

On Christian Pacifism

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*Even known things are known to a few...
(Ancient wisdom)*

I

Perhaps no issue in the history of the brotherhood of Evangelical Christian-Baptists has raised so many fierce arguments and dissensions as the one concerning "the sword."^[1] Serious oversimplification is done by authors who assert that Russian Stundists and Baptists have always been, in general, pacifists^[2] or, vice versa, that most of them supported the "law-abiding" line of European Baptists and were, as a rule, loyal to their governments in military affairs.^[3] Likewise, the German-Mennonite influence on the EC-B brotherhood is exaggerated by some,^[4] if we bear in mind that the early Russian sects that preceded the native Baptists, represented by Dukhobors and Molokans, already quite independently held anti-militaristic positions.^[5]

Historians report that during the First World War and Civil War, as well as World War II, most Evangelical Christians and Baptists of military age served in the army with weapons in their hands.^[6]

^[1] This includes a whole set of difficult ethical issues related to the state's requirement to do military service, participation in war, capital punishment, and so on.

^[2] This is the so-called "Tolstoy tendency" in Russian sectarianism. See, for example, these famous works by Leo Tolstoy: *Zakon nasiliia i zakon liubvi* (The law of violence and the law of love), *Ne ubei* (You shall not murder), *Ne ubei nikogo* (Murder no one), and so on.

^[3] See, for example, A. Mitskevich, "Otnoshenie veruiushchikh k voennoi sluzhbe" (The believers' relation to military service), in *Nastol'naiia kniga presvitera* (The presbyter's handbook [Moscow: AUCECB, 1982], pp. 197-203).

^[4] See Walter Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR* (The evangelical movement in the USSR [Moscow: n.p., 1995], pp. 120, 131-137).

^[5] See S. Savinskiy, *Istoriia evangel'skikh khristian-baptistov Ukrainy, Rossii, Belorussii* (History of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists of Ukraine, Russia, and Belorussia, 1867-1917 [St. Petersburg: Bibliia dlia vsekh, 1999], pp. 45, 49-51).

^[6] See, for example, Savinskiy, *ibid.*, pp. 27, 145, 154. *Bratskiy vestnik* (Fraternal

At the same time it is likewise certain that a great many sincere Christians went to the battlefield in violation of their religious and moral convictions.^[7] That is why the hundreds of evangelical conscientious objectors who preferred a long jail sentence and even the firing squad^[8] to participation in war inevitably invoke respect even from the “military-minded” group of national Baptists.^[9]

It is characteristic that we do not find a unanimous position on the military issue even in the official creeds of the Baptist Union. The first creeds of the Russian Evangelical Christians and Baptists, no doubt influenced by the doctrines of European (primarily German) Baptists, proclaimed the necessity of “doing military service... when the government demands it”^[10] and considered “military duty to be customary.”^[11] Such assertions were important in their time for dissociating Russian Baptists from the extreme anarchist anachronisms of Stundism.^[12]

Along with this, the early evangelical confessions of faith added important reservations: “There must be no coercion

done to those who out of deep urges of their conscience... ask to be released from serving with weapons”;^[13] “we consider military duty to be customary, but we have fellowship with those who think differently about this matter.”^[14] In 1920, in the atmosphere of relative freedom after the war when the Soviet authorities regarded domestic sectarians as allies rather than enemies, one curious resolution was *unanimously* adopted at the Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists in Moscow, which, in particular, said:

Considering... the participation of Evangelical Christians [and] Baptists in shedding human blood under any state regime to be a crime against conscience and the precise teaching and spirit of Holy Scripture, equally recognizing it impossible for Evangelical Christians [and] Baptists to take up weapons, manufacture them for military purposes in all of its forms, and to learn military science, which are the same as direct participation in bloodshed—the All-Russian Council unanimously establishes that, guided by his inner convictions and experience, based

bulletin) even mentions a Baptist who was a Hero of the Soviet Union (No. 4 [1985]: 76, 78).

^[7] In this connection, for example, the testimony of a well-known EC-B minister from Kiev, L.E. Kovalenko, is typical: “My constant prayer at the front was, ‘Lord, I ask you that I wouldn’t be killed and that I wouldn’t kill anybody!’” (Author’s interview with L. E. Kovalenko, Sacramento, California, USA, 2006).

^[8] See Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR*, p. 132; Z. Kalinicheva, *Sotsial’naia sushchnost’ Bap-tizma, 1917-1929* (The social essence of the Baptist movement, 1917-29 [Leningrad: Nauka, 1972], p. 50); I. Plett, *Istoriia Evangel’skikh Khristian-Baptis-tov s 1905 po 1944 God* (History of Evangelical Christians-Baptists from 1905 to 1944), <<http://www.blagovestnik.org/books/00360.htm#4>>.

^[9] For example, in 1926 one of the leaders of the Baptist Union, P. V. Ivanov-Klyshnikov, called the best representatives of pacifists, “golden souls, who have attained high holiness,” who are “able to forgive and bear everything with love,” at the same

time adding that there are few such people (P. V. Ivanov-Klyshnikov, *Ob otnoshenii k gosudarstvoy i voennoi sluzhbe, 26 vsesoyuzny S’ezd baptistov SSSR, Protokoly i Materialy* [On the attitude to the state and military service, 26th All-Union Baptist Council of the USSR, Protocols and materials], Archives of the Russian Union of ECB/AUCECB Archives, file 11 db-22, p. 113).

^[10] From the Baptist creed, published by V. Pavlov in 1906 (essentially a translation of the Hamburg Creed of German Baptists). See Savinskiy, *Istoriia (1917-1967)*, p. 27; *Istoriia (1867-1917)*, p. 314.

^[11] I. Prokhanov, *Verouchenie Evangel’skikh Khristian, 1910 g.* (Creed of Evangelical Christians, 1910), in S. Sannikov, ed., *Istoriia baptizma* (History of the Baptists) (Odessa: OBS, 1996), p. 455.

^[12] See Savinskiy, *Istoriia (1867-1917)*, pp. 230-1.

^[13] See Baptist creed (Pavlov, 1906) in *Istoriia Bap-tizma*, p. 433.

^[14] See Creed of Evangelical Christians (Prokha-nov, 1910) in *Istoriia Bap-tizma*, p. 455.

on the teaching of the gospel, every Evangelical Christian [and] Baptist must consider it his holy duty to openly refuse military service in all of its forms, striving wholeheartedly to be a faithful follower of the One who teaches forgiveness and love. As for responsibilities replacing military service, the Council expresses the wish that all alternative forms of service be purely civil and for the needs of the civil population; however, the acceptability of these alternative forms of service must be decided by the believers themselves.^[15]

In spite of all the ensuing dramatic changes in the life of the evangelical brotherhood, including known participation in the former Soviet secret police, this unanimous pacifist resolution of the Council was never forgotten. Several generations of Russian Baptists remembered it.^[16] This document probably demonstrated openly what was hidden in the souls and hearts of Russian Protestants whenever state power (both Tsarist and Communist) pressured them in one way or another, impelling them to active support of the earthly homeland in the next war.

In 1922, I. S. Prokhanov gave an idealistic call to Christians of the whole world to refuse participation in war.^[17] However, in the following year, after three months' confinement in an isolation ward,

the leader of the Evangelical Christians of Russia was forced to deny pacifism.^[18] The leaders of the Baptist Union also felt strong pressure from Soviet power. As a result, during the following Councils, in 1923 and 1926, both Evangelical Christians and Baptists made decisions about the military issue that were quite pleasing to the State, but split their own churches almost in half.^[19] During those years local congregations were working out the following characteristic formula: "The decision to go or not to go to war is a matter of conscience and the responsibility before God of every brother. He who happens to have a strong will, much courage, and patience, would not go to fight, while he who happens to have little of these would take a weapon in his hands."^[20] Already in the 1920s, many convinced pacifists from both unions suffered severe persecution for their beliefs.^[21] However, very soon adherents of military service from among the Evangelical Christians and Baptists were caught up in the grindstones of mass repression.^[22] Stalin's labor camps made everyone equal.

It is noteworthy that much later, after World War II and until perestroika, when officially the Baptist Union painstakingly dissociated itself from pacifism, anti-militarist feelings, especially in the

^[15] *Otchet Vserossiyskogo S'ezda Evangel'skikh Khristian Baptistov* (Report of All-Russian Council of Evangelical Christians Baptists) (Moscow, 27 May–6 June, 1920), Archives of the Russian Union of ECB/AUCECB Archives, file 11de, document 11de-16, p. 24).

^[16] For example, this document was kept by Iu. S. Grachev and then passed on to other brothers, including I. P. Plett, who published it with several alterations in *Istoriia Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov s 1905 po 1944 god*.

^[17] Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR*, p. 132.

^[18] Savinskiy, *Istoriia (1917-1967)*, p. 31.

^[19] See Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR*, pp. 132-3; Savinskiy, *Istoriia (1917-1967)*, p. 32; A. Savin, ed., *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Evangel'skie Tserkvi Sibiri v 1920-1941 gg.* (The Soviet state and evangelical churches of Siberia from 1920-1941: Documents and materials), (Novosibirsk: Posokh, 2004), pp. 136, 155.

^[20] Savin, *Sovetskoe Gosudarstvo i Evangel'skie Tserkvi Sibiri*, p. 232.

^[21] Savinskiy, *Istoriia (1917-1967)*, p. 33.

^[22] The same P. V. Ivanov-Klyshnikov, as well as the majority of the leaders of the Evangelical Christians and Baptists, was put in prison. See Savinskiy, *Istoriia (1917-1967)*, pp. 118-31.

provincial churches, often prevailed.^[23] It was so tangible that even in the 1980s, shortly before Gorbachev's perestroika, while discussing the project of the Baptist statement of faith in Section 13 ("Relation to the State"), these unambiguous words: "As citizens of our country, we feel obliged to 'render to all what is due them,' including the fulfillment of military duty (Bible references follow^[24]), were finally transformed into something less unambiguous: "As citizens of their country, Christians are called to 'render to all that is due them', i.e. to fulfill the State laws" (the same Bible references follow).^[25] At the same time, the official periodical *Bratskiy Vestnik* from time to time complains, "It is sad... that some believers refuse to do their military duty."^[26]

Thus, it can be concluded that among the Russian Baptists two classical Christian views on the problem have always co-existed: the so-called "just war" position (which descended mainly from "above," i.e. from the authorities and to some degree from the Baptist leadership) and the pacifist position (traditionally dominating "below," among ordinary believers).

II

The logic of both viewpoints is well-known and understandable. The "just war" principle, alien to the early church^[27] (because

the first Christians themselves were persecuted, or discriminated against, by the pagans in the Roman Empire), received widespread notice in the fourth century and gradually became the prevailing view.^[28] A number of authoritative church fathers, beginning with St. Ambrose and St. Athanasius the Great, upheld it. And St. Augustine, for example, responding to the threat to the Roman Empire from the barbarians, in his famous treatise *The City of God*, wrote:

They who have waged war in obedience to the divine command, or in conformity with His laws, have represented in their persons the public justice or the wisdom of government, and in this capacity have put to death wicked men; such persons have by no means violated the commandment, "thou shalt not murder."^[29]

If, before the emperor Constantine's conversion to the faith at the beginning of the fourth century, the number of Christians in the Roman army compared to pagans was insignificant, then already at the beginning of the fifth century the emperor Theodosius II enacted a decree allowing military service *only* for Christians.^[30] In this way, at the king's command, the ranks of the "Christ-loving army" increased. Alas, we would not talk about the quality of such Christianity. In later times the ideas of "just war" were de-

^[23] Sawatsky, *Evangelicheskoe dvizhenie v SSSR*, pp. 136-7, 148.

^[24] "Proekt veroucheniia EKh-B" (Project of the creed of the EC-B), *Bratskiy Vestnik*, 4 (1980): 52.

^[25] "Verouchenie Evangel'skikh Khristian-Baptistov, Priniatoe na 43 S'ezde Ekh-B v Moskve" (The creed of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Adopted at the 43rd Council of the EKh-B in Moscow), *Bratskiy Vestnik*, 4 (1985): 49.

^[26] See, for example, "Obrashchenie Plenuma VSEKh-B" (Appeal of the plenum of the AUCECB), *Bratskiy Vestnik*, 6 (1982): 54.

^[27] See, for example, *A Dictionary of Early Christian*

Beliefs, ed. by D. W. Bercot (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), pp. 676-81, although some Christians, no doubt, served in the army as far back as the first centuries of the church's history (see *ibid.*, pp. 681-2).

^[28] See, for example, a historical overview of the subject in J. D. Charles, *Between Pacifism and Jihad* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

^[29] Augustine, *O grade Bozhiem* (The city of God) (Minsk: Harvest, 2000), p. 38.

^[30] J. D. Weaver, "Pacifism" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by W. A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991), p. 813.

veloped, for example, by the Catholic theologian St. Thomas Aquinas and by almost all leaders of the Reformation (except for Anabaptists), including Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin.^[31]

The main logical device of the adherents of this position can be reduced to the separation of personal and public moral laws in Holy Scripture. Referring to the wars in the Old Testament, sanctioned by God Himself, the advocates of “just war” theory speak about the necessity of fulfilling the commandments, “You shall not murder,” and love to enemies only in terms of personal relations with one’s neighbor. However, the king puts a sword in Christians’ hands during a difficult time for the country; therefore, in this case, public law takes first place, or the necessity of submitting oneself to a higher authority, and then killing one’s enemy in war in no way is regarded as murder, but rather as an exploit.^[32] “Just war,” as much as possible, should correspond to the following criteria: 1) have a “just cause” (for example, defense against external aggression); 2) be done under the orders of a legal and respected government; 3) be a last resort of resolving the conflict, i.e. all peaceful means must be exhausted; 4) have the “right intention” of restoring order and justice; 5) commanders should

soundly estimate possible casualties in battles (which should be kept to a minimum).^[33]

Russian society, in its time, adopted a similar tradition from the Byzantine Empire, and also mainly supported Christian participation in war, “for the Faith, the Tsar and the Fatherland.” For example, Vladimir Soloviev in his famous book *Three Conversations* on behalf of a Russian general tells the following characteristic story of the war against the Turks in 1877-78. A Russian military detachment with several cannons discovered a large Armenian village that had been destroyed by the enemy. All of its inhabitants, including women and children, had been killed with refined Asian cruelty. Finding a short mountain path to the neighboring village where the Turks were headed, Russian warriors outran the enemy, which was many times greater in number, laid an ambush, and fired on them at close range. Now it is the punitive Turkish detachment that is falling under cannon fire, “but I feel the bright Resurrection of Christ in my heart,” says the general, “I was killing not by my sinful hands, but from six pure, unblemished steel weapons with most righteous... grapeshot.”^[34]

Along with that, in the Orthodox tradition not everything is so univocal and

^[31] Ibid., p. 814. Luther, for example, allowed a Christian even to be an executioner (See Martin Luther, “O svetskoi vlasti” [On secular government] in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* [Selected works] [St. Petersburg: Adreev i Soglasie, 1994], p. 140). Concerning the “just war” he wrote the following, “...The hand that wields this sword and slays with it is then no longer man’s hand, but God’s, and it is not man, but God, who hangs, tortures, beheads, slays and fights. All these are His works and His judgments” (M. Luther, *Mogut li voiny obresti tsarstvo nebesnoe* (That soldiers, too, can be saved), <http://www.svitlo.net/biblioteka/lut_voin/lut_voin01.shtml>).

^[32] See, for example, Charles, *Between Pacifism and Jihad*, pp. 97, 134.

^[33] See R. Doerflinger, “War” in *Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine*, ed. by R. Shaw (Huntington, Ind: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 1997), p. 700. Adherents of this position seem not to consider the fact that all wars, at the beginning, appear “just” in their own way to every warring side. Besides, the presence of nuclear weapons in the modern world makes even the most “just” war pointless and willy-nilly leads human society to a kind of “humanistic” pacifism.

^[34] V. Soloviev, *Sochineniia* (Works), 2 vols. (Moscow: Mysl’, 1990), v. II, pp. 660-3.

simple. The persistent pacifism of the ancient church could not pass by without leaving a trace. As far back as the first canonized Russian saints, the princes Boris and Gleb did not resist their cruel brother Svyatopolk who illegally seized the throne in Kiev, but instead deliberately went to their doom.^[35]

In the Church Canons by St. Basil the Great, we find:

Canon 13: Our fathers did not consider killing in the course of war to be classifiable as murder at all, on the grounds, it seems to me, of allowing pardon to men fighting in defense of sobriety and piety. Perhaps, though, it might be advisable to refuse them communion for three years, on the ground that their hands are not clean.^[36]

Canon 43: He who gives a mortal wound to another is a murderer, whether he were the first aggressor, or did it in his own defence.^[37]

Canon 55: Let those who kill bandits, if they are not clerics, be excluded from partaking of the holy sacraments, and if they are priests, let them be deposed. For it is said, "All those that live by the sword shall perish by the sword."^[38]

St. Basil, as we can see, obviously tended in the direction of the "impractical" teaching of the Savior and opposed the military tendencies of his age, thinking that even hero-warriors have "unclean hands" and need an extended period of repentance. He also denied a Christian the right to "just vengeance," calling those

people murderers who even "legitimately" take the life of cruel bandits. If those ancient church ordinances are applied to lay people, they concern priests even more. The following Apostolic Canons, directly or indirectly, confirm what we have said: according to Canon 6, priests are forbidden to take care of "worldly business";^[39] Canon 81, referring to Matt 6:24, absolutely does not allow bishops and presbyters to be involved in government affairs;^[40] Canon 83, quoting Matt 22:21, solemnly cautions any clergyman against serving in the army.^[41] In addition, Canon 7 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, under threat of excommunication, forbids priests and monks to perform military service.^[42]

Thus, we come to an analysis of the second, pacifist, tradition of the church, and if we neglect it (calling it "sectarian," "marginal," and so on) we are regrettably ignorant of Christian history. Based on the gospel teaching (first of all, on the Sermon on the Mount) and the personal example of Christ who died at the hands of His enemies without killing them, a considerable number of Christians in all historical periods have shared the position of nonviolence. Such famous early Fathers and Teachers of the church as Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, Lactantius, and others, upheld pacifist views.^[43] For example, Tertullian wrote in his treatise *On Idolatry*, between the second and third centuries:

^[35] See, for example, *Khristianstvo: Entsiklopedicheskii slovar'* (Christianity: An encyclopedic dictionary), ed. by S. Averintsev, 3 vols. (Moscow: Bolshaia rossiyaskaia entsiklopediia, 1993), v. I, pp. 302, 415.

^[36] *Pravila Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi* (The canons of the Orthodox Church), 2 vols., ed. by bishop Nikodim

[1911] (Moscow: Otchiy Dom, 2001), v. II, p. 394.

^[37] *Ibid.*, p. 426.

^[38] *Ibid.*, p. 436.

^[39] *Ibid.*, v. I, p. 64.

^[40] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

^[41] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

^[42] *Ibid.*, p. 345.

...Now inquiry is made about this point, whether a believer may turn himself unto military service... However, there is no agreement between the divine and the human oath... It is impossible, having one soul, to be obliged to two masters—God and Caesar. And yet Moses carried a rod, and Aaron wore a buckler and John [the Baptist] was girt with leather and Joshua the son of Nun led troops into battle; and the whole people of God warred. But the question is, how will a Christian man fight... without a sword, which the Lord has taken away from him? For albeit soldiers had come unto John, and had received the formula of their rule; albeit, likewise, a centurion had believed; still the Lord afterward, in disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier.^[44]

Surely we may disagree on some points with the early church fathers, questioning some of their arguments, but we cannot ignore their general position. We should not forget that those great people were much closer to the cradle of the Christian faith, to the time of the earthly lives of the Lord and the apostles, and so they knew better and felt more keenly every incongruity with it. Already the first Christians in military service were disturbed by many things that were scarcely compatible with their faith: the necessity of taking the oath of allegiance to the emperor (which sometimes was viewed as one of “sacraments” of the Roman State); abso-

lute obedience to military commanders (including the command to unquestioningly kill people); the cult of the “banner” or standard of their legion; the observance of the calendar of obligatory military celebrations,^[45] and so on. It is no wonder that many Christians in the first centuries of church history refused to serve in the Roman army, suffering torment and death for that reason.^[46]

At the same time, the early Fathers, as a rule, did not oppose the state itself. For example, Origen in his apologetic work *Against Celsus* (VIII, 73), referring to Paul’s First Epistle to Timothy 2:1-2, writes that humble Christians help the emperor even more than armed soldiers going into battle, for they have the power to conquer with their prayers the demons who, in fact, incite people to break peace and wage war.^[47] Obviously, such an argument makes no sense to atheists. But from the Christian viewpoint it is quite genuine “spiritual warfare” (cf. Eph 6:10-18). Along with this, Christian pacifists consider the existing authorities to be God’s institution and render them all due respect, pay taxes, and pray for them (Matt 22:17-21; Rom 13:1-7; 1 Tim 2:1-3). In other words, Christians by no means reject the earthly kingdom, but they maintain the superiority of the heavenly one. Although Christ loved Judea, still He taught first of all, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

^[43] See, for example, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, pp. 474-6, 676-81.

^[44] Tertullian, *Ob idolopoklonstve* (On idolatry), <<http://pagez.ru/lisn/0095.php>>.

^[45] See D. G. Hunter, “The Christian Church and the Roman Army in the First Three Centuries,” in *The Church’s Peace Witness*, ed. by M. E. Miller and B. N. Gingerich (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), p. 168.

^[46] See, for example, V. Bolotov, *Lektsii po istorii drevnei tserkvi* (Lectures on the history of the an-

cient church), 4 Vols. (Moscow: Izdanie Spaso-Preobrazhenskogo Valaamskogo Monasterya, 1994), v. II, pp. 136-40. It is interesting that even St. George the Victor became famous not as a Christian warrior, but as a man who refused his military rank and became a confessor of the Christian faith and then a martyr in the time of Emperor Diocletian (see *Khristianstvo: Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar’*, v. I. pp. 406-7).

^[47] See Origen, *Against Celsus*, <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.ix.viii.lxxiii.html>>.

As for the division between personal and public moral laws in Holy Scripture which forms the basis for the “just war” concept, it is difficult not to feel how artificial this approach is when applied to the New Testament. Just as the marriage of Abraham and the other patriarchs to several wives does not support polygamy for us today, so the wars of King David hardly give Christians the right to fight.^[48] In any case, the words and acts of Christ Himself do not give any serious ground for it. It is not by accident that the Savior compares His disciples not with eagles or lions, but with quite harmless sheep. And if Christ, called a Lamb Himself, chose His apostles for any special qualities, it was evidently not for their military valor (suffice it to recall events in the garden of Gethsemane).

True, John the Baptist did not forbid soldiers to do their service (Luke 3:14). But here there is no commandment, nor any command on behalf of the Lord. It has *indirect* inference that John the Baptist was not opposed to military service. But Christ in the Sermon on the Mount gives His disciples unambiguous and *direct* commandments, which cannot be combined with any belligerence: “whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt 5:39); “and unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also” (Luke 6:29); “I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you” (Matt 5:44).

What will change if we declare that the given law of God is strictly personal and not public? If people who sincerely

^[48] See J. Wenger, *Khristianskoe mirolubie (The way of peace)*, <<http://rusbaptist.stunda.org/dop/mirolubie.html>>.

follow these commandments are gathered together to form a whole army and given weapons under fear of death, what will change? Will a great number of sheep become stronger and more militant than a lion? Does any king need soldiers who are praying not to kill anyone? Or is it still somehow possible to love enemies while killing them? How does one imagine it in practice? Every soldier will affirm that during battle he experiences literal hatred for his enemy and even a kind of fervor, or *passion* to kill. Moreover, real battle is by no means a “noble duel” between two aristocrats who are particular about points of honor, but is, as a rule, an insidious surprise attack where two, three, or ten men pounce on another. No, if we are going to be consistent to the end, we should accuse not peace-loving Christians, but the Lord God Himself (if, of course, anyone will dare) of rejecting bloodshed, since when He took on human flesh, He simultaneously became a pacifist. If Christ killed His enemies, He would not be our Savior; it is the peace-loving nature of Christ, His sacrificial death for all people living on earth, which opens the way for people to be saved.

Observe that for some reason Jesus Christ did not utter a single word to call Jews to a *just* war of liberation against Rome, although He undoubtedly suffered not only from personal enemies (whom we are not allowed to kill), but also from public ones, the Romans, who were the enemies of all Jews and the occupiers of their motherland Judea. It would seem that to destroy them would be a pious and heroic deed. Thus, we see that the very basis of the “just war” concept in no way coincides with the teaching of the gospel. The absurdity of the principal difference for Christians between personal and

public moral law was well demonstrated by Blaise Pascal in the following parable:

“Why do you kill me?” – “What! Do you not live on the other side of the water? If you lived on this side, my friend, I should be an assassin, and it would be unjust to slay you in this manner. But since you live on the other side, I am a hero, and it is just.”^[49]

But the opponents of Christian will object that the Savior drove the merchants from the Temple with a whip (John 2:14-16); He said He brought to earth “not peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34); finally, He gave the example of the one who “laid down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). If only all of them were really a serious argument against the extreme peacefulness of the New Testament! After all, of course the use of tangible physical force is much more desirable and reliable for people than invisible Christian prayers. Yet how easy it is to refute such reasons which flow in essence not so much from the gospel as from that “common sense” which is frightened by the “irresponsibility” of Christ’s familiar words regarding the realities of earthly life and grasps at any straw in the evangelist’s account to somehow “help” Him, “correct” His teaching—which anyway is impossible to fulfill!

True, Christ once took a whip, but whom did He kill, who was taken to the hospital when He did? Was the merchants’ flight from the Temple really due to Christ’s impressive muscles and not to His spiritual, divine power? Why, again, did Christ not fight in Gethsemane (just in order to show that it is acceptable for His disciples too)? As for the “sword”

Jesus brought: it is enough to look at the cross reference in Luke to be convinced that the expression is not about armed struggle, but rather about the “division” (in society, in families) caused by Christian teaching, to which the whole context of the passage testifies (Matt 10:34-38; Luke 12:51-53). As for Christ’s words about laying down one’s life for one’s friends, it refers to showing *sacrificial* love (“as I have loved you,” John 15:12-13), as Christ did on Calvary, substituting by His suffering and death for the punishment of the whole of fallen humanity; it is not about killing enemies at all.

Opponents of Christian pacifism also often remember the “ruler,” who “beareth not the sword in vain” (Rom 13). However, for some reason they lose sight of the fact that this ruler is a pagan (which is why he actually bears the sword). The apostle Paul wrote those words in the first century when Christians in the Roman Empire were cruelly persecuted; he himself was beheaded by the “rulers’ sword” at the time of Emperor Nero. How could a Christian ruler have appeared at that time in Rome? And if a high official joined the church, all the data we have about early Christianity testifies that this person would have left his sword immediately. Therefore, the given biblical image can hardly provide a good basis for the “military” Christian position. Furthermore, note that it would be a good thing for all those who love to quote Romans 13 to open sometimes also the preceding chapter, the end of which undoubtedly expresses the actual and not invented thoughts of the apostle Paul concerning the sword: “Bless them which persecute you... Recompense to **no man** evil for evil... Live peaceably with **all men**... Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves... If thine en-

^[49] B. Pascal, *Mysli (Thoughts)*, <http://www.krotov.info/lib_sec/16_p/pas/cal_1.htm>.

emy hunger, feed him... **Overcome evil with good**" (Rom 12:14-21).

III

Surely common sense always remains on the side of the "just war," as well as the actual experience of our far from perfect life; however we spoke above about the teaching of Christ and the apostles, which often touched the hearts of even the greatest tyrants, who were by no means sentimental. For example, the following words belong to the Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible:

Tsarist... power is permitted to use fear and prohibition and coercion and extreme punishment—for the most evil and crafty criminals. Understand the difference between... monasticism, priesthood, and tsarist power. Would it be proper for a king, for example, if he had been slapped across his cheek, to turn the other one? Is this the most perfect commandment; how can a king rule the state, if he allows such dishonor to be done to him? But a priest—ought to do it...^[50]

Long ago it was said in Russia, "Angels are light for monks; monks are light for lay people."^[51] Russian Baptists, if we disregard external things, are, in essence, the same monks who completely denied the world and devoted their lives to serving God. Should they not turn the other cheek to their offenders? Should they brandish a sword? If zealous monks and evangelical Christians will not defend themselves and their native land by their prayers, then exactly for whom did Christ leave His holy teaching, that very same Sermon on the Mount? Would not it be

more blessed, if one believes in eternal life and recompense in the afterlife, to be killed as Christ was, rather than kill anyone?

N. S. Leskov, a remarkable Russian Orthodox writer of the nineteenth century, in many of his stories about "God's people" describes Christians whose life is a worthy example to imitate. A holy person for him is without fail a humble Christian. For example, in *The Legend of Conscientious Danila* (1888),^[52] based on the ancient Prologue, Leskov relates the story of a monk who lived in the fourth century and, taken captive by pagans and fearing for his life, killed an Ethiopian and escaped. But he had no joy; Danila could not pray and was racked with remorse. Here are several quotations from the story, which are useful for our argument:

If it were not contrary to God's Spirit, my spirit would not hurt and the black Ethiopian would not trouble my conscience. The commandment of God is direct: "Thou shalt not murder." It does not say, "Thou shalt not murder thy neighbor, but murder thy enemy," but simply: "Thou shalt not murder," but I broke [the commandment], murdered the man and cannot expiate my guilt. I taught others that all people are brothers, but I myself acted as a fiend... Don't seek an excuse in craftiness, because it is not allowed to kill anyone...

Then Danila, as Leskov writes, visited many hierarchs, asking them for spiritual help and punishment for himself, "so that my spirit would suffer for its guilt and be cleansed." But all of them, even patriarchs, said that to kill a pagan is "not contrary

^[50] Ivan IV Groznyi, *Sochineniia (Works)* (St. Petersburg: Azbuka, 2000), p. 53.

^[51] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

^[52] N. Leskov, *Legenda o sovestnom Danile* (The legend of conscientious Danila) in N. Leskov, *Sobranie sochineniia* (Selected works), 12 vols. (Moscow: Pravda, 1989), 10:82-98.

to Christian teaching at all.” Then Danila asked them (exactly as a Baptist would), “Show me mercy, point out in the Holy Gospel of Christ where it says so.” But everybody just laughed at him and called him an ignoramus. Then Danila came to the Christian tsar of his country and asked him to put him in prison as a murderer. The tsar spoke with him. “Didn’t you feel better after your confession before the patriarchs?” he asked Danila. “No, I felt even worse,” the latter answered. “Why?” “Because, your majesty, I have started to think that human words ought not to conceal the word of Christ from our eyes, for justice and the law of Christian love flee from people...” The tsar answered, “I would be glad to help you, but I cannot cancel the judgment of the patriarchs; however as tsar, I will add something. If you killed a person of our land and our holy faith, then I would sentence you to pay the penalty or to execution, but how can I sentence you if you killed our terrible enemy, the unbaptized barbarian! Do they not make raids on our lands; do they not steal our cattle and capture our people? How can we pity them? ...I think you did a good thing by killing a barbarian, but you would do even better by killing seven barbarians; then I would praise you more.”

Danila said, “O, Your Majesty! You speak well about the stolen cattle, but I wish you knew more about the forgotten Christ: you sharpen the sword, destroy with the sword, but you may perish from the sword yourself. And Danila started to ardently speak Christ’s words about enemies and stirred everybody so much that the tsar, with his head bowed low, listened to him and then said, “Go, Abba!

Your word is right, but it has no place in us, for our godliness is attended with power and guarded by fear.” Not looking at Danila, the tsar rose and went to his palace and ordered to let Danila... go wherever he wanted...”

The story ends with Danila finding consolation and forgiveness from the Lord by caring for lepers. And then, says Leskov, the Ethiopian he killed was illuminated in his memory.

Here is a model of authentic Christian holiness, or the “more excellent way” compared with human society’s usual understanding of justice and the ancient law of revenge. We often refer to Orthodox experience because Russian Baptists mainly came from Orthodoxy and no doubt borrowed a lot from it. That brings to memory a tragic story in the life of D. I. Mazaev, one of the most famous leaders of the Baptist Union in Russia before the Revolution. In 1917, Mazaev’s estate suffered an armed attack. Defending himself, Mazaev shot through the door, which was being broken open by bandits. One of the bandits was killed on the spot; the others fled.^[53] Formally, a person under such desperate circumstances certainly has a right to firmly resist his attackers, and according to civil law he is innocent. Perhaps Mazaev would be justified as well by the Baptist creed of 1906 (translated from German), since it clearly speaks of “unconditional submission to the laws” of the state, including the ordinance about “the sword” punishing “evil-doers.”^[54] But in reality we see quite a different picture tracing back to the best examples of ancient Christian tradition: the local congregation where Dei Ivanovich was a member (Ros-

^[53] See L. Kovalenko, *Oblako svidetelei Khristovoykh* (A cloud of witnesses of Christ), (Kiev: Tsentr khristianskogo sotrudnichestva, 1997), p. 90.

^[54] See the Baptist creed (Pavlov, 1906) in *Istoriia baptizma*, p. 433.

tov-Nakhichevanskaia) made a hard decision—excommunication—and he himself acknowledged his guilt without reservation, and, according to eyewitnesses, “sincerely bewailed” it at “every service” (that was the reason why he was restored to the church later).^[55]

Russian Baptists excommunicated Mazaev for killing a criminal as if following Canon 55 of St. Basil the Great. No allowance was made for him as a clergyman until the time of complete repentance. This displays, in essence, a yet apostolic Christian-pacifist (or simply evangelical) spirit which does not know any denominational distinctions. The voice of another famous Baptist author of the Stalin years sounds a dissonant note against this background: “D.I. Mazaev... felt alien to Tolstoy’s nonresistance and he did not hesitate to use weapons against the evil robbers who threatened his life and the life of presbyter Cherniavskiy who was with him in his house on that night in 1917...”^[56] Thus, under the influence of state power to a great extent, the “just war” position (or “deserved punishment”) invariably finds some support and even its own theologians in the Russian Baptist brotherhood.^[57] The “Byzantine” and “Evangelical” traditions,^[58] though not without strain, paradoxically cohabit among Russian Baptists.

IV

The peaceful behavior of a Christian, even in the case of mortal danger or serious personal threat, still has fundamental biblical advantages over the usual human passion to win an all-out physical victory over one’s enemy. At the same time, Christian pacifists do not cancel out the struggle with evil at all; however it is transferred from the external, physical level to the spiritual one, i.e. to where the sources of evil are born. This gives the Christian the opportunity to exercise diligence in prayer and to trust God in full measure even when the situation becomes hopeless. The gracious impact of humble Christian words and acts in response to aggression is well known. From time to time it inevitably produces a wonderful effect and contributes to genuine change in the lives of offenders.^[59] The *Lives* of (Orthodox) saints and the pious stories of Russian Baptists contain many such examples.

For example, in *Drevniy paterik* there is a touching story about an elder and some robbers who burst into the holy man’s cell and robbed him. Not only did the latter not stop the perpetrators, but he also helped them to collect his own things. When the robbers left, laughing at him, the elder remembered a hidden purse with money; he took it from its hiding place and chased after his offenders cry-

^[55] See Kovalenko, *ibid.*, p. 90.

^[56] N. Levindanto, “Pamiati Deia Ivanovicha Mazaeva” (In memory of Deo Ivanovich Mazaev), *Bratsky Vestnik*, Nos. 2-3 (1953): 96.

^[57] See, for example, A. Mitskevich, “Kak osveshchaet Slovo Bozhie vopros ob otnoshenii verushich k voennoi sluzhbe” (What the Word of God says about the believers’ attitude to military service), *Bratsky Vestnik*, No. 3 (1971): 66-71; *Nastol’naiia kniga presvitera*, pp. 197-203.

^[58] See V. Bachinin, *Vizantizm i evangelism: Geneal-*

ogiia russkogo protestantizma (The Byzantine and evangelical traditions: A genealogy of Russian Protestantism) (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2003).

^[59] Long ago Tertullian made the same observation, “The more often you mow us down, the greater we grow in number; the blood of Christians is seed... For who sees it [our sufferings] and is not moved to inquire what is at the bottom of it? Who, after inquiry, does not embrace our doctrines?” (*Apology*, 50).

ing, “Children, take what you forgot in my cell!” Seeing such holiness, the robbers felt ashamed and gave back all the property to the elder, saying to one another, “This is a man of God!”^[60]

In the Russian Evangelical-Baptist tradition, this kind of Christian testimony has always elicited respect.^[61] In the middle of the 1970s, a large Baptist family moved from Kirgizia to the Russian city of Syzran’. The believers bought a house there, but their neighbors gave them a hostile reception. As soon as the family unloaded their things from the truck, entered the house and began to set the table for dinner, rocks flew through the windows and all the glass was broken. When the new tenants went into the yard, they saw that a pile of logs and garbage blocked their gate on the street side. The street at that moment was empty of people, but many neighbors secretly watched the Baptists’ response from their houses. Then this deeply believing family, having prayed and cleared out the pile, went to the nearest houses and began to invite the neighbors to their house, saying that the table was already laid for such good people. Nobody came to visit them that day, but very soon the family enjoyed the respect of the whole street.^[62]

If evil is resisted by force, of course, no such spiritual victory is possible. Any violence raises an even greater desire for revenge on the offended side. Fazil Iskander wrote a gloomy story about two respected families from Abkhazia who had a scrap with each other over some small thing and then for a long time mercilessly destroyed one another according to the custom of blood feud.^[63] In such cases, of course, more courage is needed not to continue the violence (for it is a usual matter in the world) but to stop it, to forgive the enemy and not to repay evil for evil. Vengeance belongs to the Lord. If God kills a man, He is able to raise him from the dead, but nobody living on earth can do it. That is why the Christian conscience (and sometimes even the conscience of people who are far away from Christianity^[64]) instinctively rejects killing. Even if one’s human reason were quite persuaded by logical arguments that, let us say, killing during a war is not murder, but on the contrary is a holy and righteous deed, the conscience still would not agree.

On the morning of August 6, 1945, the plane of Major C. Eatherly did air reconnaissance over Hiroshima. The major radioed to the pilots of the B-29 with the atomic bomb on board that visibility was good and they could proceed to their tar-

^[60] *Drevny paterik* (Ancient book of the lives of the Fathers), 16,20. <http://www.pagez.ru/lsn/13_16.php>.

^[61] According to the testimony of a member of the Baptist church, S. Germakovsky (Syracuse, New York, USA, 2007), a poem with the following characteristic plot (very similar to the story in *Drevny paterik*) was popular in some Baptist congregations of the Soviet Union: robbers stopped a believer in the street; he told them he did “not have a penny” and they let him go. The Christian came home and knelt to pray when suddenly a small coin dropped from his pocket. The man was upset: “This means I lied!” so he went out on the street again, found the

robbers, and having apologized for telling a lie earlier, gave them the coin. Then the robbers were touched and the Lord spoke to them.

^[62] Testimony of Baptist church member A. S. Shevchuk. (Author’s interview with Ya. A. Shevchuk, A. S. Shevchuk and V. Ya. Virkh, Los Angeles, California, USA, 2006).

^[63] See F. Iskander, *Tri rasskaza* (Three stories), <http://lib.ru/FISKANDER/r_despina.txt>.

^[64] Let us remember, for example, the positive image of a soldier who refused to shoot his brother-in-arms from the famous song by V. Vysotskiy, “He Who Did Not Shoot.”

get. Soon Eatherly returned home where he was acclaimed as a hero. It seemed that everything was fine: the enemy was defeated and the war was finished. But Eatherly suffered from pangs of conscience. Again and again he came across newspaper articles about the consequences of the bombing of Hiroshima: tens of thousands of dead and wounded, disfigured children's faces, women giving birth to monsters. Eatherly went through a long term of medical treatment, but still he died in a mental hospital.^[65] Other American pilots, who participated in the bombing, so it is officially communicated, never repented of carrying out the order.^[66] But who looked into their souls and who knows what they said to God many years later on their death bed?

V

At the same time, pacifism is not always beyond reproach. It begins to fail, for example, in cases when the issue is not self-defense, but the necessity of fighting on behalf of one's neighbor, especially if the neighbor is weak, helpless, or young. As opponents of pacifism sometimes put it, is a Christian entitled "to turn somebody else's cheek"?^[67]

If the Lord sometimes allows extreme circumstances, He also shows a way out of them. For example, the author once observed how a "militant" Christian, who loved to joke about the "holy fist," in

practice yielded to a fear of bullies and did not defend the girls whom he was seeing home late one evening. This was done instead by a God-fearing young man, a pacifist of several generations, from whom nobody expected such a thing.^[68] However, what is curious and especially important is that after the event the believing lad did not cease to be a pacifist, but sincerely thought he did not show enough humility and love to the offenders and drove them away, "because of his infirmity." Here is a worthy example of holiness in one's thoughts!

Thus, even if we talk about defending a weak person, we should not easily neglect the teaching of the Savior, for that is the ideal of the Christian life to make every effort to strive for. That is why we would do better to teach the church exactly as Christ did, by His words and by His life, even if it goes against all the practices of our sinful world and against common sense. For this is actually the way of faith.^[69] If a Christian does not always have the heart to do in real life as Christ taught, and, for example, shows aggression in a certain situation and even physically beats his antagonist, it should nevertheless not be typical for a believer. It is more blessed to wash such behavior with the tears of repentance and confess it as another example of one's "own infirmity." For compared to the commandment of God, what does the common

^[65] See, for example, V. Ovchinnikov, *Teni na mosty* (Shadows on the bridge), <http://www.rg.ru/ansons/arc_2000/0805/3.shtm>.

^[66] Ibid.

^[67] See I. Iliin, *O soprotivlenii zlu siloy* (On resistance to evil by force) (Moscow: Dar, 2006), p. 224.

^[68] Note that pacifism is by no means cowardice. Christ was not afraid of his tormentors, nor beseeched them to show mercy (as very many sentenced to death fear their executioners) nor did he threaten

them (as the boldest may do when preparing to die). Instead, He prayed for those crucifying Him (of which only the best of the Lord's disciples are capable, starting with St. Stephen and the apostles who became martyrs).

^[69] It was proclaimed as long ago as the early Church: "And the Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And He was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain, because it is impossible" (Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, 5).

phrase, “but life teaches us...” mean? If life experience testifies that, “the money we have is not sufficient for us,” does it mean that it is right and reasonable not to give any offerings to the church? And if we know from practice that some believers abuse alcohol, should we not speak about the sin of drinking at all? And why, while allowing the freest interpretations of the commandment, “thou shalt not murder,” must Christians simultaneously strictly and unconditionally observe the commands, “you shall not commit adultery,” “you shall not steal,” “you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” and others, written in the Bible in the same context?

In other words, even in defending their neighbor, Christians should strive to do it as much as possible *sacrificially*, but not militantly, i.e. literally “laying down their lives for their friends.” Figuratively speaking, it means not turning “somebody else’s cheek” to the attacker, but turning one’s own sinful head to the blow meant for the weaker person, meanwhile calling on God for help and thus defending one’s neighbor. If anyone thinks that this behavior is crazy and mistaken, we dare to ask whether Christ and the apostles were really faint-hearted and in error when they did not give a physical rebuff to their enemies? Were they really insufficiently quick-witted and a little bit foolish when they died themselves rather than “washing their feet in the blood of the wicked” (as it says in Ps 58)? Every time the se-

vere prescriptions of the Old Testament are presented as an example for Christians, the author remembers the sad words of St. John Chrysostom: “Nothing is more miserable than Jews... When there was need to observe the Law, they trampled it under foot. Now that the Law has ceased to bind, they obstinately strive to observe it...”^[70] Should Christians today, having rejected the grace and mercy of the Savior and overstepped the gospel, return under the shadow of Jewish law in order to reclaim the old right to another’s tooth in place of their own loosened one?^[71]

Thus, there is the sphere of state functions approved by the Scripture, and there is the spiritual-moral realm, beyond the access and judgment of earthly rulers. Nobody except God has authority over a Christian’s heart and soul. If he walks a monastic (or evangelical) path, he should not be forced to take weapons in his hands. Because then Caesar will gain for his kingdom either another martyr of the faith, or, having broken his will, gain a person despised by all.

VI

The points mentioned above also concern the problem of the death penalty. In connection with the disappointing statistics on the increase of crime in a considerable part of the world and the constant terrorist threat, the topic becomes continually more pertinent. We will touch on it at least briefly.

^[70] St. John Chrysostom, *Protiv iudeev* (Against the Jews) (Moscow: Lod’ia, 2000), p. 6.

^[71] Jewish authors also describe remarkable instances of true mercy today. For instance, Efraim Sevela wrote the following story: at the end of WWII a Jew who was a Red Army soldier found among the residents of a conquered German town a local family with the same number and ages of children as in his

own family, which had been shot by the fascists. The soldier burst into the German house with weapons in his hands “to right the wrong,” but on seeing the eyes of the frightened children he untied his knapsack and began to feed them canned food from his soldier’s ration (E. Sevela, *Monia Tsatskes–Znamenosets* [Monia Tsatskes: Standard bearer] [St. Petersburg: Kristall, 2000], pp. 150-4).

Why can a Christian who relies on gospel teaching not support the death penalty with a clear conscience, at least for the most desperate criminals? It is well known that few of even the professional judges, those who pronounce the death sentence, are actually present at executions;^[72] furthermore, no normal judge will express the desire to carry out the sentence himself.^[73] Judges recoil from it with noble resentment! Why is this so? The law is necessary for society and the one sentenced to death is usually truly guilty.^[74] Why does the human conscience resist when it is offered the opportunity to be consistent to the end and take the punitive sword in hand? One would think it is because the execution sanctioned by the state remains, in essence, murder, despite being called by another, seemingly more decent word. It is not so easy to get over the notions God put in people's hearts (the commandment, "you shall not murder") concerning the special value of human life. This is the source of the unacceptable character of capital punishment for a sincere Christian, just as murder in general, and pity for the soul of the executioner.

It is remarkable that capital punishment was not practiced, with rare exceptions, in Orthodox Russia from the mid-

dle of the eighteenth century until the First Russian Revolution of 1905.^[75] The exceptions were, for example, the executions of Emelian Pugachev during the reign of Catherine the Great and of five Decembrists in 1826. Accordingly, in those times it was not easy to find a person to be an executioner ("Van'ka-Cain"). However, of course, we should not idealize the Russian nineteenth century, because some veiled forms of execution took place. For example, the following resolution of Tsar Nicholas I gained sad notoriety: "The culprits must run the gauntlet through one thousand men twelve times. Praise God, we do not have capital punishment and I would not initiate it..."^[76]

The commandment "you shall not murder," in its strict interpretation, no doubt, also forbids the sin of suicide. Humanity, as the crown of God's creation, is made according to the image and likeness of the Creator. That is why suicide represents a hopeless rebellion against God and the order of things established by Him. It is absolutely not "courage" or "wisdom," liberating a person from the "vanity of life," as it was considered at different times by famous Stoic philosophers and existentialist writers,^[77] but rather a grave sin for which a human being has no

^[72] Long ago the ancients used to say, "A good person should not admire the execution of an evil one." An "evil good" runs the risk of ceasing to be good at all.

^[73] See A. Kistiakovskiy, "Issledovanie o smertnoy kazni" (Research on the death penalty), in *Smertnaia kazn': Za i protiv* (The death penalty: Pro and con), ed. by S. Kelin (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1989), p. 189.

^[74] Although such horrible mistakes inevitably happen in judicial practice from time to time that this fact alone causes many experts to speak against the death penalty in favor of a long prison term. Taking criminals' lives deprives them of the opportunity of

moral recovery. Christian history knows of many people who were once deadly criminals but found peace with God in prison. Could it really be better to execute them?

^[75] See, for example, O. Shishov, "Smertnaia kazn' v istorii Rossii (The death penalty in the history of Russia), in *Smertnaia kazn': Za i protiv*, pp. 34-62.

^[76] See *Podrobnaiia biografiia Nikolaia I* (A detailed biography of Nicholas I), <<http://hist0rian.ru/glava5.html>>.

^[77] See, for example, E. Tseller, *Ocherk istorii grecheskoi filosofii* (Essay on the history of Greek philosophy) (St. Petersburg: Aleiteiya, 1996), p. 190.

opportunity to receive forgiveness. In any case, the apostle Paul did not approve of this kind of fearlessness for the Macedonian jailer in Philippi (Acts 16:27-28).

Another outrageous trampling of the sixth commandment of the Lord, widespread in our society, is abortions. What can be more horrible and detestable than killing children! It is like the cruel pharaoh, struggling with God at the time of Moses, who ordered that Jewish infants be put to death (Ex 1:15-16), or like the bloody king Herod who massacred little children in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16-18). So many things can be changed in human history by saving the life of a child: the infants Moses and Jesus, who miraculously escaped death as children, saved entire nations when they were grown.

Taking a close look around, we will unfortunately also see many indirect violations of the great commandment of God. It is possible to lead a person to death without any weapon, but merely by maliciously pronouncing evil, unjust words against him (Ps 57:4; Jas 3:8). We can kill our neighbor by indifference, by not providing help to a person who desperately needs it, by not feeding a starving person, by not lifting up a man lying on the ground on a cold winter day, by not taking someone who is bleeding to the hospital. Spiritual murder is to seduce, or draw away the "little ones in Christ" from faith in God (Matt 18:6). Therefore, the sixth commandment still remains relevant for all people, including even the most convinced pacifists.

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