

Thou Shalt Kill (Under Certain Circumstances)

When evaluating several Christian texts from a variety of renowned Christian authors, it is evident that regarding military activity and Christian religious belief, there is no universal relationship between the two. However, in a similar fashion to the way in which Christianity has several unique denominations that worship the same God, each author takes their idea of what Christian warfare entails in different directions but have a few underlying similarities when it comes to virtue. St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Einhard, Geoffroi de Charny, Pope Urban II, and Jean de Joinville all use similar ideology to support alternate opinions on what just Christian warfare looks like.

Self-sacrifice and spiritual duty are strong examples of prevalent characteristics shared amongst each text, especially when answering questions concerning if Christians are to engage in warfare. St. Augustine, in *The City of God Against the Pagans*, speaks on the inevitability of war, saying that “every man seeks peace by waging war, but no man seeks war by making peace” (Augustine, Chap. 12). Furthermore, considering that every man sins, war is something that every man might do. So, from Augustine’s perspective, Christians are certainly allowed to engage in warfare. There is a paradox of sorts when it comes to his concept of the inescapability of war, however, in that he believes war to be a result of sin, but also a treatment: “every victory, even though gained by wicked men, is a result of the first judgment of God, who humbles the vanquished either for the sake of removing or of punishing their sins” (Augustine, Chap. 15). War through that lens is a spiritual duty of sorts, as war can be a remedy for sin. In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas has a similar attitude, citing Augustine to showcase his opinion that war is “the object of securing peace, of punishing evil-doers, and of uplifting the good” (Aquinas, Article 1). Here again, spiritual duty as a believer of the Christian faith is seen. It is almost the

duty of Christians to fight for that peace and punish evil doers, assuming the peace, evil, and good mentioned are the Christian definitions of the words. Self-sacrifice is another theme here; Christians are encouraged to put their lives on the line to defend these concepts. This concept is familiar to Charny's *Book of Chivalry*, a text that delves into the notion of prosperity gospel: power from God. Here it is outlined that not only is success on the battlefield a blessing from God, but defeat is the loss of not only your life, but your soul. That being said, war is not only acceptable for Christians, but God plays a large part in who experiences victory and who is defeated: "our Lord in his mercy allowed you to perform the deeds from which you have gained such a reputation" (Charny, 135). War, if done correctly according to Charny, is a glorious thing to commit oneself to. A similar sentiment is seen yet again in Pope Urban II's work *Speech at the Council of Clermont*. Here he says, "you have promised the Lord to maintain peace more earnestly than heretofore in your midst, and faithfully sustain the rights of the Holy Church... a very necessary work in which you can show the strength of your good will by a certain further duty" (Pope Urban II, 162). Once again there is a sense of obligation to defend as a Christian. Spiritual duty is a prevalent theme of *The Life of St. Louis* written by Joinville, arguably more so than any of the other texts. Here, the idea of religious pilgrimage is a core concept, and the Crusades are some of the most obvious examples of this. The purpose of pilgrimage is a spiritual duty in itself, and self-sacrifice was a necessity. A small example of this is when St. Louis was ridiculed for being too charitable, his response was "I prefer it that my extravagant expenditure be incurred through giving charity for the love of God than through worldly pride or vainglory" (Joinville, 326). Einhard, in *Life of Charlemagne*, illustrates his opinions on Christian warfare in a similar fashion to that of Joinville, outlining his points about Charlemagne and his leadership as the focus of his text. He uses Charlemagne as an example to showcase what warfare should

look like and thus, it is easily assumed that he believes that Christians can engage in warfare. His take is more subtle than the other writers, but he speaks highly of certain actions Charlemagne participated in relation to war and Christianity. For instance, he used his wealth from war to make the “admirable” basilica of the Holy Mother of God (Einhard, 43). This can, in a way, be tied back to that underlying theme of self-sacrifice in a more indirect way. Many kings spend their wealth from war on eloquent parties and other luxuries, Charlemagne poured it into a church in a very similar way to that of St. Louis as described in Joinville’s writing. In sum, each author goes in a slightly different direction, but each text is tied back into self-sacrifice or spiritual duty (sometimes both).

As for how such war is conducted, it still rings true that certain virtues are common between authors and texts. Many have clear guidelines on in what case war is to be waged and others delve into how Christians should act on the battlefield as vessels of God. As far as the situations in which war should be engaged, Aquinas says that “in order for war to be just, three things are necessary” (Aquinas, Article I). These things include the approval of the leadership of the state, a proper reason, and good intentions. In his eyes, consent from the authority of the sovereign meant that war was not for the selfish reasons of business or private matters. A just cause is not for petty reasons like “avenging wrongs”, but instead “those who are attacked should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault” (Aquinas, Article I). Aquinas cites Augustine to support his third point, quoting that “wars that are waged not for motives of aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace” are peaceful in themselves (Aquinas, Article I). He acknowledges that war can be waged by the authority of the sovereign, but for the wrong intentions, and deems those wars to not be agents of peace. Augustine, of course, holds a similar perspective to Aquinas, as Aquinas drew much inspiration from *The City*

of God Against the Pagans. He holds that “for it is the wrongdoing of the opposing party which compels the wise man to wage just wars; and this wrong-doing, even though it gave rise to no war, would still be matter of grief to man because it is man's wrong-doing” (Augustine, Chap. 7). Here he argues that while war is just when rightfully intended, humans should feel badly about it, or in his words, if one doesn't feel bad about the grotesqueness of war “he thinks himself happy because he has lost human feeling” (Augustine, Chap. 7). In his evaluation of the matter of just Christian war there is an additional and necessary need for emotion. Pope Urban, in his speech, calls for a “divine correction” of a previous promise to “the Lord to maintain peace” (Urban, 162). While he doesn't quite outline the specifics of when war is just and when it isn't, he finds that there is a current situation where it is necessary. The Turks attacked the “brethren dwelling in the East” he said to his people, “who need your help, which they have often asked” (Urban, 162). It seems here that war can be waged in situations where religion or the people who practice it need protection.

When it comes to how Christians should conduct themselves during time of war there are a few differing opinions. Charny, as could be assumed by the title of his text, has a lot to say on the matter. The entirety of the *Book of Chivalry* outlines how Christians should act in battle; a majority of such demarcating how one should treat an enemy. Here is where the Christian values really show face, Charny believes war should act in a way where “you can and must maintain any benefit or honor which God may bestow on you” (Charny, 133). There is an entire book of ways in which one can stay in God's good graces on the battlefield such as “do not praise your own conduct nor criticize too much that of others”, “never regret any generosity you may show”, and “honor Him He will honor you” (Charny, 129, 131, 199). There are dozens more tidbits of advice from Charny, but in general his teachings are that Christians should act in an honorable

and trustworthy manner in times of war. Einhard spoke more on the generosity aspect of war. Through the life of Charlemagne, he speaks on the importance of sharing the wealth, a typical quality of Christian beliefs. A part of Charlemagne's success was his ability to not overindulge, but to also give to other Christian kingdoms. He formed ambassadorships with other kingdoms, sent them "magnificent gifts" and later, when needed Charles received the only elephant a nation had (Einhard, 43). Charlemagne himself was painted in a light that was meant to draw parallels to Jesus, through his generosity, but also his "common dress of the people" (Einhard, 47). Him leading by this example showed how acting like a Christian was important on the battlefield and was modeled by leaders. Joinville also speaks on the Jesus-esque actions of the subject of his writings: St. Louis. He was told to wash the feet of the poor, and "not despise doing this, for God had done so" (Joinville, 318). With this in mind King Louis had his workers, including the baillis (medieval officers with military power) and sergeants swear on an oath. In this oath several points were made regarding proper Christian conduct in times of war. Some of these points included to "deal fairly with all people without exception – the poor as well as the rich", "not to receive any gift of whatever kind" and to "abstain from blasphemous swearing against God (Joinville, 320-321). Here we see a focus on ensuring leaders of battle aren't corrupt, so that there are leaders by example.

Because each author believes that Christians can go to war, it's a given that being a soldier will not immediately incur a denial of heaven. There's an interesting dynamic between the two, mostly due to Christian values like "thou shalt not kill" and "love thy neighbor". Because war contradicts such statements, the authors describe ways to go about warfare as an effective soldier and a good Christian in order to assure men that if done correctly, not only can a good man go to heaven, but someone with sin can wipe the slate clean. Aquinas mentions said

tension in Article 2 of *Summa Theologica*. Whether it is lawful for clerks and bishops to fight, saying “warlike pursuits are altogether incompatible with the duties of a bishop and a cleric” (Aquinas, Article 2.). For a regular soldier these inconsistencies have loopholes of sorts: “no man who has a certain duty to perform, can lawfully do that which renders him unfit for that duty” (Aquinas, Article 2.). If war is a necessary duty, then by this logic, an effective soldier is a good Christian. Aquinas also justifies aspects of how Christians conduct war such as ambushes, and argues as to why those actions are just, and therefore won’t exclude one from going to heaven. Charny titles a chapter of *Book of Chivalry* “Souls Can be Saved in Pursuit of Arms”. “If you are in a state of grace and die honorably does not God show you great mercy when He grants you such a glorious end to your life in this world and bears your soul away with Him into eternal bliss?” (Charny, 133). This line, along with the title proves that Christian soldiers can not only get into heaven, but their souls can be saved through warfare. In this context, this would mean sins being relinquished by serving a duty to God of sorts through battle.

Not only does Christian warfare allow for leeway to heaven, but Christians, according to some authors, have the chance to gain glory for themselves through combat. Glory, as referred to in the texts, can be broken up into two sub-groups. glory from God, and self-earned glory. Charny, for starters, believes that Glory comes directly from God, and that soldiers should constantly keep this in mind during battle. He warns, “do not put too much faith in people who have risen rapidly above others by good fortune, not merit, for this will not last: they will fall as quickly as they rise” (Charny, 131). This hesitation is because he felt as if true glory will come from God, not fortune or any other means. Additionally, he asks “does not God confer great honor when He allows you of His mercy to defeat your enemies without harm to yourself” (Charny 133). Here he shows how God is what is protecting one on the battlefield and defeating

the enemy, not oneself, and thus, the glory belongs to him. Augustine has a similar opinion on the matter, believing that virtues “when inflated with pride, ...are therefore reckoned to be vices” (Augustine, Chap. 27). In that sense, self-induced glory, which is a prideful feeling, is incorrect. In his words “so that which gives blessed life to man is not derived from man, but is something above him” (Augustine, Chap. 27). It is God (“that which gives blessed life”) that makes it blessed, so glory in Augustine’s perspective is given by God, not to be earned by man. A similar verdict is reached by Aquinas; “he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil” (Aquinas, Article 1.). Again, we see a Christian author viewing soldiers as a vessel of God, so inherently the glory of war would be reasonably attributed to God. On the other hand, Einhard, through his depiction of the life of Charlemagne, would lend credit to the individual. The wording of this quote specifically backs that point: “he added to the glory of his reign by gaining the goodwill of several kings and nations” (Einhard, 43). Here, God is not mentioned in the concept of glory whatsoever and is instead a product of Charlemagne's personal actions.

In sum, a consistent Christian view of warfare does not exist, at least not in the narratives of prevalent Christian authors. Christian values, of course, effect the ideas and suggestions given by Augustine, Aquinas, Einhard, Charny, Pope Urban II, and Joinville in their respective texts, but their takes in general are heavily reliant on their personal experiences, leaders they admire, and the time at which they were writing their message. For that, there are several overlaps between texts, but their ideas go in so many different directions that it would be doing none of them justice to address them as one singular position.