

**THE CHRISTIAN MILITARY CHAPLAINCY:
AN ORWELLIAN MINISTRY**

Part Three

A Ministry of the Ministry of Peace

I have heard military chaplains say that we are not a pacifist Church, meaning the Catholic Church or one of the other non-pacifist Churches. We are a just war Church. We follow the just war theory and with that, they simply exonerate everything that they are about, everything that is going on, everything that we have talked about, and dismiss Jesus' teaching of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies to an irrelevancy. Well first of all, Jesus wasn't a pacifist either and neither am I.

Pacifism is a word that enters the human language in France in about 1880. It first appears in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1910. Pacifism is the rejection of all war. That rejection can be because one sees it as reasonable to reject it, because one is abhorred by it, because one sees it as God's will to reject it. But pacifism is limited to war and the Jesus of the Gospel is not talking primarily or exclusively about pacifism, although pacifism does fall within what He taught.

Jesus's teachings of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies is a rejection of all violence and enmity in thought, word and deed because it is contrary to the Reality and the Will of God. Now, in a more sophisticated form, people will say our Church, the Catholic Church or some other, follows the just war tradition. Well let's be clear, a just war tradition is tradition with a small "t." meaning something like custom, but not infallible dogma.

The Catholic Church, no Church as far as I know, has ever said dogmatically that you must kill in war, that the just war theory is in fact an imperative, a dogmatic imperative of its spiritual and moral Tradition, capital "T." The just war theory is simply that, a theory. And so, it is tradition with a small "t" we are speaking about when we talk about the just war tradition—not tradition with a capital "T" as when we talk about the Incarnation.

It is then said by the Christian just warists that we are followers of the natural law and in natural law there is a right to defend yourself with violence, even lethal violence, if that is necessary. Now Natural Law in the Catholic Church and other Churches is defined as the imprint of the Word of God on the soul of the human being. It is not the laws of nature. It is the Word of God placed in the core of the very being of the human being by God, when He creates the human being in his own image and likeness.

The natural law is the imprint of the Law of God on the souls of everybody, every human being. That is what the Natural Law is. But for the Christian the first question that has to be asked is this: Is there any difference between the Natural Law—the imprint of God's Word in all human beings, on the souls of all human beings, in the hearts of all human beings—and the interpretation of that Word?

Therein lies one of the major problems in terms of saying, as a Christian, the Natural Law allows us to kill, maim, and destroy enemies and other people, e.g., criminals, in contradiction to what Jesus taught. Why? Jesus in the Gospel is called the Word of God. It says right there at the beginning of the Gospel of John: *“In the beginning was the Word: the word was with God the word was God. All things were made through him and without him nothing that has been made would have been made. And the Word became flesh.”* Jesus is the Word of God from all eternity. He is the *only* Word of God and now and always and unto ages of ages. Through Him and only through Him all things came to be.

The Greek word that we are translating Word is *“logos,”* which means logical, reasonable word, logical word. So Natural Law is the implanting of the logical Word of God—it has to be—in the very being of the being called a human being. But the One who implants Natural Law there is the Word of God. It is the Word of God who implants the Word of God, the Law of God, in the human soul, in the being of each individual human being. This is the same Word of God who *“became flesh and dwelt among us.”* And, when the Word of God became flesh He taught as God's Will as God's Law, a Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies by his words and by his deeds. He is the definitive, infallible interpreter of Natural Law because He placed the Natural Law in the hearts of human beings.

Said in a sentence: The One who spoke the Sermon on the Mount is the One who created the universe, is the One that is the Word of God within each human being. There are no two words of God; there are no two *logoi*. There is Jesus of Nazareth. He *is* the *Logos* through whom all things are created. Jesus *is* the source of the Natural Law. He is the authoritative interpreter of Natural Law. Jesus *is* the Law of God, incarnate in the flesh. Therein lies the problem for Natural Law Just Warists Christians. Jesus is the *Logos*. Jesus is the *Logos* of God. Jesus is the Incarnation of the *Logos* of God. Jesus is the enfleshment of the *Logos* of God who is God from all eternity. God does not contradict God! God does not contradict Himself! God's Word, God's *Logos*, does not contradict God's Word, God's *Logos*.

God is simple. *There is no contradiction in God.* If we see a contradiction in God, that comes from our concupiscent-riddled, post-fall, post-original sin consciousness nurtured in a human society that is also riven with a post-original sin consciousness, telling us what is true, what is real, what is untrue. *Jesus is the Word of God; Jesus does not and cannot contradict His Sermon on the Mount in His Natural Law nor does He contradict natural Law in His Sermon on the Mount.*

The Sermon on the Mount and Natural Law are utterly and completely logically compatible. So, when a person says, "But certainly it is the first law of nature is survival." We can say, "True enough, fair enough." That seems to be true in the animal world from the smallest microscopic living thing to the largest, the whale; they prey on each other and defend themselves with violence. But when the Word of God has been placed in a human being who is then made in the image and likeness of God—a human being with an immortal soul, a human being who was made by the Word of God from the beginning—when the Word of God is placed in that human being, indeed one can reasonably say that survival is the first law that a human being understands, has to follow. One can also reasonably say that the human being knows that it is

utterly irrational, illogical, and unreasonable to choose temporal survival over eternal survival. *“Those who try to save their life in this world will lose it; but those who lose their life in this world for my sake and the sake of the Gospel will save it,”* teaches the Author of Natural Law. There is a difference between the experience of the imperative of survival for the animal and for the human being made in the image and likeness of God, imbued with reason, who knows he or she is mortal, but who also knows that he or she desires, indeed, longs for eternal life. And if a Christian has been explicitly shown by Jesus the Way to Eternal life in God in order to reach that end and to reveal to others how to reach that desired end.

And so, the question is: Can God, Jesus is God Incarnate, contradict himself? Can God say in the Sermon on the Mount “X is true,” and then in Natural Law say, “X is not true”? Pope Benedict the XVI gave a famous lecture in 2006 at the University of Regensburg where he once taught. The lecture became famous or infamous because of how he began, which was with the story of the Byzantine emperor speaking to a Muslim holy man and saying that everything that Islam has brought into religion that is not in Scripture, Hebrew or Christian scripture, is evil. The mass media and therefore most people stopped reading his lecture right there. It became a cause célèbre for all kinds of people that wanted to accuse Benedict of being anti-Muslim or accuse him of this, that and the other thing.

It would have been good to read the whole lecture; it would have been rational to read the whole lecture before commenting on it. In that lecture what Benedict is pointing out, with explicit direct quotes from Muslim clerics and Muslim scholars of the Quran, is that Islam maintains that submission to God's Will is absolute. If God says “X is good on Monday,” you do it. If God says, “X” is evil on Tuesday, and then you do not do it. Benedict says, “No,” to this understanding of God. God is *logos*, logic, Word. His Word is eternal. God is not self-contradictory. He is not absurd. What He says is and is eternally. He does not change His will from Monday to Tuesday. We may be unclear in terms of what He says; we may interpret what He says wrongly but *what He says is eternally valid and logically consistent, so logically consistent that it is a total unity.*

God does not say “X is good on Monday” and then on Tuesday say “X is evil.” And so, Jesus does not say in a straightforward manner, “Love your enemies,” “Do good to those who hate you,” “Pray for those who persecute you;” In Gethsemane and Golgotha He witnesses to what he taught, “Love of enemies” etc. He, the very Word of God does not place a different truth as God’s truth in the hearts of people and call it Natural Law, e.g., kill your enemies. *Natural Law must be and is consistent with the teaching of Jesus; and there is no way to derive from Natural Law a Christian just war theory that is consistent with the teaching of Jesus.* To try to do that is to engage in the illogical, in the absurd and God is neither illogical nor absurd. As Benedict says, God is *agape*, love; but God is also *logos* and what is revealed clearly by His Word (*Logos*) cannot be not validly contradicted by human philosophy or *by a contradictory revelation*, since God is the only source of revelation and God is *Logos*.

Therefore, a Christian cannot run to Natural Law and draw out of it a truth about God’s will that contradicts Jesus’ teaching, e.g., the moral right to kill people on earth in order to survive temporarily in his or her earthly life. Earthly survival is not a value in the New Testament; look it

up! Earthly survival is not a value in the teachings of Jesus; look it up. The cross is not a symbol of earthly survival; look it up.

Jesus teaches a Way of salvation unto eternal life, a Way of eternal communion with God. That Way is by participating in the very love that is the life of God which He shows us, which is why He give us His “*new commandment*,” to love as He loves. This is how one enters into eternal life at this moment and forever. Following this “*new commandment*” of God Incarnate is how a person enters into the Reality of God—“*who is love*” and who only is eternal—at this moment and forever.

How did this whole thing get started that Natural Law philosophy is raised to the same level or above the level of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel? It all stems from two little sentences in Romans 2:14 and 15. The sentences read, “For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts.” That is fine. That is what Paul says. But let us examine and interpret that passage.

Every single time outside of the possibility of that passage, every single time Paul uses the word law, he means Torah. Every other use of the word law as we translate it in St. Paul is Torah, not natural law. Not philosophical natural law. Because of Greek grammar and verbiage, there is confusion on the meaning of the sentence. What we have here is we have Paul, who writings are by far the most extensive in the New Testament and who universally in his Epistles means the Torah when he speaks of law, in this one passage being interpreted to mean philosophical natural law when he speaks of law. Listen to the words and see which makes more sense, remembering that he is universally talking about Torah— except it is being maintained in this particular case— he is talking about philosophic natural law. Does he change here, from Torah, the law given by God to Moses to philosophical natural law derived from sin-drenched reason perceiving and interpreting a ting segment of empirical reality? What is the evidence for that?

Why would Paul change to the natural law when every other use of this term law (*nomos*) in his writings is Torah? The fact is that if Paul knew anything about natural law, even the thought of it, the only natural law he would have known is Stoic natural law and that he could not possibly be thinking of because Stoic natural law reasons to the conclusion that suicide is the ultimate good choice that human beings can make. So the question remains: What is Paul talking about here?

Certainly he is not talking about Aristotelian or Thomistic natural law or any other kind of philosophical natural law; that is, he could not be referring to these because he did not of know them. What is Paul talking about here? He is referencing to Jeremiah 31:33-34 an esteemed passage full of hope and promise. Remembering that all Paul, all the Gospels, the whole New Testament has to use the language and symbols of Judaism because that is all the people know. They have to use symbols, signs, words from Judaism of the time to point to whatever it is Jesus is communicating, felt to be, is, is doing.

Jeremiah 31: 33-34 reads thus. "*But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts. I will be their God and*

they shall be my people. They will no longer have to teach their friends and relatives to know the Lord. Everyone from the least to the greatest shall know me." That is what Paul is referring to, the Torah, the Word of God clearly written in the hearts of human beings, so "*they will no longer have to teach it.*" So clear will it be that the Word of God will reveal God Himself—"*Everyone from the least to the greatest shall know me.*" That is what Paul is talking about Jesus, the Word of God; so clearly presenting the Will and Way of God that people will know God Himself. To know Jesus is to know God; "*He who sees me sees the Father, the Father and I are one.*" He is the content of that new "*covenant God will make with the house of Israel after those days.*"

What I am raising here is this situation: The whole history of justified violence and enmity in the Church is a history of disobedience, disloyalty to Jesus. It is also a history of grasping at intellectual straws to try to find loopholes in the teaching of Jesus. It is using reason to altar, mortify, demean and dismiss the Word of God made visible in Jesus. In days passed, not too long ago, everyday Christians, Catholics and otherwise, the first thing they jump to in order to escape Jesus teaching of Nonviolent Love of all under all circumstances is the overturning of the tables in the Temple. Jesus whipped those money-changes right out of there. Therefore, it was held that we Christians could use violence in every form. But, Jesus strikes no human being in the cleansing in the temple in that universally known now. He never strikes a human being in the temple or any place else with a whip or anything else. He strikes the animals. The passage in scholarship is referred to as the overturning of the tables. The violent cleansing of the temple is an interpretation of it from the Middle Ages. As a matter of fact, if you look at El Greco's painting *The Cleansing of the Temple*, Jesus is there whipping human beings with such fury on his face that he looks like Rambo with a whip in his hands; there aren't even any animals in the painting! All he is doing is beating on human beings; that is not in the Gospels, not in any one of the four passages that deals with the overturning of the tables in the temple. But for century upon centuries, everyone simply said, "Oh, that means that violence can be justified for the Christian." Nonsense.

Another Loophole to evade Jesus teachings that reject violence and enmity and justify everything from child and wife beating to the dropping of the atomic bombs was "*I come not to bring peace but the sword.*" Again, nonsense! Everyone knows that today. The sword that Jesus brings is Himself, the Word of God Incarnate: "*The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" We have to stop these interpretations whether of Scripture or of Natural Law that contradict the teaching of Jesus and are only an attempt to escape the life for which we were chosen by Jesus and Baptized. What we are talking about here is grasping on straws to justify a disciple's disobedience to Jesus. *With these straws the military chaplaincy is built.*

And so I just would like to leave you with a thought. Bertolt Brecht, very conscious of the realities of the institutional Church as a war-Church, wrote a little poem with which I shall conclude. He is not the only one, so writing. People have been writing on this problem of the

justification of violence by the institutional Church since the days of Constantinian revolution in the Church. Constantine wanted one empire, one emperor, and one religion, as a way of uniting unifying the Roman Empire. So he began to give the Christian Church largess, especially the leaders. He gave them power; he made Bishops secular judges in their territory with the Roman military to back up their decisions. Gave them wealth, gave them property and in return the Christian leaders gave him loopholes to get around Jesus' teachings regarding violence and enmity. To get around Jesus teaching first with a little bit of violence exercised by the Bishop-Civil Judge here and within a hundred years the flood gates were opened, and so we have all the Christian butchery of human beings that we have today and for most of yesterday. And the Church leaders to this day are still supplying not only the bodies of Christians to be cannon fodder for the nation to the world, but also it is supplying the phony theological rationales for Christians to engage in mass slaughter. The Christian military chaplaincy is a key component in this anti-Christ operation.

This problem has been known since the time of Constantine and people have struggled against it. But, money and power are difficult to walk away from. It is hard to change the minds and behaviors of people, if they must remove themselves from power and from wealth on the scale that they are used to. in order to change; and so it is with the Christian Churches and their leaders.

In any world-wide multi trillion dollar organizations, trillion dollar organizations, where it possesses extraordinary luxury wealth more and people do not have enough to survive, there is no way to protect that luxury wealth except with the gun. And of course, if that wealth organization is a Christian one that means validating spiritually following the sword instead of the Nonviolent Jesus of the Gospels. It means encouraging the organizations members to fight and kill and die for God and the organization whatever it may be. The Christian chaplains of the organization are the frontline cheerleader egging people on to kill and be killed, to maim and be maimed for God and the organization. So let me conclude, as promised, with this little excerpt from Bertolt Brecht's poem, *Mother Courage*. It transparently sums up what the place of Christian military chaplaincy in the schemes of the ecclesiastically, politically and financially powerful of this earth.

Your blessings priest, make haste
for we have no time to waste.
We must be dying, dying, dying
Our emperor's greatness glorifying.

-Emmanuel Charles McCarthy