

THE ARMY OF GOD: RECLAIMING A MILITARY MODEL OF THE CHURCH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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There are many ways to perceive the Christian Church, and there are many models to guide our definitions of the church. No description provides an all-encompassing or perfect model, but nearly all descriptors have something to offer. Each has unique characteristics that when used properly and in perspective, can improve the Church. Perhaps the most controversial model of the Church, as well as one of the oldest, is that of Church as an "army."

Throughout Jewish and Christian history, metaphors of the Church being an army abound. These metaphors have influenced our very way of talking about spirituality and the Church. Phrases like "more than conquerors," "victors," "soldiers of God," and even "kingdom of God" all point to how extensively military language and metaphors have influenced the Church's language.

The military model of the Church, however, has also been one of the most misused models of the Church. People have taken the "military" model and changed it into the "militant" model of the Church. As the Church has realized that horrors and abuses that have happened in the name of God throughout history, many have come to distrust, or even completely reject, the military model of the Church. Christians have downplayed the value of a carefully used military model to assuage their guilty consciences for evils that militant Christians have committed.

While trying to separate themselves from Christianity's violent past, some Christians have removed from their hymnal songs relating to military images. They deny that this imagery has anything beneficial to offer the Church today. They distance themselves from meaningful and valued ways in which Christians have expressed this model in the past.

This sort of action is understandable. Unfortunately, it neglects a valuable and historically influential model of the Church for the sake of political correctness, for fear of repeating past mistakes, and in an attempt to assuage a sense of guilt for past sins. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the historical usages of the military model of the Church, to reclaim some of its value for the Church today, and all the while guard against future misuses.

The Old Testament

Military language pertaining to God's people first appears in the Old Testament. In the historical books, Israel is frequently involved in wholesale violence and war, often at the call of God. One of the major ways the writers of the Old Testament refer to God also involves military imagery.

These writers, and presumably the believing community as well, frequently referred to God as the "Lord of Hosts." This title appears a staggering 278 times in the Old Testament¹ and refers to God's command over armies, both heavenly² and physical.

There are numerous instances in the Old Testament where Israel behaves as an army. Israel acts out God's commands as a quite literal physical army. Deuteronomy 7:2 is a perfect example of this. "...when the LORD thy God shall deliver them (enemy nations) before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them."³

The books of Joshua through Kings are filled with such examples. The general use of the military terminology and imagery for believers in the Old Testament is a militant use. Literal violence was acceptable as long as the violence was at God's directive and done in God's name. The Israelites would not have comprehended the idea of a military "metaphor." To them, they were the literal army of God. Many people today have a problem with such language taken literally, but it is difficult to overstate the importance of this Old Testament military imagery and orientation.

Biblical scholars note the importance of militant activity for Israel. Friedrich Schally claims, for instance, that Israel finds its very origins in war.⁴ Similarly, Julius Wellhausen claimed that "war was at the heart of Israel's religion and thus of its identity."⁵ In his book *Holy War in Ancient Israel*,

Gerhard von Rad argued that war was not just of practical but also of cultic and central significance to the Israelites.⁶

Regardless of whether or not these scholars are right, military imagery is important in the Old Testament and the idea that God's followers are an army is prominent there. Over the centuries, believers have accepted portions of these images and discarded others as views on war change. The basic imagery, however, will remain nearly the same throughout Christian history, and Old Testament first provides it.

Intertestamental Period

The militant model of believers began to change into a more military model as apocalyptic literature became popular. This change is especially evident within the Qumran community, the community that wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls. Scroll 1QM, otherwise known as the War Scroll, gives a good example of this change. The War Scroll is a description of the final battle between good and evil. In it, humans fight each other, but the fighting is becoming less violent, more stylized, and more metaphorical.

The key soldiers in this conflict are described as between forty and fifty years old,⁷ and those on the side of good win the battle in the War Scroll by sounding trumpets. Physical combat between one human and another is not present. The trumpets symbolically represent God's power to fight Israel's battles for them.⁸

"For the Battle is yours (God's)! And it is from you that power comes, and not from our own being. It is neither our might nor the power of our own hands which perform these marvels, except by your great strength and by your mighty deeds."⁹ This quote shows how much the author of the War Scroll views war not in physical terms of one human army striking down another. Instead, the author views war in spiritual terms, where the fight is through God's power and God's alone.

The Qumran community based its way of living upon the military organizational structure in use by the Israelites during the conquest of Canaan. They gave themselves ranks and organized themselves into groups of thousands, hundreds, and fifties.¹⁰ The Qumran community saw themselves as holy warriors awaiting God's call to do battle against God's enemies.¹¹ To prepare themselves for this battle, they practiced discipline and kept themselves pure.

Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus and the Qumran/Essene communities, spoke of the Qumran community quite warmly. Of special note, Philo spoke of how one could not find a maker of weapons, armor, or any violent or destructive tool among the Essenes.¹² The Essenes were a community that modeled itself along military lines¹³ and yet had no weapons of any kind within their community.

What believers once thought of as physical war sanctioned by God had begun to change into a spiritual war of equal intensity, but without the physical violence. The significant influence of apocalyptic writings accelerated this trend during the Intertestamental Period, and until the time of the New Testament, the military model steadily became less physical and more metaphorical.

Another key inter-testamental source that shows the spiritualization of combat within the believing community is Fourth Maccabees. Within this book is an account of a mother who was tortured and died along with her children because they would not renounce their faith. The writer of Fourth Maccabees has this to say about her. "Mother, soldier of God in piety's cause, elder and woman withal! By your brave endurance you have overcome even the tyrant..."¹⁴ (IV Maccabees 16:14)

Fourth Maccabees was probably written between 63 BCE and 70 CE.¹⁵ By this time, the idea that a soldier of God was someone who physically killed God's enemies was nearly gone. This woman peacefully accepted brutality and death, and by her endurance of suffering earned the title of "soldier of God." This is a definite difference from Joshua and Judges.

A new concept of God's people was forming. It was an image of believers being an army through discipline and togetherness, but not through bloodshed. This concept of a pacifist, or at least non-aggressive or non-combatant, army was continued and expanded on in the New Testament writings, especially within the writings of Paul. One possible reason why this revised model of God's army developed is the conquest of Judea by the Romans in 63 BCE. Before Roman rule, the main use of an army that the Israelites had experienced was for creating death and destruction. Leaders brought in armies to kill people, sack cities, and that was it.

The Romans, however, had many more uses for their army than merely killing people. Soldiers in the Roman army did nearly everything including building public works, policing the cities, farming, mining, and administering government.¹⁶ In fact, as a general rule, Roman soldiers in some locations fought so rarely that the Canons of Hippolytus tell us that a Christian being a soldier is acceptable, as long as they do not kill. Apparently, it was quite possible to serve as a Roman soldier for many years and never kill anyone.¹⁷

As the military that Jews were familiar with became less violent and took on more positive roles within the community, it is only natural that Jewish views of what it meant to be an army of God should change as well. The idea of a pacifist army began to appear more frequently during this period. People had proof that an army could do more things than kill people, while retaining the positive attributes of the military machine.

The New Testament

Interestingly, Jesus did not speak at all about a military model of belief. He rarely even spoke about the physical military, or about violent things. Instead, Jesus spoke of the “kingdom of God” or the “kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 3:2, 4:8, Luke 17:21) This is a bigger picture of what believers are a part of than just a military. However, it does not exclude the military as being part of that concept, especially as armies were a large part of what it meant to be a kingdom in that day and age.

It is not particularly surprising that Jesus did not use any military references. Many Jews were expecting a military Messiah; and it is my opinion that Jesus did everything he could to distance himself from that expectation. The use of military language, even if used in the new trend of service and dedication instead of physical violence, would have only encouraged people to think of him as their conquering savior and not as who he was. I believe that Jesus purposefully avoided using military metaphors to avoid giving people the wrong impression of what he was here on Earth to do.

What Jesus did frequently, however, was reinvent old ideas and change them into something new and shocking. Jesus repeatedly took old thoughts and gave them a new spin. Jesus was the master storyteller and loved to put a new surprising end to well known stories and parables. Many of his stories were retellings of rabbinic parables from earlier writings, but with twists that the listeners did not expect.¹⁸ The best-known example of this style is a large section of the Sermon on the Mount. Here the most noticeable format is “you heard it said... but I say...” Jesus reinterpreted and reinvigorated images and ideas that people already had heard and accepted.

The writers of the New Testament, and of the early Church, caught onto this idea. Paul especially loved to take a well-known idea and give it a new meaning. Paul also did not have any problems talking about military metaphors for the Church. The most famous of these is in Ephesians 6:10-18. Ephesians is a book almost entirely dedicated to discussing metaphors for the church. Within these pages are numerous illustrations of what the Church should be like. The body of Christ, the temple of Christ, and the bride of Christ are but a few examples most Christians have heard and know well.

Finally, at the end of the book, Paul talks about representing the Church through a military metaphor, the Christian soldier. In Ephesians 6:10-18 Paul describes how believers need to be like soldiers in many ways. However, Paul also follows Jesus’ example and slightly twists the image of what a soldier should be like. Paul tells the soldier to stand, not to attack. *“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then...”*¹⁹ In Ephesians, the military model of the Church met Jesus’ teachings on love and non-violence.

This was a soldier, but not one that attacked anyone, or even went on the offensive against people. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood...”²⁰ Even though Christians are like soldiers we do not fight people. The armor-of-God passage makes this very clear. The passage emphasizes preparedness, discipline and unity, not violence. Christians must be ready and put on God’s armor before problems come.

Christians should also “take up the shield of faith.”²¹ This shield was so large that soldiers had to use it in formation in order to be truly effective. The original meaning of the word used for “shield” in this passage meant “door”²² which shows the large size indicated. The word “take up” is also second person plural in form, “you all” should take it up, not just one individual. These pieces of evidence together indicate that what Paul had in mind was the Christian soldier being in formation with other

believers much as Roman soldiers worked, protecting each other with their shields. 1 Corinthians 14:40 supports this idea by telling believers that everything they do “should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”²³ The Greek used in this passage literally means that Christians should keep “in proper battle array.”²⁴

The idea of believers being soldiers in God’s army was quite common and natural during that time. Greek philosophers such as Seneca and even Socrates had long referred to spiritual and intellectual struggle as “battles” and “war.”²⁵ Likewise, military language and ideas had already fully infiltrated Hebrew thought during the Intertestamental period. In Philippians 2:25 Paul shows how far this language had saturated the culture by casually calling Epaphroditus “my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier.”²⁶

The image of a Christian soldier is quite common in the New Testament, but is never one of violence against people. Instead, it presents an image of discipline, support, preparedness, dedication, and self-sacrifice. The standard image of a soldier physically fighting for God, or even spiritually fighting humans for God, is stopped cold, and replaced with a metaphor that emphasizes carrying out God’s will instead of fighting. Nowhere in the New Testament is a military metaphor used to promote violence against another human. The Roman army helping to give tangible evidence that not all soldiers need to be violent or destructive almost assuredly helped bring about this shift in thinking.

One of the few passages in the New Testament that is even close to a violent military image is found in 1 Peter 2:11. *“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”*²⁷ Here, the war taking place is not a physical war, but a psychological and spiritual one taking place within us. Here the emphasis is less of a military theme, and more one of spiritual warfare. For the purposes of this paper, these two concepts are distinct and separate entities.

Whereas military imagery usually emphasizes the communal and disciplined nature of Christianity in everyday life, spiritual warfare almost invariably emphasizes the individual struggle against the supernatural. However, separating these two concepts can be very difficult, if not impossible. This is especially true because the authors of the Bible themselves did not often differentiate between the two concepts.

Spiritual warfare began to be associated with the military model of the church in large part due to the rise of apocalyptic literature in the Intertestamental period. Even today, we can see this connection between military language within the Church and spiritual warfare. The recent emphasis on spiritual warfare has strengthened this connection. My contention is that the military metaphor of the Church, while historically often connected with spiritual warfare, is a viable model for the Church in its own right. It is this idea of a military model of the Church, unencumbered by a necessity for spiritual warfare, which is the topic of this paper.

The Early Church

Even after the New Testament period the idea of Christians being pacifist soldiers was rooted deeply enough in Christian thought that many early Christian writers continued to use it. Clement of Rome²⁸ wrote in 1 Clement Chapter 37 “Brothers, let us be His soldiers, therefore, in all earnestness, under His faultless commands. Let us consider those who are enrolled under our rulers, how well-ordered, and how readily, how obediently they carry out commands.”²⁹ The emphasis in this passage is on recommending Christians to act as disciplined and as obedient as a physical army. Nowhere is there any mention of hurting or fighting anyone.

The writer of the Shepherd of Hermas tells his readers that they are to be “armed with the fear of the Lord” so that they can resist “evil desire.”³⁰ Nowhere does the author propose the idea that Christians need to fight physically with other people for any reason. The author does not even mention the idea of Christians even metaphorically fighting other people. Instead, there is an idea of Christians arming themselves for daily living.

The Acts of Paul, written between 150 and 200 CE, is another early Christian work that deals extensively with military imagery in the Church. In this book, the standard way of referring to Christians is to call them soldiers. This is even what the non-Christians call the believers. At one point in the book, Emperor Nero confronts Paul and asks him “Man of the great king, now my prisoner, what induced you to come secretly into the Roman Empire and to enlist soldiers in my territory?” Paul

replies, "Caesar, we enlist soldiers not only in your territory, but in all lands of the earth. For thus we are commanded to exclude none who wishes to fight for my king."³¹

Here the author equates salvation with the enlistment of people into God's army. This book also uses the military model to imply equality between believers, regardless of nation or prestige. The author of the Acts of Paul only calls Paul himself the "leader" of the soldiers in Rome, not a centurion or any other rank of officer over them. At best, Paul is the first among equals, a leader that has the same rank as everyone else.

Later in the book, the author uses military metaphors to indicate the constancy and dedication of Christians. Paul resists escaping from prison with these words: "I am not a deserter from Christ but a faithful soldier of the living God."³² This book is a key piece of evidence in the use of the military model of the Church in the early centuries of this era. Nowhere is it the Christian's job to attack or kill anyone, not even spiritually. Instead, it is Jesus or God who tears down kingdoms and fights for us. We simply follow God and behave as good soldiers should, with discipline and loyalty.

Another key proponent of the military model of the Church is Clement of Alexandria. Clement was a Christian writer from Egypt who lived around 200 CE.³³ Clement is famous for ignoring the Christian community, but it is my opinion that this view is unfounded. As the following quotation clearly shows, Clement believed in the community of believers, but he saw that community as an army, a fact often overlooked by scholars of Clement.

"But when the shrilling trumpet blows it assembles the soldiers and proclaims war; and shall not Christ, think you, having breathed to the ends of the earth a song of peace, assemble the soldiers of peace that are his? Yes, and he did assemble, O man, by blood and by word his bloodless army, and to them he entrusted the kingdom of heaven. The trumpet of Christ is his gospel. He sounded it, and we heard. Let us gird ourselves with the armor of peace, (here he quotes Ephesians 6: 13-17 and describes the pieces of the armor of God.) Thus does the apostle marshal us in the ranks of peace. These our invulnerable arms; equipped with these let us stand in array against the evil one."³⁴

Clement makes a point of saying that the soldiers gathering were soldiers of peace and were not violent. This is a bloodless army. Clement also emphasizes the preparedness needed to withstand the struggles of life by quoting from Ephesians 6. He also discusses the unity and discipline that one can find in the ranks of an army by talking about answering Christ's trumpet and marshalling into ranks of people. This short quote is the pinnacle of military metaphors in the Church. The army of believers does not turn against unbelievers, nor are they violent or lazy. Instead, the army is peaceful, while containing nearly all of the positive qualities that make armies institutions worth modeling ourselves after.

Early Christians would never have thought about taking a pacifist military model of Christianity, such as what Clement offered, and turning it into a physical war or even allow physicality of any sort to be a part of it. In the early church, Christians were not even supposed to join the Roman army. If they were in the army they could stay in it, but they were not to join after having become a Christians.³⁵ Indeed, until 170 CE no known Christian joined the army.³⁶ For years after this, it was still uncommon for Christians to participate in physical violence and military service.

As time went by this view became more muddled. The early Church leader Origen saw "no place for Christians in the imperial armies, but was prepared to pray for these (soldiers.)"³⁷ Origen also supported forced pacifism and encouraged emperors to keep the peace in force.³⁸ Slowly Christians began becoming soldiers until the practice became accepted.

Fall of Rome and the Dark Ages

When Christianity became the state religion under Constantine, the lines began to break down even further. Force became an accepted practice to further noble goals in life, even for Christians. By 340 CE, Christians were comfortable with the idea of taking up arms and physically killing people. The great Church leader Athanasius even went so far as to say that it "was lawful and even praiseworthy to kill enemies in time of war."³⁹

The early Christian image of the Church as a pacifist army was fading rapidly. With Christianity being the state religion, it was necessary for Christians to be in the army if there was to be any army. As the condition of the Roman Empire declined, Christians began to feel even more inclined to fight in wars, if only for self-protection. Augustine codified this by creating the "Just War" theory. For the first time in Christian history, it was theologically as well as practically acceptable for Christians to fight and kill. In the process, Augustine also indirectly provided a justification for violent and forced conversions⁴⁰, something that would soon be commonplace.

The once spiritual and metaphorical Christian army was becoming a literal one. While a physical Christian army was well on its way to being a reality by the fall of the Roman Empire, Charlemagne struck the final deathblow to pacifist Christianity. When Rome fell, people in the West no longer read the classical works of Christianity as they once had. When Charlemagne rediscovered the early Christian authors, and especially Augustine, his scholars' lack of knowledge led them to interpret concepts like "army of God" and "city of God" as literal instead of metaphorical.⁴¹ This in turn led Charlemagne to start considering his own kingdom the kingdom of God and the society of the faithful.

Once the idea that God had chosen one group of people to be God's instruments became common again, it was easy for Charlemagne, and generations after him, to begin to think that everything they did was for God. Soon Charlemagne began forcibly converting Saxons that he conquered, making it illegal to resist or evade Christian baptism.⁴² The transformation of the pacifist military model of the Church into a violent militant model was complete.

The concept of what a Christian army meant had come full circle back to the Old Testament model. Once again, it was acceptable for a nation to consider itself God's chosen people and to kill and destroy other nations in the name of God. While this made it easier for kings to convince their soldiers to fight, it ignored several centuries of Judaic and Christian thought in the pacifist, but military, model of the Church.

A key ingredient that brought about this change in the Church was the conversion of Germanic tribes to Christianity.⁴³ These Germanic tribes were culturally very warlike, with the Roman historian Tacitus mentioning that to these cultures "to throw away one's shield (to lose courage and run away) is the supreme disgrace."⁴⁴ These cultures could not imagine any army that did not spill actual blood; it was not something they knew. Because the Church used military language, it was easy to assume that people should take the language literally and apply it as the Germanic cultures had always applied military language, with blood.

These tribes also often saw the God of Christianity more in terms of what their old pagan Gods were like than what the Bible described God as. "They saw Christ not as the Prince of Peace but as a warrior god; that is, they accepted him in terms they understood and interpreted his life and teachings in ways seemingly different from their original intent."⁴⁵ Whatever the cause, however, when the Germanic tribes became part of Christianity, that conversion continued the change from what had once been a peaceful Church into one that approved of, supported, and committed violence in the name of God.⁴⁶

Medieval Period

This change from the metaphorical model of the Church as an army to a physical and violent model of the military Church soon affected the rest of the continent as well. On November 29, 1095 Pope Urban II brought together Germanic militantism and Augustinian just war theories in a speech to a crowd of assembled nobles.⁴⁷ The Pope called on all good Christians to join together and cast out the infidels from Jerusalem. This speech launched a holy war; and the idea of a military model of the Church became crystallized for centuries to come as the violent Old Testament image.

Once again, one could hear cries of "God wills it" shouted from believers' lips, intent on violence and death. Never before had Christianity known such violence in God's name. From then on "the acceptance and even glorification of violence became an integral part of the Catholic tradition."⁴⁸ For the next five centuries the violence continued, with Popes calling literally hundreds of different Crusades against a variety of people.⁴⁹ More than any other series of events, the Crusades have given the idea of a military model of the Church a bad name. However, the model was not deficient, the interpretation of that model was. The Crusaders thought that God hated the people they were killing. When we begin to say that God hates anyone, it becomes easy for God's army to cease being spiritual and peaceful, and become violent distributors of God's wrath.

This began to change in the 1500's as the Protestant Reformation took hold.⁵⁰ Slowly people began to question and even reject the idea that Christians are called to engage in physical war with others. Several groups formed that rejected such a violent, hateful use of the army of God. The Anabaptists were such a group, pacifist to the extreme. However, even though they abhorred physical violence they never abandoned the military imagery of the Church. "Our fortress is Christ, our defense is patience, our sword is the Word of God, and our victory is the sincere, firm, unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ"⁵¹ is an Anabaptist quote that shows how much even a pacifist group such as this valued military imagery.

Other reformers were equally reluctant to abandon the military language of the Church, even while they were rejecting the traditional violent interpretation of that language. Martin Luther's famous song "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" illustrates this quite well. With the advent of the Reformation, the majority of military images used outside of the Roman Catholic Church were once again metaphorical. However, the just war theories of Augustine lingered on, and while people were rebelling against the idea of the Church needing to fight, most Christians still had no problem with wars in general.

Post Reformation

By the coming of the 1700's and the Enlightenment, many people no longer believed that wars could be Christian.⁵² Christians still maintained military imagery, however, as shown by the number of Christian hymns written during the period with decidedly military leanings.⁵³ A new misuse of the military model of the Church was rising, however. Groups such as the Mennonites, and later the Salvation Army, were beginning to accept a form of spiritual dualism.

Gone was the notion of Christian violence for God's cause. In its place was an emphasis on spiritual warfare, which often led to a subtle form of dualism. The Mennonites wrote about there being two kingdoms, ruled by the two princes of strife and peace.⁵⁴ The Salvation Army also saw itself as God's kingdom making war against Satan's kingdom.⁵⁵ This dualism, while a decided improvement from the violence of the Crusades, did nothing to change Christianity's mentality that this is an "us or them" world, and that Christians are the enemies of everyone else.

This is not to say that all Christians held any of these views, however. After the Reformation, and especially after the 1700's, no one definitive statement of belief encompasses all of Christianity. Christians held a wide variety of views on nearly every subject, including the subject of a militarily oriented Church. A complete discussion of every group's beliefs in this area is well beyond the scope of this paper. Indeed, a complete study of even one denomination is a far larger task than this paper can accomplish. Instead, I will briefly survey the beliefs of one specific group, the Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army is quite probably the most outspoken modern proponent of the idea of a church modeled along military lines. The founders of the Salvation Army modeled it around the concept of making war on sin and the problems of the world.⁵⁶ The Salvation Army base their organization on the hierarchical structure found in modern military institutions and each of their ranks of officers has a modern military title.⁵⁷ Other than that, they are close to many other churches in structure, simply with different names for things and a burning desire to help people in need.

While the Salvation Army is physically non-violent, they have a tendency to see themselves making war against the rest of the world. William Booth, their founder, had this to say. "We are sent to make war against the bulk of the people, against any number, and stop short of nothing but the subjugation of the world to the sway of Jesus."⁵⁸ Catherine Booth, William's wife and co-founder, describes it by saying "It has only been for want of faith that the world has not been conquered long ago."⁵⁹ Members of The Salvation Army see, or saw, themselves as constantly fighting a war to extend God's kingdom.⁶⁰

While it may seem that the Salvation Army is returning to the image of the Church that Clement of Alexandria wrote about, it is not. The Salvation Army is very hierarchical, "with a strict order of command,"⁶¹ pastors being "officers" and laymen being at the bottom of the chain as standard "soldiers".⁶² While a strict hierarchy within the military model had been around for thousands of years, it was never a major part of this model of the Church until the Salvation Army.⁶³

Another difference between the Salvation Army and the historical use of the Church as an army is that the military imagery used by both Clement of Rome and Clement of Alexandria is decidedly pacifist. Even when the soldiers of God have an adversary, their job is not to attack anyone,

or even to fight. Their job is only to defend themselves, stand their ground, and wait for God. The Salvation Army, however, relies on the idea of spiritual warfare much more heavily.

As shown in the quotations above, the founders of the Salvation Army believed that Christians are truly fighting a spiritual war against the rest of the world that is not Christian. Catherine Booth illustrates this further in another quote, "If ever the world is subdued, it will be by His servants carrying out their Lord's instructions, and setting themselves to subdue it... It will be done by *hard desperate fighting*."⁶⁴ Even though their war is not physically violent, it is nonetheless a definite war.

The Salvation Army still exhibits to some extent the legacy of Charlemagne and the Crusades. At one time in the late 19th century, an edition of the *War Cry*, the Salvation Army's official paper, proclaimed "The Days of the Crusaders Have Returned" on their cover.⁶⁵ The legacy that warfare intermixing with Christianity has left, as these numerous quotations illustrate, is accepted and continued in the Salvation Army through its willingness to use violent language when speaking of non-Christians, even if they do not use violence itself.

Outside of the Salvation Army, many other members of the Christian community in the twenty-first century have again begun to recognize the legacy of mixing violence with religion that Christians have inherited from past. Many Christians have once again begun to acknowledge the brutality and horrors found in many parts of Christian history, especially the Crusades. Unlike the Salvation Army, most other Christians appear to try to separate themselves from this past instead of embracing it. Unfortunately, in an effort to separate themselves from the Crusades and other horrors, many Christians have rejected the historical, and valuable, military model of the Church.

People have deleted songs from hymnals, preachers avoid passages of scripture, and many Christians are afraid to use the rich heritage a military model of the Church has to offer. Avery Dulles in *Models of the Church* said "to be effective, images must be deeply rooted in the corporate experience of the faithful."⁶⁶ Perhaps in the recent era of peace that recently ended for the United States, a military model did not resonate with people in the US. However, with our army today on the forefront of everyone's minds, is there any model more applicable or more a part of our experience than the military model?

What I will propose in the rest of this paper is a military model of the Church that seeks to reject the negative influence that the Crusades have had on our view of the "army of God." I will be seeking to present a model founded on the New Testament and early Christian ideas of what the army of God really is. However, no one has ever systematically presented the military model of the Church in such a way as to protect it from misuse. This I hope to do by expanding on the ideas found in the first few centuries of Christianity's existence.

Reclaiming the Military Model for Today

At the foundation of the military model of the Church are two basic issues. These two issues are how people conceptualize, non-believers and the kingdom of God. This paper will discuss a healthy view of non-Christians later, but a short discussion on the kingdom of God is needed before a more thorough description of the military model of the church can be developed.

If someone sees the kingdom of God as being fully in the past, the military model of the Church is useless. Instead of a strong army we are weak, past our glory, and are steadily losing any war we may be fighting. The army becomes one that is clinging to past glories, and is too weak to hold onto what it once had. However, if the kingdom of God is purely future, then the military model of the Church becomes dangerous enough that no one should attempt to use it. This is because if we are "bringing" the kingdom of God, then we are attempting to conquer the world and gain territory. This sets us up against non-Christians and leads to a high probability of eventual physical violence.

Instead, Christians need to understand the kingdom of God in terms of "now but later." If we see the kingdom of God as a present reality that will culminate into something even better in the future, many problems are resolved. Jesus has already won the war and founded his kingdom, so we do not have to. We are not fighting against anyone to make God's kingdom, the whole world is God's kingdom. We are simply in a more active role within that kingdom than most of the other citizens. We are the army.

The key characteristics of great armies are training, discipline, good equipment, unity, mutual support, excellent leadership, and purpose. The Church has the ability to have all of these, as well.

These are the qualities that the military model can emphasize and promote. After a proper understanding of the kingdom of God, the next thing Christians need to understand about the military model of the Church is the relationship of the Church to non-Christians. Christians have a tendency to see non-Christians as our enemies that we must fight and conquer. However, this is not a particularly healthy or constructive view, as many different groups have proven throughout history.

Instead, given Jesus' emphasis on helping those around us and loving everyone, a more Biblical view of non-Christians would be to see them as civilians in God's kingdom. Following the idea that the kingdom of God is "now but later" we can extend the metaphor to say that all people are in some way a part of God's present kingdom. We, as Christians, have signed up for the active duty of serving God as soldiers. We have the spiritual resources to protect others and ourselves. We have the training and the guidance to succeed in helping both the rest of the world and our fellow Christians.

However, everyone else is still part of the same kingdom we are a part of; the same ruler still loves them. Other people are citizens without serving, taking advantage of prevenient grace without taking an active role in God's kingdom. Some are even in rebellion against God's kingdom, but we are still the army that is to look out for them. There is no army in the world that kills and conquers its own people and makes it very far.

Keeping the idea firmly in mind that non-Christians are civilians who need our protection promotes evangelism and social work. At the same time, it prevents Christians from viewing nonbelievers as people we need to conquer and force into God's army. Rulers form armies to protect the civilians of a kingdom, not to hurt them.

In this model, evangelism takes the role of supporting hurting individuals through hard times and of inviting them into a way in which they can protect themselves. *The Acts of Paul* supports this idea by repeatedly calling conversion "enlistment" into the army of God.⁶⁷ This goes against what Christians often interpret as the role of evangelism in a military model, which is that conversion is what happens when a Christian is victorious and wins a battle in the spiritual war against one of Christ's enemies, making them an ally.

This idea of protection and support does not extend just to the civilians around us, but is also a key concept in how soldiers of God should interact and care for each other. People have often said that combat is the best bonding experience there is. In battle, every person must rely on each other completely. Each soldier must trust that everyone else around him or her is doing what he or she is supposed to do, and not about to get him or her killed. This level of trust and reliance was especially true of the Roman military.

The Romans were not the largest or the strongest people in the world, but their armies were the best for centuries. What set them apart in many ways was their support of each other in battle. The Romans always carried very large shields with them into battle, and when battle would start, they would form lines, overlapping their shields to protect themselves and the people to either side of them.⁶⁸ This is the same shield that Ephesians 6:16 mentions as being part of the Christian's equipment, the shield of faith.

This is a perfect analogy, and a key concept that we should apply to the military metaphor of the Church. We are supposed to protect and look out for one another just as much now as the Roman army did in 50 CE. We are to relate and live with fellow Christians as if the bonds of war have forged us together. We are to be so close to each other that our faith protects not just ourselves, but also the people around us. If my faith is weak, those people close to me can support me and encourage me with their own faith and strength until I can get mine back.

This sort of closeness and support does not happen in many churches. In many churches, it is not even actively encouraged. Some Christians seem to operate under the assumption that they can live their lives however they want to, and that somehow community and closeness will magically develop. The type of community that is called for in the military Church does not just happen, it takes discipline, it takes training, and it takes work.

The first thing that is required for Christians to become close enough to each other to support each other as they are called to, is that each soldier must know where they are supposed to be. It is a common misconception in American Christianity today that only pastors receive "calls" from God, and that everyone else can live their lives however they want and God will not care. This does not hold

true in a military model. In the military, each person has their assigned place, and the success of the whole depends on individual soldiers staying where their commanding officer assigns them.

In Christian terms, we each have a call from God on our lives. God has a place where each one of us should be and we are most successful when we find that place and stay there. As we will discuss later, this call comes directly from God to us. Our fellow soldiers do not give it to us, but they can confirm it. When we are in the position in the Christian army that God wants us to be in, we are also in a better position to support those around us with the gifts and talents with which God has graced us.

As in any military, however, no one moves by him or herself. I have never heard of God calling someone to do something that no one else had ever done, and to which God had called only that person. God makes sure that there are other soldiers around us to support and protect us wherever we go. This view supports an individual response to God, confirmed and encouraged within a community. Neither is it only by ourselves that we guide our future. God also has a say in it, guiding us and providing places for us to thrive, protected by other believers who support us as we move where God wants us to be.

Besides turning the military model into a militant one, the second most misused aspect of the military view of the Church is the tendency of people to make it rigidly hierarchical. In this perversion of the model, God offers revelation and guidance only to those at the top of the hierarchy, everyone else receives their marching orders from their human superiors. The Salvation Army can sometimes be a good example of this, and in some ways it makes sense, because a hierarchical structure is a standard military practice. However, nowhere in the New Testament and only very rarely in early Christian writings is there any hierarchy associated with this model. Instead, all believers work together to help people recognize when God is guiding them.

Along with being a pacifist army, this flattened command structure is one of the unique twists that believers have given to the military imagery. Unlike a physical army, the Christian soldier can receive instruction and guidance directly from God. There is a true "priesthood of all believers" represented in this model of the Church. Each person receives God's instructions for him or herself, and the community merely affirms those instructions, it never gives them.

In this model, pastors cease to be generals of their own overseeing their division, and instead become loving squad leaders with no more rank than anyone else, simply more training, and experience in how to train others. The power in the military model of the Church lies directly in God's hands, not in any set group of Christians. However, this is also one of the weaknesses of the military model. Each person can do as he or she pleases, and there is no one with the power to tell him or her otherwise if he or she chooses to ignore the community into which God has called him or her.

Another important aspect of any army is the equipment that it uses. The better the equipment, the greater the possibilities are for that army to be a great army. In the case of Christians, there can be no doubt about the power of our equipment. Writer after writer makes sure that we do not underestimate the power and effectiveness of what God has given us.⁶⁹ Faith, righteousness, truth, salvation, peace, God's word, and many more things are all pieces of our "equipment" that God has given us. In Ephesians 6, Paul makes sure that we do not miss the importance of these items for our Christian life. Just as a physical army would quickly lose without any equipment, so we will not survive this life as Christians if we do not make use of the equipment that God has given us.

This use of spiritual equipment gives another way of emphasizing the importance of reliance on God. Without the gifts that God is giving us we could not do what God wants us to do. We must have the equipment God is offering, and so we are dependent upon God. At the same time, we have to take up those pieces of armor and put them on. While to succeed we must rely on God, we also have to make that a conscious decision to accept God's help. We have a part to play in our spiritual welfare, just as God does.

This leads us into what is one of the most applicable and least applied aspects of this model, training. Any army has an extensive training program to get people equipped with the gear that will help them to be victorious. The spiritual army is no different. The first time anyone puts on a piece of armor or uses a sword they are inexperienced in its use, and use it poorly. It takes work and training to be able to use fully what God has given us.

The role of the pastor is not to be someone with more pieces of armor, or a higher rank. Instead, the role of a pastor is to be someone who has trained more extensively in the use of the equipment all believers get. Pastors can train and equip other believers in how to use and grow in their faith, how to live lives of truth, how to deal with their salvation. This training never ends, either. God's soldiers are constantly training and improving, growing closer to God as long as they live. This is the main form of growth in the military model of the Church. People do not receive new gifts from God at various stages in their lives, but learn how to use more fully the gifts that God gives everyone at salvation.

The military model of the Church also provides a possible theological basis for denominations. In any army, there are a number of different divisions, many of which have drastically different talents and objectives. In Roman times various divisions would be building aqueducts and roads, policing the cities, patrolling the countryside, repairing temples, and much more. In Christian terms, each denomination has a specific task that it is best suited to accomplish. People form denominations over disagreements of where a group should stand on various issues. Now that we so many denominations, many different tasks have the possibility of being accomplished than were being done before.

Denominations do not have to compete with each other in this model. Instead, denominations can recognize that we each have strengths and weaknesses that complement each other. We are all in the same army, protecting the same civilians, serving the same God. The military model of the Church helps us all to unite, while still recognizing and accepting our differences.

If various denominations are merely divisions in the same army, and non-Christians are civilians that we are to protect, then there is no physical entity left to attack. Indeed, the entire idea of a physically militant Church no longer works in this model. The only battle left that we can fight is a spiritual one. However, I believe that the military model of the Church has more to do with discipline and unity than it does with spiritual warfare. Our job is to be ready for life, not to try to win a war in which Jesus has already been victorious.

Conclusion

The military model of the Church provides a way of viewing non-Christians that promotes Christian service to them, not violence or hatred. It also emphasizes reliance on God, a need for the community of believers, and the necessity of discipline within the Christian life. This model has room in it for both guidance and direction from God and a response from humanity, both of which are essential to any Wesleyan understanding of the Church.

This model also emphasizes the support and protection of each soldier within our community. This is a very important and neglected part of the Church. We should be lifting each other up and helping each other to live this life as best we can. However, perhaps the most needed aspect of this model is that it calls for concerted, disciplined, helping action on the part of all Christians. An army does not watch while its citizens die, it acts. An army especially does not let other units of itself be torn apart. We also must act, we must help, and this model provides a way of explaining that drive. However, this model does have several weaknesses as well. This model has had a history of people misusing it and turning it into violence. However, by emphasizing the "twist" within the military metaphor, by emphasizing non-Christians as citizens under our protection, we can avoid this problem. The military model of the Church also has no set way of dealing with either the sacraments or the Bible. The Bible can be referred to as a training manual, but experience is always the best teacher. In the end, both of these issues fall outside of the scope of the military model, which makes it imperative not to use the military model in isolation.

Another problem with this model emerges when we think that each soldier receives direction from God directly. Such a perspective leaves participants with an idea of continuing revelation that leaves what God's revelation largely up to individuals. I have tried to alleviate this problem by talking about the movements of units within the army, not of individual soldiers. Any major marching orders, God gives to a group of people who will carry them out, not to one person alone. A final area of weakness could be that of sanctification. Within this model, sanctification is when a soldier finally decides to put on and train in all of the pieces of God's armor. However, that is a very weak definition of sanctification.

In the end, the military model of God is not one the Church can successfully use without other models to support it. Like all models, it needs the help of the other metaphors for the Church to fill in

its weaknesses and to shore up the other model's weaknesses as well. The major areas to which this model is relevant are community, the role of pastors, discipline, relationships with unbelievers, training, and the mutual support of believers. These are the areas that the military model of the Church excels in, and it does well in several more areas.

It is time that Christians reclaim the rich heritage of military metaphors the Church has left us through the ages. It is time we once again acknowledge that it is acceptable to become the Church in Clement of Alexandria's writings.

"But when the shrilling trumpet blows it assembles the soldiers and proclaims war; and shall not Christ, think you, having breathed to the ends of the earth a song of peace, assemble the soldiers of peace that are his? Yes, and he did assemble, O man, by blood and by word his bloodless army, and to them he entrusted the kingdom of heaven. The trumpet of Christ is his gospel. He sounded it, and we heard. Let us gird ourselves with the armor of peace, "putting on the "breastplate of righteousness," and taking up the shield of faith, and placing on our head the helmet of salvation; and let us sharpen "the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God." Thus does the apostle marshal us in the ranks of peace. These our invulnerable arms; equipped with these let us stand in array..."⁷⁰

We need to shake off the misuses to which people have put these metaphors and guard against repeating the same errors, and make the most of this model.

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Endnotes

¹ Paul J Achtemeier. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 686.

² "Lord of Hosts" is sometimes used with reference to God's power over the stars, but as stars were often thought of as heavenly beings, the military idea remains, even in what today would appear to be a purely metaphorical usage.

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- ³*The Holy Bible : King James Version.*, Dt 7:2. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.), 1995. Parenthetical comments added.
- ⁴ Gerhard von Rad. *Holy War in Ancient Israel*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 4.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁶ *Ibid.* This theory is the entire point of the book, and a complete reading of it is recommended for further study of this subject.
- ⁷ Wilfred G.E Watson. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*. (London: E.J. Brill, 1994), 100.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 102
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹¹ Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edwin Cook, trans. and eds, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 125
- ¹² Philo. *Philo in Ten Volumes*. Translated by F.H. Colson. (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1967), 55.
- ¹³ This paper makes the common, if not the certain, assumption that the people of Qumran were Essenes.
- ¹⁴ James H. Charlesworth. Ed. Vol. 2 of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. 2 Vols. (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1985), 561.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 533.
- ¹⁶ Adrian Goldsworthy. *The Complete Roman Army*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 143-151.
- ¹⁷ Robert G. Clouse. Ed. *War: Four Christian Views*. (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 12..
- ¹⁸ George Lyons. Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation. (Class Lectures: NNU, Fall 2004.)
- ¹⁹ *The Holy Bible : New International Version*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984) Ephesians 6:13-14.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, Ephesians 6:12.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, Ephesians 6:16
- ²² *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976). Vol. 5, Page 312.
- ²³ *NIV.*, 1 Corinthians 14: 40. There are many other uses of military language in 1 Cor. 14 and 15, however, most translators choose words that avoid these connotations. Other passages dealing with discipline are 1 Cor. 15:23, Gal. 5:25, and 2 Tim. 2:3-4.
- ²⁴ Williams, David J. *Paul's Metaphors*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Pub., 1999), 213.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.
- ²⁶ *NIV.*, Phil 2:25.
- ²⁷ *NIV.*, 1 Peter 2:11.
- ²⁸ There were two major Clements in the early Church, both of which are cited in this paper, Clement of Rome (circa 100 CE) and Clement of Alexandria (circa 200 CE). For more information see Roger E. Olson. *The Story of Christian Thought*. (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999).
- ²⁹ Shopp, Ludwig. Ed. Vol. 1 of *The Fathers of the Church*. 92 Vols. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 39.
- ³⁰ G.P. Goold. Ed. *The Apostolic Fathers*. 2 Vols. (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1977), 127.
- ³¹ Bart D. Ehrman. *Lost Scriptures*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 110.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 111.
- ³³ Roger E. Olson. *The Story of Christian Thought*. (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 85.
- ³⁴ Clement. *Clement of Alexandria*. Translated by G.W. Butterworth. (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1979), 247-248.
- ³⁵ Hans Küng. *The Catholic Church*. Trans. by John Bowden. (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 29.
- ³⁶ Clouse, 12.
- ³⁷ W.H.C. Frend. *The Rise of Christianity*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 420.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 421.
- ³⁹ Robert M. Grant. *Augustus to Constantine*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 273.
- ⁴⁰ Küng, 47.
- ⁴¹ R.H.C. Davis. *A History of Medieval Europe*. (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), 131.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 135.
- ⁴³ Actually, the earliest Gothic tribes converted were converted to Arianism, not orthodox Christianity. The Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Vandals were all Arians. The Franks under Clovis were the first Germanic tribe converted into orthodoxy, though other tribes had been converted to Arianism. See William R. Cook, and Ronald B. Herzman. *The Medieval Worldview: An Introduction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 101-102.
- ⁴⁴ Tacitus. Translated by H. Mattingly. *Tacitus on Britain and Germany*. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960), 106.

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- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 97.
- ⁴⁶ Clouse, 17.
- ⁴⁷ Tony Allan, Ed. *The Divine Campaign: Timeframe AD 1100-1200*. (Alexandria, Time-Life Books, 1988), 62.
- ⁴⁸ Cook, 97.
- ⁴⁹ Allan, 63.
- ⁵⁰ Hans J. Hillerbrand. *The Protestant Reformation*. (New York: Walker and Co., 1968), XII.
- ⁵¹ Clouse, 21.
- ⁵² Küng, 149.
- ⁵³ Charles Wesley wrote “Soldiers of Christ Arise” in the 1700’s, as did Isaac Watts with “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” This trend continued in the 1800’s with songs such as “Onward Christian Soldiers,” “Sound the Battle Cry,” “The Banner of the Cross,” and “Fight the Good Fight with All Thy Might.” Found in *The Service Hymnal*. (Chicago: Hope Pub., 1953.)
- ⁵⁴ Arthur F. Holmes. Ed. *War and Christian Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 185.
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- ⁵⁷ Frank S. Mead. *Handbook of Denominations* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), 172.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 61.
- ⁵⁹ Booth, 93.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 90-91.
- ⁶¹ Walker, 8.
- ⁶² Mead, 172-173.
- ⁶³ The only mention of a hierarchy within the early Christian community is a short reference in First Clement Chapter 37. Other writers, such as the author of the Acts of Paul and Clement of Alexandria, specifically avoid creating ranks within the Christian community. New Testament imagery such as the body of Christ and all Christians being equal within it seem to uphold the idea of a flattened hierarchy within the Church.
- ⁶⁴ Booth, 94.
- ⁶⁵ Diane Winston. *Red-Hot and Righteous*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 98.
- ⁶⁶ Avery Dulles. *Models of the Church*. (New York: Image Books, 2002), 13.
- ⁶⁷ Ehrman, 109-112.
- ⁶⁸ See Adrian Goldsworthy’s *The Complete Roman Army* for a fuller description of Roman battle tactics and formations.
- ⁶⁹ Ephesians 6:10-18 and Hebrews 4:12 are classic examples of this.
- ⁷⁰ Clement. 247-248.

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