

CHAPTER 14: WAR AND PACIFISM. GENOCIDE

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As a result of learning more about World War I and the history of war, Christianity and Islam, I've been thinking about pacifism. Like most evangelical Christians, I don't think I've ever thought a whole lot about this before. I've known about pacifism and that there were Christians who were pacifist, but growing up and when I was in university, they just seemed like a fringe element whom we could ignore and who had no relevance to us. So it's a little embarrassing to only come to examine this so late in life. What shocked me into beginning to investigate this was realizing that World War One was fought between the some of most Christian nations on the planet: England, Germany, France, Austria-Hungary. I can't believe that it took me so long to realize this. I wish that someone in my life had given a clear teaching about pacifism when I was a young Christian. My viewpoint or position is now beginning to solidify around the belief that a Christian should be a pacifist and cannot support war or the military. It's important to realise that I am not providing my definition of pacifism as I am still figuring this out. Some people seem to have the erroneous assumption that pacifism is just laziness, sitting around apathetically determined not to get involved. That's ridiculous. Pacifism is very similar to non-violent resistance, and in the Christian realm, seems to always be accompanied with a strong element of social justice and concern for the oppressed. All pacifism rejects war, but some variations allow some sort of self-defense as well as non-violent civil disobedience. I do know that there are many people with different opinions, and also that much of what we think and believe can be based on emotions or justification for our behaviour. So even though we may share the same fundamental Christian theology, there's no way that everyone will agree on the application of theology to this or other issues. Hopefully reading this will make you think about your own positions and justifications for them.

Just Wars?

The main rationale or justification for waging war is that of a Just War. It is claimed that the cause of justice is so critical that we must intervene militarily to stop terrible injustices from happening. However, the Just War justification for war is not that robust. Look throughout history at all the invasions and wars. WWI was fought for stupid reasons between the most Christian countries of the time. "Christians" butchering and gassing each other! There were religious (Christian) wars in Europe for hundreds of years – the last one was with the IRA and UDA in the 1990s. The invasion of Afganistan was pretty much a war of revenge and anger. There are very few wars that people can claim to be Just Wars, basically just WWII and possibly the Korean war – and there can be arguments made against these too. Even during these two very rare examples of Just War, there was an awful lot of rape and looting by the "good guys"; it's just rarely mentioned because it sullies our impression of it. Why would I (and most people) say that WWII and the Korean war are just wars? I've always thought that these wars were against clearly evil forces and countries. However, Gwynne Dyer points out that:

“Unlike previous great-power wars, the two world wars had to be represented as moral crusades against evil because new wealth and technology turned them into total wars that required mass participation. If people are going to be asked to sacrifice vast numbers of their children in a war, they must be told that it has some higher purpose than the traditional one of settling disputes among the great powers.”ⁱ

Another article also explains that an important motivation for Hitler's aggression (beyond throwing off the crushing punitive damages of the Treaty of Versailles) was to secure a stable food source in the Ukraine.ⁱⁱ It looks like wars could be avoided if the two sides could find ways to meet each other's needs. Unfortunately pacifism gets blamed for the reluctance of the US and UK to confront Germany leading up to WWII. So pacifism gets confused with weakness and appeasement of bad people. It is nothing of the sort.

After WWII there were the amazing and unprecedented Marshall plan to rebuild Germany and MacArthur's SCAP to rebuild Japan. If anyone wants to promote a Just War doctrine, going to war and killing people based on ideals of justice and caring for the oppressed, then one of the essential ingredients for calling it a Just War is having a Marshall plan – helping former enemies recover and become stable countries with strong economies. After they won WWII, the US and UK were providing food aid to prevent starvation in Europe and Japan. But where's the Marshall plan to rebuild Haiti after the earthquake? or Congo, Iraq, etc? We definitely know how to do this since we (the West) did it in 1948, but haven't done it since then. And upon close examination, even the motives for the Marshall/SCAP plans were not all altruistic. A large part of the motivation was the fear of communism spreading, and these plans were designed to do this. Perhaps that's why we no longer see these plans. The West doesn't have to worry about its hegemony, so it doesn't need to provide this sort of assistance to other countries. There seems to have been some attempt to fix up Afghanistan and Iraq after the US attacks, but it didn't work. It was really an opportunity for private enterprise to come in and loot the country. Halliburton received \$39 billion from the US government in Iraq related contracts and did more harm than good. So if there is no Marshall plan, no caring for the decimated populace of the countries we invade it is totally deceptive to call these wars Just Wars! Also don't forget that the state propaganda machines can convince people that the enemy populace will be so much better after being "liberated" and we rebuild their country – however the truth, after the fact is far different. Any country going to war nowadays will definitely have very convincing claims that it will rebuild the defeated foe, but based on recent history, there's no reason to believe this sort of idealistic propaganda.

Most wars are for selfish reasons or for revenge; they are an extension of government policy just using other means. The idea of a Just War is not borne out in history. Have any wars been not fought or military conflicts avoided because, upon reflection, the war was understood not to be just? In other words, which country has ever said: "We really want to fight country X, but wait, it's not a Just War so we won't." Has that ever happened? And yet no one intervenes when justice is clearly required as in the massive genocides of the 20th century: Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and now Congo. No one country moved in their soldiers to stop the genocide. If Just War was defensible, if it is such a high and noble ideal, then we should at least see the world moving to stop these horrific genocides. It's a no-brainer. Instead we see countries having other, more powerful economic reasons for going to war, and then using propaganda to paint their war of aggression as a just war. "We are good and the enemy is evil" – believing this, makes the public support the war a whole lot more, financial support and sending their children into battle. Dehumanizing your opponent makes it a lot easier to kill him. The lack of action on the part of the powerful and ostensibly civilized and formerly Christian countries to intervene and prevent genocide is a clear statement to me that Just War theory is a sham and a lie, a moral and intellectual fraud. A deliberate effort was made to make sure that no Western powers got involved in preventing the Rwandan genocide.ⁱⁱⁱ The ideals of justice have never been a sufficient cause for a country to go to war. Instead what we do see are continual wars to protect our economic and political interests, totally destroying the infrastructure of other countries, and encouraging internal fighting among partisan groups that removes any chance of a stable and just government for decades to come. In the past decade we've seen this happen in Haiti

(after the earthquake), in Iraq, Libya, and Syria. Instead of being peacemakers we use war to destabilize countries. This is completely opposite to what Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:2. "I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." Paul was living under the dictatorship of Nero, a very evil man, and he didn't call for a coup against him. Wars are really only started for these reasons: defence, politics, religion, revenge, or economic purposes. Actually there is another reason for war: pride. The leader of a country may want to be immortalized, and who becomes famous for having decades of peace? It's a lot easier to be famous for attacking an "enemy" and destroying them, witness Alexander The "Great". Then there are the generals and military establishment. Their whole training and purpose in life is to fight and win. Imagine that you are the best hand surgeon in the world, but no one ever injures their hands. You would be so frustrated. You have these amazing talents, but no one ever gets to see them. You don't get to practice your skills and develop them. I think that it's the same with the military. Having a powerful military will in itself lead to wars. The military needs to fight and so will pressure the government to get involved in conflicts so that it can accomplish its purpose and receive the acclaim that it wants.

Might makes right, but that's not how Jesus sees it. We hire private armies (PMCs) that can operate with impunity and immunity from all consequences of their violent attacks (from 1965 in Congo to private military companies in Afghanistan and Iraq today)

Roles for armies: Genocide, Peacekeeping, Defense

One might argue that peacekeeping is a valid use of the military. Yes, but again, look at the genocides. Genocide is the single most valid justification for intervening in another country. As I pointed out above, the world's response to genocides in the past 100 years has been abysmal. Peacekeeping is not really the same as a just war. It happens after a war when one side has been stomped on, but not so much that they can't continue to cause trouble. Peacekeepers then try and maintain an uneasy hostility between the two camps -- preventing open violence from breaking out. Because this has worked in some places (Cyprus), people think that this is awesome and worthy of praise, and so it may be, but there are many many places where peacekeeping hasn't worked or even been tried. If you look at all of the other conflicts and exploitation by force, you'd probably see that successful peace keeping is the exception rather than the rule, and probably can't justify the existence of an army.

The only armies that seem to be justifiable from an ethical, Christian point of view are the ones strictly limited to **self defense armies** as in post-war Japan and Germany, and possibly Switzerland (although they do rent out mercenaries). I can think of some other justifiable self-defense armies in history: Charles Martel and the Battle of Tours in 732 to stop the Moors in Spain and France, after the Muslims conquered all of North Africa. The battle of Vienna in 1683 to halt the Ottoman expansion into eastern Europe also seems like a justifiable self-defense action.

Note that self-defense is not "self defense" so that we shoot missiles into Yemen, invade Panama, Granada, Iraq, Libya, et cetera, et cetera, even if there are "no boots on the ground". Self defense that includes defending ourselves by preemptive strikes is a lie and is not self defense at all.

Soldiers

Are individual soldiers guilty? This is a bit harder. Many of them are forced into the army because there is no other way for them to earn a living. The "top 1%" has arranged things this way – taking

so much of the wealth that poverty is widespread. So, in many ways, soldiers are victims too. It's easy to see this when they return from the war with terrible wounds and PTSD. Jesus and John the Baptist both interacted with soldiers, but didn't condemn their occupation. . Cornelius was a soldier and at his miraculous conversion, involving angels and visions, he was never told to stop being a soldier. Many people take this as a tacit approval of soldiers, armies, and even warfare. There are two vital points to recognize here: First of all, Jesus and the New Testament authors did not condemn slavery either, but that doesn't mean that it is right. There are all sorts of social evils that are not condemned in the New Testament. So from their silence on this, we cannot conclude that soldiering is right. Secondly, Jesus did not come to introduce a new earthly kingdom. He clearly stated that his kingdom is not of this world. In the Old Testament we have a physical kingdom with physical enemies whom the Israelites fought with using physical weapons (and spiritual too). Jesus brings in a spiritual kingdom with spiritual enemies fought using spiritual weapons (see Ephesians 5). Once this is clear in your mind you will see that there is no justification for wars, armies, soldiers in Christianity.

The whole question of whether soldiering is morally right or wrong could be expanded further. After WWII soldiers in the west were taught that they are not absolved of guilt for evil actions by simply saying that they obeyed orders (a la Adolf Eichmann). They have to use their own morals and conscience to think about if an order is inhumane and evil and then refuse to obey it. Nowadays, soldiers in the US would get in a lot of trouble if they refused orders on this basis (in Afghanistan or Iraq). The problem is that your superior officers are the ones who decide if an order is lawful/moral or not.^{iv} (Being sent on a suicide mission is completely lawful by the way, so I assume that an American soldier could be told to strap on explosives and go and blow up enemy soldiers. If he were blowing up civilians though, that would be unlawful.) Also your fellow soldiers would probably turn against you. The army is not really designed to have individuals think about orders and question them, which makes it is really hard to be a Christian in the army.

As many people^v have pointed out, a Christian soldier is either going to kill an enemy who is a Christian or not. These are the only two possibilities. If his is killing a Christian, then he's killing a brother in the family of God – a family that has closer ties than earthly relationships. If he's killing a non-Christian, then he's killing someone who quite likely will be going to hell as soon as he's dead. In either case, it makes more sense for the Christian soldier to lay down his rifle and allow himself to be killed.

Is it possible to be a Christian and a soldier? Yes, I think so. Salvation is not negated by killing others. It is based on loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, loving your neighbour as yourself, making Jesus your lord and master. However, I think that I've made it very clear why I find it very hard to conceive of a Christian being a soldier, willing to kill fellow human beings; the only role I could see being justified is a soldier in a self-defense army. With all of the differences in theology, I think it is too easy to just condemn others who don't share my viewpoint and I want to avoid doing this. This really is a really hard and thorny issue. It's also possible that centuries ago soldiers were misled by their spiritual leaders just as some are now and thought that they were following Jesus by fighting. In the past, society was much more hierarchical and authority was not often questioned. It is not our job to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. C.S. Lewis was not a pacifist, but he should have been.^{vi}

Old Testament vs. New Testament God

There is a remarkable change from the Old Testament to the New Testament. This change is so marked that many people take the easy, yet self-contradictory and illogical way of thinking that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are different. Somehow God evolved from being brutal, violent and judgmental to being kind and loving – in just a few centuries! This makes no sense. How would a god, a supreme being, change so much and so radically in such a short time? How stupid the god must have been initially to have needed to be enlightened. It is really all anthropomorphizing and projecting what we think and feel onto God. Another alternative is that there are two gods – the NT one somehow did away with the OT one and replaced him. This is also completely idiotic. Alternatively, there could be a God with multiple personalities who sometimes is kind and sometimes is angry and vengeful. This leads to seeing God as capricious and unreliable – exactly the opposite of the revelation of him in Scripture and nature. A much better thing to do is to take the Word of God at face value and then spend time and effort to think and do research and ponder – trying to get rid of the preexisting external and internal biases and preconceived ideas. What do we see when we look at the Bible alone? There you can see the love, patience, care and gentleness of God coming through in the Old Testament as well as God's holiness and judgment in the New Testament. It requires humility and a bit more effort to hold these more complex ideas in mind – rather than just choosing the simple easy way, which leads to a complete mockery of God and which is exactly what we see in the media.

As I've discussed above, a lot of people like to use selective Old Testament passages to support their pet beliefs. For example: David was a warrior and beloved, by God, therefore we too can go out to battle and kill others. The problem with this is that David was a king over Israel. The laws and history of the Old Testament are primarily related to eradicating the previous inhabitants of Canaan (more on genocide in a later chapter) and setting up a theocracy in Israel. This has no bearing on us today. The New Testament is not about setting up a theocratic earthly government or a caliphate. I repeat, God's approval of Israel's battles in the Old Testament has no direct bearing or application to us today. This can be seen from the fact that Jesus (unlike Mohammed) never killed anyone or ordered anyone killed. It is totally beyond possibility for me to imagine Jesus saying we should kill someone. Anyone who knows Jesus would agree with me. (Self defense for a home invasion is a different situation, most pacifists would say that you could resist, possibly with force, but killing another human is still absolutely wrong. So, resist, but do not ever kill them.) Furthermore, nowhere in the New Testament is there any justification for followers of Christ using violence, killing, armies, or warfare. Not one single verse anywhere. The Old Testament was specifically aimed at organizing the people of Israel during the time when they were building their own kingdom. There are parts of it that can, with care and proper exegesis, be applied to us today. But look, we even have problems with deciding which parts of the New Testament apply to us today (e.g. women covering their head in church or women teaching men in church – is that just a cultural thing?), how much more difficult it is to apply the Old Testament correctly when it wasn't written directly to the church.

Look at Christian teachings on war and violence. How can I love my enemies and bless those who are attacking me if I resist them through violence? Is this not what the pagans do? The Sermon on the Mount and the way Jesus lived his life make it clear that violence should not be a part of a Christian's life. The fruit of the spirit in Galatians is all non-violent, while the acts of the flesh are connected to violence. As I mentioned before, there is no support for Christians using force or committing violence anywhere in the New Testament – this is seen both in the teachings and in the lives of the apostles and of Jesus. There is a lot more I could write about this, but I've discovered that it is all in Bruxy Cavey's series of sermons on pacifism entitled "Inglorious Pastors"^{vii} Do I need to list dozens of verses, or should I leave it as an exercise for the reader? Would people who

support the military be able to look beyond the one or two proof text verses at the preponderance of pacifist verses in the New Testament? Is Jesus your Lord if you act exactly opposite to him, acting instead like the Romans and Jews who killed him, saying “it is expedient for one man to die for the nation”? (John 11:50). People who support violence normally follow the philosophy of “the end justifying the means” – very dangerous.

So how did things get this way? Why are we so good at ignoring the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament authors on this one topic? Why does this only happen in the West? One hears stories of Christians being persecuted in China, India, Muslim countries, and they react with grace, love, and peace, even as their churches are burned, their homes and livelihoods destroyed, their family members are shot. A pastor is pulled from his home in Orissa and beaten to death by a Hindu mob. His home is set on fire and his family is forced to flee. Does his widow band together with other Christians to fight back? Do the Christians organize self-defense forces? No here and elsewhere in the world, they pray for their persecutors and ask God to forgive them: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” Read the “Voice of the Martyrs” magazine for more information. It seems a universal characteristic of non-Western Christians, that they understand and practice the non-violent teachings of the faith. What happened to us? Why do we not know the history of our martyrs over the past millennia and about the peaceful Christians being martyred around the world today?

Constantine and Augustine screwed up badly

For the Christian, Jesus' life and teaching bring in a New Covenant that replaces the Old Covenant. So, if you read Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, then it is clear that it is wrong to be violent, join the military, etc. Up until 300AD or so, all Christians were pacifist and would rather be killed than kill anyone. Emperor Constantine changed this. He was an emperor and a Christian, and he needed soldiers in his armies. So he got some theologians (predominantly Augustine) to justify killing and torturing people for the sake of God. To reiterate, the “Christian” emperor Constantine, asked bishop Augustine to come up with a theology that would allow followers of Jesus to kill other people in battle. And Augustine succeeded very very well ...he came up with the idea of Just War and made a list of criteria to tell if a war was just. These criteria were refined by the state Catholic church over the centuries. The Sermon on the Mount was then said to just be an unreachable ideal, or else only for clergy and monks. Government and state became inextricably intermingled. This obviously led to wars, crusades and bad political policies being ascribed to both Christianity and the state. What could be more just than sending armies to conquer the Holy Land and liberate Jerusalem from pagan infidels? But today no Christians support this, though many do support armies attacking other countries. The religious-state sponsored violence seems to have started with the Crusades (1100-1200AD), then the hundred years war (1350-1450). The wars increased dramatically from 1500 after the Protestant Reformation. After Napoleon (1800) things were quiet for a century until WWI and WWII, except for the terrifying French revolution and the barbarities as “Christian” countries continued colonisation of the world. WWI was a paroxysm of meaningless violence and death as Christian countries and Christians in the armies slaughtered each other. This bloodthirsty violence perpetrated by Christians should make us weep and repent.

At long last, in the 20th century, with the growth of secular humanism, atheism, materialism, Western countries have become so secularized that now European and North American countries are no longer considered as being Christian, and so the wars and aggression that they instigate and participate in cannot be blamed on religion. This rise in secularism is a very good thing because basically since 1000AD, any time a European country went to war, it was unclear which decisions were due to government and which were due to Christianity since Christianity was the state religion.

Now Christianity can no longer be blamed for and associated with the terrible violence that is a result of political aspirations. Now there is finally a growing movement to realize that this way of looking at things is wrong, and we should see what Christ teaches and follow him (since we are, after all, called Christians). I hope that in coming years there will be a huge movement towards pacifism in the western churches.

Here are quotes from Augustine and some other seminal Western theologians who have so influenced us that it is almost axiomatic that Christians (in the west) are enthusiastic about Just Wars. As far as I know, these rationalizations are unique to the branches of Christianity that flourished in Europe and North America. This is why Western Christians feel that they can kill other human beings in war, but Christians in the rest of the world do not.

"Just wars are usually defined as those which avenge injuries, when the nation or city against which warlike action is to be directed has neglected either to punish wrongs committed by its own citizens or to restore what has been unjustly taken by it. Further, that kind of war is undoubtedly just which God Himself ordains."

An alternative translation from Latin:

"A just war is wont to be described as one that avenges wrongs, when a nation or state has to be punished, for refusing to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects, or to restore what it has seized unjustly."

~ Augustine : Quaestiones in Heptateuchum ("Questions on Joshua") Book VI, Question 16.

Note: I can't find this original document in English.

"For what is blamed in war? Is it the death of those who must die sooner or later, but who give up their lives to bring peace by overcoming guilty men?"

~ Augustine, Contra Faustum, I, XXII, Chap. 74

"For peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged in order that peace may be obtained. Therefore, even in waging war, cherish the spirit of the peacemaker, that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace ..."

~ Augustine, Ep. ad Bonifacium, CLXXXIX

Notice the strong thread of "The end justifies the means" in Augustine's thinking. Yes, we can kill people because we are doing it for peace.

Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentences according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, ... etc. Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian.

~ Augsburg Confession, 1530

It is lawful for Christian men, at the commandment of the Magistrate, to wear weapons, and fight in the wars.

~ Thirty-nine articles of the Church of England, 1571

It is lawful for Christians to accept and execute the office of a magistrate when called thereunto; ... they may lawfully, now under the New Testament, wage war upon just and

necessary occasion.
~ Westminster Confession, 1646

If you look at these writings, they're used to justify war and also later on the Inquisition. Basically Christians are saying absurdities like "I love God so much that I am willing to kill you." Or "I am killing you out of love for you and concern for your soul." What about loving your neighbour as yourself? What about laying down our lives for others? (John 15:3, 1 John 3:16)

What about dealing with heretics? Paul says don't judge those outside the church – that's what the civil society is for – so we don't judge others as evil and kill them. Well, that leaves people in the church – let's judge them – yes, these people are heretics. Okay – there is a bit of support for this, but Paul says that we expel them. We don't kill them. If we spend our time searching out heretics, we need to balance it: yes, watch out for wolves in sheep's clothing, have discernment and know sound doctrine, but don't pull out the weeds with the wheat – God will do that at the end of time. If we spend our time on witch-hunts and executions, what does that show the world about the church? Is it an attractive place? Does it transform people's lives to be more like Jesus? No – we end up more like Herod, the paranoid murderer. So, there no justification to kill non-Christians and no reason to kill Christians.

I'd like to mention that Constantine and Augustine did do many good things. Augustine has made great contributions to theology. Constantine and his son stopped persecution of Christians, allowed freedom of religion, halted the branding of people on their faces and segregated male and female prisoners for the first time.^{viii}

Christianity vs Islam

There are many good things about Islam and I'll begin by listing the ones that I can think of. In general, Muslims are very religiously observant and devoted to following Islamic teachings. They revere the Quran and memorize large parts of it. They pray five times a day and fast. I am envious of all of these things that Christianity should be doing and copying, but doesn't. Most Christians don't take their faith that seriously. Another amazing part about Islam is the community aspect. When you're a Muslim, you are part of a community that socializes together, shares with you, celebrates with you and shares with you. There is not the isolationism that exists in western culture. I am so envious of this. There are also many things that we have in common which I won't bother listing here, as it is not germane to my topic. However, the nature of the two religions is very different, in spite of secular media trying to paint all religions with the same brush. There are some serious problems with Islam. I'm not going to be talking about problems with Islamic theology that much, nor about the reliability and inspiration of the Quran or Bible.

Muslims are very offended when their faith is mocked and rightly so. It is totally understandable. Christianity has also been mocked and misrepresented. Books like "The DaVinci Code", movies like "The Last Temptation of Christ" by Martin Scorsese, groups like The Jesus Seminar are all blasphemous and make me angry. I can totally see how Muslims are enraged by the degrading cartoons of Mohammed. One difference, though, is that Christianity allows debate and discussion and critical thinking of its theology, beliefs, and practices. Islam doesn't. If you ask too many questions, you are in trouble and can be classed as an infidel.

It's instructive to briefly compare the lives of the two founders. There are more detailed and longer comparisons on the Internet. Both seemed to be charismatic people who attracted followers with

their teachings. Neither Jesus nor Mohammed wrote their teachings down. After the Hijra, Mohammed became a military strategist in addition to being a prophet and his teachings included violence and war. He himself ordered people killed and encouraged deceit to trap and destroy his enemies^{ix}. Mohammed ended up marrying 11 wives, one as young as nine years old! Jesus, by contrast, preached love for your enemies, refused to defend himself when he was falsely accused, tortured and killed. Jesus never married. While both Mohammed and Jesus had harsh words for their enemies, Jesus never ever advocated killing them (the Pharisees). Mohammed and the Quran often permit bad actions because for them the end **always** justifies the means. This way of thinking, this justification of evil and crime, has always been associated with the most terrible governments, dictators, and massacres in human history. No Christian can ever claim that the end justifies the means – even though the people who did this during the Inquisitions and Crusades claimed to be Christians. As I've tried to show above, killing anyone, even heretics, for Jesus is a total contradiction.

Unlike Christianity, Islam started by being simultaneously a religious, political, and military movement and it has continued as such until today. It is estimated that well over 200 million people have been killed in the name of Islam since Mohammed died. Even in the Golden Age of Islam, they were invading and over other countries. I don't see any prospect in the future for Islam ever to be a religion separated from state. This means that it is pretty much impossible to figure out which wars and violence are caused by political policies and which are caused by religious orthodoxy.

I really dislike Islam and see it as a very bad oppressive and regressive religion. However, I have had Muslim friends and many Muslim students whom I know are good people and whom I respect. Muslims are victims too. They too are victims and prisoners of Islam: born into this religion, indoctrinated, and cannot leave.

The other main problem with Islam is its inability to change the human heart and human nature. This is true of all sorts of religions, philosophies and worldviews. You can change the outside, but inside you still have the same depravity and harmful desires. Islam has blatant contradictions in what it says and what it does. Most Muslims claim that Islam respects women. Women in Islamic countries don't think so.^x While upholding the virtues of modesty (especially in how women dress) there is an insatiable appetite for pornography in the Middle East^{xi}. To have sex with a prostitute without being immoral, all you do is have a temporary marriage (muta') that lasts a few hours. Islam forbids alcohol, yet at private parties liquor is freely available and statistics show that the demand for alcohol is growing. Islam claims to be a religion of peace, yet its followers seem to be full of hate. Islam allows lying and deceit to further the cause of Islam (al Taqiyya)^{xii}.

Christianity, by contrast teaches strongly against all of these things – and not only the actions, but also the thoughts and desires of the heart (lust, hatred, covetousness, deceit). This is remarkable! God's Spirit living in us changes our hearts and gives us a new nature. Sometimes though, it is really hard to break free from bad habits – even asking God for help. It's true that there are Christians who live appalling lives – which makes one wonder if they can be called Christians – but there are also many who can testify to the transforming power of the gospel to change their hearts and desires, to break them free from drug addiction, to change criminals into honest people who live with integrity. I don't see this in Islam; I wonder how often it happens. If it does exist it may be related to the mystical minority sects and it is certainly not an essential core teaching as it is in Christianity.

Genocide in the Old Testament^{xiii}

I think that it is important enough to address this issue because it is raised so frequently these days. I don't remember it being so much of a problem in the 1980s and before. This issue is raised over and over again and used to impugn God and paint a very distorted caricature of him. It ends up creating a straw man argument that can then be demolished, with the proponents concluding: why would anyone want to believe in a petty, violent, dictatorial deity?

The crux of the problem is:

Why did God tell the Israelites to kill all men, women and children when they went to the Promised Land?

1. Why does this seem like a problem to us?
 - it seems wrong to us to have wholesale killing of everyone
 - it is not a problem with other civilizations killing people (e.g. Assyrians, Huns). We can handle them being ruthless and barbaric. That doesn't cause problems with how we see God.
 - The problem is with GOD telling the Israelites to do so. God is telling his people to commit genocide. We see genocide as one of the most heinous crimes against humanity.
2. First of all, why do we need to explain this?

Why do we need an explanation of what God does? To some degree, we don't and we can't have a complete explanation. God is completely sovereign and really does what he wants to when he wants to. He doesn't have to answer to us for his actions. This is the message of Job. I suspect that in previous centuries, with a greater fear of God and less of a rational mindset, believers did not feel that they needed to understand why God did things in order to continue to believe in him and his goodness. He is infinite and perfect and we are not. We are incapable, intellectually and morally, of understanding the reasons for everything that he does.

On the other hand, God always acts according to his character. We accept this idea by faith (and revelation). So, does God's command in Deuteronomy 20 contradict his character? God is love. God seems to command aggression and violence – even against women and children! Is God always loving in everything he does? Is God always just in everything he does? If we answer yes to these two questions, and I do, then we really don't have to go any further. Yes, he is always loving and just! That is an a priori fact; we can stop here and we don't have to explain anything in order to continue to trust in his character. If we know God, genocide is much less of a problem. I know God. I know his supremacy, sovereignty, his love, justice and mercy. I know who I am with my weaknesses, limitations, biases and sinfulness. I don't need to question him.

Nevertheless, it is helpful to see if we can understand what is going on – both for explaining this to people who use this to criticize God, and to work out doubts that we may have – these things may cause us to stumble in our faith too. Studying the Bible and learning about God's character is always worthwhile.

3. What exactly did God say? Where are all the passages in the Bible (Old Testament) that deal with genocide?
 - a) Noah's flood: Genesis 6:5-8
Genesis 6:11-13 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So

God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth."

Genesis 9:11 "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

- b) Sodom and Gomorrah: Genesis 19 tells how God destroyed these two towns because their sin was so great and terrible. (Since it is not destruction of a whole people group, it cannot really be called genocide.)
- c) The Passover described in Exodus chapters 11 and 12, in which all of the firstborn men and boys of Egypt were slaughtered. (It is astonishing that after seeing all of the miracles and plagues the Egyptian rulers (and people?) still rejected God as the one true God who commands and must be obeyed. The Pharisees did the same thing with Jesus – saw all of the miracles and still rejected Jesus and God.)

- d) Canaanites: Instructions for total annihilation are given in Numbers and Deuteronomy. The destruction was carried out in Joshua.
Deuteronomy 20:16 "As for the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is going to give you as an inheritance, you must not allow a single living thing to survive. Instead you must utterly annihilate them – the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites – just as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that they cannot teach you all the abhorrent ways they worship their gods, causing you to sin against the Lord your God."

Deuteronomy 7:1-4 "When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations— the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you – and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you."

Deuteronomy 7:16 "You must destroy all the peoples the LORD your God gives over to you. Do not look on them with pity and do not serve their gods, for that will be a snare to you."

- e) The Amalekites:
1 Samuel 15:1-3: Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'"
1 Samuel 15:18 And he sent you [Saul] on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.'

4. How do we explain this?

- First of all, in the other “genocides” God was the one taking action against sin. He supernaturally caused Noah’s flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the death of the firstborn Egyptians. We see similar widespread destruction of all people when there is

a natural disaster – e.g. a tsunami or earthquake that sweeps away everyone, man, woman and child. We don't normally lose our belief in God the first time there is a disaster in the world. The main difference with disasters nowadays is that we don't know if God has a specific reason for allowing it – and without a direct clear revelation from God it is harmful to speculate on this: e.g. Mount Etna is a volcano because the Etnans are so sinful!

As mentioned above, God is sovereign and just. I can easily trust his character to know that these annihilations of people were not evil. Our theology teaches us that we are all worthy of death and should be killed for our sin and rebellion against God. It is completely amazing that God is so merciful and patient to allow us a change to repent and change allegiance back to him. He does not treat us as we deserve. He would be perfectly just in wiping every single human being out. If you don't accept this, then you probably don't understand the fundamental nature of sin.

- With the **Canaanites** and the **Amalekites**, God ordered the Israelites to do the slaughtering. Note that this is the only time in the Bible where God commands this sort of action. The reason for this is clearly stated in Deuteronomy chapters 7, 20 and elsewhere. God's people will be living there and he doesn't want them to be corrupted by the evil practices of the inhabitants – and we'll see below that this was not just run-of-the-mill evil. God never commands slaughter of any city or people in other countries where the nation of Israel is not going to be set up. Deuteronomy 20:2-4 shows that these wars are clearly God-ordained.
- “The passages calling for holy war commonly employ the Hebrew term *herem*, a word with religious significance (Deut. 7:2; 20:17; Josh 6:17; 1Sam 15:3). As Walter Kaiser notes, ‘The root idea of this term was “separation”; however, this situation was not the positive concept of sanctification in which someone or something was set aside for service and the glory of God. This was the opposite side of the same coin: to set aside or separate for destruction.’ ” xiv
- This is a preview of God's final judgment on the earth – as explained in Revelation. Total destruction of the ungodly in his justice.
“Divine judgment refers to God's designation of certain persons, places, and things as objects of his special wrath and judgment because, in his omniscience, he knows them to be impure and hopelessly unrepentant.” xv
- God gave them warning and time to repent. He did not tell Abraham to kill the Canaanites among whom he was living. Genesis 15:16: “*In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.*” That turns out to be 500-700 years warning! Note that Abram was friends and allies with Mamre the Amorite and even rescued the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 14. His life was a witness to them.
- What about the innocent people among the wicked? Why should they be killed?
 - (i) First of all, there are no innocent people anywhere. There are no good or holy people without Christ's redemption. See the first few chapters of Romans. We all should be dead; destroyed by God for our sins. It is only by his mercy that we are still alive.
 - (ii) In many instances in the Old Testament, God treats nations as a single entity. For example, the Egyptians during the Exodus. (I need to do more thinking about this.) However,

as seen with Rahab and others, God does still make provision for the few god-fearing people living among the wicked.

- Canaanite society and religion were more corrupt than any other in the ancient near east. It was filled with violence, sexual immorality, war, lust, bestiality, sacred prostitution, child sacrifice, sodomy & homosexuality, demonology, and incest.^{xvi} People simply do not realize what a horrific evil place that was to live in.
 - The Canaanites had warnings in addition to that of Abraham:
Thus Canaan had, as it were, a final forty-year countdown as they heard of the events in Egypt, at the crossing of the Reed Sea, and what happened to the kings who opposed Israel along the way. We know that they were aware of such events, for Rahab confessed that these same events had terrorized her city of Jericho and that she, as a result, had placed her faith in the God of the Hebrews (Josh. 2:10-14). Thus God waited for the "cup of iniquity" to fill up -- and fill up it did without any change in spite of the marvelous signs given so that the nations, along with Pharaoh and the Egyptians, "might know that he was the Lord."^{xvii}
 - The Amalekites were associated with ruthlessness, trickery and treachery, much more so than Pharaoh or Philistines^{xviii} – neither of whom were to be exterminated. God punished the Amalekites by ordering Saul to destroy them (1 Samuel 15:2-3, see above). This was over 300 years after they had first attacked Israel. During that time, the Amalekites had contact with the Israelites and would have heard about God. They could have repented and changed their ways, but they continued to raid and plunder other cities up to the time of Saul and David (1 Samuel 30:1-3).^{xix} The remnant of the Amalekites were finally killed in 1 Chronicles 4:43.
5. What can we learn about God's character from this? What should our response be?
- Sin is really serious. God wants his people to be free from sin and its influence. We are not to dabble in it or minimize it.
 - Do not think of God only as a friendly person. Yes, as Christians, we are part of his family and he is our Father, yet he is also the all-powerful sovereign ruler and he will judge the world. He has the right to do this. Don't reduce God to an idol – to what you want him to be to fit into your little box of happy modern theology. Let God reveal himself to you.
 - God is patient and longsuffering. He will give many chances to repent and will even give people the benefit of the doubt (see Genesis 18 and Luke 13: 6-9), but in the end, evil will be punished.
 - God does not take pleasure in the destruction of the innocent. He warns them and wants them to repent. (see Sodom, Jonah 4)
6. Possible misinterpretations
- The "holy wars" of the Old Testament could erroneously be used to justify crusades, other holy wars, eradicating people who do not believe in God the way that you do. Why then does this part of the Bible not apply directly to us today? Simply because God did not command it. He commanded the destruction of specific nations at a specific time period by his people who were invading the land. There are no similar commands for today. The situation in the world today is no longer the establishment/beginning of the only nation that

God specifically chose for himself as a special people. “The slaughter of the Canaanites represented an unusual historical circumstance, not a regular means of behavior.”

Verses detailing the annihilation of Canaanite cities

Numbers 21:2,3 Then Israel made this vow to the LORD: "If you will deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities." The LORD listened to Israel's plea and gave the Canaanites over to them. They completely destroyed them and their towns; so the place was named Hormah.

Numbers 21:35 So they struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army, leaving them no survivors. And they took possession of his land.

Deuteronomy 2:34 At that time we took all his towns and completely destroyed them—men, women and children. We left no survivors.

Joshua 6:17 -21¶ The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury." When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it—men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

Joshua 9:24 They answered Joshua, "Your servants were clearly told how the LORD your God had commanded his servant Moses to give you the whole land and to wipe out all its inhabitants from before you. So we feared for our lives because of you, and that is why we did this.

Joshua 9:27 That day he made the Gibeonites woodcutters and water-carriers for the community and for the altar of the LORD at the place the LORD would choose. And that is what they are to this day.

Joshua 10:28 ¶ That day Joshua took Makkedah. He put the city and its king to the sword and totally destroyed everyone in it. He left no survivors. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

Joshua 10:40 So Joshua subdued the whole region, including the hill country, the Negev, the western foothills and the mountain slopes, together with all their kings. He left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded.

Joshua 11:11,12 Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anything that breathed, and he burned up Hazor itself. Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded.

Joshua 11:14 The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed.

ⁱ <http://gwynnedyer.com/2014/putin-on-d-day/> Putin on D-Day, by Gwynne Dyer, June 4, 2014 . Retr. 11 Aug 2014.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/environment-energy/magazine/78207/global-warming-genocide>

The Coming Age of Slaughter. December 6, 2010. Retr. Nov 7, 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2001/09/bystanders-to-genocide/304571/>

Bystanders to Genocide, Samantha Powers, Sept 1, 2001.

^{iv} <http://usmilitary.about.com/cs/militarylaw1/a/obeyingorders.htm> This explains the current situation and provides some interesting stories.

^v Link to Bruxy Cavey's sermon on Jesus and Jehovah

^{vi} <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/08/24/3575360.htm> Man of war: Why C.S. Lewis was not a pacifist

Stanley Hauerwas, ABC Religion and Ethics 24 Aug 2012

^{vii} Inglorious Pastors: Waging Peace in a World of War . May 2010.

(<http://www.themeetinghouse.com/pageid/1700/>)

^{viii} "Under the influence. How Christianity Transformed Civilization" by Alvin J. Schmidt

^{ix} See such sites as http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Arlandson/ten_reasons.htm
<http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/pages/muhammad/life-of-muhammad.aspx>

^x Read the book "Princess" by Jean Sasson. It details the horrible life of a Saudi princess. If it's this bad for royalty, imagine how it is for the average woman.

^{xi} Sasson. Ibid., and statistics: Pakistan tops the world for searches about sex and bestiality.

^{xii} <http://www.islamreview.com/articles/lyingprint.htm> (among many other websites and sources)

^{xiii} Sources used for this section:

<http://www.new-life.net/joshua.htm> (ret. 2007)

http://www.religioustolerance.org/god_cana.htm * not a Christian website

(as well as the next 4 references)

^{xiv} <https://reformedbaptistfellowship.wordpress.com/2007/05/21/god%E2%80%99s-command-to-exterminate-the-canaanites-a-biblical-apology/> (still available via Internet Archive)

^{xv} <http://classic.net.bible.org/search.php?search=unrepentant&in=notes>

^{xvi} <http://www.theology.edu/canaan.htm>

^{xvii} <http://www.theology.edu/canaan.htm>

^{xviii} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amalek#War_of_extermination_against_the_Amalekites retrieved January 2011

^{xix} from <http://www.rationalchristianity.net/amalekites.html>