2

Early Christianity and War

Paul Middleton

From Marcion (c. 110–160 CE) onwards, many Christians have perceived a marked difference in the level of violence in the New Testament compared to the Hebrew Bible. While Biblical Israel engaged in holy warfare to claim, maintain, and regain the Promised Land, Christians were committed to an eschatological rather than temporal kingdom. As nascent Christianity was developing, other Jews understood the Roman occupation of the Promised Land as an indignity that could only be solved by war. Indeed, in addition to the Yahweh Wars of the Hebrew Bible, first-century Jews could look to the recent example of the successful Maccabean wars of independence as both reinforcement of Holy War theology and inspiration for the war against the Romans. While early successes raised hopes that God would bring them victory, Jewish holy war ideology was dealt severe blows by the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE and the unsuccessful Bar Kochba uprising (132–135 CE).

Therefore, it is said, while early Christianity was indebted to Second Temple Judaism for much of its theology and practice, a lack of commitment to land, and following a crucified Messiah, 'whose kingdom is not of this world', there was a radical break in understanding what it meant to be the people of God. Such accounts of early Christianity see discipleship exemplified in following Jesus' model of non-violent suffering, even if it leads to martyrdom. Martyrdom is interpreted as the ultimate

expression of non-violent resistance against the violence of imperial or national ideology and practice.

Of course, even those who believe there is a contrast between the violence of the Hebrew Bible and something akin to pacifism in the New Testament acknowledge that this non-violent ideal did not survive the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. After Constantine's conversion, Christians embraced the apparatus of the State, eventually engaging in violent repression of Jews, pagans, and heretics. Augustine's refinement of the just war tradition did not exclude correctional violence and would prepare the way for centuries of Christian empires engaging in Holy Wars, such as the mediaeval Crusades. For some readers of early Christianity, the paradigm shift between pre- and post-Constantine Christianity marks a no less significant shift in attitudes to violence and war as from the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament. So a particular account of Christian history (found with greater or lesser sophistication) runs that the violence of the Hebrew Bible is replaced by a non-violent New Testament, which informs the early Christianity, until that 'Old Testament' violence is adopted once again with Constantinian Christianity. That is to say, there is a 'pure' non-violent form of Christianity that existed for a few centuries before Christians fell victim to the temptation to wield the power of the State (e.g. Howard-Brook 2016).

However, this idealist position is undermined by several factors. Firstly, violence is far from absent in the New Testament, especially the Book of Revelation. Secondly, it is far from clear that early Christians did adhere to pacifism. Different attitudes to service in the Roman army are found among Church Fathers. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, the language of warfare was deeply embedded in the Christian psyche. Early Christians saw themselves as engaged in cosmic warfare in which they were

active combatants in God's Holy War against evil. Martyr literature in particular embraces agnostic metaphors, such that the language attributed to what could otherwise be interpreted as an act of supreme non-violent resistance engages in apocalyptic fantasy violence (Frilingos 2004; Frankfurter 2009). In these 'spiritual' battles, Christians were not simply victors; they imagined their defeated persecutors to be subjected to violent torture, not all of it post-mortem. Therefore, this chapter will argue that early Christians did not eschew the violence of the Hebrew Bible Yahweh War; rather, it was eschatologically transferred. Christian language of warfare fuelled negative attitudes to outsiders that justified violence when it could be actualised in changed circumstances. In short, in the first three centuries of the Church, Christian violence was only temporally and temporarily displaced.

Violence and Warfare in the New Testament

In recent years, there has been growing scholarly concern over dealing with the 'problem' of violence in the Bible (e.g. de Villiers and van Henten 2012; Zehnder and Hagelia 2013). Most studies that deal with the Christian canon in its entirety usually consciously or unconsciously work harder with the Hebrew Bible than the New Testament. Hays suggests that 'the greatest intra-canonical challenge to the witness of the Sermon on the Mount concerning nonviolence and love of enemies comes not from any New Testament text but from the Old Testament, particularly the holy war texts' (Hays 1997: 336). Ultimately, Hays concedes that 'the Old Testament obviously validates the legitimacy of armed violence by the people of God under some circumstances', but for Christians, 'the New Testament's witness is finally normative …

The New Testament vision trumps the Old Testament' (Hays 1997: 337; see also Yoder 1972; Wink 1984, 1986, 1992, 2003).

However, Desjardins, in her important study on New Testament violence, is more balanced: 'I am unable to reduce the evidence either to one option, "the New Testament is fundamentally peace-promoting" or to the other, "the New Testament encourages people to be violent." The strong presence of both is striking and intriguing' (Desjardins 1997: 11). In the last few decades, many volumes have appeared on violence in the Bible from both apologetic (e.g. Creach 2013; Zehnder and Hagelia 2013; Paynter and Spalione 2020; Nickel 2021) and more equivocal perspectives (e.g. Matthews and Gibson 2005; Boustan et al. 2010; de Villiers and van Henten 2012).

Jesus and the Gospels

Jesus is generally held up as a model of pacifism and non-violent resistance, in both word – especially the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5–7) – and deed, exemplified by his acceptance, even embrace, of suffering and death. Of course, recovering the historical figure of Jesus from the gospel tradition is notoriously difficult. Alongside synoptic teaching on the blessedness of the peacemakers (Mt 5.9), non-retaliation (Mt 5.38–39a), and love of enemies (Mt 5.43–45//Lk 6.27–29) are threats of eschatological judgement against those who reject Jesus (Lk 10.13–16) and vengeance upon his 'evil generation' (Lk 11.49–52), not to mention graphic depictions of eternal torment (e.g. Mk 9.48; Lk 19.23–28; Mt 25.41). Moreover, the Jesus of the gospels imagines himself as the eschatological Son of Man who will come from heaven with an army of angels to unleash apocalyptic judgement and separate the elect for salvation from those destined for destruction (Mk 13.24–27//Mt 24.29–31; cf. Lk 21.25–28). Some scholars see an

intolerable and irreconcilable tension between Jesus' call to love one's enemies while at the same time appearing to wish violent eschatological destruction upon them, and so they dismiss the apocalyptic material as a later, non-authentic tradition – a move associated particularly with the Jesus Seminar (Funk and Hoover 1993; see also Joseph 2014: 71–89). They promote a sapiential non-apocalyptic Jesus who eschewed the violence of his day, whether Roman imperial violence or Jewish Davidic militaristic messianism (e.g. Crossan 2009).

While the non-violent figure that emerges is attractive, such accounts are not unproblematic. They fall victim to a theological tendency towards making Jesus an exceptional figure in 1st-century Judaism. Josephs goes so far as to suggest Jesus' non-violence 'scandalized his contemporaries' who were still committed to Davidic revolt against the Romans (Josephs 2014: 229–230; Wright 1996: 446–450). However, the consensus, such as it is in Historical Jesus studies, is that he was indeed an apocalyptic teacher (Allison 1998; Ehrman 1999), and any tension with the non-violent teaching of the Sermon on the Mount remains (cf. Nickel 2021).

However, at the other end of the spectrum, some reconstructions of the historical figure of Jesus have placed him in the tradition of the zealots in seeking to overthrow the Romans (Brandon 1967; Maccoby 1973; Bammell 1984; Ellens 2004; cf. Nickel 2021). In support of a more apocalyptic version of this thesis, Martin (2014) notes the fact that the assault by one of Jesus' followers on the arresting party in Gethsemane clearly demonstrates at least some of Jesus' followers were armed, an incident the early Church is unlikely to have created. Martin argues that this combined with the anti-Temple gospel tradition suggest that Jesus expected his followers to participate in a revolt against the Romans and Temple authorities, accompanied by a heavenly army.

However, if this were the case, it is not clear why there were not more arrests. In any case, it is not impossible to explain why the incident could have been created; it demonstrated that the Jesus movement was not a threat to Roman peace and security. Furthermore, this theory leads to the opposite problem from pacifist readers: how to account for the strong non-retaliation tradition.

If some modern commentators have difficulty reconciling the non-violent and apocalyptic traditions, this is not a problem shared by the evangelists. Furthermore, the reason given for not resisting evil-doers reflects the fact that God currently sends blessing on good and bad alike (Mt 5.45//Lk 6.35). Nonetheless, the ultimate fate of evil-doers is judgement. In the parable of the wheat and the tares (Mt 13.24–30), both are permitted to grow together until the eventual destruction of the latter. Indeed, in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Mt 25.31–36), the failure to act ethically results in violent eternal punishment. The earliest Christian writers clearly had no issue maintaining an ethic of non-retaliation in the present with violent retribution in the future.

While Marshall (1985: 115) is surely correct to note that the New Testament does not directly address the issue of war, the appropriation of the Jewish revolt within the gospels' eschatological scheme is not unlike the conviction found in the Hebrew Bible that God directs human wars, even when his people are on the losing side. The Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem appear in the apocalyptic discourse (Mk 13.2, 14//Mt 24.2, 15), explicitly so in Luke (21.5, 20). The gospels also demonstrate that Roman military action against the Temple is God's judgement on the people through juxtaposing the cursing of the fig tree with Jesus' Temple action (Mk 11.11–25//Mt 21.12–21). In the parables, the link is even clearer. In the parable of the wicked tenants

(Mk 12.1–12//Mt 21.33–46//Lk 20.9–19), the people are destroyed (Mk 12.9//Mt 21.41//Lk 20.6), with Matthew adding that the vineyard, which he interprets as the Kingdom of God, will be given to another people (Mt 21.41, 43). Matthew is even more explicit in his version of the parable of the wedding banquet (Mt 22.1–14; cf. Lk 14.15–24). After his invitations are refused and his servants abused, the enraged king 'sent his troops … and burned their city' (Mt 22.7). The clear implication of Matthew's redactional activity is his belief that God used the Roman military in order to bring judgement on the people of Israel for rejecting Jesus. While it has had a catastrophic history of interpretation, the destruction of the Temple is also probably in view in the Jewish people's curse that Jesus' blood be on them and their children (Mt 27.25). For the evangelists, then, the Roman military machine was the agent through which God executed temporal judgement. Therefore, even if it had been practical, Jesus' followers had no need to live and die by the sword (Mt 26.52), for they believed God would ultimately deal with their enemies.

In John's gospel, Jesus tells Pilate that his kingdom is not from the world, adding 'if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews' (Jn 18.36). Moreover, despite the apparent lack of resistance from Jesus, John's insists Pilate's power is limited to that which has been given to him (Jn 19.11), a point made clear when Jesus can only be arrested in the garden after he consents (Jn 18.4–9). It is the necessity of his arrest that appears to be the primary motivation for Jesus instructing Peter to put away the sword (Jn 18.11). Even in Matthew, Jesus does not require to be defended by the unknown disciple, as he could command a legion of angels to protect him (Mt 26.53). In each of the gospels, the

primary motivation for non-resistance at Jesus' arrest is the prophetic necessity of the cross (e.g. Mt 26.54), rather than any clear prescriptive objection to violence.

Paul

Paul does not address war directly. He does, however, have a version of the non-retaliation maxim: '[s]ee that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all' (1 Thess 5.15). An expanded version is found in Romans, where in addition to noting repaying evil for evil (Rom 12.17), he urges his readers to 'bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them' (Rom 12.14). Nonetheless, the general injunction to 'live peaceably with all' (Rom 12.18) is found alongside the expectation of eschatological judgement: 'never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written "Vengeance is mind, I will repay, says the Lord"' (Rom 12.19). Clearly the implication is that Paul's readers can 'overcome evil with good' (Rom 12.21), not only by shaming their assailants (Rom 12.20), but sure in the knowledge that God will take vengeance on them.

Paul, also in common with the gospels, has no difficulty with combining a non-retaliatory ethic with a belief in violent eschatological judgement. As well as there being little alternative for the early Jesus movement living in the midst of sometimes-hostile neighbours (Hurtado 1999; Middleton 2020), Paul sees the example that his will readers set as being important for spreading the gospel. However, while peace is a common Pauline concept (Swartley 1996: 2434–2435), often attributed to God (e.g. Rom 15.22; 1 Cor 14.33; 2 Cor 13.11; Phil 4.9; 1 Thess 5.23), it is this God of peace who will ultimately crush Satan underfoot (Rom 16.20). While Paul advocated peace between believers and, at least in the present, with those outside the churches, he

conceived of the Christian battling against cosmic forces in a war against spiritual forces and even death itself (e.g. Rom 8.37–39; 1 Cor 15.24–28, 24–57). For this struggle, Paul liberally deploys military metaphors; Christians are soldiers (1 Cor 9.7; Phil 2.25; Phlm 23; cf. 1 Tim 1.18; 2 Tim 2.3–4), dressed in the armour of light (Rom 13.12; 1 Thess 5.8), with the metaphor developed most fully in the post-Pauline letter to the Ephesians (6.10–18).

While Paul imagines himself and his churches to be fellow soldiers in war against cosmic forces, he is also capable of turning this war language on his own readers, as he does in his correspondence with the Corinthians (2 Cor 10.1–6; see Roeztel 2010). In defending his apostolicity against challenge, he deploys ferocious bellicose language, warning his readers that although he is human

> [w]e do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God. (2 Cor 10.3–5)

Paul ends with the threat that these weapons of war will be turned on his readers unless they accept his authority: '[w]e are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete' (2 Cor 10.6). Having launched his assault, Paul, perhaps unconvincingly, reassures his readers that he is not trying to frighten them (2 Cor 10.9)! To be sure, this, and indeed all of Paul's military language, is metaphorical. Nonetheless, given that Paul and his readers would no doubt have believed in God's coming eschatological judgement, this threatening militaristic language would have had real effects.

Revelation (The Apocalypse of John)

Even if one accepts the claim – metaphorical warfare notwithstanding – that the New Testament is generally non-violent and does not imagine war as a legitimate option for Christian communities, the Book of Revelation presents a particular challenge. While more non-violent readings have been advanced (Blount 2005, 2009; Johns 2003, 2005), in the Apocalypse, God's people are depicted as engaging in the end-time war as part of the armies of heaven (Rev 7.1–8, 14.1–5, 19.11–14), to the extent that the book has been dubbed a 'Christian war scroll' (Bauckham 1998). The verb 'to make war' (*polemeō*) and the noun 'war' (*polemos*) occur fifteen times in the Apocalypse, compared with eight in the rest of the New Testament: 'wars and rumours of war' in the synoptic Apocalypse (Mt 24.6//Mk 13.7//Lk 21.31); a parable about preparedness in Luke (14.31); Paul's metaphor of the necessity of a clear bugle sound to call armies to war (1 Cor. 14.8); the roll call of war heroes in the heavenly witnesses in Hebrews (11.34); and finally representing internal strife in the community and body in James 4.1–2, the only other occurrence of the verb outside Revelation.

In Revelation, there are various actors involved in war. First, the forces of evil, led by the Beast, make war on the saints (11.7, 12.17, 13.7; cf. 13.4), and although he is successful in killing them (11.7, 13.7), it is only because he is permitted to do so, but in any case, through death, the saints conquer him (12.11, 15.2). Second, there is the war in heaven between Michael and the Dragon with their respective angelic armies resulting in the expulsion of Satan from heaven (12.7–9). This is the backstory to the current conflict between the forces of evil and John's readers (12.13–17). Third, there are wars between Jesus and various cosmic and human forces (16.14, 17.14), culminating in the great battle in which Christ appears as a rider on a white horse:

> Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. (Rev 19.11–15)

As in much early Christian tradition, Christ takes over the role of judge from God, and there are clear parallels here with the warrior God who judges righteously (e.g. Isa 63.1–6; Pss 75.2, 96.13, 98.9). Judgement in this scene is portrayed as the final battle that has been anticipated throughout Revelation (16.12–16, 17.12–14), and Jesus lines up with the heavenly army, including the white-robed martyrs (cf. Rev 6.9–11), against the Beast, the kings of the Earth, and their armies (Rev 19.19). As John has already intimated that Christ has conquered them (Rev 17.14), the war itself is not described in any detail, and is an anti-climactic rout. The Beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 19.20), and 'the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh' (Rev 19.21). While some commentators take the lack of description of the final battle to mean one did not actually take place (Neville 2011: 76–77) or argue that the fact that the sword comes from the rider's mouth means that he was victorious through a 'war of words' rather than violence (e.g. Blount 2009: 354),

the macabre description of birds gorging on the slain on the battlefield (Rev 19.21; cf. Ezek 39.17–20) renders these efforts unpersuasive. God wields the sword of judgement throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Deut 32.1; 1 Chr 21.12; Ps 17.13; Isa 27.1, 66.1; Jer 9.16, 47.6; Ezek 29.8–9, 30.24; Zech 13.7), and elsewhere in the New Testament, Christ slays the lawless one by the breath of his mouth (2 Thess 2.8). There is one further reprise of the final battle when Satan is loosed after his 1,000-year imprisonment, which is narrated equally briefly (Rev 20.7–10). The armies that surround the holy city are destroyed by fire from heaven (Rev 20.9).

One further instance of warring is noteworthy. In a clear threat to insiders, John warns his churches that Jesus will come and war against deviant belief and action among the churches to which he writes (2.16). While the Apocalypse may be read principally as less-than-gentle encouragement to John's readers to remain faithful, in general Christians are issued with a call to conquer (2.7, 11, 17; 3.5, 12, 21) in the same way as Christ has conquered (3.21). Like the language of warfare, the concept of conquering is also concentrated in the Apocalypse, and it is explicitly linked to martyrdom in Revelation (12.11, 15.2), just as Christ's conquering is also strongly linked to his death through the image of the slaughtered lamb (5.5–6). While some commentators see this act of conquering as non-violent passive resistance (Hays 1997: 332), the death of the martyrs is not the end of the story. Martyrs are enlisted in the army of the Lamb and are raised in order to reign with Christ, and, significantly, they are given authority to participate in divine judgement (20.4–6). Whether the literary world of the Apocalypse imagines all of the faithful will be martyred (Middleton 2018) or merely prepared to undergo martyrdom (van Henten 2012), it is clear that, following death, conquering martyrs are vindicated and exalted.

Finally, the central image of the slaughtered lamb as the ultimate symbol of conquering in Revelation has often functioned as an exegetical antidote to what is perceived as the problematic violence of the Apocalypse. John is told 'the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David has conquered' (Rev 5.5), and he then sees 'a lamb standing, as though it had been slain' (Rev 5.6). There is voluminous literature on the apparent incongruently of the juxtaposition of the militaristic lion and sacrificed lamb (see Middleton 2018: 65–96), with many commentators arguing that the image of suffering weakness of the lamb overcomes the militaristic overtones of the Lion of Judah (e.g. Bauckham 1993: 74; Barr 2003; Johns 2003; Koester 2014: 388–389). However, the lamb is the dominant symbol for Christ in the Apocalypse, and he undertakes activities that are entirely consistent with the conquering Judaic lion imagery: the peoples of the Earth plead to be spared from the day of wrath of the lamb (6.12–17), the wicked are tormented in his presence (14.10), and he conquers an army in war (14.10). While non-violent interpreters focus on the lamb's death, it should be noted that the lamb is 'standing'; the image presupposes the resurrection and exaltation (Hurtado 1985: 117). In the Apocalypse, Christ is *already* the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the Earth (Rev 1.5); like the martyrs, his death was not the end of the story, but the means through which he attained glory and power (Rev 5.10–11) and the authority to stand as the eschatological judge, who will destroy his enemies with his faithful armies.

Therefore, although the New Testament does not deal with war directly, we find metaphors of war and conflict used to interpret the Christian struggle against evil or sin. There are also violent images of eschatological judgement alongside ethical injunctions to non-violence or non-retaliation. The Jewish revolt is reflected in the text and is

positively interpreted as God's judgement in line with Hebrew Bible ideology. In the Book of Revelation, these images of war and judgement are particularly concentrated and expanded, but martyrdom is the means by which Christians conquer the forces of evil. To be sure, the Apocalypse is non-violent in the sense that it does not instruct Christians to take up arms in what would be a futile battle with the Romans, but it did encourage its readers to see themselves as participating in an eschatological holy war in which they would end up as agents of divine judgement. Moreover, John depicts those outside his believing communities as mere objects of and legitimate targets of divine wrath. In this respect, the Apocalypse is not alone in the New Testament. These twin themes of 'othering' opponents and participation in holy war, especially through martyrdom, would develop in Christian thought over the forthcoming centuries.

Martyrdom and Holy War

Themes of persecution and martyrdom were important for Christian self-understanding in the first three centuries CE, as the Church represented itself as a 'suffering body', following the pattern set by Jesus through his passion and death (Perkins 1995). While there is now general agreement that anti-Christian persecution was far less extensive and systematic than was once thought (Moss 2013), there were sufficient pockets of local hostility for Christians to interpret their experiences as imperial persecution (Middleton 2021).

Pacifist interpretations of early Christianity often point to the phenomenon of martyrdom as the ultimate act of non-violent resistance, with Crossan dubbing it 'the final act of ethical eschatology' (2009: 289). Other writers have similarly enlisted early

Christian martyrs to the history of civil obedience (e.g. Fergusson 1993). However, Crossan recognises that even martyrdom, if it is overly desired,

> colludes with the violence it opposes. Such collusion may entail minimally, desiring or provoking martyrdom (but every martyr needs a murderer). It may entail, maximally, the hunger-striker or the suicide attacker. Such collusive actions are not eschatologically ethical. (2009: 285)

Other writers are similarly sensitive to any comparison between the passive acceptance of the early Christian martyr and violent acts associated with, for example, some contemporary Islamic manifestations of martyrdom, in which the martyr seeks their own death through suicide attack (e.g. Wicker 2006). However, there are many examples of early Christians actively seeking out martyrdom, who 'participate in the violence provided by the Roman Empire' (Koscheski 2011: 105) – the so-called voluntary martyrs. While a generation of scholars simply dismissed these martyrs as heretical or abnormal, more recent studies have demonstrated that enthusiasm for martyrdom, 'volunteerism', and sometimes even suicides are found and recognised as martyrdom in the early church (de Ste. Croix 1963; Middleton 2006; Moss 2012).

While it is the case that the early Christians never took up arms against Rome, to insist that this lack of physical retaliation is evidence of pacifism is to set the bar very low. Not only was there the example of the consequences of the disastrous Jewish revolt, early Christians did not have the hardware to launch any kind of military action against Rome, such as an army with which to attack or a homeland to defend, so while they inherited an apocalyptic war tradition of Second Temple Judaism, early Christians spiritualised the tradition in their martyrologies and shifted the conflict to the cosmic

realm (Middleton 2006: 133; Koshecki 2012). The confrontation with earthly magistrates was reconceived as a cosmic conflict in which they were God's soldiers against their Roman enemy. In the fulcrum of this battle, the devil sought to sway the Christian from their martyr's confession and thus save their life (cf. Mk 8.34–38). Therefore, in order to win on the battlefield, martyrs had to hold fast to their confession – 'I am a Christian' – and win the war through their own death. As Tertullian wrote:

> Serving as a soldier under this oath, I am challenged by the enemy. If I surrender to them, I am as they are. In maintaining this oath, I fight furiously in battle, am wounded, hewn in pieces, slain. Who wished this fatal issue to his soldier, but he who sealed him by such an oath. (Scorp. 4.5)

Parallels between the oaths of the martyr and the gladiator (*sacramentum gladiorum*) have been noted (e.g. Barton 1994: 56), as Christians liberally deployed agonistic language from the arena for their struggle, especially as the games became an important setting for many Christian martyr stories. Tertullian merged the images of gladiator and soldier in much of his reflection on martyrdom; the Holy Spirit used the prison as both soldiers' barracks and training ground (*Ad Mart.* 3) for the 'most accomplished gladiators' (*Ad Mart.* 1) awaiting trial. Similarly, he claims that the Christian desires to suffer in the same way a soldier longs for war, and conquers through dying (*Apol.* 50).

This image of the potential martyr participating in battle as a soldier is found throughout the early Fathers and martyrologies (Hartog 2020: 110–111). Origen opens his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* by interpreting the Christian facing persecution in militaristic terms. His aim in writing is to 'animate the soldiers of Christ' (Pref. 1), who constitute 'an army established in the heavenly camp' (Pref. 2). He warns that the devil

wages a war against the Christians, seeking to 'find Christ's soldier unprepared' and defeat him, but those who continue to confess Christ will never be conquered (Pref. 2; also 5.36, 5.44). Cyprian also calls Christians 'soldiers of Christ' (e.g. *Ep*. 8, 10, 15, 24), who are trained on the battlefield (*Ep*. 50, 55, 80), and he contends that the Devil similarly trains his army in opposition to the Christians (*Ep.* 10). The same idea is also reflected in the Christian martyr acts, such as the *Martyrs of Lyons*, in which the Devil is said to 'train and prepare his minions against God's servants' (1.5; also 1.16, 23, 25, 27, 35; cf. e.g. *Mart. Polycarp* 3.1, 17.1; *Mart. Carpus* 17; *Mart. Justin* rec. C 1.1). In the *Passion of Perpetua*, the eponymous heroine realises that although she is condemned to die *ad bestias*, 'it was not with the wild animals that I would fight but with the Devil, but I knew I would win the victory' (10.14). The moment of death is the decisive victory, as Tertullian remarked: '[t]he Christian is snatched by faith from the jaws of the devil, but by martyrdom he fells to the ground the enemy of his salvation' (*Scorp.* 6).

As martyrdom is often interpreted as a notable example of non-violent resistance, the violence inherent in the act is almost always interpreted as going in one direction: the persecutor on the persecuted. However, we have noted that in many early Christian texts martyrdom is interpreted as an act of cosmic combat, in which members of the early Church (at least so far as the martyr accounts are concerned) embraced or even in some cases sought it out. Martyrdom was conceived in pugilistic terms, with the martyrs conquering not only their human but their cosmic opponents. But there is also another locus of violent activity found in accounts of martyrdom and persecution: eschatological violence upon the persecutors.

Often, the persecutors' actions against the Church and their fates are inextricably linked, so Polycarp compares the short time that his burning will take with the eternal

fire being prepared for those who condemn him (*Mart. Polycarp* 11.2). In the *Passion of Perpetua*, the martyr Saturnus tells the gathered crowd to look carefully at their faces, so they will recognise them on the day of judgement (17). Sometimes, the anticipation of the violent judgement that will await the wicked is barely tempered. Tertullian argued that Christians should not attend the Roman games on the grounds that their dedication to the gods made them idolatrous (*On the Games* 4–6), but also that the violent blood sport could have a negative effect on the soul of the Christian (*On the Games* 14–16). However, he is far less squeamish imagining the fate of non-Christians when they face their own time in the arena come the Day of Judgement:

> But what a spectacle is that fast-approaching advent of our Lord … Yes, and there are other sights: that last day of judgment, with its everlasting issues; … when the world … shall be consumed in one great flame! How vast a spectacle then bursts upon the eye! What there excites my admiration? what my derision? Which sight gives me joy? which rouses me to exultation? – as I see so many illustrious monarchs, whose reception into the heavens was publicly announced, groaning now in the lowest darkness with great Jove himself, and those, too, who bore witness of their exultation; governors of provinces, too, who persecuted the Christian name, in fires more fierce than those with which in the days of their pride they raged against the followers of Christ. (On the Games 30)

Tertullian effectively turns the tables on the Christians' tormentors. He imagines that it will be the persecutors and the crowds who urged them on who will now be in the arena as the army of Christians sit watching the bloodthirsty spectacle of judgement. They will revel in the sight of kings groaning in despair, and their persecutors getting a

taste of their own medicine in even fiercer fires will provoke joy and exultation. Martyrdom not only wins salvation for the Christian – it effectively damns the persecutor.

The most graphic account of this type of retribution is Lactantius' *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, in which God does not wait until the eschaton to judge the tormentors of the Church. Lactantius runs through the persecuting emperors and argues that their deaths were a result of divine punishment. After describing the fates of selected emperors from Nero to Valerian (2–5), he wonders how after numerous examples of divine retribution falling on the persecuting emperors anyone would move against God's people. This is a prelude to a lengthy consideration of the Great Persecution, in which the description of both tortures of the Christians and the deaths of the emperors is particularly graphic, notably that of Galerius (33). Therefore, in the minds of the Christians, the Holy War brought salvation for the martyrs and defeated their cosmic enemies. However, persecuting the Church also had consequences for the persecutors. Frend was right that martyrdom was not only a means of victory – it was 'in itself an act of vengeance' (1965: 38).

So far, we have considered the metaphorical use of war rhetoric in early Christianity. In at least some strands of early Christianity, the rhetoric of martyrdom was played out in a cosmic war with violent pugilistic metaphors deployed not only to frame the victory of martyrdom, but also to imagine the ultimate defeat of Christians' persecutors. Therefore, 'although the early Christians did not resist persecution with physical violence, violence was very much on their minds' (Shafer 2004: 215). We now turn to ways in which that rhetoric of eschatological violence and holy war could be actualised, first through considering Christian involvement in the army and then the

beginnings of Christendom when Constantine made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire.

Christians and the Roman Army

As we have noted, much scholarly discussion around Christianity and violence or the Church and warfare tends to be refracted through more modern theological and ethical concerns. Helgeland, in his extensive study on Christians in the army, suggests that this 'interference' (in both pacifist and non-pacifist directions) stems from the impulse to take 'the thoughts and conduct of Christians in the first three centuries as normative for the contemporary church' (1979: 732–733; see also Charles 2010: 22). However, even if this prescriptive claim for the early Church was uncontentious, as we will see, as important as the Fathers have become for modern ethical reflection on peace and war, Christian involvement in the Roman army does not appear to have been a major issue for the early Church. We know for sure that there were Christians serving in the army, not least because there are a number of Christian soldiers who became martyrs.

As Christianity began to spread rapidly across the Roman Empire, Christians were found in nearly every aspect of the Empire's life. Inevitably, this included the army. Many early Christian thinkers simply take this for granted. Clement of Alexandria advises sailors to look to the heavenly pilot, while soldiers should 'listen to the Commander who orders what is right' (*Protrepticus* 100; cf. *Paed* 12). Tertullian, whose early writings are more positive about the army than his Montanist works, recounts the story of the so-called Thundering Legion: Christian soldiers under Marcus Aurelius, whose prayers ended a drought in Germanica. As a result, the Emperor forbade any accusations against the Christians (*Apol.* 10; cf. Eusebius *H.E.* 5.5). Cassius Dio (82.8.1–

10.5) recounts a similar story, but the credit is given to an Egyptian magician (Helgeland 1979: 769–772; Shafer 2004: 225); obviously, however, if Christians were present in Marcus' army, then they must have been there for some time.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that some early Christian thinkers did oppose participation in the Roman army. In his early career, Tertullian had been content to pray for the army against invaders (*Apol.* 30.4), and he suggests that at least some Christians served in the army: '[w]e sail together with you, we go to war … our efforts are at your service' (*Apol.* 42.3). Like Justin before him, Tertullian's *Apology* argues that Christians played a positive role in and were not a threat to the Empire. To substantiate this claim, he maintains that Christians participate in every walk of life, other than in idolatry. However, Tertullian later became more hard-line in his opposition to the presence of Christians in the army. This may be due to the ethical rigorism of his Montanist phase, or that the number of Christians enlisting or soldiers converting brought the issue into focus (Gero 1970). Yet Tertullian addresses the question of military service in any significant way in just two pieces of writing: *On Idolatry*, in which military service is dealt with in passing, and the more substantial treatment in *On Crowns*.

Tertullian's treatise *On Idolatry* concerns what he calls 'the principal crime of the human race' (1), and he is rigorist in his approach. Even the appearance of idolatry, such as wearing clothes associated with festivals and honouring the gods, is to be avoided, even if one is not participating in the rites (17–18). He then applies this principle to military service, which he regards as necessarily idolatrous (19). In the face of potential counterargument, such as those of lower rank who would not necessarily have to offer sacrifice to the gods, he responds: 'there is no agreement between the divine and the human sacrament (*sacramentum divinum*, *sacramentum humanum*), the

standard of Christ and the standard of the devil … One soul cannot be due to two masters – God and Caesar' (19). Even the potentially stronger objection that John the Baptist did not ask the soldiers to leave their profession is dismissed by appeal to Jesus' demand to Peter to put away his sword. Tertullian reasons that, by disarming Peter, Christ disarmed every soldier. This final argument offers what appears to be a more pacifist reason set alongside the principal argument of idolatry.

The treatment in *On Crowns* is more extended, and it is occasioned by the example of a Christian soldier who has been imprisoned for refusing to wear the military crown. Tertullian argues that Christianity is incompatible with military service on the grounds both that Jesus admonished Peter for attempting to rescue him with the sword and due to the constant danger of idolatry, of which he provides an extensive list, such as serving on the Lord's Day, guarding pagan temples, eating idol meat, and sacrificing to the gods or the Emperor (11.4). Nonetheless, while it is clearly Tertullian's preference that Christians should not serve in the army, he recognises that for some soldier converts desertion was not an option. A similar concession is found in Hippolytus:

> A soldier of the civil authority must be taught not to kill men and to refuse to do so if he is commanded, and to refuse to take an oath; if he is unwilling to comply, he must be rejected. A military commander or civic magistrate that wears the purple must resign or be rejected. If a catechumen or a believer seeks to become a soldier, they must be rejected, for they have despised God. (Apostolic Tradition 16.17–19)

It is not clear whether the injunction against killing relates to any warfare or is restricted to execution, but it is clear enough that there is a significant antipathy to

service in the army, although falling short of an outright ban. It should be noted that Hippolytus does not single out the military in this section; this is merely one of a long list of occupations he that finds unsuitable for new converts, including sculptors or painters if they make idols, actors, teachers, charioteers, gladiators, or huntsmen (*Apostolic Tradition* 16.9–15).

When Origen considered the issue, he was facing the accusation familiar to apologists that Christians were a threat to the social order and security of the Empire. While Tertullian's first approach was to point to the fact that Christians played a role in civic and military service, only later changing his position, Origen faces both ways simultaneously. He insists Christians are peace-loving, as distinct from their Jewish forerunners (*Against Celsus* 5.33). Nonetheless, when pushed by Celsus, he notes that there are Christians in the army, but even those who do not serve pray for the Empire's armies, and in doing so they contribute as much as those who actually engage in battle:

> [T]he more anyone excels in piety, the more effective help does he render to kings, even more than is given by soldiers, who go forth to fight and slay as many of the enemy as they can … And none fight better for the king than we do … we fight on his behalf, forming a special army – an army of piety – by offering our prayers to God. (*A*gainst Celsus 8.73)

He further argues that Christian abstentionism where it is found is similar, albeit more effective, than that of the pagan priests who are exempt from military service.

It is clear that the question of military service was not an issue that generally exercised the earliest Fathers, and where it did, they tended to treat the question briefly and with some ambivalence. To be sure, there is no enthusiastic embrace of the military, yet apologists in particular would use the presence of Christian involvement

defensively. Pulling in the opposite direction were the non-retaliatory words of Jesus, which led to more pacifistic arguments against involvement. However, for the most part, the strongest objection concerned the danger of idolatry. Significantly, even where the most negative judgements are found, such as with Tertullian, this view was clearly not universally held, for he has to acknowledge that, despite his wishes, Christians continued to serve (e.g. *Flight* 13). Even in his most extensive reflection (*On Crowns*), Tertullian must face the fact that the 'soldier of God' was not the only Christian present when the martyr-soldier was singled out for refusing to wear the soldier's crown; the rest, presumably like the growing number of Christian soldiers in the army, *were* able to accommodate the competing demands of loyalty to Caesar and Christ.

As Christians experienced sporadic bouts of repression from the mid-3rd century, soldiers were among those who were martyred, such as Marinus, Maximillian, and Marcellus (see Musurillo 1972: 240–243, 244–249, and 250–259, respectively). After the outbreak of the 'Great Persecution' in 303 CE, Diocletian purged the army of Christians (Lactantius, *Death* 10), leading to further martyr-soldier stories, including Julius the Veteran and Dasius (Musurillo 1972: 260–265, 272–279). Julius' defence against the demand to offer sacrifice is that he had served for twenty-seven years and had never been regarded as a troublemaker, demonstrating the established position of Christians in the army (Helgeland 1979: 820–829). However, Christians' precarious position in the army changed after Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE and his 'Edict of Milan' in the following year, first granting toleration to Christians and restoring confiscated property, then Christianising the Empire.

Famously, Constantine's 'conversion' was the result of a religious experience prior to his victory, in which, according to Eusebius, he saw 'a cross-shaped trophy

formed from light and a text attached to it which read, "by this conquer"' (*Life* 1.28.2; trans. Cameron and Hall 1999). Although Eusebius claims to have received this account directly from the Emperor, there are good reasons to be cautious (Barnes 1981: 140–147), given his unqualified belief that God was behind Constantine's rise. Lactantius also recounts this event, although slightly differently: Constantine saw the 'heavenly sign' to be fixed to his soldiers' shields in a dream (*Death* 44). While both Eusebius (*Life* 1.39) and Lactantius (*Divine Institutes* 1.1) believed Constantine's conversion as a sure sign of God's providence, there is evidence that Constantine was careful and more political in implementing reforms (Barnes 1981; but cf. Drake 2000), particularly in the army, since he would not have wanted to alienate his non-Christian soldiers before his battle with Licinius in 324 CE (Helgeland 1979: 814–816). Nonetheless, Eusebius recounts that he introduced observance of Sundays (*Life* 4.18, 19), placed the *labarum* on his armies' shields (4.21), ordered the cessation of sacrifice (4.23), and eventually ordered that only Christians could be promoted to the highest ranks (4.52). Eventually, less than a century later, only Christians were permitted to serve in the imperial army. Pacifist scholar Walter Wink complains:

> In the year 303 CE, Diocletian forbade any member of the Roman army to be a Christian. By the year 413, no one could be a member of the Roman army *unless* he was a Christian. (2004: 54)

Now with imperial apparatus behind it, the Church could prosecute its holy war against not only spiritual principalities and powers, but also their earthly manifestations, generally heretics, Jews, and 'pagans'. The Donatists would be first to experience the full weight of the new Christian state (Frend 1985: 141–168; Tilley 1996; Gaddis 2005: 103–130), as for the first but not the last time Christians would

create other Christian martyrs. For Donatists, of course, this was nothing more than the continuation of the Great Persecution as they sought to portray the Christian state as persecutors. The Donatist Petilian accuses 'you who call yourself a Christian' of 'imitating the dreadful deeds of the Gentiles', arguing 'God does not have butchers for his priests' (Augustine, *Answers to Petilian* 2.42). Augustine dismissed this complaint with the retort that the Donatists brought their plight upon themselves (2.32, 64–65), and violence against them was not persecution, but correction (Brown 1964; Gaddis 2005: 131–150; Dunn 2017):

> There is a persecution of unrighteous, which the impious inflict upon the Church of Christ; and there is a righteous persecution, which the Church of Christ inflicts upon the impious … She persecutes in the spirit of love; they in the spirit of wrath; she that she might correct; they that they might overthrow. (Ep. 185.2.11)

Other heretics (Gaddis 2005: 68–102) and Jews in particular would suffer similar repression in the Empire. Conversion to Judaism was outlawed (*Cod. Theod.* 16.8.7), and the Jews' right to public gathering was increasingly restricted (*Cod. Theod.* 16.8.16, 24). Ambrose of Milan famously defended a Christian mob who, led by the local bishop, had attacked a synagogue in Callinicum against Emperor Theodosius' demand for restitution (McLynn 1994: 198–307).

Augustine, building on Ambrose and Cicero (*On Duties*), effectively legitimised war through his development of the just war doctrine (*jus ad bellum*; *Against Faustus* 22.69–76; Markus 1983; Ramsey 1992; Syse 2007). Ambrose regarded defence of the Empire as essential in defending Christianity (*On the Faith* 2.14.136–143). Similarly, he argued that defending others with force is demanded, using positively the example of

Moses killing the Egyptian in defence of his fellow Hebrew, such that not intervening makes one as guilty as the assailant (Exod 2.11–15; *De Off. Min.* 1.36.178–179). Ambrose had not, however, applied the same logic to the Jews who had suffered in Callinicum. He insisted that 'the maintenance of civil law should be secondary to religion' (*Ep.* 40.14). Augustine similarly regarded any instruction by God to engage in war to be sufficient cause, citing Moses' military adventures (*Questions* 6.10). While war should be for the aim of peace (*Ep.* 189) and be a means of bringing justice (*Questions on heptateuch* 6.10), Christians were now given positive reasons to join the battlefield: 'Christians will engage in war to secure the earthly peace and will suffer war as a means to heavenly peace' (*City* 19). While Augustine's ultimate aim was to limit the justification for war, he effectively provided Christian blessing for warfare, which would have consequences he could never have imagined.

Conclusion

Constantine's reign is often seen as a turning point for Christianity's relationship with violence and war, when 'Christian objection to military service evaporated' (Shafer 2004: 236). However, it is clear that any Christian objections to serving in the army prior to the Christianisation of the Empire were not universally held, and these tended to stem from a concern about idolatry rather than a commitment to pacifism. Moreover, Christians from the New Testament onwards made liberal use of pugilistic language, with martyrdom seen as a potent weapon in a holy war against the forces of Satan, and in the process 'Satanized' the people of the Empire (Koscheski 2011: 105). While the non-retaliation strand in Jesus' teaching meant that Christians were not encouraged to take up arms in this struggle, it sat alongside the eschatological tradition, inspiring the

belief that God would not only vindicate the suffering Christian, but punish those who persecuted them through eschatological violence. Adolf von Harnack (1981) recognised the problem that this commitment to eschatological judgement meant that Christians could not ultimately shake off a violent impulse.

Finally, while it may frustrate those looking for a uniform prescriptive attitude to war in early Christian tradition, the evidence is clearly mixed. Even if the historical Jesus was not an eschatological figure and was entirely consistent in his teaching on non-violence, before the first extant Christian text came to be written, apocalyptic beliefs had already been attached to the movement. By the time that the gospels came to be written, parables containing judgement and violence had been attached to Jesus. With Krieder (2003: 423), we should surely accept there is no single 'Christian attitude' to war in the early centuries. Origen was probably the first Christian thinker to imagine what the world might look like were the whole Empire to convert. He thought that if all of the Romans embraced the Christian faith, there would be no more war (*Against Celsus* 8.70); in this, he was clearly wrong.

chapter-references

References

Allison, Dale. 1998. *Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet*. Fortress Press.

Bammel, E. 1984. 'The Revolutionary Theory from Reimarus to Brandon.' In *Jesus and the Politics of His Day*. Edited by E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule. Cambridge University Press. 11–68.

Barnes, Timothy D. 1981. *Constantine and Eusebius*. Harvard University Press.

Barr, David L. 2003. 'Doing Violence: Moral Issues in Reading John's Apocalypse.' In *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*. Edited by David L. Barr. Society for Biblical Literature. 97–108.

Barton, Carlin A. 1994. 'Savage Miracles: The Redemption of Lost Honor in Roman Society and the Sacrament of the Gladiator and the Martyr.' *Representations* 45: 47–71.

Bauckham, Richard. 1993. *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*. Cambridge University Press.

1998. 'The Book of Revelation as a Christian War Scroll.' *Neotestamentica* 22: 17–40.

Blount, Brian K. 2005. *Can I Get a Witness? Reading Revelation Through African American Culture*. John Knox Press.

2009. *Revelation: A Commentary*. New Testament Library. John Knox Press.

Boustan, Ra'anan S., Alex P. Jassen, and Calvin J. Roetzel, eds. 2010. *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity*. Brill.

Brandon, S. G. F. 1967. *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity*. Charles Scriber's Sons.

Brown, Peter. 1964. 'St. Augustine's Attitude to Religious Correction.' *Journal of Roman Studies* 54: 107–116.

Charles, J. Daryl. 2010. 'Pacifists, Patriots, or Both? Second Thoughts on Pre-Constantinian Early-Christian Attitudes towards Soldiering and War.' *Logos* 13(2): 17–55.

Creach, Jerome F. D. 2013. *Violence in Scripture*. Westminster John Knox.

Crossan, John Dominic. 1999. *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Crucifixion of Jesus*. T&T Clark.

2009. *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*. HarperOne.

de Ste. Croix, Geoffrey E. M. 1963. 'Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?' *Past and Present* 26(1): 6–38.

de Villiers, Pieter G. R. and Jan Willem van Henten, eds. 2012. *Coping with Violence in the New Testament*. Brill.

Desjardins, Michel. 1997. *Peace, Violence and the New Testament*. Sheffield Academic Press.

Drake, Harold A. 2000. *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*. John Hopkins University Press.

Dunn, Geoffrey D. 2017. 'Discipline, Coercion, and Correction: Augustine against the Violence of the Donatists in *Epistula* 185.' *Scrinium* 13: 114–130.

Ehrman, Bart D. 1999. *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium*. Oxford University Press.

Ellens, Harold J. 2004. 'The Violent Jesus.' In *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Vol. 3: Models and Cases of Violence in Religion*. Edited by J. Harold Ellens. Praeger. 15–37.

Fergusson, Everett. 1993. 'Early Christian Martyrdom and Civil Disobedience.' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1: 73–83.

Frankfurter, David. 2009. 'Martyrology and the Prurient Gaze.' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17(2): 215–245.

Frend, William H. C. 1965. *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*. Blackwell.

1985. *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, revised edition. Oxford University Press.

Frilingos, Chris. A. 2004. *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs and the Book of Revelation*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Funk, Robert and Roy W. Hoover. 1993. *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*. Maxwell Macmillan International.

Gaddis, Michael. 2005. *There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*. University of California Press.

Gero, Stephen. 1970. '"*Miles Gloriosus*": The Christian and Military Service According to Tertullian.' *Church History* 39(3): 285–298.

Hartog, Paul A. 2020. 'Themes and Intertextualities in Pre-Nicene Exhortations to Martyrdom.' In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*. Edited by Paul Middleton. Wiley Blackwell. 102–119.

Hays, Richard. 1997. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. T&T Clark.

Helgeland, John. 1979. 'Christians and the Roman Army from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine.' In *Aufstieg under Niedergang der Rōmischen Welt II.23.1*. De Gruyter. 724–834.

Hurtado, Larry W. 1985. 'Revelation 4–5 in Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies.' *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25: 105–124.

1999. ‘Pre-70CE Jewish Opposition to Christ-Devotion.’ *Journal of Theological Studies* (new series) 50: 35–58.

Howard-Brook, Wes. 2016. *Empire Baptized: How the Church Embraced What Jesus Rejected (Second to Fifth Centuries)*. Orbis Books.

Johns, Loren J. 2003. *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John*. Mohr Siebeck.

2005. ‘Conceiving Violence: The Apocalypse of John and the Left Behind Series.’ *Direction* 34: 194–214.

Joseph, Simon J. 2014. *The Nonviolent Messiah: Jesus, Q, and the Enochic Tradition.* Augsburg Fortress.

Koester, Craig. 2014. *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible Commentary 38A. Yale University Press.

Koscheski, Jonathan. 2011. ‘The Earliest Christian War: Second- and Third-Century Martyrdom and the Creation of Cosmic Warriors.’ *Journal of Religious Ethics* 39(1): 100–124.

Maccoby, Hyam. 1973. *Revolution in Judaea: Jesus and the Jewish Resistance*. Ocean Books.

Markus, R. A. 1983. ‘Saint Augustine’s Views on the “Just War”.’ In *The Church and War*. Edited by W. J. Sheils. Blackwell. 1–13.

Marshall, I. Howard. 1985. ‘New Testament Perspectives on War.’ *Evangelical Quarterly* 57: 115–132.

Martin, Dale B. 2014. ‘Jesus in Jerusalem: Armed and Not Dangerous.’ *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 37(1): 3–24.

Matthews, Shelley and E. Leigh Gibson, eds. 2005. *Violence in the New Testament*. T&T Clark.

Middleton, Paul. 2006. *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*. T&T Clark.

2018. *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgement in the Book of Revelation*. T&T Clark.

2020. 'Martyrdom and Persecution in the New Testament.' In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*. Edited by Paul Middleton. Wiley Blackwell. 51–71.

2021. 'Were the Early Christians Really Persecuted?' In *Tolerance, Intolerance, and Recognition in Early Christianity and Early Judaism*. Edited by Outi Lehtipuu and Michael Labahn. Amsterdam University Press. 229–250.

Moss, Candida. 2012. 'The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern.' *Church History* 81: 535–551.

2013. *The Myth of Persecution: How Christians Invented the Story of Martyrdom*. HarperOne.

Moyise, Steve. 2001. 'Does the Lion Lie Down with the Lamb?' *Studies in the Book of Revelation*. Edited by Steve Moyise. T&T Clark. 181–194.

Musurillo, Herbert. 1972. *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. Clarendon Press.

Neville, David J. 2011. 'Faithful, True, and Violent? Christology and "Divine Vengeance" in the Revelation of John.' *Passionate Eschatology: The Future as Friend*. Edited by Ted Grimsrud and Michael Hardin. Cascade Books. 56–84.

Nickel, Jesse P. 2021. *The Things That Make for Peace: Jesus and Eschatological Violence*. De Gruyter.

Paynter, Helen and Michael Spalione, eds. 2020. *The Bible on Violence: A Thick Description*. Sheffield Phoenix.

Perkins, Judith. 1995. *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era*. Routledge.

Ramsey, P. 1992. 'The Just War According to St. Augustine.' In *Just War Theory*. Edited by J. B. Elshtain. Blackwell. 8–22.

Roeztel, Calvin J. 2010. 'The Language of War (2 Cor. 10:1–6) and the Language of Weakness (2 Cor. 11:21b–13:10).' In *Violence, Scripture, and Textual Practice in Early Judaism and Christianity*. Edited by Ra'anan S. Boustan, Alex P. Jassen, and Calvin J. Roetzel. Brill. 77–98.

Shafer, Grant R. 2004. 'Hell, Martyrdom, and War: Violence in Early Christianity.' *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Vol. 3: Models and Cases of Violence in Religion*. Edited by J. Harold Ellens. Praeger. 193–246.

Swartley, William M. 1996. 'War and Peace in the New Testament.' In *Aufstieg under Niedergang der Rōmischen Welt 26(3)*. De Gruyter. 2298–2408.

Syse, Henrik. 2007. 'Augustine and Just War: Between Virtue and Duties.' In *Ethics, Nationalism, and Just War: Medieval and Contemporary Perspectives*. Catholic University of America Press. 36–50.

Tilley, Maureen A. 1996. *Donatist Martyr Stories: The Church in Conflict in Roman North Africa*. Liverpool University Press.

van Henten, Jan Willem. 2012. 'The Concept of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation.' In *Die Johannesapokalypse: Kontexte–Konzepte–Rezeption*. Edited by Jörg Frey, James A. Kelhoffer, and Franz Tóth. Mohr Siebeck.

von Harnack, Adolf. 1981. *Militia Christi: The Christian Religion and the Military in the First Three Centuries*. Fortress Press. (German original, 1905.)

Wicker, Brian. ed. 2006. *Witnesses to Faith? Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam*. Ashgate.

Wink, Walter. 1984. *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*. Fortress Press.

1986. *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence*. Fortress Press.

1992. *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*. Fortress Press.

2003. *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*. Augsburg Fortress.

2004. 'Beyond Just War and Pacifism: Jesus' Nonviolent Way.' In *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Vol 4: Contemporary Views on Spirituality and Violence*. Edited by J. Harold Ellens. Praeger. 53–76.

Wright, N. T. 1996. *Jesus and the Victory of God*. SPCK.

Yoder, John H. 1972. *The Politics of Jesus*. Eerdmans.

Zehnder, Markus and Hallvard Hagelia, eds. 2013. *Encountering Violence in the Bible*. Sheffield Phoenix.