

Ambiguity over Pacifism in the Stone-Campbell Movement: Diary of an Army Air Force Chaplain's Assistant¹

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Although early leaders in the Stone-Campbell Movement held strong pacifistic positions, the rise of Hitler and the start of World War II tested these views as never before. The author—a 95-year-old WWII veteran—provides a firsthand account of his experience as a student at Harding College in the 1940s and as a chaplain's assistant in the Army Air Forces after being drafted in 1944. His recollections from that momentous time provide a unique insight into Stone-Campbell history, particularly the tensions caused by the clash between the strident nationalism of the early 1940s and traditional Stone-Campbell Movement values.

In the fall of 1940, I posed a question to my Christian pacifist father on our Nebraska farm. Hitler had annexed Czechoslovakia and Austria, invaded Poland, then Western Europe, and the air war dubbed “The Battle of Britain” had waxed heavily over London’s skies that summer. Like many American children, and as a fourteen-year-old of that era, I was worried that Hitler would soon invade the American continent. “Dad, if you had a telescopic rifle and the crosshairs were centered on Adolf Hitler, *would you* pull the trigger?” I asked. After a few moments of thought, he answered, “Son, I’d be *mighty tempted!*”

My father was an immigrant from Denmark when he was five years old. Along with his family, he had learned to cherish his new nation deeply. His brother, E. L. Jorgenson, became a close associate of R. H. Boll, who had in turn been a student of James A. Harding in Nashville. My dad was also a committed Christian, who studied the Word and read the writings of Boll and others in the Stone-Campbell Movement. It was not easy for him to make a definitive choice between asserting a spirited defense of his adopted country and commitment to his understanding of Scripture and the teachings of Jesus. The ambiguity of his fatherly answer to his son

¹ The US Army Air Force was established as an administrative unit in June 1941, and continued until 1947 when it was succeeded by the Department of the Air Force.

might well characterize much of the theological discussion within the Stone-Campbell Movement from the late nineteenth century until the present. That ambiguity attached itself to me and to many other young men who turned eighteen and became eligible for the universal military draft during World War II.

This article is my story and thoughts about war from the perspective of the Stone-Campbell Movement and others. Let me start with key thoughts from two Reformation giants, Martin Luther and John Calvin.

The question of military service by Christians, and the debate over a “just” or “defensive” war versus an “offensive” war, has been a Protestant issue since the Reformation. In 1523, six years after the posting of his ninety-five theses and a year before the onset of the Peasants’ War, Martin Luther issued a brochure in which he asked both the question of the viability of Christians’ participation in warfare and the matter of defensive versus offensive conflict. Richard Friedenthal, in his biographical study of Luther, summarizes Luther’s ambiguous stand at the time:

May a true Christian take up the sword? That was a burning question which has not been put to rest until today. He opines, no Christian can take up the sword for himself or his own interests, but for another he may and should do it and advocate it, to put down evil and support righteousness.²

John Calvin also discriminated between offensive and defensive war, within defined criteria and accepting the necessity of defensive conflict:

But kings and people must sometimes take up arms to execute such public vengeance. On this basis we may judge wars lawful which are so undertaken. For if power has been given them to preserve the tranquility of their dominion, to restrain the seditious stirrings of restless men, to help those forcibly oppressed, to punish evil deeds—can they use it more opportunely than to check the fury of one who disturbs both the repose of private individuals and the common tranquility of all, who raises seditious tumults, and by whom violent oppressions and vile misdeeds are perpetrated?³

THE STONE-CAMPBELL MOVEMENT AND WAR

The first generation of reformers among the Disciples—including Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, Walter Scott, and Robert Richardson—did not speak ambiguously about the question of Christians in military service or “Christian” nations going to war. The particular wars in which the United States participated during his

² Richard Friedenthal, *Luther, sein Leben und seine Zeit* (trans. by Dale Jorgenson; München: R. Piper, 1970) 453.

³ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.20.11 (trans. Ford Lewis Battles; ed. John T. McNeill; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 2:1499.

lifetime may have conditioned Alexander Campbell's unequivocal opposition to military service by Christians. As a citizen of his adopted country, a substantial landholder, and a college president since 1840, Campbell had high hopes for America within the framework of his postmillennial eschatology. Throughout his life, however, he broke with traditional Protestant Just War theory in opposing war of any kind.

In the first issue of *The Christian Baptist*, the journal he edited from 1823 until 1830, Alexander Campbell disparaged both the concept of a military Christian chaplaincy and the belief in a "just war":

And stranger still, the Christian general with his ten thousand soldiers and his chaplain at his elbow, preaching, as he says, the gospel of good will among men and hear him exhort his general and his Christian warriors to go forth, with the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other, to fight the battle of God and their country, praying that the Lord will enable them to fight valiantly and render their efforts successful in making as many widows and orphans as will afford sufficient opportunity for others to maintain the purity of their religion by taking care of them.⁴

Shortly after the war between the United States and Mexico ended in February 1848, Campbell complied with a request by leaders of the Wheeling Lyceum to deliver a major address on war. The lecture, his most extensive expression on the subject, was delivered on May 1, 1848, and was published in the July issue of *The Millennial Harbinger*.⁵ The question posed in the title of the address was, "Has one Christian nation a right to wage war against another Christian nation?" Near the end of the address, Campbell expressed regret that he had not spoken out earlier, which might have saved some lives which were thrown away in the desert, but in the interest of objectivity he had "finally decided not to touch the subject till the war was over."⁶

Early in the address Campbell disposes of the offensive-defensive difference when he says,

First, then, had we prefixed the word *offensive* to the word *war*, we would, on proving that a Christian nation has no right to wage an offensive war, be obliged to institute another question, and to have asked, Can a Christian nation wage a defensive war against another Christian nation?—thereby implying that one Christian nation might be the aggressor and another the aggrieved. But we can with difficulty imagine a Christian nation carrying on an aggressive war. We, therefore, simplify the discussion by placing in the proposition the naked term *war*.⁷

⁴ Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Religion," *The Christian Baptist* 1 (3 August 1823) 8.

⁵ A. Campbell, "An Address on War," *Millennial Harbinger* (July 1848) 361.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 364.

Reflecting the thought that neither the United States nor any other country could be accurately defined as “a Christian nation,” Campbell presents a strong fabric of biblical arguments against the efficacy of a disciple of the Prince of Peace entering military service to become “the professional and licensed butcher of mankind.”⁸ After cataloging many of the horrors of war—including moral, human life, cultural, and fiscal costs—he addressed the individual, community, and national calamities associated with historic wars. His conclusions rest essentially on a theological theme he had developed over years of ministry in preaching, teaching, and writing. The famous—perhaps watershed—“Sermon on the Law” delivered in 1816 at Cross Creek, Virginia, by the twenty-eight-year-old preacher delineated sharply the separation of the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, so that the wars of the Jews described in the OT with God’s approval were not valid examples of Christian obedience.⁹ Thomas Campbell, Alexander’s father, in his *Declaration and Address*, anticipated his son’s sermon by seven years in expressing a similar distinction concerning the applicability of the Law of Moses for instruction in Christian morality:

That although the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inseparably connected, making together but one perfect and entire revelation of the Divine will, for the edification and salvation of the Church and therefore in that respect cannot be separated; yet as to what directly and properly belongs to their immediate object the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline and government of the Old Testament Church, and the particular duties of its members.¹⁰

In January 1830, Campbell published the first issue of his new journal, *The Millennial Harbinger*, a publishing venture which continued until 1870 and superseded *The Christian Baptist*. The opening issue begins a series of articles on the millennium, partly, no doubt in explaining the title he had chosen for the new journal, but primarily to relate the millennium of prophecy to his crusade for unity in the church, a unity which Campbell saw as essential to prepare for his postmillennial expectation of Christ’s kingdom on earth. Robert Richardson wrote of Alexander Campbell’s optimistic postmillennialism:

⁸ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁹ Alexander Campbell, “Sermon on the Law,” *Millennial Harbinger* (September 1846) 493-521. See also Campbell, “Address on War,” 373, who says, “But as we are neither under a Jewish nor a pagan government, but professedly, at least, under a Christian, we ought to hear what the present King of the universe has erected on this subject.”

¹⁰ See Charles A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Chicago: Christian Century, 1904; repr., Joplin, MO: College Press, 1985) 109.

He thought the religious world was now sufficiently aroused from its apathy, and that the spirit of inquiry, already set on foot, would ultimately effect the deliverance of the people from clerical domination. From the rapid spread of the reformatory principles, the union of so many of different parties in the primitive faith, and the evident check given to the progress of the infidel schemes of Mr. Owen and others, he was also impressed by the conviction that the millennial period anticipated by the church was nigh at hand.¹¹

In his introductory remarks for the 1983 reprint edition of *The Christian Baptist*, Gary Lee has written,

Campbell believed that the inception and progress of the millennium would proceed in direct relation to the restoration of the church. “Just in so far as the ancient order of things or the religion of the New Testament is restored, just so far has the millennium commenced, and so far has its blessings to be enjoyed.”¹²

Barton W. Stone (1772–1844) represented what church and cultural historian Richard Hughes has called an “apocalyptic” orientation within the Stone-Campbell Movement.¹³ That term includes Stone’s premillennial beliefs, his anti-slavery posture, and his pacifism. In *The Christian Messenger*, the journal he edited for most of fourteen years after 1826, he contended that Christian participation in human government excited a negative inspiration on spirituality, and that “the laws of Jesus were sufficient to rule the world.”¹⁴ Having been a participant in the Great Revival of 1801 and a leader in the Cane Ridge Revival later that year, Stone exhibited a more active concept of the work of the Holy Spirit than his brothers of the Campbell Movement in Bethany. However, while Campbell, with his postmillennial view, believed that the growing unity of the church, facilitated by the proclamation of the “Ancient Order” would hasten the coming of the millennial kingdom, Stone, with his premillennial eschatology, also believed that “the union of Christians was the hinge upon which the millennial kingdom turned.”¹⁵ Richard Hughes says of Stone and his followers:

¹¹ Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (vol. II; Cincinnati: Standard, 1897) 302.

¹² Gary Lee, “Background of the Christian Baptist,” in *The Christian Baptist*, by Alexander Campbell (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1983) 23. See also Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith, The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996) 29, who says, “Campbell . . . thought that the restoration of primitive Christianity would lead directly to the millennial age.”

¹³ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 92, provides a definition of what he terms “an apocalyptic worldview”: “An outlook on life whereby the believer gives his or her allegiance to the kingdom of God, not to the kingdoms of this world, and lives as if the final rule of the kingdom of God were present in the here and now. Such a perspective inevitably generates a countercultural lifestyle.”

¹⁴ D. Newell Williams, “Stone, Barton Warren,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (ed. Douglas A. Foster, et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 718.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 719.

It goes without saying that Stone and his people embraced an ethic of pacifism and grounded that ethic squarely in their anticipation of the final triumph of the kingdom of God. . . . It is clear that Stone implicitly rooted his pacifism in the first Christian age, and yet the apocalyptic vision of the final triumph of the kingdom of God, informed by the ancient faith, was most decisive for his thinking on war and peace.¹⁶

Therefore, while Campbell and Stone came to similar conclusions concerning Christian involvement in war, they curiously arrived at their conclusions by opposite routes. Campbell, along with many others whose ethical systems were based upon the ethos of *The Christian Baptist*, grounded his rationale for pacifism mainly on the biblical pattern and the first Christian age, rather than the Stoneite concept of the final triumph of the kingdom of God. Hughes comments, “While Campbell and Stone agreed on the issue of pacifism, they came to their positions from different directions.”¹⁷

MY STORY: COLLEGE, ENLISTMENT, AND SERVICE

The apocalyptic tradition was sustained during and after the American Civil War, among others in the Stone heritage, by leaders of the Nashville Bible School. David Lipscomb, co-founder of the school along with James A. Harding, and who served as editor of the *Gospel Advocate* for fifty years after the Civil War, is identified by Hughes as “the man who, more than anyone else, carried the Barton Stone tradition into the twentieth century.”¹⁸ His book on *Civil Government* was widely circulated among members of the emerging Churches of Christ. Lipscomb believed that God would eventually establish his sovereignty over all the earth and would then destroy all human governments. He posed the question as to how Christians could attach themselves to systems which God himself would eventually destroy.¹⁹ Thus, Lipscomb, in his mature years, refused to endorse Christians’ participation in military life, running for public office, or even casting a franchise.²⁰

Lipscomb’s colleague and the president of the Nashville Bible School was former Kentuckian, James A. Harding. Hughes says Harding represented “the epitome of the apocalyptic tradition that had flourished in the South for a hundred years.”²¹ Harding held unapologetically to a premillennial eschatology and a worldview defined by the expectation of the coming kingdom of God. As citizens of the

¹⁶ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 111.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

present and anticipating the imminent coming of the kingdom of God on earth, Harding, like Lipscomb, eschewed Christian involvement in civil government, voting, holding secular office, or military service. As his biographer and grandson-in-law L. C. Sears wrote in his biography of Harding,

Harding and Lipscomb, as well as all the teachers and most of the students (of The Nashville Bible School) believed that the Christian should not vote, hold political office, or participate in the affairs of civil government. His responsibility was simply to be obedient as a foreigner, for his citizenship was in heaven.²²

Among the students at the Nashville Bible School between 1895 and 1900 was a young German immigrant named Robert Henry Boll.²³ Boll, a recent convert to the Church of Christ from Roman Catholicism, was an eager student who embraced wholeheartedly the apocalyptic stance of his mentors at the school—especially that of David Lipscomb and James A. Harding, along with the premillennial eschatology of Harding and their colleagues at the Nashville School. That position a little later made Boll the primary target of a militant and long-term attack on premillennialism until the end of his life. In the introductory paragraph of his essay on Boll’s early life, Hans Rollman has written: “For a long time he was the target of either endearment or scorn for his pre-millennial eschatology and views by ecclesiastical opponents, or unmitigated admiration by friends and followers.”²⁴ Hughes describes Boll’s position as “strictly anti-modern,” as he “grounded his position in the Stone-Lipscomb vision that the Christian does not belong to the kingdom of this world.” Hughes adds his personal conviction, “There is no question but that Boll had learned his apocalyptic lessons from his teachers at the old Nashville Bible School, but Harding seems to have been especially influential.”²⁵

During World War I members of the Churches of Christ reflected a variety of views concerning Christian participation in wars of the United States.²⁶ My uncle, E. L. Jorgenson, was a colleague and close friend of R. H. Boll after Jorgenson moved to Louisville in 1909. Influenced heavily by Boll’s biblical scholarship and exemplary Christian life, he was able to share with his brother, my father, aspects of his own faith journey during the years before World War II. I was born in 1926, and from my earliest memories I recall the bedtime devotional sessions which my

²² L. C. Sears, *The Eyes of Jehovah: The Life and Faith of James A. Harding* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1970) 146.

²³ E. L. Jorgenson, “A Biographical Sketch,” in *Truth and Grace: The Writings of R. H. Boll* by R. H. Boll (Cincinnati: F. L. Rowe, 1917) 9-10.

²⁴ Hans Rollman, “From Black Forest to the Nashville Bible School: The Conversion of Robert Henry Boll,” *ResQ* 58.1 (2016) 7.

²⁵ Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith*, 142.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

parents, my two sisters and I shared during my childhood. Besides prayer, sometimes singing, and Scripture reading, those sessions often included readings from commentaries on the biblical books of the evening. The commentaries often included the brief books and pamphlets on biblical books penned by Boll, and the ambiguous response of my father as to whether he would opt to pull the trigger on Adolf Hitler could hardly be surprising.

My father passed away in the spring of 1941, six months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. On December 7 I remember sitting in a friend's car on the main street of our little Nebraska town when the car radio brought the startling news. At age fifteen and having recently lost my dad, my naïve first thought was, "This is the most terrible news I have ever heard, affecting tragically many people. But at my age and out here in the middle of the Midwest, it probably won't affect me that much personally."

The fall of 1942 found my mother and me in Searcy, Arkansas, as I was matriculating as a freshman at Harding College. Among my courses that year were surveys of the Gospel of Matthew and the Book of Acts under Professor J. N. Armstrong, son-in-law of James A. Harding. Armstrong had been both student and professor at the Nashville Bible School, and had served as president of Cordell College, Oklahoma, during the time it was closed under pressure from the government and the local draft board over Armstrong's pacifistic doctrine. He had served as president of Harding College from its inception in 1924 until 1936 when he was succeeded by George Benson. During World War II many of his male students were awarded an IV-D draft classification since they were enrolled as preministerial students. Most of the rest of us were counseled to apply for a I-A-O classification, which would enable us to serve as conscientious objectors in military uniform.

While J. N. Armstrong and his pacifist colleagues were counseling pacifism, a new movement at Harding served as a strong counterbalance to their teaching. The Benson administration, in a concerted effort to pay off the heavy college debt and to provide funding for much-needed campus improvements, had embarked on a project to "bring respectability to such right-wing concerns as laissez-faire capitalism, anti-Communism, and Christian patriotism."²⁷ This "stridently patriotic, pro-capitalist, and anti-Communist perspective" was "institutionalized at Harding in his National Education Program."²⁸ This effort not only succeeded in strengthening Harding's fiscal circumstances but was an effective instrument for refreshing patriotic values in an era when the nation was being pressed on two fronts to sustain its existence. At the same time, it would not be accurate to say that the program did not impact negatively the pacifistic tradition of the campus—and perhaps of the churches in community with Harding.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

As a student for whom it was necessary to work on campus to help pay college expenses I was fortunate in having acquired reasonable facility with both Gregg shorthand and typing. Consequently, I was assigned to work for Mr. Ward Halbert, the creative Assistant to the President, whose job it was to prepare the syndicated conservative business and political column for the National Education Program. Halbert also sustained a busy correspondence with business people around the nation who were part of the financial development project and the side of the school involved in developing a renewed American patriotism. I was poised, at ages seventeen and eighteen, between a high fidelity patriotism in my work and an apocalyptic and pacifistic worldview in my Bible classes. Ambiguity seemed to be the color of my world.

Pacifism, Hughes observes, “had always been a minority position among Churches of Christ, though pacifists were especially strong in Middle Tennessee. Not surprisingly, then, the record on pacifism among Churches of Christ in World War I was mixed.”²⁹ Prior to World War II many of the “main-line” Churches of Christ, partly under the militant leadership of Texas-born preacher Foy E. Wallace Jr., left every form of the Stone-Lipscomb apocalyptic tradition, including premillennial eschatology, a theology of grace, and pacifism. The attack on Pearl Harbor by the Empire of Japan on December 7, 1941, abruptly hardened the anti-pacifist position of congregations and leaders of the Churches of Christ and Christian churches.³⁰ Fortunately for me, a number of faculty members and students at Harding still supported the Armstrong counsel and were sympathetic with the position other student draftees and I took in response to that teaching.

On my eighteenth birthday in March 1944, I registered for the draft in White County, Arkansas. Having decided to go with Professor Armstrong’s counsel, I requested a I-A-O status from the draft board, buttressing my application with a group of “proof texts” the people of the draft board had doubtless seen on many applications from Harding students before mine.³¹ My draft card with the conscientious objector caveat came, almost immediately, probably as a result of the long practice the White County decision makers had had over similar requests. I was happily able to complete my sophomore year before reporting for the draft early in June 1944.

Early on a spring morning I climbed on a bus crowded with draftees like myself, heading for Camp Robinson at Little Rock. After a few days of the standard

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ The classification I-A signified immediate eligibility for the draft. I-A-O referred to the immediate draft-eligible status of a conscientious objector. 4-D suggested a category of a citizen deemed essential for the government and thus provided a deferment from military service. It applied both to practicing ministers and to declared preministerial students.

humiliating life of new inductees, including kitchen police, ill-fitting fatigue uniforms, and shoes which seemed to be far too large (presumably allowing for swollen feet during marching), we all took IQ and placement tests to help determine the future assignments we would get in the Army. I was elated to receive orders to report to Sheppard Field (now Sheppard Air Force Base), Wichita Falls, Texas, for basic training in the Army Air Corps.

Air Force basic training was relatively benign compared with that in some other branches of the service, but I was surprised when in spite of my I-A-O classification, I was taken to the firing range to qualify on the carbine and get an introduction to the pistol. As a farm boy in Nebraska I had enjoyed having my own 22-caliber rifle for six years, and took pleasure in the competitive military shooting matches. Nevertheless, I wondered what I was expected to do with my marksmanship in the future. I feared that “someone up there” had made an error, or perhaps my records were lost.

At the conclusion of basic training we were again given aptitude tests and most of my fellow recruits were sent directly to air gunnery school. I was assigned a 213 MOS classification, which meant that I was destined to be a stenographer somewhere in the Air Force. My orders came shortly to report to Second Air Force Headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The Second Air Force was the official training command for the Twentieth, the outfit which would soon be flying the new B-29 bombers in the Pacific Theater of war.

Upon arrival at Colorado Springs I was directed to a beautiful office building with a picture window framing Pike’s Peak and introduced to my new boss, an Air Force captain who had flown many missions on B-17s in Europe and who was preparing to write the gunnery training manual for B-29 gunners. He asked whether he could dictate the book to me and whether I could then get it into type. For three months we worked on the manual, although again the concern haunted me that, as a conscientious objector, I was helping put together the menu for men to kill efficiently. Contrary to Alexander Campbell’s grouping of both kinds of warfare together without distinction, the typical question for Christians in a time of war often revolved around a distinction between defensive killing, which the tail and waist gunners would be doing for their crews, and offensive. But when one considers the fact that the primary mission of the plane’s crew would be offensive attacks on Japan, the offensive versus defensive consideration loses its validity and the major question reverts to the larger issue as to whether war is justifiable under any circumstances. As a mere stenographer, I was not creating the ideas, but the distinction becomes blurred on serious reflection.

By December 1944 the gunnery manual was nearly completed, and it seemed to be the right time to ask for duty in a combat zone overseas, besides being able to do something other than typing gunnery manuals. Shortly after making the application, I was informed that the only two jobs open to a conscientious objector

overseas were to serve as an enlisted medic or to take an assignment as a chaplain's assistant. Realizing that I had no special aptitude for work as a medic, and considering the musical instruction I had received, both at Harding and before college, to say nothing of the stenographic abilities I could bring to the chaplain's office, I opted for the chaplain's assistant assignment.

I had also cherished the hope since college days that I might be able to share my Christian faith by bringing my choral experience to bear by sharing hymn texts with fellow soldiers. Not that that assignment would be without particular problems for me as a member of the Church of Christ, recently charged with denominational fervor for the aspects of worship which characterized the fellowship through two years at Harding College. Fairly heavily imbued with the thought that "our" fellowship represented the "true church" and that "the denominations" were all "in error," it seemed inevitable that I would have to work under a Protestant chaplain whose message was divergent from my own understanding of the simple gospel. Besides that, I was concerned about the likelihood of my being called upon to provide the very instrumental accompaniment on a piano or field organ for hymns, a duty which I felt was contrary to biblical worship.

Leroy Garrett summarizes a similar dilemma he faced as a Church of Christ minister when he applied for a commission as a Navy chaplain. Having graduated from Abilene Christian College in the spring of 1942, he considered ways in which he might serve his country:

I eventually responded to the war effort by applying to the Navy recruitment office to be a chaplain. I passed the test, and they indicated that I would probably soon be called. I never was. But I doubt if I would have made a good chaplain. I was not then ecumenical enough and I had too many hang-ups. I wondered what I would do about instrumental music in military chapels!³²

For an enlisted chaplain's assistant many of the obstacles confronted by Garrett were similar, except in the area of music where the chaplain's assistant might well be the very one *playing* the instrumental music!

I checked into the 502nd Bomb Group, 315th Bomb Wing of the Twentieth Air Force at Grand Island on a cold Nebraska day in January 1945. I was awed by the squadrons of the enormous B-29s which would soon be stationed somewhere in the Pacific Theater of war flying bombing missions over Japan. My new boss, newly-commissioned First Lieutenant Chaplain C. Alan Goss, welcomed me heartily. He was young, friendly, musically gifted, on fire for preaching the Word, and a Northern Baptist (now American Baptist). We liked each other from our first meeting.

Another boon: the permanent chapel at Grand Island had a regularly-assigned organist with no need for me to face that dilemma until we had at least arrived at

³² Leroy Garrett, *A Lover's Quarrel, an Autobiography: My Pilgrimage of Freedom in Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2003) 42.

our overseas base. “Chappie” did not flinch at my I-A-O status, and he appreciated my stenographic skills because they were not officially a prerequisite for the assistant’s job description and thus represented a bonus for his work. Since the unit had lost several planes in training accidents in Puerto Rico, Kansas, and Nebraska, we went to work immediately writing condolence letters. He had the heart of a pastor and many people commented on the loving approach he brought to the tragic business of contacting families after disasters.

In April, the ground echelon of the 315th Wing boarded a train on our Nebraska air base for Seattle, Washington, our scheduled port of embarkation. There we boarded a troop ship, with its standard “stacking” of bunks four deep in the hold, and headed out to the Pacific Ocean. As we were issued our gear for the passage, I was entrusted with the standard 30 caliber M-1 carbine, the same weapon on which I had qualified at Sheppard Field. As I was trying to decide what to do about it, Chappie, no conscientious objector, ordered, “Jorgenson, if we get in a tight spot, you toss me that gun as quick as you can!”

Very few of the men knew what their destination was, but after twenty-eight days, mostly in convoy with protecting destroyers and another troop ship, we docked offshore at Guam in the Mariana Islands. We moved into tents at the edge of the jungle while the Seabees were still bulldozing the new airstrips for what would be Northwest Field, our new home. Chappie was able to purchase a truckload of bamboo panels weaved by native craftspeople in one of the remote villages, and he negotiated the necessary framing timber for his chapel through channels of the Army. With the supervision of a GI carpenter, a volunteer crew of men who had time on their hands until it was time to fly missions helped erect a handsome chapel with bamboo sides, partitions, a very comely church-like steeple, and a raised pulpit/altar. For chairs, we used halves of empty bomb crates. We held services outdoors on Sundays until the chapel was usable, and the air crews arrived the next month. The Wing was ready to join the war over Japan.

The B-29s of the 315th Wing had been modified to remove all the defensive armament except for the tail gunner’s position.³³ The removal of the side nacelles which housed the guns enabled the planes to attain more speed and carry somewhat heavier bomb loads than the standard models. The men who had trained to be gunners on each side of the plane were now only scanners, with responsibility to monitor visually the four engines and watch for enemy fighter aircraft. One aerial scanner who was quite regular in chapel attendance was able and willing to play the field organ (powered by the feet), and his availability spared me from making a decision to violate my anti-instrumental music concern for the time being. I led singing, chose hymns, and started a chorus for some of the men who loved to sing.

³³ See George E. Harrington and William Leasure, eds., *A New Chapter in Air Power: The 315th Bomb Wing (VH) Guam, WWII* (2nd ed.; St. Petersburg, FL: Byron Kennedy and Co., 1986) 18.

Later several of the men told me that the choir had brought them to the chaplain, who in turn had been able to lead them to Christ.

As practice and then combat missions began in mid-summer fatal accidents and an especially tragic loss in combat over Japan again claimed the lives of several of our crews. These events kept Chappie very much involved in pastoring, counseling, conducting memorial services, and corresponding with bereaved families back home. So I was also busy with my portable typewriter trying to keep up with his dictation of letters and getting them in mailing condition for the trip back to the United States. With only the bamboo partition between the sanctuary and the office, I was a passive auditory guest for Catholic Masses conducted by a neighboring Catholic chaplain and for Jewish services, led by a layman from our own unit. Chappie was sometimes asked to present an OT sermon for the Jewish airmen after they had concluded their liturgy and worship service.

One Sunday, Chaplain Goss met me at the door of the chapel as I was arriving for services. Uncharacteristically, he had his hand on the captain's bars on the right side of his collar, and said, "Sergeant, there is the jeep, there are the field hymnals, there is the field organ *if* you want it, and up that trail about ten miles is the Navy radar station where they haven't heard the Word for weeks." Then, pointing to me, "There is the guy who is going to take it to them!" I thought that was a rather clear "call to preach." In any case, the sailors under the cliff had the questionable benefit of one of my first sermons.

I was privileged to ride in the bombardier's chair for a pair of practice missions over the little island of Rota. Sitting in that position, in the nose cone and most advantageous seat in a B-29, drove home to me the ultimate questions about what it meant to operate that equipment against human beings. Our Wing's assigned targets concentrated on destroying fuel facilities and not residential areas, but inevitably the "collateral damage" had to be part of the moral equation. The Wing was effective in helping to bring the war to a close, even after the two atomic bombs were used against the Japanese government while the war lords were trying to prevent the surrender message from being broadcast.³⁴

Doubtless, what our crews did saved lives in the long run, but the ambiguous part of the question remains: can a Christian kill other human beings, created in the image of God, for even a life-saving cause? During the war, with my naïve perception of the question, I took comfort in the thought that I had not personally killed anyone. But I could not finally escape the responsibility of being where I was to give support for the men who had the actual killing to do. One still wonders whether serving in a noncombat role in the military was morally acceptable, compared to the lot of the few Americans who spent the war in peace camps, mostly run by the traditional "peace churches."

³⁴ See Jim Smith and Malcolm McConnell, *The Last Mission: The Secret History of World War II's Final Battle* (Portland, OR: Broadway Books, 2002).

It took nearly eight months after the armistice was signed on the battleship Missouri for me to finally get back to the States and to Harding College, providing a period on Guam and Saipan when I was able to spend a great deal of my time in Scripture study and discussion with Chappie and other serious Christian men. This was a time, more than any other, when my fellow soldiers asked numerous questions about Scripture study, using language without cursing and other earmarks of typical Christian lifestyle. Almost always, during the war and the period during which we waited to get passage home, I was treated respectfully for my CO status by both officers and my fellow soldiers.

THE BOMB, ASSASSINATIONS, AND CHRISTIANS

History's most visible and crucial decision over the use of deadly power was that faced by President Harry Truman shortly after his accession to the oval office on April 12, 1945.

Called by historian J. Samuel Walker, “the most contentious issue in American history,” the decision to use the atomic bomb against the Empire of Japan still generates vigorous ethical debate.³⁵ The traditional view, expressed by Truman and still held by a majority of Americans, contended that ending World War II by the use of the bomb saved thousands, even a million Japanese and American lives by making an invasion of the island nation unnecessary. The “revisionists” frame the debate on different terms, contending that the war could have been ended with neither an invasion nor the bomb.³⁶ For the men of the 315th Bomb Wing, or those of any Allied military service in the Pacific Theater in 1945, the decision was of course the only viable one. The continued vitality of the ongoing debate is typical of the ambiguity in values by Americans about the issue of war—both collectively and individually—and especially by Christians concerning the issue of pacifism and militarism.

Alexander Campbell, Barton Stone, and their successors of the apocalyptic heritage wrote in a different time, had not faced a Holocaust, the atomic bomb, nor a Bataan death march, although they clearly understood the cruelty and barbarism of war. Today's mail brings news of a Christian set of camps in the Middle East where families, young girls, and others who were abused by ISIS were being nurtured. Because the terrorists are incessantly looking for the camps to wreak destruction and murder it was found essential to post armed guards to protect the vulnerable. This kind of situation brings questions to mind which were not raised in an era of “conventional warfare,” and the answers are again not easy to come by.

³⁵ J. Samuel Walker, “Harry Truman's Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb,” *History News Network*, 2 August 2015, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/159959>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer had no direct connection to the Stone-Campbell tradition, and reports of his *Letters and Papers from Prison* give some evidence of his departure from an evangelical faith.³⁷ Because of his witness throughout World War II, his martyrdom by the Nazis, and his theological analysis of the time, he does provide one of the few studied theological statements about the Christian's responsibility in time of war by one who experienced it personally. Before his imprisonment, on several occasions he gave a rather tortured but spiritually thoughtful answer to the question of whether it might be acceptable for a Christian to participate in the assassination of one man in order to save many lives.

Bonhoeffer's "retreat from pacifism" has been debated by Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel.³⁸ However, citations from Bonhoeffer himself dealing with the question are extant from his early ministry in Spain until the period late in life when he was a member of the *Abwehr*, the secret service, which he used primarily for a cover for his work in smuggling Jews out of Germany and planning with western church leaders for a post-Hitler Germany. In 1928, while the twenty-two-year-old Bonhoeffer was ministering to a German congregation in Barcelona, Spain, he delivered three lectures which have been preserved. In the third lecture, he said: "There is no such thing as an (inherently) bad action, and even murder can be sanctified; one can only be faithful to or fall away from the will of God. There is no law actually etched in stone, but only the law of freedom, that is to say, the responsibility all carry before God."³⁹

This existential statement seems to be echoed in a passage from Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, the unfinished writing project which came near the end of his life:

Urgent necessity calls for freedom of self-responsibility. There is no law behind which accountable people may seek cover. Therefore, there is no law that can force responsible people to make this or that decision. Moreover, there is, in this situation, only the rejection of any law binding on the conscience to have to make a decision so that responsible (people) have to decide freely and under the clear realization that the law will be violated and broken. This is also tied to the recognized applicability of the law, and finally the rejection of any law so that entirely alone (one) submits his own action to the divine judgment of history.⁴⁰

³⁷ Richard Weikart, "The Troubling Thing about Bonhoeffer's Theology," *Christian Research Journal*, 35.6 (2012).

³⁸ Mark Thiessen Nation, Anthony G. Siegrist, and Daniel P. Umbel, *Bonhoeffer the Assassin? Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

³⁹ Ferdinand Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945* (trans. by Dale Jorgenson; München: Verlag C.H. Beck oHG, 2015) 69.

⁴⁰ Cited in Schlingensiepen, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, 295. An extensive list of works advocating pacifism is available online, see Craig M. Watts, "Stone-Campbell Movement Peace and Anti-War Bibliography," <http://studylib.net/doc/7459819/stone-campbell-peace-bibliography>.

The continued debate over the actual position of the German theologian underscores the difficulty for Christians in resolving the question of a “just war” and “offensive” versus “defensive” battle. Ambiguity in finding the Christian attitude in particular circumstances of national strife is reflected in the various written reflections by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

POST-WAR POSTSCRIPT

A unique privilege in my life—along with those of my family—has been the opportunity to serve as chaplain for five years of the reunions of the men of the World War II 315th Bomb Wing. Now greatly diminished in surviving numbers but wonderfully supported by their committed families, the survivors often speak of their appreciation for the work of the chaplain in their respective spiritual lives in an era of great stress. Some members believe they fought America’s last “just war,” if there has ever been such a conflict. It is always a joy to hear how many of the members’ families sustain a relationship with Christ, often bequeathed to them by their parents of World War II experience.

The post-war pacifism of many conservative members of the Churches of Christ, ironically, joins with that of many liberal Disciples. The Disciples Peace Fellowship, founded in 1935, is “the oldest organization of its type in any denomination,” and “sponsors peace and justice by sending peace interns to peace camps, publishing a quarterly newsletter, sponsoring General Assembly events, providing peace-related congregational resources, and taking action on specific peace and justice causes.”⁴¹ Michael Casey in 2004 has written, “Pearl Harbor shattered confidence in pacifism among Disciples as most saw U.S. involvement in war as a justifiable means to stop the evils of Nazism and Japanese aggression.”⁴² Of the three main streams of the Stone-Campbell Movement, Casey suggests that the Christian Church/Churches of Christ has historically been the least pacifistic.⁴³

The existential “will of God” is not always easy to discern, even for those who are mature in the faith, let alone for people eighteen years of age. The question of “a just war,” “defense” as opposed to “offense,” and the question of responsibility which obligates the stronger to protect the weaker will doubtlessly continue to make the issue of Christian involvement in military life an ambiguous enigma. In the context of the current political climate the need for clarity becomes increasingly acute. Like my father, I would probably answer the 1940 question of pulling the trigger with a similar response, “I’d be mighty tempted.”^{SCJ}

⁴¹ Disciples Peace Fellowship website: <http://www.dpfweb.org/>.

⁴² Michael Casey, “Pacifism,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (ed. Douglas A. Foster, et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 587.

⁴³ *Ibid.*