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Christianity and War

by Laurence M. Vance

The following is a transcript of a speech given at The Future of Freedom Foundation's June 2008 conference, "Restoring the Republic: Foreign Policy & Civil Liberties" held in Reston, Virginia.

Jacob Hornberger: I can tell you that Laurence Vance's articles carry a power the likes of which few writers carry. If you'd like to see a sampling of his articles, you can go to LewRockwell.com and check the archives, and also the Future of Freedom Foundation's website, where we've had the good fortune of publishing some of his articles as well. He writes most often on the relationship between Christianity, the citizen, the soldier, and the state. His latest work is a greatly expanded edition of his fantastic book, *Christianity and War and Other Essays Against the Warfare State*. Today Laurence will be talking on Christianity and war. Laurence Vance.

Laurence Vance: Thank you Jacob for the introduction and for the opportunity to speak at this conference about a subject that I feel so passionate about. And I give a special thank you to the friends and supporters of the Future of Freedom Foundation for making the educational outreach of the foundation what it is today. I am especially grateful for the invitation to this conference, because I spoke here last year and was still invited back. I would like to speak to you today about Christianity and war. I don't suppose there's anything I write and speak about with more fervor than the Biblical, economic, and political fallacies of religious people. This is especially true regarding the general subject of Christianity and war.

If there's any group of people that should be opposed to war, torture, militarism, the warfare state, state worship, suppression of civil liberties, an imperial presidency, blind nationalism, government propaganda, and an aggressive foreign policy, it is Christians. And especially conservative, evangelical,

and fundamentalist Christians who claim to strictly follow the dictates of Scripture and worship the Prince of Peace. It is indeed strange that Christian people should be so accepting of war. War is the greatest suppressor of civil liberties. War is the greatest destroyer of religion, morality, and decency. War is the greatest creator of fertile ground for genocides and atrocities. War is the greatest destroyer of families and young lives. War is the greatest creator of famine, disease, and homelessness. War is the health of the state.

But Christianity is in a sad state. In the church can be found some of the greatest supporters of the state, its leaders, its military, and its wars. Christians who are otherwise good, godly disciples of Christ often turn into babbling idiots when it comes to the subjects of war, the military, and killing for the state. There is an unholy desire on the part of a great many Christians to legitimize killing in war. The idea persists among too many Christians that mass killing in war is acceptable. But the killing of one's neighbor violates the sixth commandment's prohibition against killing. Christians, who wouldn't think of using the Lord's name in vain, blaspheme God when they make ridiculous statements like "God is pro-war."

Christians who try never to lie do so with boldness when they claim they are pro-life, but refuse to extend their pro-life sentiments to foreigners already out of the womb. Christians who abhor idols are guilty of idolatry when they say that we should follow the latest dictates of the state, because we should always obey the powers that be. Christians who venerate the Bible handle the Word of God deceitfully when they quote Scripture to justify U.S. government wars. Christians who claim to have the mind of Christ show that they have lost their mind, when they want the full force of government to protect a stem cell, but have no conscience about U.S. soldiers killing for the government.

There is an unseemly alliance that exists between certain sectors of Christianity and the military. Even Christians who are otherwise sound in the faith, who are not fooled by Bush's pseudo-Christianity and faith-based socialism, who believe that the less government we have the better, who don't support the war on Iraq, and who oppose an aggressive U.S. foreign policy-- even they get indignant when you question the institution of the military. Some churches would have no trouble doubling as military recruiting centers. There are Christian colleges that even offer Army ROTC. Most churches fawn over current and former members of the military, not just on Veterans Day but on other holidays like Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day, the Fourth of July, and also on special military appreciation days that they designate.

Well, like those in foreign countries on the receiving end of a U.S. military intervention, I don't appreciate most of what the military does today, as I will explain later. Much of the blame for Christian support for war must be laid at the feet of the pastors, preachers, and priests who have failed to discern the truth themselves so they can educate their congregations. It is tragic that many so-called Christian leaders

moonlight as apologists for Bush, the Republican Party, and Bush's Republican-supported war. In fact, some of them could double as Republican Party operatives without changing their sermons. Too many pastors are cheerleaders for war, bloodshed, death, and destruction, since, after all, Iraqis are all just a bunch of dumb ragheads, Muslim heathens, or incorrigible terrorists.

We hear more from the pulpit today justifying military intervention in the Middle East than we do about the need for missionaries to go to the Middle East. It is appalling that instead of the next military adventure of the U.S. government being denounced from every pulpit in the land, it will be preachers who can be counted on to defend it, and more so if it is another Republican war. To compound all of this, many of the church and denominational leaders who don't follow the Republican Party line and don't support the war in Iraq are strangely silent. Not a word about the immorality of the Iraq war. Not a word about U.S. imperialism. Not a word about the lies of the U.S. government. Not a word about the pseudo-Christianity of the President. Not a word about Christians naively supporting the latest U.S. government pronouncement. Not a word about the CIA and the military being no place for a Christian young person. Not even a mild word of warning about the evils of the U.S. government.

I don't buy the excuse that these leaders are merely preaching and teaching the Bible, and choosing not to dabble in politics. They are not silent about the evils of rock music, trashy daytime television, abortion, and pornography, even though the Scripture doesn't mention these things; yet they are silent about the evils of war. Perhaps their churches contain too many current and former members of the military, and they don't want to rock the boat. Perhaps they are Veterans themselves, and feel embarrassed to now criticize their former employer. If there's any group within Christianity that should be the most consistent, the most vocal, the most persistent, and the most Scriptural in its opposition to war and the warfare state, it is conservative Christians who look to the Bible as their sole authority. Yet never at any time in history have so many of these Christians held such unholy opinions.

The adoration they have toward President Bush is unholy. The association they have with the Republican Party is unholy. The admiration they have for the military is unholy. The thirst they have for war is unholy. The callous attitude they have toward killing foreigners is unholy. The idolatry they manifest toward the state is unholy. If you doubt the truth of what I am saying about the sad state of Christianity, then look no further than the support that a theocratic warmonger like Mike Huckabee received in primary elections earlier this year, held all over the South in the so-called Bible Belt. A church in my hometown of Pensacola, Florida, even had Huckabee in to preach on a Sunday evening during primary season. And this time the primaries down South weren't the usual case of Christians holding their noses and voting for what they perceive to be the lesser of two evils, for there was actually a principled conservative Christian on the ballot, Ron Paul.

Much of the Christian antagonism toward Dr. Paul was on account of his opposition to the war in Iraq, and the larger war on terror. Yet Christians who chose Huckabee over Paul chose the greater evil that they hoped to avoid. They themselves are evil, not because they rejected Ron Paul, but because they love war, the military, and the warfare state. Huckabee not only supported the sending of more troops to their death in Iraq. He actually maintained that we should not withdraw from Iraq because “we are winning.” If we are winning in Iraq when 4,000 soldiers are dead, thousands of physically and or mentally disabled soldiers need a lifetime of care, a trillion dollars has already been spent, the morale and readiness of the military are at historic lows, the Guard and Reserve forces are decimated, military hardware and equipment are worn out, the reputation of America in the eyes of the world is at rock bottom, and new terrorists are being created faster than we can kill them, I hate to see what kind of condition we would be in if we started losing.

And then there is John McCain, whose foreign policy is based on a Beach Boys song. Although he has been harshly criticized by many Christians for not being conservative enough, he is rarely if ever condemned for being the most radical warmonger of all the presidential candidates. Christians may disagree with some of his proposals, but they generally consider him to be a decorated war hero instead of a dangerous mad bomber. I’ve already heard Christians talking about “holding their noses” in the November election and voting for McCain, “so we don’t get one of those evil Democrats in the White House.” As if McCain were any less evil than any Democrat who has ever held or run for the office.

I have made some shocking statements about religious people, perhaps even some provocative and incendiary statements. In fact, people that don’t know anything about me might be inclined to believe that my remarks thus far have been an attack on Christianity. To the contrary, I am a Bible-believing Christian, as conservative as they come-- probably more conservative than many nominal Christians would feel comfortable with. True, I have spoken or written negative things about every religion, sect, and Christian denomination, including my own. But the difference between me and the Christian apologists for Bush, the Republican Party, the military, war, and the state is that I worship the God of the Bible, not Mars, the god of war.

Although I am not an ordained minister, I have preached in churches and other venues. I have earned degrees in theology. I have taught children in Sunday school and adults in Bible College. I will put my conservative Christian credentials up against anyone. I think I know Christianity and Christians as well as anyone. So please understand that it is not Christianity I’m criticizing; it is Christians, who by their persistent support for war, the warfare state, and the military are giving Christianity a bad name.

The result of Christian support for war reminds me of a story in the Old Testament, about two sons of the patriarch Jacob. In order to avenge the rape of their sister by some foreigners, the sons of Jacob told their leader that if his people consented to be circumcised, then both groups of people could intermarry and the rapist could have their sister to wife. However, after all the foreigners were circumcised when they were sore, two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, came and slew all the men who were incapacitated and spoiled their city. When their father Jacob heard about this, he told his sons, “Ye have troubled me to make me stink among the inhabitants of the land.”

Christian warmongers have made Christians to stink among the non-Christian inhabitants of the United States. After five years of this senseless war in Iraq, some of the war’s greatest defenders continue to be Christians. A poll conducted last year by *Christianity Today* magazine asked the question, do evangelicals need a time of repentance for the Iraq war? A plurality of respondents answered in the negative, and agreed with the proposition that the war in Iraq was necessary and justified. Sure, overall Christian support for the war has declined. Unfortunately, however, it is generally not out of a principled opposition to war and the warfare state, but only because the war didn’t turn out as planned. The war is taking too long. The war has been mismanaged. The war is costing too much, or the war has resulted in too many dead and wounded American troops.

The morality of going to war in the first place, as well as the number of dead and wounded Iraqis, is of absolutely no concern to most Christian Americans. Yet every dead American soldier is a hero. What a beautiful word is that word, “hero.” The more hideous the death, the more beautiful the name it is necessary to find for it. Christians have bought into a variety of American nationalism that has been called “the myth of American exceptionalism.” This is the idea that the government of the United States is morally and politically superior to all other governments, that America is a city on a hill, the redeemer nation, the messiah nation, Rome on the Potomac, the hope of all mankind, as President Bush said. That American values are the only true values, that the United States is the indispensable nation responsible for the peace and prosperity of the world, that the motives of the United States are always benevolent and paternalistic. That to accept American values is to be on this side of God, but to resist them is to oppose God; that other governments must conform to the policies of the U.S. government; that other nations are potential enemies that threaten U.S. safety and security. And that the United States is morally justified in imposing sanctions or launching military attacks against any of our enemies that refuse to conform to our dictates.

This is why U.S. foreign policy is aggressive, reckless, belligerent, and meddling. This is why U.S. foreign policy results in discord, strife, hatred, and terrorism toward the United States. This is why U.S. foreign policy excuses the mass murder of civilians in the Philippines, Germany, Japan, Korea, Vietnam,

Laos, Cambodia, and Iraq as for the greater good. This is why the fruits of U.S. foreign policy are the destabilization and overthrow of governments, the assassination of leaders, the destruction of industry and infrastructure, the backing of military coups, death squads, and drug traffickers, imperialism under the guise of humanitarianism, support for corrupt and tyrannical governments, brutal sanctions and embargoes, and the United States bribing and bowing itself around the world as the world's policeman, fireman, social worker, and busybody. And because Americans are preoccupied with reconciling religious faith with national pride, they care little about the consequences of American foreign policy, preferring instead to view the world in Manichaeian terms of good: us, and evil: them. People who are non-Christian or non-religious and oppose the actions of the warfare state should be concerned about the Christian attitude toward war. An overwhelming majority of Americans identify themselves as Christians; the same can be said of the members of the U.S. military. The percentage of congressmen who identify their religion as Christianity is higher than that of the general population. If Christians at all levels of society were to withdraw their support for the war in Iraq, the war on terror, and the military, the war in Iraq would end tomorrow, the war on terror would be suspended, and the military would no longer receive a steady supply of cannon fodder from churches and Christian colleges.

What a shame that non-Christians, including atheists, agnostics, infidels, pagans, and the irreligious who oppose the genocide that the United States has unleashed in Iraq, have a higher moral code than that of many Christians? Non-Christian Americans should know that Christian enthusiasm for war and the warfare state is a perversion of Christianity, an affront to the Savior whom Christians worship as the Prince of Peace, a violation of Scripture, contrary to the whole tenor of the New Testament, and an unfortunate demonstration of the profound ignorance that many Christians have of history and their own Bible. God only knows how many non-Christians have been driven from Christianity because of Christian indifference toward or outright support of war. The early Christians were not warmongers, like so many Christians today. They did not idolize the Caesars like some Christians idolize President Bush. They did not make apologies for the Roman Empire like many Christians do for the U.S. Empire. They did not venerate the institution of the military like most Christians do today. They did not participate in the state's wars like too many Christians do today.

If there was anything at all advocated by the early Christians, it was peace. After all, they had some New Testament admonitions to go by: "Blessed are the peacemakers," Matthew 5:9. "Live peaceably with all men," Romans 12:18. "Follow peace with all men," Hebrews 12:14. Aggression, violence, and bloodshed are contrary to the very nature of Christianity. True, the Bible on several occasions likens a Christian to a soldier. As soldiers, Christians are admonished to put on the whole armor of God. The apostle Paul, who himself said "I have fought a good fight," told a young minister to "war a good warfare." But the Christian soldier in the Bible fights against sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil. He wears the

breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation. The weapons of the Christian are not carnal. His shield is the shield of faith, and his sword is the Word of God. The New Testament admonishes Christians to not avenge themselves, to do good to all men, and to not render evil for evil. There is nothing in the New Testament from which to draw the conclusion that killing is somehow sanctified if it is done in the name of the state.

The Church Father Justin Martyr described the peaceful nature of the early Christians: “And we who had been filled with war and mutual slaughter and every wickedness have each one all the world over changed the instruments of war, the swords into plows and the spears into farming instruments, and we cultivate piety, righteousness, love for all men, faith and the hope which is from the Father Himself through the Crucified One. We who hated and slew one another, and because of differences in customs would not share a common hearth with those who are not of our tribe, now after the appearance of Christ have become sociable, and pray for our enemies, and try to persuade those who hate us unjustly in order that they, living according to the good suggestions of Christ, may share our hope of obtaining the same reward from God, Who is master of all.”

Unlike many Christians today who proudly serve in Caesar’s army, the early Christians were critical of the Roman Empire and military service. Instead of being willing to die for the emperor and his empire, Christians declared Jesus is Lord in direct opposition to Roman imperial claims. The Church Father Lactantius explained that the Romans believed that there is no other way to immortality than by leading armies, devastating foreign countries, destroying cities, overthrowing towns, and either slaughtering or enslaving free peoples. “Truly the more men they have afflicted, despoiled, and slain, the more noble and renowned do they think themselves. And captured by the appearance of empty glory, they give the name of excellence to their crimes. If any man has slain a single man, he’s regarded as contaminated and wicked. Nor do they think it right that he should be admitted to this earthly dwelling of the gods. But he who has slaughtered endless thousands of men, deluged the fields with blood, and infected rivers with it, is admitted not only to a temple, but even to heaven.”

Unfortunately the 19th century Quaker, Jonathan Diamond, similarly observed of Christians: “They who are shocked at a single murder on the highway, hear with indifference of the slaughter of 1,000 on the field. They whom the idea of a single corpse would thrill with terror, contemplate that of heaps of human carcasses mangled by human hands with frigid indifference.” The famed church historian Adolph von Harnack described the features of military life that would have presented great difficulty to the early Christians: the shedding of blood on the battlefield, the use of torture in the law courts, the passing of death sentences by officers, and the execution of them by common soldiers, the unconditional military oath, the all-pervading worship of the emperor, the sacrifices in which all were expected in some way to

participate, the average behavior of soldiers in peacetime, and other idolatrous and offensive customs. All these would constitute in combination an exceedingly powerful deterrent against any Christian joining the army on his own initiative.

The aforementioned Lactantius described Christians as “those who are ignorant of wars, who preserve concord with all, who are friends even to their enemies, who love all men as brothers, and know how to curb anger and soften with quiet moderation every madness of the mind.” And then came Just War Theory. This was the attempt by Augustine to reconcile Christian participation in warfare with the morality of New Testament Christianity by, among other things, distinguishing between soldiers’ outwardly violent actions while waging war and their inwardly spiritual disposition. In its essence Just War Theory concerns the use of force: when force should be used, and what kind of force is acceptable. The timing of force relates to a country’s justification for the initiation of war or military action. The nature of force relates to how military activity is conducted once a country commits to use force. The principle of the Just War is actually many principles, all of which must be met for a war to be considered just.

I agree with Christian philosopher Robert Brimlow, who views Just War Theory as untenable “because it is difficult to know with sufficient confidence whether all of its conditions have been met, because some of its tenets are impossible to realize, because the criteria of Just War Theory are too flexible, because it contradicts itself in that it sanctions the killing of innocents which it at the same time prohibits, and because it is used to justify rather than prevent war. Indeed, Just War Theory can be used effectively by all sides to justify all wars.” I would add that Just War Theory is not even based on Scripture. It is however rooted in blind obedience to the state. It is the state that decides to go to war, not the people, most of whom want nothing to do with war that is until the state sufficiently propagandizes its citizens. The state always claims that it is acting defensively, has the right intention, has the proper authority, is undertaking war as a last resort, has a high probability of success, and that a war will achieve good that is proportionally greater than the damage to life, liberty, and property that it will cause.

Just War Theory merely allowed Christians to make peace with war. Then of course came the Crusades, followed by the continual wars among European Christians. The ultimate picture of the folly of war is the bloodbath perpetrated by the Christian nations in World War I. I have heard a lot lately about how most terrorists are Muslims, about how Islam is a violent religion, and about how Muslims are willing to kill in the name of their religion. That may all be true, but Christians who live in glass houses should be careful about throwing stones at Muslims. Yes, I am familiar with the tenets of the Muslim religion, and when I mentioned that I had said negative things about every religion, I certainly meant to include Islam. But it was Christians who expelled the Jews from Spain in the 15th century, not Muslims. It

was Christians who exploited and killed Africans by the millions in the Congo Free State in the late 19th century. It was Christians, Christian Americans, who slaughtered thousands of Filipinos in the so-called Philippine insurrection at the turn of the 20th century, after we liberated them from Spain. And then from 1914 to 1918, in battle after senseless battle, Christian soldiers in World War I shot, bombed, torpedoed, burned, gassed, bayoneted, and starved each other and civilians until 20,000,000 of them were wounded and another 20,000,000 lay dead.

And what did the Christians at home in the United States do and say before and during World War I? Their conduct was shameful. Challenged with the problem of arousing the patriotic spirit of the nation, government leaders must convince the populace of the absolute necessity of the war, the utter wickedness of the enemy, and the supreme justness of the country's cause. To these ends the churches became willing servants of the state. They contributed to wartime hysteria and propaganda. Christianity became an adjunct to nationalism. Loyalty to one's country became the highest expression of the Christ-like life. Love of country exceeded love of mankind. God and country became synonymous. To give one's life for his country and its flag was to give it for God and His kingdom. As Christ died to make men holy, so U.S. soldiers died to make men free. There was no difference between the pronouncements of patriotic organizations, government propaganda bureaus, and the edicts of Christian leaders. Religious organizations and nationalistic groups vied with each other in their flowery patriotic declarations.

America's participation in the war was viewed as a missionary enterprise. It is a blot on Christianity that many of the religious dissenters from the drive for war were unorthodox Christians, socialists, Unitarians, Universalists, Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Several members of this latter sect were sentenced to prison for circulating a book by their late leader with this particularly objectionable passage: "Nowhere in the New Testament is patriotism, a narrowly-minded hatred of other peoples, encouraged. Everywhere and always murder in its every form is forbidden, and yet under the guise of patriotism civil governments of the earth demand of peace-loving men the sacrifice of themselves and their loved ones, and the butchery of their fellows. And hail it as a duty demanded by the laws of heaven."

What a shame that this statement was not on the lips of every so-called orthodox Christian. Orthodox clergymen in the pulpit and their followers in the pew during World War I, both succumb to war psychology and to societal pressure, just as most other citizens. One Baptist pastor said that he "looked upon the enlistment of an American Soldier as he did on the departure of a missionary for Burma." A Presbyterian minister likewise remarked, "Every dollar and every service given to Uncle Sam for his army is a gift to missions." The Dean of Oberlin College, who was also a Congregational minister, maintained that "The Christian soldier in friendship wounds the enemy. In friendship he kills the enemy." A Methodist preacher from Pittsburgh declared that he "would have gone over the top with other

Americans. I would have driven my bayonet into the throat or the eye or stomach of the Huns without the slightest hesitation,” he said, “and my conscience would not have bothered me in the least.” An Episcopal minister wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* that “The complete representative of the American church in France is the United States Army overseas.” Leaders in the Lutheran and Catholic churches had no trouble likewise expressing their patriotism by a steadfast allegiance to the government.

One of the most notable Christian servants of the state during World War I was Randolph McKim, the rector of the Church of the Epiphany in Washington, D.C. McKim made claims for Germany that were never ascribed to Hitler: “Germany seeks to control the whole world. Her ambition is to dominate mankind. Her aim is to bring all peoples and nations under the Hohenzollerns.” To McKim the conflict in Europe was a crusade. It was a holy war, because he believed that civilization was at stake, and humanity, and even Christianity itself. McKim maintained, “It is God who has summoned us to this war. It is His war we are fighting.” Soldiers at the front were marching to Calvary to meet the armies of the anti-Christ.

Other Christian ministers during World War I advocated restraints on anti-war speech and writing, the suppression of German-language newspapers, the purchase of war bonds, spying on American citizens, the death penalty for those who obstructed recruiting, harsh treatment of conscientious objectors, absolute loyalty to the government, hatred of the German people, torture of the German Kaiser, a 100-year boycott of German goods, and the mass sterilization of soldiers in Germany. Para-church organizations were enlisted by the state as well. The YMCA was recruited to check morals, to promote morale, and to make men better fighters physically. Its secretaries exhibited the Bible as the greatest of all war books, and presented Jesus as a warrior, thrusting his bayonet through a Hun in battle as an example to others.

Even the American Peace Society, whose members consisted largely of Christians, came to support the war. Religious journals donated advertising space for the sale of war bonds. Near the war’s end, *Christian Work* magazine ran a full-page ad that read at the top of the page, “Kill the Hun. Kill his hope.” In the middle of the page was a picture of a bayonet and a hundred dollar liberty bond. Underneath this was the reminder, “Bayonet and bond. Both kill. One kills the Hun. The other kills his hope. Buy U.S. government bonds.”

We hear much of the same now regarding the Iraq war, without the massive government propaganda campaign that was undertaken during World War I. I guess Christians have gotten dumber. When Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq in March of 2003 with the announcement that our cause was just, Christians lined up in droves to support their President. They enlisted in the military. They put “W”

stickers and yellow ribbons on their cars. They implored us in church to pray for the troops. They made heroes out of every dead American soldier. They began reciting their patriotic sloganeering, their God and country rhetoric, and their “obey the powers that be” mantra. They dusted off their books on Just War Theory. They denounced Christian opponents of the war as liberals, pacifists, traitors, and Quakers, usually preceded by the adjectives unpatriotic and anti-American.

Why? Why have so many religious people gotten it so wrong? As I have explained in many of my articles on Christianity and war over the years, there are many reasons: thinking that the war in Iraq was in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks; believing that Saddam was another Hitler; supposing that Iraq was a threat to the United States; seeing the war in Iraq as a modern-day crusade against Islam; assuming that the United States needed to protect Israel from Iraq; viewing Bush as a messiah figure; equating the Republican Party with the party of God; blindly following the conservative movement; deeming the state to be a divine institution instead of a lying, stealing, and killing machine; failing to separate the divine sanction of war against the enemies of God in the Old Testament from the New Testament ethic that taught otherwise; having a profound ignorance of history and primitive Christianity; reading too much into the mention of “soldiers” in the New Testament; adopting the mind-set that brute force is barbarism when individuals use it, but honorable when nations are guilty of it; possessing a warped God and country complex; holding a “my country, right or wrong” attitude; and as I mentioned previously, accepting without reservation the myth of American exceptionalism.

But if I had to single out one thing that has caused Christians to be so accepting of war and the warfare state, it would have to be the military. Americans love the military, and American Christians are no exception. It doesn't seem to matter-- the reason for each war or intrusion into the affairs of another country. It doesn't seem to matter how long U.S. troops remain after the initial intervention. It doesn't seem to matter how many foreign civilians are killed or injured. It doesn't seem to matter how many billions of dollars are spent by the military. It doesn't even seem to matter what the troops are actually doing. Americans generally believe in supporting the troops, no matter what.

Social activist Lee Griffith remarks in his book, *The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God*, “Currently public support for military actions is virtually instinctive, especially so if the troops have already been placed in harm's way. It is claimed that to question the endeavor, to express less than enthusiastic support, is to show callous disregard for the lives of the young women and men who face enemy bullets on our behalf. As if by magic, the charge of disregard for life is leveled against those who oppose placing troops on the battlefield, while the potentates who placed them there are held immune. Americans are repulsed by the serial killer who, to satisfy the most basest of desires, dismembers his victims, but revere the bomber pilot in the stratosphere, who flying above the clouds never hears the

screams of his victims, or sees the flesh torn from their bones. Killing women and children at a distance of 5 feet is viewed as an atrocity, but at more than 5,000 feet it is a heroic act.”

Christians of all branches and denominations have a love affair with the military. This alliance includes Catholic Just War theorists, Evangelicals in and out of the military, Red State Christian fascists, right-wing Christian nationalists, progressive Christians who oppose the war in Iraq, theocratic voters, Christians who are not part of the Religious Right, and even conservative Christians who oppose an aggressive interventionist foreign policy. The superstitious reverence that many Christians have for the military in some cases borders on a fetish. Criticism of the military is strictly forbidden. To question the military in any way-- its size, its budget, its efficiency, its bureaucracy, its contractors, its weaponry, its mission, its effectiveness, its foreign interventions-- is to question America itself. One can condemn the size of government, but never the size of the military. One can criticize federal spending, but never military spending. One can denounce government bureaucrats, but never military brass. One can deprecate the welfare state, but never the warfare state. One can expose government abuses, but never military abuses. One can label domestic policy as socialistic, but never foreign policy as imperialistic.

I am often accused of being anti-military, of not appreciating the sacrifices that have been made so that I can have the freedom to speak English, vote, and write articles critical of the military, and express my negative opinions about U.S. foreign policy. But if the military were actually engaged in defending the United States, securing the borders, guarding the shores, patrolling the coasts, and protecting the skies, I would be as pro-military as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

What is the purpose of the military? I think it is beyond dispute that the purpose of any country having a military is defense of the country against attack or invasion. Not to rid the world of evil, as Bush proclaimed from the pulpit of the National Cathedral a few days after September 11th. U.S. military should be engaged exclusively in defending the United States, not defending other countries, and certainly not attacking them. It is U.S. borders that should be secured. It is U.S. shores that should be guarded. It is U.S. coasts that should be patrolled. It is U.S. skies where no-fly zones should be enforced. But because U.S. foreign policy is aggressive, reckless, belligerent, and meddling; because it has a history of hegemonic nation-building, regime change, and jingoism; because it is the story of interventionism, imperialism, and empire; because it results in discord, strife, hatred, and terrorism toward the United States, the U.S. military-- the enforcer of U.S. foreign policy-- is a force for evil in the world.

Because America's U.S. military heritage is not one of how our troops have repelled invaders, kept us safe from attack, or defended our freedoms, it is not honorable to serve in the military. This is a bitter pill to swallow, especially for soldiers who fought for a lie, and the families of soldiers who died for a lie.

America's military heritage is unfortunately one of bombs and bullets, death and destruction, intervention and invasion, and occupation and oppression. The purpose of the military has been perverted beyond all recognition. The military spreads democracy by bombs, bayonets, and bullets. The military garrisons the planet with troops and bases. The military is responsible for the network of brothels around the world to serve U.S. troops who have no business being away from home.

Military personnel serve simultaneously as policemen, firemen, scientists, social workers, and bullies, with the world as their precinct, forest, laboratory, client, and playground. What do providing disaster relief, dispensing humanitarian aid, supplying peacekeepers, enforcing U.N. resolutions, and spreading goodwill have to do with defending the country against attack? How do launching pre-emptive strikes, changing regimes, enforcing no-fly zones, stationing troops in other countries, and garrisoning the planet with bases-- what does that have to do with defending the country against invasion?

Here is the new role for the army by Defense Secretary Robert Gates: "Army soldiers can expect to be tasked with reviving public services, rebuilding infrastructure, and promoting good governance. All these so-called non-traditional capabilities have moved into the mainstream of military thinking, planning, and strategy, where they must stay." Combat veterans, regardless of how they feel about the war in Iraq and U.S. foreign policy, should be outraged at this new vision for the army. Is the army explaining its new vision to young people who walk into army recruiting centers? And with the tremendous financial incentives being offered to enlist in the military today, do young people even care what the vision of the military is, or are they blinded by the dollar signs in their eyes?

But regardless of how the purpose of the military has been perverted beyond all recognition, the troops are still responsible for their actions. After all, it is the troops that are doing the actual fighting in Iraq right now, not Bush, not Cheney, not Gates, and not Rice. As much as I have nothing but contempt for the architects of the war, the President who instigated the war, the neocons who welcome the war, the congressmen who funded the war, and the conservatives who supported the war, it is still U.S. soldiers who are dropping the bombs, firing the mortars, throwing the grenades, launching the missiles, and shooting the bullets. It is U.S. soldiers who have paved the way for the rampant sectarian violence. It is U.S. soldiers who have unleashed brutality, murder, genocide, death, and destruction in Iraq.

I was told by one of my critics that he agreed with me on the point of not fighting illegal and unjust wars, but that doing so was not the fault of the soldiers. Well then, whose fault is it? No one is doing the fighting except the soldiers. It doesn't matter who told them to bomb, maim, and kill, or what the reason is they were told to do these things. If the troops stopped fighting, the war would grind to a halt. I don't support the troops. I didn't support them in the last war, and I won't support them in the next

war. It is the troops that are ultimately responsible for prosecuting this senseless and immoral war, yet U.S. forces are generally not held responsible for any interactions by their superiors, the government, or the general public unless they do something particularly evil that becomes an embarrassment.

Most people say the troops are not responsible because they're just following orders. No soldier is responsible for the death and destruction he inflicts as long as it is state-sanctioned death and destruction. Many Evangelical Christians agree and join in this chorus of stateolatry, with their obey-the powers-that-be mantra. Even many of those who maintain that Bush and Cheney are war criminals are hesitant to condemn the individual soldier. I am not.

First of all, the last time I looked in my Bible, I got the strong impression that it was only God Almighty that should be obeyed 100 percent of the time without question. Second, what would the attitude toward the soldier be if he were ordered to attack in some way American citizens under the guise of maintaining order? Is that an order that we want U.S. soldiers to obey? Third, why would we want U.S. soldiers to follow orders to bomb, maim, kill, and otherwise attack foreigners around the world that have never lifted a finger against the United States? Fourth, soldiers in other countries are not accorded this luxury. Unlike the soldiers of any other country, U.S. soldiers are always viewed by Americans as liberators and peace keepers, never invaders and occupiers. We would get extremely upset at foreign soldiers if they killed Americans, even if they were just following their orders. No supporter of the war in Iraq who uses the obeying orders defense would allow a German officer at the Nuremberg Trials to get away with saying "He was just following Hitler's orders." And fifth, if the U.S. government told someone to kill his mother, any American would be outraged if he under any circumstances went and did it. But then if the government tells someone to put on a uniform and go kill some Iraqi's mother, the typical American puts a yellow ribbon on his car and says that we should support the troops.

But why should the response be any different? Why should morality be put off just because a uniform is put on? Being told to clean or paint a piece of equipment is one thing. Being told to bomb or shoot a person is another, but it is objective. Even if some commands are questionable, U.S. military effectiveness would be greatly diminished if the troops didn't obey orders. Well, let's hope so. How many Vietnamese and Laotians and Cambodians would be alive today if the U.S. military had been rendered impotent?

We have heard a lot lately about how the United States may need to confront Iran militarily. First it was that the Iranian President was the reincarnation of Hitler. Then it was Iran's ambition to build a nuclear bomb. And now it is Iran's arming of Iraqi insurgents. These are all bogus threats, of course, but when has that ever prevented the United States from going to war? Listen, every act of American military

intervention in some other country was made possible because the troops blindly followed the orders of their superiors. If they had refused to do anything that was not related to actually defending the country, then there would not have been any overseas deployments, preemptive strikes, land mines, torture under the guise of interrogation, and no meddling in other countries.

Now, if the purpose of the military has been perverted beyond all recognition, if the military spends more time securing the borders, guarding the shores, patrolling the coast, and protecting the skies of other countries, if the military is engaged in sending its soldiers thousands of miles away to kill people and destroy their property, why in God's name would a Christian join the military and help the state carry out its evil deeds? Why would a pastor implore his congregation to pray for the troops? Why would a church display a yellow ribbon that says, "We Support Our Troops"?

There were 181,000 people who joined the military last year. Certainly the majority of them would designate their religion as Christianity. Many Christians will not allow their children to set foot in a public school, but then encourage them, or at least not discourage them, to join the U.S. military and not only face government propaganda and immorality on a much greater scale, but participate in bringing death and destruction to the latest enemy, not of the American people, but of the U.S. government. There is universal agreement among Christians that no Christian could in good conscience work as a pimp, a prostitute, an abortionist, a drug dealer, or an exotic dancer. Adherents of other religions would also generally select more wholesome occupations. For a Christian to sell himself to the highest bidder as a contract killer would be considered a very immoral thing to do. But if the same Christian serves as a killer for hire for the U.S. government, he is held in high esteem.

I know I've been rather blunt, but the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy was even more direct: "Armies will first diminish and then disappear only when public opinion brands with contempt those who, whether from fear or for advantage, sell their liberty and enter the ranks of those murderers called soldiers." Because the war in Iraq is immoral and unjust, and because there is no draft, Christians who join the military are willing accomplices to murder. Christians not in the military are some of the greatest supporters of the military. Many Christians have exchanged Biblical Christianity for imperial Christianity.

I've got some news for them; The Lord never sanctioned any crusade of Christians against any religion. The God of the Bible never called, commanded, or encouraged any Christian to kill, make apologies for the killing of, or excuse the killing of any adherent to a false religion. Dispensationalists, who are quick to point out the distinctions between Israel and the church, often invoke the Jewish wars of the Old Testament against the heathen as a justification for the actions of U.S. military. Although God sponsored these wars and used the Jewish nation to conduct them, it does not follow that God sponsors

American wars or that America is God's chosen nation. The last time I checked, George Bush was not God, America was not the Nation of Israel, and the U.S. army was not the Lord's army.

Christians and churches should treat members of the military no different than they treat employees of Wal-Mart or McDonald's. They should stop this nonsense of asking God to bless the troops. Should we pray that God blesses the troops while they drop their bombs, throw their grenades, and shoot their bullets? Is beseeching God to protect the troops as they shoot, bomb, maim, and destroy, and carry out an evil foreign policy? Is that consistent with the Christianity in the New Testament? Yes, we should pray for the troops. We should pray that the troops come home. We should pray that no more of their blood is shed on foreign soil in some senseless war. But we should also pray that they stop bringing death and destruction to foreigners. And while we're at it, we should pray that young, impressionable students are not ensnared by the military recruiters. We should likewise pray that churches stop supplying cannon fodder to the military.

It is high time for Christians who still defend the state, its leaders, its military, and its wars to wake up and open their eyes and recognize some cold hard facts. The United States has become a rogue state, a pariah nation, an evil empire. The United States military is the greatest force for evil in the world. The United States is the arms dealer to the world. The United States is not the world's policeman. The United States cannot redeem the world through violence. The United States is not the God-anointed protector of Israel that enjoys a special relationship with God. The United States government is the greatest threat to life, liberty, and property, not the leaders or the military or the people of Iraq, Iran, Syria, China, Russia, or Venezuela. Our Republic is crumbling. It is imperative that we return to the non-interventionist foreign policy of the Founders. Christians, of all people, should be leading the way. Thank you