Timothy Olinski
Queen's University

Roman and Christian Just War: A Re-Analysis[1]

The concept of just war, no matter the culture it is drawn from in the Western world — Greece, Republican Rome, Christian Europe — tends to have shared ideas, values, and motivations. They also tend to have multiple dimensions, such as the moral grounds upon which war can be seen as an appropriate response, or proper conduct during war. Just war theories also tend to aim to limit the use and excess of warfare by the culture or state in which it operates. This is also done for unique reasons, some of which we will explore below, but for the purposes of this discussion, we will be focusing on Republican and Imperial Rome. Unsurprisingly, just war has been the focus of an intense amount of scholarship, and this paper will focus on three of those discussions as they relate to the evolving Christian relationship with both warfare and military service in the period of the early Church (roughly the first three centuries AD).

The intellectual tradition surrounding the concept of just war has a long and contested history, reaching back to antiquity. Academic scholarship on just war theory, however, is divided over several topics, including its origin. Some scholars, such as Miller, Mattox, Barnes, O'Brien, and others, present a shallow assessment of what is otherwise a concept with a long history. Instead of recognizing just war's antique origins, many of these scholars attribute the origin of just war to St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who sought to justify Christian participation in

[1] The translations that follow are drawn from a variety of sources, but are not my own production. Each is drawn from available professional translations as listed in the bibliography below.

Roman wars.[2] Other scholars recognize the greater antiquity of just war, and its relation to Roman society through the evidence of Cicero's *De Officiis*.[3] A second trend in the scholarship on just war, typified by scholars such as Bainton, Kunz, Ramsey, and Galli – is a belief in a pure and moral early Church, pacifist in nature, before Constantine's unexpected conversion in 312 AD. These scholars consider this sudden change in the relationship between Christians and the empire to have had two effects. First, it reversed the outlook of the early Church fathers on temporal power, leading to a steep moral decline. Constantine was, in the eyes of those scholars, the start of a fall from grace for the Church, as it traded moral purity for the organs of political power.[4] Second, this view argues that this sudden change in the relationship between the Church and the empire caused patristic theoreticians to do an about-face in regards to teachings on military service, pushing them to adopt Roman traditions concerning war with little to no adaptation. These scholars see Augustine's just war as a direct copy of Republican Rome's *Iustum Bellum,* which ignores centuries of gradual change.[5]

Now, the discussion of whether the early Church was, by nature, pacifist is a separate, albeit related topic. The choice of early Christians to integrate into – or remain a part of – Roman

---

[2] Miller discusses just war in connection with Augustine, making some connection to other Christian theoreticians, but largely ignores its long history. Driscoll does an excellent job reviewing its antiquity, as well as identifying several scholars who ignore that history. For more, see Richard B. Miller, "Just War, Civic Virtue, and Democratic Social Criticism: Augustinian Reflections," in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 89, No. 1, 2009, pp. 1-30, and Cian O'Driscoll, "Rewriting the Just War Tradition: Just War in Classical Greek Political Thought and Practice," in *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 1, 2015, pp. 1-10, pg. 1.

[3] For some examples of this scholarship, see John Langan, "The Elements of St. Augustine's Just War Theory," in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vo. 12, No. 1, 1984, pp. 19-38, pg. 20, and Mark Vorobej, "Is Pacifism An Extreme View?" in *Peace Research*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2014, pp. 5-29.

[4] See, for example, Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace*, Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1960, James T. Johnson, "Just War in the Thought of Paul Ramsey," in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 1991, pp. 183-207, pg. 186, Josef L. Kunz, "*Bellum Iustum* and *Bellum Legale*," in *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 1951, pp. 528-534., pg. 530, and Carlo Galli, "On War and on the Enemy," in *CR: The New Centennial Review*, Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (trans.), vol. 9, No. 2, 2009, pp. 195-219, pg. 200.

[5] Most notably, see Bainton (1960), pg. 95, and Galli (2009), pg. 200, Bainton describes the two systems as essentially the same, with a few changes, while Galli describes Augustine as 'resuming' Cicero's *iustum bellum* ideas.

society (either by joining the military or serving as magistrates) is a big part of the narrative surrounding its relation to the idea of just war. The intent of this paper is to examine the evidence concerning early Church pacifism, its teachings on military service, and state-sanctioned violence as a reflection of not only Christian integration, but also emergence, in Imperial Roman society before Constantine. Further, this emergence of the Christian population into its role as a part of the Roman Empire in the post-Constantine era reflects a wider realisation that Christians had to play a direct role in state-life – including the military. The writings of Augustine show a culmination of Christian teachings coming to terms with Roman realities, and embracing the pre-Christian concept of *Iustum Bellum* (with significant adaptation), in order to live in Roman society fully. By necessity, this discussion will begin with the Roman concept of *Iustum Bellum*, and the *Fetial* priesthood. From there we will move on into the biblical foundations for non-violence in Christian teaching, the writings of the early Church fathers on military service, and the evidence of Christian participation in the pre-Constantine period (spanning roughly 170-312 AD). Our discussion will then conclude with St. Ambrose (340-397 AD), Augustine, and a comparison of how the two concepts, Christian just war and Roman *iustum bellum,* were similar and different.

Examining these ideas will bring attention to the antique roots of Christian just war, but also the changes it underwent. Changes that took place over centuries, not just in the thought of one patristic writer, while the early Church reconciled theory and practice – coming to terms with the idea that military service could have a moral foundation. Evolving from a minority in Roman society to eventually represent something akin to a majority, Christianity had to take up the reins of power. The early Church was not strictly pacifist, but rather the scattered nature of its

communities, and the varied geographical and historical contexts in which it established itself, can give that impression. As the Christian community grew, however, it becomes more and more obvious that, while theoreticians may have had moral quandaries about military service – and eventually warfare – at the individual level, Christians, whether they found their faith before they enlisted or after, found ways to reconcile their faith with their service.

While Rome was still a small state, *iustum bellum* was a part of a ritualised system of basic inter-state diplomacy. In the earliest days of Republican Rome, there was a college of priests, the *Fetials*, who were dedicated to delivering ultimatums to Rome's enemies prior to the declaration of war. Beyond this, the *Fetials* had five duties within the Roman state. As Santangelo tells us, the *Fetials* were there to:

1. Make sure war was only waged as the result of clear provocation (broken alliances, mistreatment of Roman magistrates, etc;
2. To give the enemy the ability to comply with Roman demands (the *rerum repetitio);*
3. To ensure the enemy was treated properly;
4. Supervision of treaty stipulations;
5. To punish Roman magistrates guilty of war-time misconduct.[6]

In a time when warfare was viewed as an inevitable state of affairs, even as a beneficial part of social interaction, the *Fetial* priesthood existed to keep martial attitudes in check and prevent excess.[7]

This was, of course, back when Rome's enemies were linked to it geographically, but all of it revolved around the idea that for early Rome, war had to be pursued in a certain way. If

[6] Santangelo, Federico, "The Fetials and their 'Ius,'" in Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Vol. 51, 2008, pg. 63-93, pg. 92.
[7] Moskalew argues that, in the Roman system, war was beneficial for the senatorial class – which made sense, as it could confer on the successful general a strong public following, not to mention money. See Walter Moskalew "Fetial Rituals and the Rhetoric of the Just War," in *The Classical Outlook*, Vol. 67, No. 4, 1990, pp. 105-110, pg. 107-108.

Rome felt it had been wronged, the *Fetials* were dispatched with a demand for satisfaction, the *rerum repetitio* (rehearsal of grievances).[8] This was the early Roman diplomatic organ at work. Diplomacy in antiquity was, as mentioned, basic, limited as it was by distance and the technology of the time. As stated previously, no inter-state system existed to satisfy grievances. There was a Latin League, but this was largely relegated to religious concerns, such as proper cult practice and larger festivals.[9] Diplomacy in this instance was coercive. Grievances were aired in this ritualised manner, and either satisfied, or war was declared. With the degree to which religion played a part in Roman warfare, Rome had to follow such protocol before it could justifiably act to insure divine approval of morally righteous conflict.[10] Only when the enemy refused to satisfy their demands could Rome openly declare war.[11] The *rerum repetitio*, and the enemy refusal to satisfy Roman demands, allowed Rome to shift the blame onto the enemy. This allowed the Roman state to prosecute a war that satisfied its sensibilities as *pius* and *iustus.*[12] After all, wars that had been waged contrary to fetial law had historically resulted in serious defeats for Rome (e.g. Allia River in 380 BC). The *Fetials* were, in many ways, their intermediaries with the gods, and ensured their approval.[13]

---

[8] Eckstein presents an interesting outline of the fetial process before war was declared, although he keeps the outline limited. See Arthur M. Eckstein, Arthur M., *Mediterranean Anarchy, Inter-state War, and the Rise of Rome*, University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2006, pg. 121.

[9] Eckstein (2006), pg. 121.

[10] Eckstein here discusses that one of the main concerns regarding fetial rituals was that the war could be seen as just from the point of view of Roman religion. See Arthur M. Eckstein, *Senate and General: Individual Decision Making and Roman Foreign Relations, 264-194 B.C.,* University of California Press: Los Angeles, 1987, pg. 99, Eckstein (2006), pg. 121, Arthur M. Eckstein, "'Treaty of Philinus,' and Roman Accusations against Carthage," in *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 2010, pp. 406-426, pg. 414, and Eric M. Orlin, *Foreign Cults in Rome: Creating a Roman Empire*, Oxford University Press: New York, 2010, pg. 4.

[11] The *Fetials* were expected to deliver the ultimatum to the enemy, then provide them with 30 days to reply. Only once a response was received, could Rome declare war. See Bainton (1960), pg. 41

[12] Moskalew emphasizes the idea of *pius* and *iustus* when Rome was considering war. They sometimes had to resort to propaganda, or alter the frame of reference, to word things in a way that made them the villain. See Moskalew (1990), pg. 107.

[13] Santangelo's work emphasizes the idea that Romans tended to follow fetial law when considering war, as they had witnessed what happened when they ignored it. The example given, the Allia River in 380 BC, was a catastrophic

The *Fetials*, and their laws, thus played a significant role in defining the concept of *iustum bellum* within early Roman society. It is, however, not readily articulated in a straight-forward literary discussion until Cicero. In *De Officiis*, Cicero outlines for us the major points of Rome's just war beliefs. As Cicero tells us, war was intended as a last resort:

> Then, too, in the case of a state in its external relations, the rights of war must be strictly observed. For since there are two ways of settling a dispute: first, by discussion; second, by physical force; and since the former is characteristic of man, the latter of the brute, we must resort to force only in case we may not avail ourselves of discussion. The only excuse, therefore, for going to war is that we may live in peace unharmed; and when the victory is won, we should spare those who have not been blood-thirsty and barbarous in their warfare.[14]

A key idea here was that war was only to be pursued by a legitimate authority, and there were only a few avenues where it was justified for use: to avenge a wrong, to address an insult (only after the demand for restitution), or to defend either Rome or its allies.[15] Further, Roman just war doctrine also demanded that proper fidelity with the enemy be kept:

> Moreover, there are laws governing warfare, and it often happens that faith given to an enemy must be kept. For if an oath has been sworn in such a way that the mind grasps that this ought to be done, it should be kept…The whole of our fetial code is about such an enemy and we have many other laws that are shared. If that were not so, the senate would never have delivered notable men in chains to the enemy.[16]

No matter the conditions, even open war, Roman beliefs valued fidelity towards an enemy. Any oaths made bore the weight of law – and to break such an oath was considered perjury.[17] As an example, Cicero refers to the story of Regulus, whose oath forced him to return to Carthage and

---

Roman defeat resulting from a diplomatic debacle. In short, the Roman parties at fault were not surrendered to the injured party (in contravention of *Fetial* law, as they were scions of a powerful senatorial family) and the Gauls marched on, and sacked, Rome itself. See Santangelo (2008), pg. 71, 84-85.

[14] Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.34-35

[15] Cicero, *De Officiis* 1.36-37, 2.26

[16] Cicero, *De Officiis* 3.107-108

[17] Cicero, *De Officiis* 3.107-108

a death by torture, as he had sworn to return if the senate refused the offer he bore.[18] Fidelity, including oaths to an enemy, had to be kept, even if they meant death.

The experience of war — how Romans prosecuted war, and incorporated it into their society – has played a huge part in how both Romans, and Rome itself, has been subsequently viewed by scholars. Such scholars have argued that Rome was unique in antiquity for its belligerent and bellicose nature.[19] However, much as Eckstein points out, when viewed from a multi-disciplinary stance, namely that of history and political science, this is not the case, but rather Rome was simply one bellicose state among many. During its first 300 years of existence alone it was faced with aggressive and expansionist polities not unlike itself – Latium, the Etruscans, the Celts of the Po Valley – and so Rome was one predatory state among many.[20] Those that argue that Rome was uniquely warlike or militaristic ignore the fact that Rome operated in an ever-expanding environment of inter-state rivalry. As it grew, so too did its competitors.[21] Thus, Rome was not unique in the task of surviving within such an environment. The orthodox view that Rome was uniquely belligerent exists upon the misplaced belief that it was the only such state. Rather, as Kenneth Waltz states, "States are alike in the tasks they face, though not in their ability to perform them."[22]

What made Rome truly unique was their reliance on a fabricated status group, the senatorial class, to perform necessary tasks. As an aspect of that system, *Iustum Bellum* was one

[18] Cicero, *De Officiis* 3.110-111
[19] Scholars such as W.V. Harris express this view, arguing that Rome was uniquely predatory, and ignoring the fact that such a view turns a blind eye to other contemporary states acting in similar fashion. Eckstein addresses Harris' argument in detail in his work. See Eckstein (2006), pg. 176-183.
[20] Eckstein (2006), pg. 176-177, 182-183.
[21] Eckstein (2006), pg. 3, 10, 119.
[22] This comment, pulled from Eckstein's treatment of Waltz's study, was largely tied to the concept of Roman exceptionalism. See Waltz, (1979), pg. 96, in Eckstein (2006), pg. 311.

way to insure a modicum of consensus in action. Rome had to compete for power and security, but those wars, as stated above, needed to be waged for the right reasons to insure divine approval.[23] Without that approval, Rome risked disaster, and so they rigorously policed those who violated the morals of *iustum bellum.*[24] Much as Eckstein has stated in his work, the most formative experience for a Roman aristocrat was their period of military service during their adolescence.[25] As a result, the Roman senatorial class came into their leadership roles with plenty of experience in warfare, and so were well versed in its benefits, risks, and costs. These were the individuals that Rome relied on to act in its interests – these men had no professional staff to rely on, no civil service to provide them information or intelligence.[26] Nor did Rome set coordinated policy for them to adhere to. Instead, in their roles as senators, diplomats, and generals, Rome's aristocrats were trusted to act in its interests based on their shared experience. After all, in the rudimentary state of politics in antiquity, clear lines of communication could not always be relied on, and so commanders often had to act how they believed the senate would want them to act. While they may not have had direct communication, they had that shared idea of *iustum bellum* to help guide them, and were entrusted with the necessary authority to act within Roman social mores.[27]

What sets *Iustum* Bellum apart from what we will observe later in Christian just war theory is motivation. For the Romans, there was the concept of *inuria,* which, simply put, was any perceived insult to Roman authority. This could involve treaty violations, harming a Roman

[23] Eckstein (2006), pg. 118, and Eckstein (2010), pg. 411.
[24] Eckstein (2010), pg. 414.
[25] Eckstein (1987), pg. XV-XVI
[26] Eckstein (1987), pg. XIX.
[27] Eckstein (1987), pg. XV-XVII, XIX, 319, 320.

ally, and other such injuries.[28] But instead of having an inherently judicial, or legalistic approach to retaliation, *iustum bellum* was more concerned with maintaining Rome's international dignity. It was less about justice, and more about projecting to other states an air of dominance to deter aggression. It was a way to maintain security, while also ensuring divine approval of a conflict. To see this in action, one needs to look no further than the Augustan period, where avenging the defeat of Crassus, which was universally seen as an unjust attack on Parthia, could be framed as an adequate justification for war. For Augustus it was a national disgrace that could be leveraged for his needs. Although the Parthians were justified in their actions, Augustus was able to frame the discussion in a way that made it seem as if the Parthians had insulted Roman authority.[29] Despite other ancient authors deploring Crassus' greed and ambition, Augustus was able to leverage it to gain public backing and popularity.[30] As stated, *iustum bellum* was as much about saving face as about addressing a wrong.

If we look even further back, to when Caesar, in documenting his Gallic wars, came to the point where he had to justify his invasion and subjugation of Gaul, he likewise turned to a Roman defeat to justify his ambition. In his *Gallic War*, Caesar relates the following:

> The name of the canton was the Tigurine; for the whole state of Helvetia is divided into four canons. In the recollection of the last generation this canton had marched out alone from its homeland, and had slain the consul Lucius Cassius and sent his army under the yoke. And so, whether by accident or by the purpose of the immortal Gods, the section of the Helvetian state which had brought so signal a calamity upon the Roman people was the first to pay the penalty in full. Therein Caesar avenged private as well as national outrages; for in the same battle with Cassius the Tigurini had slain Lucius Piso the general, grandfather of Lucius Piso, Caesar's father-in-law.[31]

[28] Mattern-Parkes outlines Augustus' move to use Crassus' defeat to boost his reputation. He successfully marshals Roman opinion to bully Parthia into returning the lost standards. See Susan P. Mattern-Parkes, "The Defeat of Crassus and the Just War," in *The Classical World* Vol. 96, No. 4, 2003, pp. 387-396., pg. 391-392.
[29] Mattern-Parkes (2003), pg. 389, 393.
[30] Mattern-Parkes (2003), pg. 390, Plutarch, *Life of Crassus* 14.4, 16.2
[31] Caesar, *B. Gall.* 1.12

This event refers to the battle of Burdigala in 107 BCE, where a Roman army was nearly destroyed by the Tigurini after entering their territory. The Tigurini had allied with the Cimbri, a migrating Germanic tribe that Rome feared would attempt an invasion of Italy, and so it had launched a campaign to prevent it. While justified, Rome was the aggressor in this situation, and so their defeat was similar to that suffered by Crassus. However, the memory that the survivors were forced to pass 'under the yoke' in order to survive had to have offended Roman dignity. What is remarkable is that, over fifty years later, Caesar could consider this as a viable justification for his campaign. Roman vengeance of perceived indignity to its authority was highly flexible. The spectre of any defeat, no matter how ancient, could be used as the grounds to justify a war, provided that it was framed properly. Clearly Romans held grudges as serious debts to be collected – either immediately, or whenever the opportunity presented itself.[32]

Together with Crassus, these two cases show us that Roman just war doctrine was more concerned with Roman dignity than anything else. Any insult, or *inuria*, be it legal or a perceived slight, could be used to justify military retaliation. This went far beyond simply addressing issues of treaty violations – insults to Rome, such as being defeated on the field of battle, even when Roman forces were carrying out an unjust attack, were enough to warrant aggression. As stated, Rome was one predatory state among many, and so violent displays were one way to reinforce security. The spectre of Roman retaliation could help to project dominance and deter war.

It is into this martially-inclined, and dignity focused society that early Christianity began to emerge. However, there are a few factors to consider before we delve into the early Church's relationship with violence and military service. First, the pre-Constantine Christian community

[32] And the Roman public loved a victor, no matter their motivations. Mattern-Parkes noticeably discusses this same episode in her work in connection with Crassus. See Mattern-Parkes (2003), pg. 393-394.

was scattered across a vast empire. These Christian communities faced varying levels of military activity and thus had different outlooks on it.[33] The interior provinces saw little military activity, and so patristic writings from those areas present a greater resistance to military service. Other areas, like Southern Armenia, where the *Legio XII Fulminata* hailed from, faced variations of both extremes (willingness to serve, and extreme asceticism).[34] Second, some argument is made that Christianity spread largely among those ineligible for service.[35] However, this willfully ignores the Roman auxiliary military units, which made up a large portion of its military strength. This would also be a moot point, as citizenship was only a requirement for enlistment in the regular legions, which took volunteers, not conscripts.[36] Further, Emperor Caracalla would extend Roman citizenship to all free males in the empire in 212 AD. Third, there is a lack of evidence of participation before the period of 170-180 AD, which some scholars take as evidence of condemnation. This outlook does ignore the idea that, as Kopel points out, the Roman army comprised roughly 300,000 of a population of at least 50,000,000: less than one percent of the total.[37] That little evidence of the early Christian community can be found in this period should come as no surprise. This was also a time when it could be dangerous to be openly Christian, so a convert among the legions was likely to hide their faith until they could muster out at the end of their service.

---

[33] Bainton discusses the absence of evidence concerning Christian participation pre-170 BC largely in connection with the varying degrees of military activity that the different Roman provinces saw. See Roland H. Bainton, "The Early Church and War," in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 1946, pp. 189-212, pg. 195.
[34] Bainton (1946), pg. 195.
[35] Shean gives a solid outline of why discounting Christian military participation before 170 BC as linked to the citizenship requirement to serve was poor evidence. See John F. Shean, *Soldiering for God: Christianity and the Roman Army*, Brill: Boston, 2010, pg. 72.
[36] For further discussion on the debate concerning citizenship, Christians, and military service, see Shean (2010), pg. 87.
[37] The military/population breakdown is best outlined in David Kopel, "Christian Pacifism Before Constantine," SSRN Electronic Journal, 2008, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228277490> pp. 1-32, Pg. 8.

Fourth, there are some scholars that argue against Christian participation before 170 AD, or that it was evidence of pacifism, as a result of an abhorrence for violence, such as Adolf Harnack, Cadoux, and others.[38] These scholars do not adequately take into account the changes that started in the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211 AD), where military personnel started serving administrative and civil functions. Garrison duty in peaceful areas (where the military and police were not separate entities), the *Vigiles* in Rome (who served as fire protection and as civil peace-keepers), prisoner custody, ordinance handlers, etc. – there were many roles where convert-soldiers could serve without ever having to kill.[39] While issues might have existed concerning idolatry, the diverse functions of the Roman army presented opportunities for social advancement that many Christians could not resist, whether they had found their faith before enlisting or after.[40]

Further, while Rome was unique in its willingness to incorporate new cults or religious beliefs into its ever-expanding pantheon, those who presented a threat to social cohesion were often the target of repression.[41] During the first centuries of its existence, Christianity fell into that category, largely due to its proselytizing mission, exclusivity of veneration, and that its spread ignored social hierarchies. In a society where the practice of public cult was considered a

[38] Bainton and Shean both discuss these debates, as well as the changes to administration in relation to the military, in their work. For a more thorough treatment, see Bainton (1946), pg. 190, and Shean (2010), pg. 72-78.
[39] Bainton and Shean both outline that various duties that came under military control, see Bainton (1946), pg. 197-198, and Shean (2010), pg. 96.
[40] While Bainton and Shean discuss the possible roles, Swift argued that that expansion made the military a more appealing employment prospect for early Christians, as you did not need social connections in order to enlist and gain position, see Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, M. Glazier: Delaware, 1983, pg. 46.
[41] For discussion of Roman attitudes towards new deities or cults, see Yanfei Sun, and Dingxin Zhao, "Religious Toleration in Pre-modern Empires," in Francesco G. Duina (ed.), *States and Nations, Power and Civility: Hallsian Perspectives,* University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2019, pp. 249-270, pg. 244, and James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity,* InterVarsity Press: Illinois, 1999, pg. 98-99.

civic duty to ensure the good will of the gods, the Christian insistence that others abandon their beliefs was a problem. As a result, Christians were the target of persecution that varied in its brutality, from execution to exile. No doubt this pushed early Christians away from either declaring their faith openly, or from taking part in Roman society.[42] As a whole, these factors contribute to the perception that Christians resisted integration into Roman society, even holding themselves apart. To some degree, this is a possibility, but the absence of evidence is not proof that Christian beliefs were incompatible with military service. Much as Kopel points out in his work about just war in Greek thought, just because we do not have evidence of homosexual soldiers in Washington's Continental Army, does not mean they were not present, or that they were pacifists.[43]

These points aside, any discussion of Christianity and warfare must, of course, begin with its biblical foundation. Throughout early Christian writings on violence, there are two significant passages that are typically applied to this debate – the Sermon on the Mount, and the Arrest of Christ episodes:

> 'You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist an evil-doer. But if anyone strikes you on right cheek, turn the other also; if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give him your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.[44]
>
> Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword

[42] Much as Charles points out, it would be 250 AD before there were Christians in public office, see J. Daryl Charles, "Pacifists, Patriots, or Both?: Second Thoughts on Pre-Constantinian Early-Christian Attitudes toward Soldiering and War," in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2010, pp. 17-55, pg. 18, 21.
[43] Kopel (2008), pg. 9.
[44] *Matthew* 5:38-42

> will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen this way?"[45]

The first quotation, the afore-mentioned Sermon on the Mount, has Christ replacing the old Testament idea of 'an eye for an eye' with his own ideal: 'turn the other cheek.' Many Christian authors took this teaching to mean that Christians were to avoid any kind of violence. They believed this was Christ's way of forbidding violence, even to defend oneself and one's property. The second quotation, the account of Christ's arrest, emphasizes Christ's condemnation of Peter's violent action. This second quotation, even more so than the first, formed the basis for much of the patristic writing on violence. Some believed that Christ, in telling Peter to sheathe his sword, had forbidden Christians to take up arms, thereby disarming them for all time.[46]

At this point, we turn our attention to the writings of the early Church fathers – namely Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Lactantius. These three patristic writers present the most detailed discussion of the conundrum that was military service in the pre-Constantine period. Further, as stated, Christian communities of the time were widely dispersed, and represent geographic variations in thought. They also had different experiences with warfare – much as Bainton discusses in his work, evidence of pacifism in patristic writing varied. Such thought was strong in the interior provinces, where things were peaceful, but in areas such as North Africa, there was evidence for both acceptance and rejection.[47] So, focusing on the writings of patristic thinkers from geographically distinct communities (such as Carthage, Rome, and Greece) allows us to see a variety of views. Lastly, as a whole they represent Christian theory between roughly

[45] *Matthew* 26:50-54
[46] Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 19.1-3, for example, expresses this exact idea. See Charles (2010), pg. 40, for more discussion on this topic.
[47] For a more detailed discussion of the varied acceptance/rejection of military service, see Bainton (1946), pg. 193.

170 and 312 AD, and can provide us with an idea of Christian theory, if not practice, during this time.

With Tertullian (ca. 160-220 AD), an early Christian author from Carthage, we can see that Christians were present in key Roman institutions. Referred to by some as the 'father of Latin Christianity,' Tertullian was the first Christian author to produce an extensive Latin body of writing on Christian teachings. He was also one of the chief pacifist voices in early patristic thought, but his views were noticeably inconsistent over his lifetime.[48] In response to criticism that Christians were not contributing to the empire, Tertullian wrote the following in his *Apology*, dated to 197 AD:

> Thus, we live in the world, sharing with you the forum, the market, the baths, the shops, the factories, the inns, the market days and all other commercial activities. We, no less than you, sail the sea, serve in the army, farm the land, buy and sell.[49]

Immediately, two points stand out. First, Christians were serving in all aspects of Roman society, including the army. Second, this does not seem to have been an issue for Tertullian, although it would be later. Perhaps, at this early phase, Tertullian was basing his thought on certain parts of the bible that fail to condemn military service, such as the response of John the Baptist to convert-soldiers: "Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what should we do?' He said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."[50] Influenced by this passage, which does not condemn soldiering nor demand that soldiers abandon their service upon conversion, Tertullian proudly presents this evidence of his fellow Christians contributing to Roman society.[51] Whatever the case may be, Tertullian's boast of

[48] Charles refers to Tertullian and Origen as the chief pacifist fathers of the early Church, see Charles (2010), pg. 32.
[49] Tertullian, *Apology* 42.2-3
[50] Note that Tertullian directly references this passage later in his *On Idolatry* 19:1-3, see *Luke* 3.14
[51] Tertullian, *Apology* 42.2-3

Christian participation tells us another significant factor: Christians were becoming a more visible part of Roman society. With this passage, we do not get the sense that they are a society within a society, but instead more a part of Roman society. Clearly, they openly identify as Christians, but they are also part of Roman society, and Tertullian shows satisfaction in pointing that out – even when it comes to military service.

This initial acceptance by Tertullian, however, is short-lived. His later works, *On Idolatry* and *On the Crown*, show a rejection of Roman military service, taking a strong pacifist tone. *On Idolatry*, for example, conveys the following message:

> But the question now is whether a member of the faithful can become a soldier and whether a soldier can be admitted to the Faith even if he is a member of the rank and file who are required to offer sacrifice or decide capital cases. There can be no compatibility between an oath made to God and one made to man, between the standard of Christ and that of the devil, between the camp of light and the camp of darkness. The soul cannot be beholden to two masters, God and Caesar…But how will a Christian do so? Indeed, how will he serve in the army even during peacetime without the sword that Jesus Christ had taken away? Even if soldiers came to John and got advice on how they ought to act, even if the centurion became a believer, the Lord, by taking away Peter's sword, disarmed every soldier thereafter. We are not allowed to wear any uniform that symbolizes a sinful act."[52]

For Tertullian, Christianity and military service were now completely incompatible entities. For him, a Christian's baptismal oath made any oath of loyalty to the Emperor, which soldiers had to swear multiple times during their service, impossible to fulfill.[53] This was the Roman *sacramentum,* an ancient piece of Roman military tradition dating back at least to the Second Punic War (ca. 218 BCE). The oath was tied to Roman religious practice initially, and bound soldiers to obey their commanders under threat of religious and legal sanction. It was grounded

[52] Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 19.1-3

[53] Much as Swift discusses in his work, it was the belief that a man could not fulfill both temporal and spiritual oaths, as represented by the baptismal oath and the *sacramentum*, so Tertullian believed it incompatible with Christian belief at this time in his life, see Swift (1983), pg. 42. Shean also notes that this was part of Harnack's argument in favor of pacifism in the early Church, see Shean (2010), pg. 73.

in the religious and hierarchical nature of Roman society, and had been used by Roman commanders, such as Caesar, to restore order to unruly troops.[54] It represented a bond between commander and soldier which, while it had lost its religious dimension over time, became more personal with the Marian reforms to the army.[55]

Where the issue exists for Tertullian is that this oath represented an incompatibility: a Christian could not serve both a spiritual and temporal master. Not only that, but Tertullian has shifted his view to one completely opposed to any military service, espousing the idea, drawn from the Arrest of Christ episode, that Christians had been disarmed for all time. Thus, Tertullian now viewed both military service, and the violence that accompanied it, as incompatible with being Christian. By the time of *On Idolatry*, Tertullian's view of military service had shifted from one of approval to strict condemnation. For him, a Christian could not be devoted to both God and the Emperor.

However, this view would change again, as Tertullian neared the end of his life. One of his later works, *On the Crown*, put forward the same general pacifist views in relation to violence, but his view on military service was noticeably different. This work, discussing a Christian soldier's refusal to wear a civic crown awarded to him, represents a re-assessment of his more extreme views. In particular when Tertullian refers to convert-soldiers, he expresses the idea that, while unlikely, if these converts could serve the Emperor while doing nothing that conflicted with their Christian values, they could remain in the military.[56] This shifting stance in

[54] Caesar, for example, used the *sacramentum* to restore order to troops that were mutinying in 47 BCE. See Lee L. Brice, "*Sacramentum*," in Lee L. Brice (ed*.), Warfare in the Roman Republic: From the Etruscan Wars to the Battle of Actium*, ABC-CLIO Ltd.: California, 2014, pp. 13-124, pg. 123-124.
[55] As Brice points out, the Marian reforms started to link soldiers and their generals more closely. So this became more of a personal connection, see Brice (2014), pg. 123-124.
[56] Tertullian, *On the Crown* 11.1-7

regards to whether military service was compatible with Christianity has several important points. The change is likely reflecting the social changes we mentioned earlier – Severus' reign had expanded the duties the military took charge of. As a result, a Christian in the ranks was not obligated to kill, or even use violence, and so could find a way to reconcile his faith and his service. Becoming aware of the opportunities there, Tertullian softened his outlook, perhaps not wanting to deny the benefits of finishing their term of service to convert-soldiers.[57] It could also have been a reflection of the realities of Christian teaching at this time. There was no consensus, but rather shifting priorities and ideas. Consistency or a unified stance was not reflective of this time in regards to the early Church.

A similar concession can be seen being granted by Hippolytus of Rome (ca. 170-235 AD), our next patristic author to discuss Christians in the context of military service. Little is known about Hippolytus' provenance, but his writings show him to have held very rigorist outlooks on Christian theology. Just like Tertullian, he takes the pacifist attitude to an extreme. His *Apostolic Tradition*, written around 215 AD, expressed the following:

> 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.[58]

From the above passage, it is clear that Hippolytus recognizes that Christians are serving in the military, although he only condones those in the ranks who found their faith after enlisting. Based on what we see above, he condones converts keeping their position provided they do not kill, swear oaths, or commit idolatry. He also forbids those who are already Christian from

[57] Much as Swift points out, the army was an avenue for social climbing when one lacked connections within the hierarchy, for more, see Swift (1983), pg. 46
[58] Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* XVI

joining the military, as it would show contempt for God. This tells us two things: first, the issue with military service in Hippolytus' view was killing, idolatry, and the *sacramentum*. Second, the concession here recognises that peace-time service in the ranks is compatible for those already enlisted. This is a stark contrast to what we saw in Tertullian at his most extreme (*On Idolatry)*, where he forbade service even in peace-time. Further, Hippolytus even takes issue with magistrates, who exercise 'the power of the sword' (i.e. execution). For Hippolytus, only low-ranking soldier positions are compatible, and only for those who are new to their faith. This presents an interesting current in patristic thought, as it recognizes that the soldier is not the one morally responsible for violent action – although he is obligated to refuse such an order.

The consensus here between Tertullian and Hippolytus (*On the Crown*) is intriguing. Although it bars Christians from joining, it does not obligate they terminate their service if they convert while in the ranks. This is likely reflecting the realities of Christianity's spread. When it was small, the chances that converts would be among the legions was small, as discussed previously, as the army represented less than 1% of the empire's population, and Christians likely less than that. As more and more of the empire converted, that chance shifted considerably. As Christians moved further and further away from being a minority, Christians would have started emerging in more and varied parts of Imperial Roman society. As a result, patristic thought was coming to terms with the idea that Christians were a functional part of Roman society to greater and greater degrees. It is remarkable that Tertullian's thought changed so much over the course of his life, and Hippolytus' ideas are also contemporary with Caracalla's 212 AD extension of citizenship to all free males within the empire. Barriers to access to the military that might have existed before were now gone, forcing patristic thought to react. We see similar thoughts in the

work of other Christian writers, such as Origen (ca. 185-254 AD) or Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 AD).[59] They also took no issue with Christian military service, provided that Christians could comport themselves in a way that showed both respect for God and Christian values. Based on this evidence, it is clear that the Christian community had gone from being a separate entity within Roman society, to being an integrated aspect of it.

The currents of patristic thought, however, were not united, and we see Lactantius (ca. 240-320 AD) take a hard line against service – at least initially. Referred to by Renaissance humanists as 'the Christian Cicero,' Lactantius had an interesting path to conversion. A Berber, born into a pagan family in Numidia, he initially taught rhetoric before traveling to Nicomedia, a Greek city in what is now modern-day Turkey. He did this at the behest of Diocletian, who had requested he teach rhetoric there, but he left imperial service after he converted. It was around this period, roughly 303-311 AD, that Lactantius expressed the following view:

> Thus it will be neither lawful for a just man to engage in warfare, since his warfare is justice itself, nor to accuse any one of a capital charge, because it makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word, or rather by the sword, since it is the act of putting to death itself which is prohibited. Therefore, with regard to this precept of God, there ought to be no exception at all; but that it is always unlawful to put to death a man, whom God willed to be a sacred animal.[60]

What we see here is a level of patristic thought in line with Tertullian's *On Idolatry* phase, but Lactantius is likely responding to events contemporary to his time. Diocletian's Great Persecution (303 AD) was underway, and it was not a good time to be openly Christian, which no doubt provoked Lactantius to resist integration, and encourage Christians to set themselves apart. Not only does he stress the incompatibility of Christianity and military service, but seems to focus particularly on violence. Nor does he stop there, but takes the discussion of war further,

[59] For further discussion of these views, see Swift (1983), pg. 59.
[60] tius, *Divine Institutes* 6.20.15-17

denouncing Rome as a barbaric, imperialistic power and its people as hopelessly brutal for lauding those who killed thousands on the battlefield.[61]

This view, however, would change rather abruptly with Constantine's victory at Milvian Bridge in 312 AD, and the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, that granted religious freedom to all. Lactantius, who had met Constantine while serving Diocletian, had been taken into the new emperor's service and would serve as tutor to his son Crispus. With these developments, Lactantius' views would once again reflect contemporary developments. His work, *Death of the Persecutors* (ca. 316 AD), features prominent episodes praising Constantine himself, including accounts such as the famous shield episode predicting Constantine's victory.[62] In the same work he also praises Constantine for his military prowess, a significant departure from his earlier stance on violence.[63] It seems that, now that the emperor has sided with Christianity, Lactantius has decided to change his tune. No longer is Christianity incompatible with the military, or Rome a barbaric empire. Instead, the Emperor is to be praised and his military service lauded.[64]

The main idea that we can take away from this discussion is that patristic theory on military service had no consensus. Different areas reflected different outlooks, and we have to recognize that, just like with Cicero, practice and policy varied. Further, theoreticians in this case are a lagging indicator, as between 170 and 312 AD we have tangible evidence of Christian participation in the Roman military. The lives of the military martyrs alone are clear evidence that Christians were serving in the Roman military early on. Marinus, for example, martyred in 260 AD, was denounced by a rival for promotion as he was Christian, and was executed when he

[61] Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1.18.8-10
[62] Lactantius, *Death of the Persecutors* 44.5.6
[63] Lactantius, *Death of the Persecutors* 18.10
[64] Perhaps, after the nightmarish conditions of Diocletian's reign, Lactantius had found a ruler he could admire? Or was it the influence of his patronage?

refused to recant.[65] Marcellus, martyred 298 AD, was likewise executed for refusing to venerate the emperor.[66] Julius the Veteran served a long career before deciding he could no longer do so, and was executed around 303-304 AD.[67] These are just a few of many martyrs that represent a Christian presence in the Roman military before Constantine. We can even go further back, to approximately 173 AD, based on Tertullian's *Apology:*

> On the contrary, we can point out our own protector, if you will examine the letters of the most venerable emperor, Marcus Aurelius. In these letters he attests that the great drought in Germany was relieved by rain that fell in answer to the prayers of the Christians who happened to be in his army…[68]

This, of course, refers to the rain miracle involving the *Legio XII Fulminata*. While it was attributed by non-Christian authors, such as Cassius Dio, to pagan deities, here Tertullian is claiming that Christian prayers from those in the legion were the true cause of the miracle.[69] What we can obtain from all of these separate instances, is that Christians, despite the objections of these Church fathers, were either willing and able to enlist throughout the pre-Constantine period, or found their faith while serving but were able to reconcile the two. While some of them came to have an issue with that service, and sought martyrdom, there were certainly others who enlisted or remained in their positions, and served without issue.

The more important point that the military martyrs represent, however, is that their existence is proof of Christian participation in the military pre-312 AD, and the rising presence of Christians in Roman society. The martyrs themselves represented a very vocal minority within

---

[65] *The Martyrdom of St. Marinus* 10-11
[66] *The Acts of Marcellus* 1.1
[67] *The Martyrdom of Julius the Veteran* 1.4-3.5
[68] Tertullian, *Apology* 5.6
[69] The rain miracle mentioned above refers to an event where legionaries, under attack and suffering from extreme thirst, experienced a sudden downpour. Christians were present in the ranks, but just how many is impossible to know, but Tertullian implies that it was a sizeable portion, if not the majority. For more see Tertullian, *Apology* 5.6ff. For the pagan view of the event, see Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 71.8-9. Note that this is taken from the *Apology*, and so Tertullian may be using this episode as a way to point towards Christian participation in Roman endeavours.

the ranks alongside others who served without issue, no doubt making things harder for their comrades. In fact we have evidence of this very thing in *On the Crown* and elsewhere that they were resented for their vocal objections.[70] Notably, in the *Acts of Maximilian*, an account of his martyrdom, we are told in no uncertain terms that other Christians served where Maximillian refused: "The proconsul Dion said: 'In the sacred bodyguard of our lords Diocletian and Maximian, Constantius and Maximus, there are soldiers who are Christian, and they serve.'"[71] This evidence, along with the epigraphical evidence of funerary inscriptions dating from the pre-Constantine period that we will discuss below tells us that Christians were serving in the military in ever-increasing numbers.

Epigraphical evidence, although sparse, provides clear evidence that there were Christians among the legions before Constantine. The downside to such evidence is twofold: first, while there are many epitaphs, it is not easy to date them. Second, such epitaphs represent a limited group – not every soldier, or their family, would have had the funds available for such an epitaph. Of the 176 epitaphs available to us, only a handful can, with some certainty, be dated to the pre-Constantine period, and represent Christian soldiers. One such epitaph, dedicated by a certain Cossutius, and hails from a Christian cemetery in Rome:

> 29. To the gods and to the shades. Cossutius, spouse of Eutyche Aurelia, made this monument for his Roman spouse, dearest and sweetest, with whom he lived twenty-eight years, member of the Second Parthian Severan Legion, in the

[70] Consider for example, Tertullian, *On the Crown* 1.1-4, where other Christians complain about the man seeking martyrdom. See also Roger Tomlin, "Christianity and the Late Roman Army," in Samuel N. C. Lieu and Dominic Montserrat (eds.), *Constantine: History, Historiography and Legend*, Routledge: New York, 1998, pp. 21-51, pg. 23, and Yann Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army*, B.T. Batsford: London, 1994, pg. 251 concerning the military martyrs.

[71] N.a., *The Acts of Maximillian* 1-2, in in Ronald Sider (ed.), The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment, Baker Academic: Michigan, 2012, pg. 154-155.

> consulship of Favianus and Mucius (AD 201), 3 days before the Ides of April (April 10th).[72]

This epitaph presents us with clear evidence that a Christian was serving in the legions before Constantine's conversion. The epitaph proudly presents the name of the unit that Cossutius was a member of – the Second Parthian legion – which was founded during the reign of Septimius Severus. Further, we can somewhat accurately date it based on the consuls for the year, Favianus and Mucius, which give us a solid date of 201 AD. This is notable for a couple of reasons. First, one of the arguments against Christian participation, which we have touched upon before, was that Christians did not qualify for the legions. This would not be an issue with Caracalla's extension of citizenship in 212 AD, but this epitaph pre-dates that event.[73] Second, one of the arguments put forth to counter the absence of evidence was that Christians could access the auxiliaries, as that did not require citizenship.[74] In this case, we have a member from one of the regular legions, and its presence in a Christian cemetery in Rome secures for us the presence of a Christian in the legions before Constantine.[75]

What this evidence tells us is that, even if we discount the stories of the soldier martyrs, the fact that they exist, when coupled with the tradition of the *Legio XII Fulminata*, epigraphical evidence, and the *Life of Maximilian*, means that Christians were present in the military before Constantine. Some patristic writers may not have looked upon it favourably, or begrudgingly made concessions to accommodate it, but it was a reality of life before Constantine. Naturally, with time, patristic thought would catch up with practice. While there is no definitive movement

---

[72] Owen Ewald (trans.), "Inscriptions from Leclerq's 'Militarisme' in DACh," in Ronald Sider (ed.), *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment,* Baker Academic: Michigan, 2012, pg. 147.
[73] Shean discusses this, as well as the counter-argument, in his work. See Shean (2010, pg. 73.
[74] Also discussed by Shean (2010), pg. 73.
[75] For more details about the epitaph, and others attributed to Christian soldiers, see Sider (2012), pg. 145-147.

in theory towards just war from earlier variations of pacifism, there is the realization by both theoreticians, and the Christian community, that, as their numbers rose, they had to fill these roles. Celsus may have been denouncing Christians when he criticized them for not participating, but his words seem oddly prophetic. Without their participation, the empire could no longer function.[76]

With the number of Christians present in the ranks increasing in number, Church theoreticians looked for instances where military service could not only be condoned, but praised. It is around this time, well after Constantine's victory at Milvian Bridge, that we have the work of St. Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339-397 AD). Ambrose is unique in the sense that he was elected to the position of bishop while still serving as a Roman governor, and so many of his views were heavily influenced by Roman traditions and ideals.[77] Ambrose was a senior aristocrat proficient in high-level government, and so when he transitioned into life as a Christian, he brought a great deal of education and experience with it, including knowledge of secular Roman literature (i.e. Cicero). He was also one of the first patristic authors to discuss situations where warfare could be justified. For example, he wrote the following in his work *On the Duties of the Clergy*: "For courage, which in war preserves one's country from the barbarians, or at home defends the weak, or comrades from robbers, is full of justice…"[78] Here we can see Ambrose condoning defensive warfare, but elsewhere he also champions war to protect the empire, or its allies:

> The glory of fortitude, therefore, does not rest only on the strength of one's body or of one's arms, but rather on the courage of the mind. Nor is the law of courage exercised in causing, but in driving away all harm. He who does not keep harm off a friend, if he can, is as much in fault as he who causes it. Wherefore holy Moses

[76] As Celsus' arguments only survive in the works of other patristic writers, see Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.73.
[77] This discussion of Ambrose's Roman upbrininging features in Swift (1983), pg. 97-98
[78] Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy* 1.27.129

> gave this as a first proof of his fortitude in war. For when he saw a Hebrew receiving hard treatment at the hands of an Egyptian, he defended him, and laid low the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.[79]

His doctrine of justified conflict looked in part to the Old Testament, and even includes such things as proper conduct towards the enemy (i.e. fidelity) and justifying war to punish enemy wrongdoing.[80] Ambrose is essential to any discussion of Christian just war doctrine, representing the first serious discussion of it within Christian theological thought. Mixing Roman and Christian ideas, Ambrose is a sign that Church beliefs were changing to reflect the contemporary situation. In Ambrose, Church teachings were becoming more Roman, espousing collaboration and not just isolation, much like its congregation. Christians were a part of the empire now, and so their teachings needed to change to reflect that.

While Ambrose represents a new frontier of thought for the early Church fathers, it is with St. Augustine of Hippo (ca. 354-430 AD) that just war doctrine takes on a more fully realized form. Like Lactantius, Augustine also hailed from Numidia, in Roman North Africa, to a Berber family that was heavily-Romanized. Despite his mother being Christian, and his father converting on his deathbed, Augustine did not find his faith until later in life. Instead, he led a largely hedonistic early life, studying classical literature and teaching grammar, until his conversion in 386 AD. After decades of rhetorical education and being a part of the intellectual elite before his conversion, Augustine was steeped in secular Roman tradition, much like Ambrose had been. While Augustine never directly addressed just war, his works are filled with short references to it that, when taken as a whole, give us a solid outline of how Augustine viewed warfare. A significant part of his thoughts can be found in his *City of God*. In Book 19,

[79] Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy* 1.36.178
[80] Ambrose, *On the Duties of the Clergy* 2.7.33, 3.9.110, 116

Augustine discusses the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, and the concept of the supreme good as it was discussed by other philosophers. In relation to war and peace, Augustine relates the following:

> Whoever gives even moderate attention to human affairs and to our common nature, will recognize that if there is no man who does not wish to be joyful, neither is there any one who does not wish to have peace. For even they who make war desire nothing but victory, — desire, that is to say, to attain to peace with glory. For what else is victory than the conquest of those who resist us? and when this is done there is peace. It is therefore with the desire for peace that wars are waged, even by those who take pleasure in exercising their warlike nature in command and battle. And hence it is obvious that peace is the end sought for by war. For every man seeks peace by waging war, but no man seeks war by making peace.[81]

It should come as no surprise that one of the strongest tenets of Augustine's just war doctrine is that war's ultimate aim had to be the restoration of peace. In this context, Augustine viewed it as a necessary resort to restore peace to the earthly city, which provides a balance of good despite its fallen state. However, his doctrine does not stop there, like Ambrose he condones warfare to punish wrongdoing, to return something wrongly taken, to avenge injury, as well as in self-defence.[82]

Even more important, and an area that sets Augustine apart from Ambrose, is his emphasis on the importance of legitimate authority. In his response to Faustus, a Manichaen, Augustine discusses John the Baptist's words to the convert-soldiers who come to him in *Luke 3.14*, tying it to Christ's oft-quoted comment 'render unto Caesar' in *Matthew 22.21,* and uses that to dispel the idea that military service was forbidden to Christians. In regard to warfare, in Augustine's view only a legitimate authority could prosecute a justified war:

> A great deal depends on the causes for which men undertake wars, and on the authority they have for doing so; for the natural order which seeks the peace of

[81] Augustine, *City of God* 19.12

[82] To punish wrongdoing, see Augustine, *City of God* 19.7, to return something wrongfully taken, and avenging injury, see Augustine, *Questions of the Heptateuch* 6.10, and for defensive warfare, see Augustine, *City of God* 22.6

> mankind, ordains that the monarch should have the power of undertaking war if he thinks it advisable, and that the soldiers should perform their military duties in behalf of the peace and safety of the community.[83]

We have already seen this same idea expressed by Cicero, where only legitimate authorities could prosecute just war. In the Old Testament, that was God's role, but for Augustine that had become the emperor. Only such a source of legitimate authority could prosecute a war, ultimately with the intent of restoring peace, be it punitive or defensive.

Interestingly, when discussing defensive warfare, Augustine reveals the source of his thoughts, and gives us an idea of where some of his thoughts are coming from: "I am aware that Cicero, in the third book of his *De Republica*, if I mistake not, argues that a first-rate power will not engage in war except either for honor or for safety…"[84] Clearly, this shows us that, by Augustine's own admission, he was actively borrowing from Roman precedents, much like Ambrose, but it was a more involved process. A significant difference, however, divides Roman and Christian doctrines when we consider the motivations behind them. That difference can best be seen when we look at Augustine's policy governing wrongdoing by an enemy:

> As a rule just wars are defined as those which avenge injuries, if some nation or state against whom one is waging war has neglected to punish a wrong committed by its citizens, or to return something that was wrongfully taken.[85]

If we look at the motivation behind Augustine's approval of warfare in this situation, it is predominantly legalistic. Augustine is concerned with righting a wrong done to the state, or returning something unjustly seized. There is an obvious tone that warfare is to be used to enforce law in an international situation that had no governing body to address such issues. It was a way for a state to address a wrong, no more. Just wars in the Christian sense were to be a

[83] Augustine, *Against Faustus* 22.75
[84] Augustine, *City of God* 22.6
[85] Augustine, *Questions of the Heptateuch* 6.10

last resort, and had to limit their extent to appropriate ends. They were not fought for glory, or to avenge an insult, but wholly to restore peace or to carry out justice.

Based on the tenets outlined above, it is hard not to see a striking resemblance between Roman and Christian doctrines. In their most basic components, they seem to share certain concepts such as who could prosecute war, when war was justified (defensive conflict, right a wrong, avenging an injury, etc.) and where it was restricted (fidelity must be upheld with the enemy, etc.). Where they depart significantly is in motivation and the factors that define justifiable warfare. When Augustine addresses the idea of retaliatory warfare, there is a very clear sense that warfare is intended to punish criminal acts.[86] For Christian just war doctrine, the spirit of retaliatory warfare was restricted to an almost legalistic framework. Anything that violated the state legally, such as treaty violations, seized territory, etc., were grounds for war. Warfare in the Christian system, was a way for the state to enforce legality in an international setting devoid of a governing body. But slights and insults do not seem to have been as much of a factor in Christian doctrine. Clearly, the motivations that existed behind these two doctrines were distinct.

While the two concepts were unquestionably distinct, the connection, the inheritance that Christian just war theory owes to *iustum bellum,* is clear. To say that they are the same, however, ignores a great deal of factors. As a final evolution, Augustine's just war doctrine is not only a product of Christianity's integration into the Roman Empire, but that of Christians into Roman society.[87] Christianity had been targeted at first for being a subversive social movement; after all,

[86] Augustine, *Questions of the Heptateuch* 6.10

[87] In his work, Kunz argues that Augustine's work on just war was a complete transformation of fetial law, and provides a surprisingly insightful discussion of the two concepts, Roman and Christian, from a legalistic view, dubbing Christian just war Bellum Legale, see Kunz (1951), pg. 530.

they seemed to be denying the emperor's temporal power by refusing to venerate him.[88] In encouraging others to abandon their gods, they seemed to be promoting a policy of atheism, abhorrent to a population who believed that the state owed its security to the proper veneration of those gods. Finally, in not worshipping or participating in Roman institutions, they were thought to be an unpatriotic and divisive element of society.[89]

However, as time passed, Christians went from being this illicit, hidden group, periodically persecuted, to a functioning part of Roman society. While they may have seemed to be pacifists, these were related more to the context — both historical and geographical — of their situation. In many ways, the early Church became Roman by attrition; as they welcomed more and more converts, they welcomed a wider array of Roman society into their number. Much as Tertullian noted at the end of the second century AD, Christians were becoming integrated into every aspect of Roman society, and over time they ceased to be seen as this subversive group. Their orthodox thinkers, those individuals we refer to as the early Church fathers, mirrored that integration with their writings, however much their policies lagged behind real-world practices. In the end, Augustine's just war doctrine does owe some of its tenets and development to Rome's *iustum bellum*. However its unifying legalistic motivation fundamentally separates it from this older institution. Though separated in this regard, both doctrines evolved within Roman society, at two very distinct periods in history. They both helped to define how Roman society, and the state, interacted with other peoples and states — at a time when warfare was endemic. Just war doctrine was just another tool to accommodate a world lacking an

[88] Jeffers discusses persecution of Christians as a result of their refusal to venerate the empire, see Jeffers (1999), pg. 107.
[89] Gerhard Krodel, "Persecution and Toleration of Christianity Until Hadrian," in Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke (eds.), Early Church History: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity, Oliphants: London, 1972, pp. 27-36., pg. 260.

overarching international authority. Force was the only judicial power, and Christianity took time to awaken to that reality.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

N.a., *The Acts of Maximillian* 1-2, in in Ronald Sider (ed.), The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment, Baker Academic: Michigan, 2012, pg. 154-155.

Ambrose, "On the Duties of the Clergy," H. De Romestin (trans.), in Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace (eds.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Ambrose – Select Works and Letters*, Vol. 10, Hendrickson Publishers: Massachusetts, 1995, pp. XXIII – 90.

Augustine, "City of God," Marcus Dods (trans.), in Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Augustin – City of God, Christian Doctrine*, Vol. 2, Hendrickson Publishers: Massachusetts, 1995, pp. 1-511.

Augustine, "Against Faustus," R. Stothert (trans.), in Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Augustin – The Writings Against the Manichaens, and Against the Donatists,* Vol. 4, Hendrickson Publishers: Massachusetts, 1995, pp. 155-345.

Augustine, "Questions on the Heptateuch 6.10," in Gregory M. Reichberg, Henrik Syse, and Endre Begby (eds.), *The Ethics of War: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Blackwell: Oxford, 2006, pp. 82.

Caesar, *The Gallic War*, H.J. Edwards (trans.), Dover Publications: New York, 2006.

Cassius Dio Cocceianus, *Roman History,* Earnest Cary (trans.), Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 1969.

Cicero, *On Duties*, M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins (eds.), Cambridge University Press: New York, 1991.

Coogan, Michael D. (ed.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Standard Revised Version,* Fifth Ed., Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018.

Owen Ewald (trans.), "Inscriptions from Leclerq's 'Militarisme' in DACh," in Ronald Sider (ed.), *The Early Church on Killing: A Comprehensive Sourcebook on War, Abortion, and Capital Punishment,* Baker Academic: Michigan, 2012, pg. 147.

Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus,* Burton Scott Easton (trans.), Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1934.

Lactantius, "The Divine Institutes," A. Cleveland Coxe (trans.), in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante –Nicene Fathers,* Vol. 7, Hendrickson Publishers Inc.: Massachusetts, 1995, pp. 9-328.

Tertullian, *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian,* Robert D. Sider (ed.), Catholic University of America Press: Washington, 2001.

Secondary Sources

Adcock, F.E., *The Roman Art of War Under the Republic*, Barnes & Noble Books: New Jersey, 1985.

Ando, Clifford, "Religion, Toleration, and Religious Liberty in Republican Rome," in *History of European Ideas,* Vol. 44, No. 6, 2018, pp. 743-755.

Ayres, Lewis, "Continuity and Change in Second-Century Christianity: A Narrative against the Trend," in James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu (eds.), *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2017, pp. 106-121.

Bainton, Roland H., "The Early Church and War," in *The Harvard Theological Review,* Vol. 39, No. 3, 1946, pp. 189-212.

Bainton, Roland H., *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace,* Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1960.

Brice, Lee L., "*Sacramentum*," in Lee L. Brice (ed.), *Warfare in the Roman Republic: From the Etruscan Wars to the Battle of Actium,* ABC-CLIO Ltd.: California, 2014, pp. 13-124.

Campbell, Brian, *War and Society in Imperial Rome 31 BC – AD 284*, Routledge: London, 2002.

Charles, J. Daryl, "Pacifists, Patriots, or Both?: Second Thoughts on Pre-Constantinian Early-Christian Attitudes toward Soldiering and War," in *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture,* Vol. 13, No. 2, 2010, pp. 17-55.

Eckstein, Arthur M., *Senate and General: Individual Decision Making and Roman Foreign Relations, 264-194 B.C.,* University of California Press: Los Angeles, 1987.

Eckstein, Arthur M., *Mediterranean Anarchy, Inter-state War, and the Rise of Rome,* University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2006.

Eckstein, Arthur M., "'Treaty of Philinus,' and Roman Accusations against Carthage," in *The Classical Quarterly,* Vol. 60, No. 2, 2010, pp. 406-426.

Freeman, Charles, *A New History of Early Christianity,* Yale University Press: New Haven, 2009.

Galli, Carlo, "On War and on the Enemy," in *CR: The New Centennial Review,* Amanda Minervini and Adam Sitze (trans.), vol. 9, No. 2, 2009, pp. 195-219.

Goodman, Martin, *The Roman World: 44 BC – AD 180*, Second Edition, Routledge: New York, 2012.

Hardy, E.G., *Christianity and the Roman Government: A Study in Imperial Administration,* Burt Franklin: New York, 1971.

Horbury, William, "Church and Synagogue vis-à-vis Roman Rule in the Second Century," in James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu (eds.), *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2017, pp. 71-88.

Jeffers, James S., *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity,* InterVarsity Press: Illinois, 1999.

Johnson, James T., "Just War in the Thought of Paul Ramsey," in *The Journal of Religious Ethics,* Vol. 19, No. 2, 1991, pp. 183-207.

Kalantzis, George, *Caesar and the Lamb: Early Christian Attitudes on War and Military Service,* Cascade Books: Oregon, 2012.

Kehoe, Alice Beck, *Militant Christianity: An Anthropological History*, Palgrave Macmillan: New
York, 2012.

Kopel, David, "Christian Pacifism Before Constantine," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2008, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228277490> pp. 1-32.

Krodel, Gerhard, "Persecution and Toleration of Christianity Until Hadrian," in Stephen Benko and John J. O'Rourke (eds.), *Early Church History: The Roman Empire as the Setting of Primitive Christianity,* Oliphants: London, 1972, pp. 27-36.

Kunz, Josef L., "*Bellum Iustum* and *Bellum Legale*," in *The American Journal of International Law,* Vol. 45, No. 3, 1951, pp. 528-534.

Langan, John, "The Elements of St. Augustine's Just War Theory," in *The Journal of Religious Ethics,* Vo. 12, No. 1, 1984, pp. 19-38.

Le Bohec, Yann, *The Imperial Roman Army*, B.T. Batsford: London, 1994.

Lintott, A.W., "Imperial Expansion and Moral Decline in the Roman Republic," in *Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte,* Bd. 21, H. 4, 1972, pp. 626-638.

Mattern-Parkes, Susan P., "The Defeat of Crassus and the Just War," in *The Classical World* Vol. 96, No. 4, 2003, pp. 387-396.

Miller, Richard B., "Just War, Civic Virtue, and Democratic Social Criticism: Augustinian Reflections," in *The Journal of Religion,* Vol. 89, No. 1, 2009, pp. 1-30.

Moskalew, Walter, "Fetial Rituals and the Rhetoric of the Just War," in *The Classical Outlook,* Vol. 67, No. 4, 1990, pp. 105-110.

O'Driscoll, Cian, "Rewriting the Just War Tradition: Just War in Classical Greek Political Thought and Practice," in *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 59, No. 1, 2015, pp. 1-10.

Orlin, Eric M., *Foreign Cults in Rome: Creating a Roman Empire,* Oxford University Press: New York, 2010.

Paget, James Carleton, and Judith Lieu, "Introduction," in James Carleton Paget and Judith Lieu (eds.), *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2017, pp. 1-22.

Philips, Gervase, "Deviance, Persecution and the Roman Creation of Christianity," in *Journal of Historical Sociology,* Vol. 29, No. 2., 2016, pp. 250-270.

Reichberg, Gregory M., "Thomas Aquinas between Just War and Pacifism," in *The Journal of Religious Ethics,* Vol. 38, No. 2, 2010, pp. 219-241.

Reinhold, Meyer, "The Declaration of War against Cleopatra," in *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 77, No. 2, 1981, pp. 97-103.

Santangelo, Federico, "The Fetials and their 'Ius,'" in *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies,* Vol. 51, 2008, pg. 63-93.

Shean, John F., *Soldiering for God: Christianity and the Roman Army,* Brill: Boston, 2010.

Sun, Yanfei, and Dingxin Zhao, "Religious Toleration in Pre-modern Empires," in Francesco G. Duina (ed.), *States and Nations, Power and Civility: Hallsian Perspectives,* University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2019, pp. 249-270.

Swift, Louis J. (ed.), *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service,* M. Glazier: Delaware, 1983.

Tomlin, Roger, "Christianity and the Late Roman Army," in Samuel N. C. Lieu and Dominic Montserrat (eds.), *Constantine: History, Historiography and Legend*, Routledge: New York, 1998, pp. 21-51.

Vorobej, Mark, "Is Pacifism An Extreme View?" in *Peace Research,* Vol. 46, No. 2, 2014, pp. 5-29.

Watson, G.R., *The Roman Soldier,* Thames and Hudson: London, 1969.

Weaver, Alain Epp, “Unjust Lies, Just Wars? A Christian Pacifist Conversation with Augustine,” in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2001, pp. 51-78.

Wilken, Robert Louis, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2012.