord, living obediently to King Jesus' commands. Kingdom Christians are morally pure, honest, and truthful. They love indiscriminately, forgive all for any offense, sacrificially serve one another, live in mutual submission considering the needs of others more important than their own, do not resist the evil man and love enemies, blessing them, praying for them and doing them good. They walk the path of peace, they do not take

into account a wrong suffered, thus there is not even an occasion for vengeance or violence. It is a glorious life of obedience that restores to humanity a truly human way of life, a way that glorifies God, and permits the creation of communities that prefigure heaven itself. To live as an obedient citizen of Jesus' kingdom is to live a true human life.

Sadly, today's Christianity bears little resemblance to authentic Christianity having become an anthropocentric hodgepodge of post-modernism, modernism, self-help psychology, new-age nonsense, modern marketing and management methods with a fair bit of state-worship hung over from the age of Christendom. Salvation comes cheap; all it takes is the sinner's prayer. "Don't get too worked up about that purity stuff or loving enemies, we're just saved sinners and we can't expect too much. Anyway Jesus just loves us where we are so don't worry."

Repentance and the necessity of an obedient life that affirms a confession of Jesus as Lord are seldom, if ever, mentioned. That we are saints whose lives must be blameless and above reproach is considered silly. Jesus is not the king who commands obedience. No, Jesus is our coach, our trainer, our lover, our therapist, our Daddy, our candy man. Nor do we take seriously the many warnings that persistent disobedience leads to eternal death no matter what we have affirmed or prayed. Working out our salvation in fear and trembling is foreign to us. We actually believe that a person whose life is not characterized by obedience can be part of the Body of Christ. Fornication, adultery, homosexuality, resistance and violence in the name of the state are all acceptable. The liberal so-called Christian embraces the first three and frequently rejects that last two. The conservative so-called Christian frequently rejects only homosexuality and fornication. Both, however, are lawless, unwilling to follow all Jesus' commands. Did not Jesus say at the end of the Sermon, "Why do you call me Lord and do not do what I say? . . . Only those who do the will of My Father will enter the kingdom of God. . . . Depart from me you who practice lawlessness.?"

In light of this breakdown in what passes as Christianity, we must ask where are the men and women who will march to the gates of Hell at their King's command? Where are the men and women who upon counting the cost to follow King Jesus then consider what is lost rubbish? Where are the men and women who will repudiate the world's wisdom and suffer its hatred and instead love and forgive even enemies and refuse the ways of resistance and violence?

There are few men and women like that. Instead most so-called Christians sit in their pews on Sunday morning and Wednesday night

and listen to sermons and seminars that tell them all about how much Jesus loves them and has all these wonderful things He wants to give them, and how He is going to pull them through in the tough times and that if they have prayed the sinner's prayer their salvation is secure no matter what. Few speak for God teaching the way of nonresistance and nonviolence, that obedience necessarily follows a true confession and that we must embrace suffering and persecution for all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Christianity today is narcissism writ large. And yet no one even flinches at this obscene, repulsive and shameful spectacle calling it the wisdom of God. Would to God He would come and put fear into our hearts and cause us to repent, for we are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked and if He has not yet already done so, King Jesus is ready to remove our lampstand from before the throne of God.³ But if Jesus would come as He came the first time as the Lamb of God, the king who came to serve and die, today's Christians would not suffer Him long and crucify Him in their own postmodern way. No, they would not be so bold as to hang Him on a cross, that's too messy and what He is talking about isn't important enough to kill for. Instead they would mock Him, show Him the door, wondering who is this fool and buffoon who presumes to tell them they must live in obedience to His commands if they are to follow Him. They would wonder at this fellow who commanded moral purity, nonresistance, nonviolence and love of enemies. In stunned disbelief they would ask if He is really so ignorant that He doesn't know how the real world operates; everyone knows that nonresistance and nonviolence are the height of foolishness, fit only for minds that are either simple or stuck in the clouds. Comforting themselves, they would tell each other that this man was simply a fool who actually believed in the neatness of His theory denying the messiness of reality.

I know that many will find my words offensive, but brothers and sisters, God's glory is at stake along with your eternal destiny. Obedience is not a suggestion; kings don't make suggestions, especially the divine Sovereign who sits on the throne of David and whose kingdom has no end, and by whom and for whom all things have been created. Faithfully keeping His commands is not measured like a football playoff where the team with the most wins out of seven receives the trophy. If you reject any of His commands Jesus numbers you among the lawless and you will not enter His kingdom, and worse than that you rob God of His glory.

In closing, I do not speak from theoretical knowledge only for I have deliberately chosen to follow my Lord and King refusing the way

³Rev 1:9–20; 3:17

of resistance and violence, swearing fealty to King Jesus alone. At the age of fifty one, while working in the defense industry, my Lord and King confronted me with the truth that He commands those who follow Him to walk the path of peace as He Himself walked, separating from the lawless principalities and powers.

The decision before me was stark and very likely extremely costly and eternity hung in the balance. I had lost everything once before eleven years earlier due to health problems and did not relish the thought of doing it again, and I was afraid that after making a commitment to follow the path of peace I could not follow through.

By God's grace I was able to leave the defense industry, and by God's mercy I did not lose everything. However, God let it run down to the wire before providing another job.

The cost of following my King in the way of peace continues to escalate. I thank God that my wife and children have followed me in obedience to Jesus' commands. Unfortunately, relationships with others, some very close and dear, have been strained to the breaking point. But did not Jesus say that He would bring conflict into our very homes? And did He not say that he who loves mother or father, wife or husband or children more than Him is not worthy of Him? He who would refuse to obey Jesus to keep peace in the home denies Jesus and will in turn be denied by Jesus.

However, the cost to me to obey my Lord is irrelevant, for I name the name of Christ, call Him my Lord and King, and I must obey Him or deny Him. Denial is not an option for in Jesus alone do I find my identity. To leave Him would be a living death followed by eternal death. And so, if I lost all what does it matter, for I gain Christ. He who will lose his life for Christ's sake will find it, and he is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.⁴ And did not Paul say:

But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings,

⁴From Jim Elliot, *In the Shadow of the Almighty*, Elizabeth Elliot, Harper and Row 1958

being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Phil 3:7–14

As Jesus taught His followers I too affirm: “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”⁵

Will you follow me and the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us? Will you finally truly confess Jesus as Lord, enter His kingdom, abandoning the kingdoms of this world and walk in peace, refusing the way of resistance and violence and thus glorify your Sovereign? I pray that you will.

⁵Lk 17:10

Acknowledgments

For their support and help I gratefully acknowledge my wife Bethany, and son Todd.

Bethany has been a wonderful editor as well as a great encouragement. She has stood by me even as I made the hard choices our commitment to Christian nonresistance demanded.

My son Todd, is in part responsible for this work and has improved it significantly as a result of our daily informal discussions. Todd's most important contribution came during his homeschooling. Todd was a historical prodigy, reading voraciously, and questioning everything. With youthful honesty and an incredibly sharp mind he saw the inconsistencies between biblical Christian belief and the actions of supposedly Christian states and he began to tear down the state's metanarrative that stood in our way.

I remember all the times I left for work with Todd following me to the car arguing that the state really had done evil things and that I was wrong to not take them seriously and abandon its mythical metanarrative.

Todd's persistence, unrelenting logic, accurate historical analysis and rock solid historical facts finally won the day and he and I came to realize that the state's metanarrative was only a paper facade. One tug and it all came down.

Without that essential bit of deconstruction I am certain that I could not have made the commitment to Christian nonresistance.

Todd's other contribution has been helping me to really understand the history I employ in this book. Without Him I would have gotten many things wrong.

I thank God for both Bethany and Todd.

Michael E. Lewis

Hartville, Ohio May 23, 2012