

CHANGED BY HIS MAJESTY

MAKING JESUS KING OF OUR WHOLE LIFE

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See companion document at: www.BarrhavenNewLifeChurch.ca/resources/2Chronicles7-14.pdf

Introduction

In 1994, the Lord called us to begin a Christian ministry whose mandate included helping facilitate healing and reconciliation between wounded and alienated people groups in Canada. Three years were spent doing in-depth historical research into the major conflicts in Canada's past, including those between: Natives and non-Natives, French and English, ethnic minority groups and the majority Caucasian society, Jews and Gentiles, and others.

Early into our work, we were struck by the fact that the institutional Church and countless individual Christians were deeply involved in all these conflicts and the many corporate sins surrounding them. The leading role played by the Church in the *Native Residential Schools* disaster is just one such example. We were troubled by how easily the institutional Church and many individual Christians could get so involved in these corporate evils, and by how widespread this problem was, not only in Canada's past, but throughout most of the Church's history. We strongly suspected that something in the traditional teachings of the Church had to be facilitating this all-too-frequent participation in corporate sin, and so we decided to study the history of the Early Church in hopes of finding some clues. This paper is the fruit of that research.

The Third Temptation

According to the Gospel of Matthew, when Satan presented Jesus with his third temptation in the desert, he offered Him worldly power over the kingdoms of the earth in exchange for worship and submission. Jesus said to him: "It is written, Worship God and serve Him only." Jesus refused Satan's offer and thereby passed the test. Three centuries later, in the days of the Roman Emperor Constantine, Satan presented the Church with the same temptation. However, unlike her Mas-

ter, the Church gladly took up worldly power over earthly kingdoms, and tragically in doing so, she submitted to Satan and failed the test. The consequences of this failure continue to affect us today and the following are just a few of the results.

The Dark Side of Church History

In the Springtime of 1994, as the world watched in horror, genocide broke out in the African nation of Rwanda. In less than 3 months, over 800,000 men, women and children, mostly Tutsis and a number of moderate Hutus, were systematically butchered, many of them hacked to pieces by their closest Hutu neighbours brandishing machetes. Author-journalist Philip Gourevitch, in his recent book on the subject, writes:

Following the militias' example, Hutus young and old rose to the task. Neighbors hacked neighbors to death in their homes, and colleagues hacked colleagues to death in their workplaces. Doctors killed their patients, and schoolteachers killed their pupils.... Radio announcers reminded listeners not to take pity on women and children.

Few of us in the West could even begin to comprehend the depth of human hatred that could exist between two people groups which could lead to and sustain such a devastating and widespread corporate atrocity. But what made this carnage all the more shocking and bewildering was the fact that Rwanda was the most Christianized nation in all of Africa. At the time of the genocide over 80% of Rwandans were self-professing Christians!

In the light of this reality we are forced to ask the question: What kind of a deception could live in the hearts and minds of Rwandan Christians, which would permit them to name Jesus as their Saviour, read their Bibles, worship the risen Lord in church on Sunday, and yet massacre entire families who lived just down the street, or approve of those who did such things?

Now some of us in the West might be smugly saying: "Well that's African tribalism; what do you expect?" But let's have a look a little closer to home. Germany was and still is among the elite nations of the Western world. It had been entirely Christianized for centuries, and was a world leader in everything from science to music to literature at the time Adolf Hitler rose to power. During the Nazi reign of terror, which lasted several years, millions of German Christians continued to attend church, pray to God, read their Bibles, and believe that Jesus Christ died for their sins. Yet, despite these convictions, they nevertheless supported Hitler, the aims of National Socialism, and the war. How was this possible?

In South Africa, one of the most diabolical ideologies of the twentieth century, Apartheid, emerged directly out of the Christian Reformed Church. This profound evil, which institutionalized and enforced the alleged supremacy of the

White race, was not the product of some godless, secular government. Rather, it was the brainchild of God-fearing, Bible-believing, self-professing Christians, and was eagerly endorsed by a multitude of similar-minded believers who were equally serious about their Christian faith.

The United States of America, a nation whose Constitution proudly declares: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” nevertheless witnessed God-fearing, Church-going, Bible-believing Christians buying, selling, using and abusing other human beings as slaves for over 200 years. In my historical naiveté and evangelical arrogance I had always assumed that it was only backslidden, mainline, nominal Christians who were involved in this great evil. That is, until I began reading the journals of early American Quakers.

To my great astonishment I discovered that until just a few decades before the 1800s, many Quakers owned slaves too. Anyone who knows about the early European and American Quakers knows that these Spirit-filled Christians took holiness and righteous living very seriously. And yet, many were involved in slavery along with the rest. What is it that is so compelling about this deception — one which says that you can have Jesus as your personal Saviour and yet participate in the gravest corporate sins imaginable — that even Quakers were not immune to its blinding power?

The list is a long one: centuries of Jewish persecution and massacres at the hands of Christians, the Crusades, the Inquisitions, the bloody religious wars of Europe following the Protestant Reformation, the conquest and dispossession of Aboriginal Peoples the world over, and more, all at the hands of those who named the Name of God’s own Son.

Finally, the most recent display of this tragic form of “Christian” witness was seen in the spring of 1999. It occurred during the NATO bombing of Serbian troops as they were mass-murdering and expelling the civilian population of Kosovo. The Serbs, who are almost all Eastern Orthodox Christians, asked NATO for a temporary halt to the bombing so they could celebrate Orthodox Easter. The incongruity of taking a pause from mass-murder in order to mark the resurrection of the One who commanded us to love our enemies, is truly mind-boggling.

It is difficult, no, impossible to imagine Jesus Himself supporting any one of these corporate evils, let alone participating in them. Try as we may, we cannot picture it. Yet, millions upon millions of those who have been involved in them have claimed to be His followers. How do we account for this? While it is tempting to simply assert that these people were not really Christians in the first place — after all, don’t their actions prove that — the evidence points to other reasons, and we would be wrong to take this easy way out.

How then do we to account for the fact that multitudes of Christians through-

out history have held attitudes and been involved in practices which Jesus Himself would never have supported or participated in? What deception operates in the hearts and minds of Christians which makes this possible? Where did it come from? When did it enter the Church? And why has it found so welcome a home in the hearts and minds of believers in virtually every generation? But most important of all, how can we, the Church in *this* generation, get free from it and live the kind of *Life* Jesus has called us to live? It is to these questions and their answers that this paper is dedicated.

Identifying the Deception

What then is this deception which has so captured the Church over the centuries and has permitted so much evil to be done at the hands of self-professing Christians? In a nutshell it is this: As Christians, we have an unconscious tendency to compartmentalize our lives into two separate spheres of existence — our personal life and our corporate life — and then we try to live by two different standards of righteousness at the same time. Without even thinking about it, we split up our lives into these two separate parts and make Jesus the King of the one but not the King of the other.

Here's how it works. Each of us is a complex composite being whose overall identity is made up of both personal elements and corporate elements. For example, I am Rudy Pohl, the son of my parents, brother of my sisters and husband of my wife. These are elements of my personal identity which are unique and individual to me. However, I am also Rudy Pohl who is English-speaking, Caucasian, male, Christian, Protestant, of European origin, a Canadian citizen and a resident of Central Canada. I belong to and participate in each one of these people groups, some by choice and some by birth, and together they make up my corporate identity. Each of these groups to which I belong has at least one counterpart group with which it has been, or continues to be in conflict today (e.g. English vs French, Protestant vs Catholic, European vs Native). By belonging to these various groups, I participate in many of the conflicts in my nation although sometimes only indirectly. Many of these conflicts are passed on from one generation to the next and some go back centuries.

In our Christian walk, most of us have little difficulty in seeing Jesus as the King of our personal life. However, when it comes to our societal lives, that is, our corporate lives as members of our people groups and citizens in our nation, it is often a different matter. When it comes to the group conflicts, issues and problems in our nation, or between nations, we often end up adopting the same sinful, worldly attitudes and actions as those around us, rather than the righteous ways of Jesus the King. While we are usually careful about sins such as anger and judgmentalism in our personal life, at the same time, we feel quite free in our corporate life to be angry at and make the most unChrist-like judgments against

other people groups. And at times even act unrighteously toward them.

It was this splitting up of life into two separate compartments and living by two different standards of righteousness which made it possible for millions of God-fearing Christians in America to participate directly or indirectly in the evils of slavery for over 200 years. How could someone pray to God, read their Bible, worship the Lord in Church on Sunday, and yet still buy, sell, use and abuse other human beings, or even be an indirect beneficiary of such an evil system? It could only happen through a profound self-deception which says that Jesus can be the King of part of life, but not the King of all of it; that His words and example do not apply to the entirety of life.

This splitting up of life lets us name Jesus as our personal *Savoir*, and even our personal Lord, and yet allows us to participate in serious sin in our corporate life, or to approve of those who do. We see Jesus as merely our personal King, but not the King of heaven and earth with authority over our entire life, *including our corporate life*. And so, we live in two kingdoms at once: the Kingdom of God in our personal life and the kingdom of the world in our corporate life.

Furthermore, because Christians have participated in inter-group conflicts over the centuries where violence, oppression and killing were involved, great harm has been done within the Body of Christ among the believers, and tremendous damage has been done to the witness of the Church and the cause of the Gospel in the world. In fact, many believe that more damage has been done to the cause of Christ throughout history by Christian involvement in corporate evil than by any other cause.

The good news is that Jesus the King is calling His Church everywhere to repent and change kingdoms in the whole of our life. He is calling us all to examine our life — especially our corporate life — to see exactly where we are thinking and acting according to the kingdom of the world rather than the Kingdom of God, and then to repent and make Him the King of our whole life, personal and corporate. As we do, we will be changed by His Majesty at a deep heart level and be transformed from glory to glory into His likeness. There will be healing, reconciliation and unity in the Church as well as a new level of sanctification among the believers. As a result, our life, our witness and our proclamation of the Gospel will have on them the power and blessing of God.

Origin of the Deception

In order to see exactly how and when this deception (splitting our life and living our corporate life by the standards of the world), first entered the Church, we need to take a brief look at the history of the Early Church. However, before doing that, we first need to fix in our minds what Jesus taught regarding the true test of an authentic Christian life, that is, a “Kingdom of God” type of life.

The Test of an Authentic Christian Life

Although Jesus taught and modeled many things during His time here on earth, He gave us only one criterion by which to judge if we are on the right track as far as being His followers, that is, to see if we are living the kind of Christian life which He has called us to live. The criterion He gave us was this: He said "If you love Me, you will obey My commands (John 14:15)." Over and over throughout the Gospels Jesus called His followers to obey His words and to follow His example. He said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples (John 8:31)" and,

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching (John 14:23-24).

Furthermore, He said that the words which He was speaking were not His own, but were from God, His Father, who had given them to Him to speak. Therefore, to obey Jesus' words was to do God's will:

My teaching is not my own, it comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own (John 7:16).

Again He said, "These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me (John 14:24)." And again: "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it (John 12:49)."

Jesus taught that simply hearing His words was not enough; we had to obey them. Only by actually obeying His words could we ever know if they are true, and experience their liberating power in our life. He said: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciple. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32)." Those who heard and obeyed, He said, were like ones who built their houses on rock, but those who heard and did not obey were like ones who built their houses on sand, and would surely end in disaster in the time of testing (Matt. 7:24-27).

In fact, so important were His words that He placed them above the created order saying, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Mark 13:31)." He warned that our future judgment would be determined not only by our attitude toward Him, but also by our attitude toward His words. He said, "If anyone is ashamed of me *and my words*, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory (Luke 9:26)." And again,

As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who

rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day (John 12:47-48).

Finally in commissioning His disciples, He sent them out to the peoples of the earth to preach the Gospel, to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach them “*to obey everything I have commanded you* (Matt. 28:19-20).”

Besides teaching that His words should be carefully heard and faithfully obeyed, Jesus held up His own earthly life as the one and only model for His followers to emulate. He called them to take up their crosses daily and follow Him. He said that no servant is greater than his Master, but that he must be like Him. And He called them to take upon themselves His yoke and learn from Him. Reinforcing this crucial point one more time, the Apostle John wrote, “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did (1 John 2:6).”

Thus, obedience to the words and example of Jesus is the one true test of an authentic Christian life, a “Kingdom of God” type of life. All of us who are self-professing Christians are to judge ourselves by this standard. According to Jesus Himself, if we truly love Him, our love will be evidenced in our faithful obedience to His words and example.

This obedience, however, is not to be a joyless, grudging, legalistic obedience born out of duty or fear. Nor is it to be a kind of works-righteousness where we try to earn our salvation by keeping the Lord’s commands. John writes, “His commands are not burdensome,” and Paul writes, “The Kingdom of God... is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” We see no trace of a legalistic, burdensome or works-righteousness obedience here. Rather, the kind of obedience we as Christians have been called to manifest, is an obedience which springs from a heart filled with love and humble gratitude toward God for who He is and what He has done. John Wesley knew this well when he described a Christian this way: “All the commands of God he accordingly keeps, and that with all his might; *for his obedience is in proportion to his love*, the source from whence it flows.”

In a nutshell: “This is love for God: to obey his commands (1 John 5:3).”

The Life and Witness of the Early Church

The First Century Church (30-100 AD)

From the time of Jesus and throughout the New Testament period, the Church was a zealous, evangelistic, pacifistic, persecuted, counter-culture, community of believers who were motivated by a radical love for God and men, including love for enemies. Nowhere in the New Testament, or in contemporary historical sources like Josephus and Tacitus, do we read of Christians arming and organizing themselves for the purposes of either self-defence or violent aggression. Given the fact

that in one day alone 3,000 new converts were added to the Church as a result of Peter's preaching, it seems likely that if the Church had thought it permissible to arm and defend itself against persecution, it would have done so. A cohesive group of this size experiencing on-going rapid growth could have put up a formidable defence. Yet, nothing of the sort occurred. In later years, when the Romans attacked and destroyed Jerusalem and Israel, the Christians refused to fight, for which they were deeply hated by their Jewish compatriots. Jesus had clearly taught His followers that they were to be in the world but not of the world (John 17:14-15). He commanded that enemies were to be loved, evil was not to be resisted, the other cheek was to be turned, and persecution was to be repaid with blessing and prayer. All these things, and more, the New Testament Church understood and followed out of obedience to Her Master's words and example. A number of New Testament epistles refer to the persecutions which Christians faced during this early period for their obedience to Christ.

The Roman historian Tacitus gives us a graphic account of the sufferings Christians faced in the time of Nero (54-68 AD), especially because of their counter-culture stance toward society, which was considered to be anti-social.

To get rid of the report [that he had ordered the burning of Rome], Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class of people hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.... An immense multitude was convicted, not so much for the crime of burning the city, as of hatred against mankind, [anti-social behavior]. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Some were covered with animal skins and torn to death by dogs. Others were nailed to crosses, while still others were doomed to the flames as human torches to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired (Tacitus, Annals 15.44).

The Second Century Church (100-200 AD)

Over the next 100 years the Church continued to grow and expand into every region of the Empire and beyond. With numerical growth and territorial expansion came a new need to critically re-assess society to determine how the Church could continue being in the world but not of it. Great care was taken to safeguard the holiness of its members in the face of a violent, immoral, and corrupting pagan society. The Church's primary emphasis continued to be evangelism, doing works of compassion and charity both inside and outside the Church, raising godly families and maintaining a holy life within the community of believers. The second century *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus* gives us a glimpse of Christian life during this period.

What makes Christians different from other people is not the country they to belong to, the language which they speak, or the cultural customs which they follow. Wherever they live, they follow the local customs of their neighbors in matters of clothing, food and other ordinary things. Yet at the same time, they demonstrate to us their

wonderful and unique way of life. While they live in their own native lands, they do so simply as aliens, sojourners and foreigners. They are citizens of their countries, and as such, they share many things with their fellow-citizens, but yet they are regarded as foreigners and because of this, must endure many sufferings.

They marry and have children just like everyone else, but they do not kill unwanted babies. They share their table with others, but not their bed. They are passing their days here on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws of the ruling authorities, and yet in their own lives they surpass these laws. They love all men, but are persecuted by all. They are put to death and yet gain life; they are poor, yet make many rich; they are lacking in all things, yet they abound in everything; they are reviled and hated, and yet they bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers.

To sum up all in one word, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. The soul is spread throughout all the parts of the body, and Christians are scattered throughout all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, but is not of the body; and Christians dwell in the world, but are not of the world. (*Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, 5. *Early Church Fathers*, Vol. 1. Paraphrased into modern English).

As the second century progressed, increasing pressure was put on the Church to slacken its discipline and participate more fully in society. In 178 AD, the pagan philosopher Celsus wrote a scathing attack against the Christians for keeping to themselves and not fulfilling their civic duties, especially in the areas of public office and military service. Celsus considered Christianity to be a serious threat to the welfare of the State and asked what would become of the Empire if all Romans were to behave like the Christians. His bitter attack was clear evidence that the Church was still maintaining a high degree of faithfulness to its original understanding and commitment to the teachings and example of Jesus. Nevertheless, cracks were beginning to appear in the wall and by around 180 AD we find the first reference to Christians being in the Roman army.

The Third Century Church (200-300 AD)

The third century saw the Church publicly respond to the criticisms levelled against it by Celsus and others, and as pressure to compromise mounted, a renewed effort was made to find ways to be in the world but not of it. Detailed lists were drawn up by Church leaders like Hippolytus of Rome stating exactly which vocations and activities Christians could participate in and which they could not. At the top of these lists were all vocations and activities having to do with idol-making and the practice of idolatry, as well as all vocations and activities which involved the shedding of human blood. The latter included soldiers since soldiers were required to kill, judges or magistrates since ordering torture and executions were regular functions of that office, and high state officials since these officials oversaw numerous activities that were either idolatrous, immoral or involved the taking of human life. Two prominent Church Fathers during this time were Ori-

gen and Tertullian, both of whom strongly defended the Church's right to pursue a way of life which was in obedience to Christ. In responding to Celsus, Origen argued that Christians contribute to the welfare of society in many alternative positive ways without involving them in sin. Tertullian recognized and encouraged Christians' involvement in numerous areas in society including agriculture, many trades and in commerce, but made an impassioned plea for them to avoid all things touching idolatry and the shedding of blood.

As far as respecting ruling authorities and being subject to them, the Church had always understood Paul's statement in Romans 13:1-8 to mean that all state authorities were appointed by God in order to restrain evil and reward good and were given the power of the sword to do so. And while the State was considered to be part of the sinful world and outside of the new life in Christ, Christians nevertheless saw it as their duty to God to respect all rulers and be subject to them, that is, so long as this did not require them to violate the commands of Christ. As such, the Church's involvement in society continued to be one of *partial participation* as permitted by the teachings and example of Jesus.

During the final decades of the century the majority of Christians were still of a similar mindset as that of Hippolytus, Origen, Tertullian and others. However, not all leaders and laypeople saw things this way, and an increasingly rapid accommodation to the world was taking place. One particular pressure on the Church to conform to society came in the form of persecution. In all, the Church experienced ten distinct persecutions in its first 300 years, some being more widespread than others, and some more brutal than others. While considerable numbers of resolute Christians gave up their lives and became martyrs for their faith, there were at the same time large numbers of Christians who apostasized under pressure, many of whom later sought re-admission into the Church. The question of their re-admission fragmented the Church even more than it already was, and put even more pressure on leaders to slacken Church discipline and conform to society.

By this time, and despite the persecutions, the Church had amassed considerable property and wealth, mainly through inheritances left by deceased Christians, and a large class of prosperous Christians was emerging as wealthy aristocratic families were increasingly accepting Christianity.

Thus, because of these and various other factors, by the end of the third century, significant numbers of Christians could be found in almost every vocation in society including high public office, the magistracy (being a judge), and the military. This steady drift away from the Church's original and long-held views by a growing number of Christians, set the stage for the great test which was about to come.

The Coming of Constantine — 312 AD

In the year 312 AD, the floodgates opened wide, and a fundamental transformation of the Church took place. What had begun and maintained itself for almost 300 years as a zealous, evangelistic, pacifistic, counter-culture religious community, which participated only partially in society where permitted by the commands of Jesus, now refashioned itself from top to bottom into a full-blown State religion of the Empire. Almost overnight, the institutional Church became a full and active partner with the State and changed its stance toward society from that of *partial participation* to that of *total participation*.

The catalyst for this monumental change was the new Roman Emperor Constantine who had just become a Christian. Crucial to his conversion was a vision, a dream and a battle. Prior to 312 AD Rome had been labouring under the heavy rule of the tyrant Maxentius, and Constantine who was stationed in Britain, decided to march on Rome and remove him. On the day before the crucial battle just outside of Rome, Constantine claimed to have seen a vision in the sky in the form of a cross with an inscription on it which read BY THIS SIGN CONQUER. He further claimed that that night in a dream Jesus Christ appeared to him and instructed him to mark himself and his soldiers with this sign of the cross and it would be a protection and would bring them victory over their enemies. Constantine obeyed the dream, and the next day he thoroughly defeated Maxentius in an unusual battle which was immediately proclaimed as a divine intervention by God. As part of the victory celebrations Maxentius' head was cut off and stuck on a lance and carried throughout the city.

Constantine converted and embraced the Church, and the Church, which had recently suffered its longest and most brutal persecution yet, thoroughly embraced him back. The Church was delighted as Christians were appointed to the very highest levels of government, became his closest personal advisors, and were placed in the highest ranks in the military. Portable chapels complete with priests and bishops were now found on all battlefields and Constantine never tired of attributing his many victories to the "Christian God." Over time, Constantine made Christianity the favoured religion of the Empire, and eventually it became the official religion of the State, displacing Rome's ancient Paganism from this role.

As the institutional Church took up its new role as partner with the State and began to exercise all the power and privilege that came with this role, gone was the evangelistic fervour which had animated it all these years. Replacing it were mass conversions of conquered peoples forced at the end of a sword, a practice begun by Constantine and continued throughout many centuries. As well, a dramatic increase in infant baptisms added to the numbers. And while not a single record exists of Christians being in the Roman army prior to 180 AD, less than a century after Constantine, every Roman soldier was required by law to be a Christian.* The Church had indeed undergone a profound and fundamental change.

The re-making of Jesus Christ

For our purposes here, the most crucial aspect of our discussion of Constantine is his dream, or more specifically, its theological implications and the Church's acceptance of these implications, two things which were nothing short of monumental. This dream resulted in the complete re-making and re-imagining of Jesus Christ into someone very different from who He is portrayed as in the New Testament.

Constantine's dream took the Jesus of the New Testament, the One who said "Love your enemies," and "My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my followers would fight;" the One who refused to be made King by the people; the One who told Peter to put away his sword and warned that "All who take up the sword will die by the sword" and then healed the servant's ear; the One who rebuked James and John for wanting to call down fire on the Samaritans; the One who commanded non-resistance to evil, turning the other cheek, and a host of other non-violent love-centred admonitions toward enemies and adversaries; the One whose followers understood and obeyed these commands to the letter for almost three centuries — in short, Constantine's dream took this Jesus of the New Testament and transformed Him into a violent, military god of war, and made Him the official god and supreme king of the Roman Empire.

As well, his dream took the Cross of Calvary, the ultimate symbol of the Saviour's humble submission to God out of the love of mankind, even unto death, and transformed it into a magic talisman which would secure Rome's military conquests over her enemies. In keeping with his own distorted view of Jesus and His Cross, Constantine fashioned a helmet for himself and a bit for his horse's mouth out of nails presented to him by his mother Helena, who claimed that these were the very nails which had fastened Jesus to the Cross! It doesn't matter whether these were the actual nails used to crucify Jesus (a preposterous claim in itself), but that Constantine said they were and that the Church readily accepted that as fact — along with all the sweeping theological implications which such a claim implied: that Jesus is a god of carnal warfare and the Cross is a symbol of killing real flesh-and-blood enemies.

In one stroke, Constantine's dream gave Jesus a complete make-over. It took the humble, non-violent, enemy-loving Jesus of the New Testament and transformed Him into Jesus, the god of war, whose purpose was to protect the Roman Empire and its legions from its enemies, and to assist the expansion of the Empire across the inhabited world, and along with it, the dominion of the Church. This, then, was the monstrous lie that Constantine's dream presented to the Church. The Church for its part, tired of being powerless and persecuted, tied its fortunes to the State and happily accepted it. But if this really was the real Jesus who appeared to Constantine as a military god of war, promising victory in battle and offering His Cross as a symbol of conquest and the killing of enemies, then we

should have no difficulty picturing Jesus Himself marching at the head of Constantine's victory parade into Rome holding up Maxentius' head on a lance! Yet, who can even begin to imagine such a thing?

The Third Temptation and the Church

Over the centuries many sceptics have viewed Constantine as little more than a power-hungry opportunist who conveniently fabricated these stories for his own political ends. However, the historical documents do not support such an easy dismissal of this man or his claims. After carefully reading a recent book by a leading expert in the field, Professor Michael Grant formerly of Cambridge University, as well as reading other works on Constantine, I believe that Grant is correct in concluding that Constantine did have some kind of authentic spiritual dream-like experience, and that he was completely convinced that it was Jesus Christ who had appeared to him in that dream. Like Grant, I do not believe that Constantine was a liar, a charlatan, or simply a political opportunist who exploited the Church solely for his own ends, although there seems to have been some of that going on. Rather, I believe that Constantine was a man who was genuinely and thoroughly deceived by our ancient foe, Satan, who presented him with a false image of Jesus in that dream. As the Scripture says, "Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14)." Then, after deceiving Constantine, Satan used him and the prevailing circumstances to deceive the Church, which has largely remained so ever since.

Thus, in a very real sense, when the Church accepted, worshipped and served this false image of Jesus — an idol promising the Church power and authority over nations and peoples through its partnership with Rome — it was actually worshipping and serving Satan without ever even knowing it. And so, through Constantine, Satan presented the Church with the third temptation of Jesus, and tragically, both for herself and for the world, she failed the test and *Christian Nationalism* was born.

So enamoured was the Church by the Emperor's many successes against his enemies and his benevolence to the Church, and so deceived was she by the false image of Jesus which Satan was promoting through the Emperor, that many Christians believed they were seeing the dawning of the age of universal peace in fulfillment of ancient Biblical prophecy. No one articulated this vision more enthusiastically than Eusebius Pamphilius, theologian, bishop, advisor to the Emperor, and the leading Church historian of the day. In a speech commemorating Constantine's 30th year of rule, Eusebius spoke of how God had raised up the Roman Empire under Constantine and the Christian religion, and had empowered these two forces to work together to defeat Paganism, which in his view was the root of all wars, strife and hatred plaguing the nations, and to establish universal peace in the world. In his speech, entitled *In Praise of Constantine*, Eusebius

says:

By the express appointment of the same God, two roots of blessing, the Roman Empire, and the Christian religion, sprang up together for the benefit of men.... These two mighty powers... have subdued and reconciled all these contending elements [warring tribes and nations]. Our Saviour's mighty power destroyed at once the many governments and the many gods of the powers of darkness.... while the Roman Empire... effected an easy conquest of those governments which still remained, its object being to unite all nations into one harmonious whole.... The endless strife and mutual hatred of nations is thus removed [by Roman conquest and Christianization]... and so the whole human race, is now subdued by the controlling power of peace and concord, and receives one another as brethren....

In short, many ancient oracles and predictions of the prophets have been fulfilled... especially those which speak as follows concerning the saving Word: 'He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth,' [Canadians take note], and ... 'They shall beat their swords into plough-shares....' These words predicted ages before in the Hebrew tongue, have been visibly fulfilled in our own day. (*Oration*, ch. XVI).

Eusebius and others believed that the Roman Empire had a special God-given destiny and purpose to fulfill, one which was linked directly to the Christian Church. This destiny was to take dominion over, Christianize, and establish world peace among the nations of the earth. So convinced were they of this "divine mission," that Old Testament prophecies such as those quoted above, and Constantine's many successes and achievements, were cited as evidence of God's favour and guiding hand working to bring this destiny to fulfillment for the good of mankind. Yet, less than 75 years after Constantine's death, and despite the fact that all future Emperors except one, were Christians — something which according to Eusebius' nationalistic-messianic theology should have pleased God — God's favour seemed to soon evaporate. Rome was sacked in 410 AD, and less than a generation later, the entire Western Empire was conquered.

Despite Eusebius' folly in believing that God was using the Roman Empire and the Church to establish world peace, (rather than waiting for Jesus to do so when He returns), and despite the complete lack of Biblical evidence for the idea of specific God-given national destinies, other than Israel's, Christians throughout history have repeatedly embraced this idea, often with disastrous results. Whenever the Church falls into this kind of Christian Nationalism, it invariably ends up believing that God has given the nation in which it finds itself a specific national destiny to fulfill — a divine purpose to accomplish on His behalf. There have been many examples of this over the course of the last 1,700 years, Russian Messianism, British Imperialism and America's *Manifest Destiny* being among them. Unfortunately, an alarming re-emergence of this phenomenon is taking place in

our day.

What then should have been the Church's response to Constantine and to the many good changes which he did bring to Rome and the rest of the Empire? It should have been something like this: The Church should have thanked God and thanked Constantine for all the good and just things he did, which were, after all, his responsibility as a ruler accountable to God (Romans 13). However, at the same time, the Church should have issued a clear, public statement, which respectfully, but strongly refuted and rejected Constantine's claims regarding Jesus as a god of war and His Cross as a symbol of military conquest. The Church should have made it clear that Constantine's representation of Jesus and His Cross were not correct when judged by the standard of the New Testament revelation. As well, the Church should have repented for its own apostasy, nationalism and worldliness, and returned to its long-held stance toward society of *partial participation*, that is, of being in the world but not of it, as mandated by Jesus Himself. Tragically, the heavily-compromised institutional Church of the day could not have easily done so, because by this time in her evolution, she herself had already nurtured and embraced this false image of Jesus. Constantine did not have to force or impose his views on the institutional Church; instead he found a willing and receptive partner.

Formalizing the Deception into Official Church Doctrine

While it was Constantine who first introduced Jesus as a god of war to both the Church and the world, he himself did not make any serious attempt to theologially justify this new image of Jesus. He merely did what he did based on his dream and people accepted it. Yet, a huge theological problem remained. It was this: how does one reconcile this new image of Jesus as a god of war, and by extension, Christians in war, with the Jesus of the New Testament Scriptures? Put in more simple and practical terms the question was: how can a Christian love his enemy and kill him at the same time? The task of addressing this crucial problem was taken up a century later by Augustine the Bishop of Hippo.

Augustine, like Martin Luther and John Calvin after him, and like many Christian leaders since, was a classic example of why we should have no heroes but Jesus. While Augustine did write many wonderful things about the Lord and the Christian faith, some of which still inspire believers today, he was not perfect by any means. In addition to the good things he gave the Church, tragically, some of his writings, especially his political writings on Church-State relations and on the treatment of heretics, unleashed a torrent of Church-sponsored violence, persecution, torture and warfare which would last for more than a millennium. His political writings still have a profound influence on most of the Church today. In reference to these writings, renown Church historian, Paul Johnson, calls Augustine

“the dark genius of imperial Christianity, the architect of the Church-State alliance.” Next to the Apostle Paul, writes Johnson, Augustine did more to shape Christianity than any other human being and was the favourite Church Father for over a 1000 years. Such is the import and impact of this one man on the life of the Church for both Catholics and Protestants.

While the deception we have been considering was first brought into the Church through Constantine, it was Augustine who actually formalized it and made it part of the official teachings of the Church. By becoming part of the Church’s accepted doctrine, it was automatically passed on from generation to generation up to the present day. It is important to realize that during the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, while the Reformers discarded many teachings of the Catholic Church, the political writings of Augustine they kept.

Augustine formalized the Constantinian revolution — and the deception which underpinned it — into official Church doctrine by doing five things.

First: He legitimated the Church-State alliance created by Constantine and gave the Church a new mandate.

Augustine rejected outright the Early Church’s vision of the Church as a counter-culture community living within society. Christianity, he insisted, was not counter society — it was society. He saw the Church and State working together in a close, mutually-dependent partnership where the Church’s role was to teach, transform and Christianize society from top to bottom, while the State’s role was to maintain justice and order while protecting the Church and promoting its mission. All human relationships, all activities, and all of society’s institutions were to be regulated, transformed and made “Christian” through the moral and spiritual guidance of the institutional Church and its Christian leaders, whose duty is was to teach everyone from slaves to kings. Addressing the Church on this issue, Augustine wrote:

It is you [the Church], who make wives subject to their husbands... you set husbands over their wives.... You teach slaves to be loyal to their masters, and masters to be more inclined to persuade than to punish. You link citizen to citizen, nation to nation... You teach kings to rule for the benefit of the people, and warn the peoples to be subservient to their kings. (P. Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, p. 115).

Johnson summarizes Augustine’s vision this way:

Led by the elect, the Church’s duty was to transform, absorb and perfect all existing bonds of human relations, all activities and institutions, to regularize and codify and elevate every aspect of life. Here was the germ of the medieval idea of a total Christian society, with the church permeating everything.... But the idea of a total Christian society necessarily included the idea of a compulsory society. People could not

chose to belong or not to belong. (P. Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, p. 115).

Thus, in a desire to create a “Christian” society, Augustine consecrated the Constantinian marriage of Church and State and radically altered the Church’s mandate in the process. For the first three centuries the Church’s mandate had always been to call lost sinners *out* of a fallen world and *into* the Kingdom of God and the community of the redeemed. Its very name — *ekleisia* — described the Church as the “called out (ek) community.” However, now, according to Augustine, the Church’s mandate was to preside over and rule over society in partnership with the State for the purpose of transforming it into a “Christian” society, and ultimately creating a “Christian” world.

Second: He said that Christians should serve the State in all areas, and that wherever they do serve, it is their duty to God to obey the State completely.

Along with rejecting the Early Church’s vision of itself as a counter-culture community within society, Augustine also rejected its stance of *partial participation* in society. Instead, he insisted that a Christian’s duty to his fellow man and to the State required *total participation* in all areas of society. This meant that there was no job that Christians could not do, no function they could not perform, and no office they could not hold. Furthermore, in whatever station they did serve the State, it was their duty to obey the authorities fully, since obedience to the ruling authorities is the will of God according to Paul in Romans 13. By this teaching, Augustine elevated a Christian’s duty to serve the State above his duty to obey the words and example of Jesus. In doing this, he effectively gave all Christians who were serving the State an exemption from our Lord’s example and many of His commands.

For instance, in his main political work, *City of God*, Augustine discusses a common situation faced by judges — State-mandated judicial torture. Judges in the Roman Empire were required to routinely use torture to extract confessions from both accused persons and witnesses. Admitting that several ethical dilemmas arise from the practice of judicial torture, and admitting that recipients of these practices “very often die under torture or as a result of torture,” Augustine nevertheless asks whether “our wise man” (by which he meant Christians), “will take his seat on the judge’s bench?” Without hesitation Augustine answers in the affirmative: “Obviously, he will sit; for the claims of human society constrain him and draw him to do his duty; and it is unthinkable to him that he should shirk it (*City of God*, XIX, Chap. 6).” Thus Augustine, being heavily committed to his model of a Church-State partnership and to his vision of transforming and Christianizing society, had no difficulty elevating the Christian’s loyalty to civic duty above his obedience to Christ. Yet, who can picture Jesus or any of the Apostles torturing anyone for any reason under any circumstance? Thus, while the Early Church

Fathers clearly understood the meaning and intent of Jesus' teachings, and because of this forbade Christians to sit as judges, Augustine, being determined to create a Christian society, encouraged the exact opposite.

The truth is that Jesus never made any exceptions nor gave any exemptions to His teachings and example under any circumstances. He never once said, "Obey My commands unless you happen to be serving Caesar." He said: "If you love Me you will obey My commands," and "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's." Jesus clearly taught that Christians were to be in the world but not of it, and that in all circumstances and at all times they were to obey His commands and follow His example. In others words, Jesus taught that *partial participation* in society was the only permissible way of life for the Church. The teaching of the rest of the New Testament was the same, and for almost 300 years the Early Church held tenaciously to that position.

Third: He split the Christian's life into two separate parts, each governed by a different standard of ethical behaviour.

It is here that we find the very core of the deception we have been considering in this paper. Because Augustine had allied the Church with the State, and because the State engages in war and other violent acts, he was forced by necessity to justify a Christian's participation in warfare and violence. To do this he did two things. First, he split the Christian's life into two separate parts — his personal private life, and his public corporate life as a citizen of the State. And second, he developed a new theory of morality which justified a Christian's use of violence when acting on behalf the State (in his corporate life), as was the case with high government officials, magistrates and soldiers.

The crux of his new morality was the clear distinction he made between a Christian's inward intentions and his outward actions. Augustine argued that what is important is not so much what a person does outwardly, but rather, what he is thinking inwardly in his heart as he is doing it. His inner intentions are the main thing, he insisted. Heavily inspired by the Old Testament, Augustine argued that whenever a soldier acting on behalf of the State, in a just cause, kills an evil-doer or an enemy of the State, so long as his heart-attitude is right, that is, so long as he is not acting from revenge or pleasure, then this is really *an act of love*. The same is true for judges and all others representing the State. For Augustine, Jesus' command to "turn the other cheek" was not to be taken literally, but rather, it referred to the inward disposition and intentions of the heart and not outward deeds. As long as someone was "turning the other cheek" in one's heart, that is, cultivating a proper heart-attitude toward an evil-doer or enemy of the State, then it was not a sin to kill him on behalf of the State. Thus, with this reasoning, Christian soldiers could now "legitimately" kill their enemies as an act of love for them.

Cambridge Church Historian Frederick Russell, summarized Augustine's argument this way: "The spirituality of the Sermon on the Mount that had induced earlier Christians to renounce war, *now justified it.*" According to Russell and others, Augustine so twisted Jesus' words, that in the end, they said the exact opposite of what Jesus had intended and what the Early Church knew these words meant. In the 1,600 years which have followed, this bizarre argument of Augustine's — that you can kill your enemy out of Christian love for him — has been pressed into service countless times by Christians in order to justify some of the most barbarous acts imaginable. Martin Luther, for example, incited German princes to slay uprising peasants resulting in more than 100,000 deaths. Justifying the action he wrote:

Let everyone, as he is able, strike, hew, stab, and slay, as though among mad dogs... these peasants.... beyond all doubt, these are precious works of mercy, love and kindness... (*Luther, Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants*).

Along with compartmentalizing the Christian's life in two separate parts and developing a new moral theology for the corporate part, Augustine was also obliged to formulate a set of philosophical principles to determine whether a war was "just" or not. He did this by updating and "Christianizing" earlier versions of just war theories proposed by Cicero and other Roman and Greek thinkers. In creating his own just war theory, which is still essentially the standard today, Augustine not only "legitimated" Christian participation in warfare, but he also consigned the Church to the role of final arbiter of the "justness" of all future wars. Obviously, if one writes a rulebook on a subject matter, one offers himself as an authority on that subject. And so it turned out. Despite Jesus' refusal to arbitrate between two brothers arguing over an inheritance (Luke 12:14), or Paul's refusal to judge those outside the Church (1 Cor. 5:12), Augustine took it upon himself to write the definition for just wars for the entire world. Russell in his book *Just War Theory in the Middle Ages*, points out that while the just war theory of the Church underwent several modifications in the thousand years after Augustine, the actual question of the morality of war itself never went back to the words of Jesus. In the Church's mind, because Augustine had forever settled the question of how a Christian could love his enemy and kill him too, all future inquiry went back only to Augustine's words — not to what Jesus had commanded or modelled.

As could well be expected, Europe's subsequent history was filled with endless examples of so-called "Christian" nations slaughtering each other, with all sides claiming that their cause was just, and with the Church typically found in the middle of it all. Yet, who can picture Jesus on a medieval battlefield with a sword and lance in hand fighting a "just war," or in more recent times, flying a B-52 bomber and dropping napalm on villages in defence of a "just cause?"

Fourth: He spiritualized and reinterpreted many of the words and actions of Jesus to make Him appear to approve of war and other acts of violence.

Augustine justified the use of violence and involvement in warfare primarily by appealing to the Old Testament Scriptures. However, this left him with the problem of reconciling violence and warfare with the words and example of the meek, non-violent, enemy-loving Jesus portrayed in the New Testament. His basic approach to resolving this problem was to say that many of the commands of Jesus, especially those in the Sermon on the Mount, were not to be taken literally. He freely spiritualized and reinterpreted the problematic words and actions of Jesus that did not support his theories, so that in the end, Jesus was portrayed as essentially the same violent god of war whom Constantine claimed to have seen in his dream.

His handling of the command to “turn the other cheek,” as we have seen, was just one of many such examples. Augustine argued that if we “consider ourselves under bondage to the literal interpretation” of these words, we must realize that “these precepts pertain rather to the inward disposition of the heart than to the actions which are done in the sight of men.” To further drive home his point, he claimed that even Jesus Himself did not literally follow His own words. He wrote:

The Lord Jesus Himself, our perfect example of patience, when He was smitten on the face, answered: ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if not, why smitest thou me?’ If we look only to the words, He did not in this obey His own precept, for He did not present the other side of his face to him who had smitten Him but, on the contrary, prevented him who had done the wrong from adding thereto (*Letters*, CXXXVIII, 12, *Early Church Fathers*, Vol. 10).

This extraordinary claim by Augustine — that Jesus Himself did not literally turn the other cheek, but actually defended Himself from further abuse — flies in the face of the Apostle Peter’s own words about the matter when he wrote: “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats” (1 Pet. 2:23). Here we get a clear view of Augustine’s two-step approach to twisting Scripture: First, he spiritualized and reinterpreted the words of Jesus. And then, he presented an example which in his mind proved the point. However, Jesus was not verbally defending Himself as Augustine claimed, nor was he trying to prevent further abuse to Himself. Rather, He was publicly establishing His own sinlessness and innocence, as Peter clearly pointed out by quoting Isaiah’s words: “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth (1 Pet. 2:22).” Furthermore, Peter made it clear that the Lord’s example of patient, non-retaliatory endurance (i.e. turning the other cheek) during this wrongfully-inflicted suffering, is the example we are to follow.

But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that

you should follow in his steps (1 Pet. 2:20-21).

Augustine used this same two-step approach to Scripture twisting in order to justify Church-sponsored, State-inflicted persecution against heretics in order to force them to repent and return to the one true Church. First, he took Scripture and reinterpreted it to give it a whole new meaning, which in this case, was that the persecution of heretics is right and good. His favourite New Testament reference for this purpose was “compel them to come in.” Augustine lifted these five little words out of their original Biblical context from the parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14, and made them into the cornerstone of his doctrine of persecution. Christian dissidents, he insisted, should to be “compelled” by force to return to the fold. Yet, this is not in any way what this parable in Luke is about. Next, Augustine came up with an example of where Jesus Himself allegedly proves the point. Here, Augustine argued that Jesus struck Paul (Saul) with great violence on the road to Damascus, knocking him to the ground and blinding him, thereby forcing him into repentance and right belief. In responding to a Christian brother who had apparently expressed some concern about this teaching, Augustine replied:

My dearly beloved brother... You are of the opinion that no one should be compelled to follow righteousness; and yet you have read that the householder said to his servants, ‘Whomsoever you find, compel them to come in.’ You also read how he who was at first Saul, and afterwards Paul, was compelled, by the great violence with which Christ coerced him, to know and embrace the truth... (*Letters*, XCIII, 5, *Early Church Fathers*, Vol. 10).

Over and over Augustine used the argument that if Jesus used force on Paul to compel him to repent of his error and accept the truth, then “Why, therefore, should the Church not use force to compel her lost sons to return?” Ironically, the very experience on the Damascus Road which motivated Paul to stop persecuting, caused Augustine to start. Augustine added many other Old and New Testament Scriptures to this core argument (e.g. Elijah slaying the prophets of Baal, Paul handing the sinner over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh), and in so doing created a complex doctrine of religious persecution which was so “logical” and expedient for the Church and the State, that it was used for the next 1,400 years. Although Augustine himself did not advocate the actual killing of heretics, but only imprisonment, confiscation of property and “beating with rods,” the examples, tone and intent of his teachings guaranteed that torture and killing would be the logical outcomes, which they soon were. In the early 400s AD, we find Augustine in correspondence with Paul Orosius, a ferocious heresy-hunter from Spain, where both Church-sponsored pogroms against Jews and the torture and killing of Christian heretics were now in full swing under his control. This correspondence has no hint of reproach for these activities.

As it turned out, Augustine's "defences" were used by the Church to justify the countless inquisitions and persecutions which occurred throughout subsequent Church history in which hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of innocent people lost their lives in the most sadistic and horrible ways imaginable. The Inquisition is one of the darkest stains in all of Church history, and Augustine's twisted arguments formed the foundation on which it rested. The last country in Europe to abolish the Inquisition was Spain in 1830.

By accepting Augustine's outrageous claim about the Church's right to persecute dissenters (a claim which stood in direct opposition to the words and example of Jesus), and by accepting his distorted Scriptural arguments supporting that claim, the institutional Church took its final and most tragic step in a century-long process of self-transformation which had begun with the Emperor Constantine. Johnson names one of his book chapters after this process: "From Martyrs to Inquisitors." These riveting words capture the essence and depth of the tragedy which had taken place. In less than one hundred years, the Church had changed itself from having been "the persecuted" to having become "the persecutors".

To summarize, by freely spiritualizing and reinterpreting the words and actions of Jesus, and other New Testament writers, Augustine portrayed Jesus as supporting violence, warfare, and religious persecution. In short, the Jesus whom Augustine presented to the Church was very much like the Jesus Constantine claimed to have seen in his dream — a violent, military god of war. C. Windass, in his book *Christianity versus Violence*, concludes that for Augustine's theories to be compatible with the New Testament, the commands of Jesus must be "put in brackets" such that the literal meaning of the Sermon on the Mount is no longer applicable.

Fifth: He spiritualized Revelation 20:1-7 so that the Church was seen as ruling with Christ now, in this present age.

Revelation 20:1-7 outlines a series of events which will take place at the end of this age when Jesus returns. These events include the following: 1. Satan will be bound and cast into the Abyss for a thousand years. 2. The Christians who die during the great tribulation at the end of the age will be raised back to life in the first resurrection. 3. These resurrected saints will rule and reign with Christ (presumably over the nations) for the thousand years.

As with so many other Biblical passages, Augustine freely spiritualized and reinterpreted this one as well. First, the 1000-year period referred to in the text was not to be understood as a literal one thousand years. Next, he said that this period would not begin at some time in the future, but rather, it had already begun with Christ's first coming and would end with His second coming. Thus,

according to Augustine, we are now presently living in the 1000-year period of Rev. 20 and will continue to live in it until Jesus comes again.

Thirdly, he said that the “first resurrection” referred to in the text is not to be taken literally as an actual bodily resurrection, rather, it is to be understood as a spiritual resurrection. In fact, it refers to the new life in Christ which every Christian believer experiences as he passes from spiritual death to spiritual life through regeneration and baptism (the born again experience) Thus, for Augustine, the first resurrection is happening right now, in every generation during this present age. Consequently we ourselves are included among the resurrected saints of Rev. 20.

Finally, Augustine spiritualized the term “Abyss”. Instead of referring to the place into which Satan will be cast while bound for the thousand year period, Augustine claimed it refers to “the countless multitude of wicked people whose hearts are hateful toward the Church of God.” For him, this explained how Satan could be “bound” at the present time, and yet still be very active on the earth. (*City of God*, XX, Chap. 7, 9).

The net result of Augustine’s spiritualized re-interpretation of this passage is that the Church is considered to be ruling and reigning with Christ *now*, in this present age, as opposed to reigning at that time in the future after Jesus’ return. The concept of *present-age ruling* was crucial to Augustine’s Church-State political theories, making possible his vision of the Church as actively presiding over, teaching and transforming society into “Christian” nations, and ultimately producing a “Christian” world. If one believes that God intends for the Church to be reigning with Christ now, in this age, then one might be sorely tempted to justify the use of coercion, force and even violence to assist the Church in exercising her “God-given” duty. This, in fact, is exactly what has happened many times in history since the days of Augustine, often with much bloodshed. If, however, Rev. 20 is not spiritualised, but rather taken at face value, then we must conclude that the Church will not reign with Christ until He returns in the future. This interpretation is an effective deterrent against the Church’s constant temptation to seek or exercise political power in this present age.

As a final note we need to say a few words in response to Augustine’s spiritualization of this passage. 1. While it is true that we cannot know whether the 1000-year period refers to an actual thousand years or not, nonetheless, Augustine had no Biblical justification for claiming that this period began with Christ’s first coming and will end with His return. This was a completely arbitrary interpretation on his part. 2. To interpret the term “abyss,” the place into which Satan will be cast, as the wicked multitude on earth, is also a completely arbitrary interpretation, especially in light of the fact that Luke 8:31 and Rev. 9:1-3 speak clearly about a place called the abyss. 3. To equate the first resurrection of Rev. 20 with the

born again experience of present-age believers is also completely arbitrary, especially since these resurrected saints are clearly specified as martyrs of the last great persecution. Yet, despite these and other problems with this view, Augustine's interpretation, called *amillennialism*, remains popular today.

The Protestant Reformation

This then was a brief overview of Augustine's teaching on Church-State co-existence. With this theology, the Church was able to take up into itself the aspirations, activities and agendas of the State, which in turn supported and promoted the aspirations, activities and agendas of the Church. With his theology and political theory, Augustine formalized into official Church doctrine the Christian Nationalism which had come into being through Constantine, and with it the deception which underpinned it. Once formed into doctrine these were passed on through the centuries. And as we have previously stated, while the Protestant Reformers in the 1500s discarded many of the teachings of the Catholic Church, the political writings of Augustine, which included this deception, they kept. Indeed, so popular were Augustine's teachings on Church-State relations that they have remained essentially the norm to this day for both the Catholic Church and almost all the Protestant Churches in the world.

Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, and Ulrich Zwingli, the founder of the Reformed Church were not Augustinian originally. In the earliest period of their labours as Reformers, they held many Early Church views and were advocates of the principles of non-violence and non-resistance. Luther, in 1520, in his booklet *Why the Pope's Books Have Been Burned*, gave many reasons for committing these books to the flames. His twenty-fourth reason was, "Because the pope teaches that it is right for a Christian to meet violence with violence, contrary to Christ's teaching." Zwingli wrote in 1522, "Considered from the Christian point of view, it is by no means right to have a part in war. According to Christ's teaching we should pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us, and if the aggressor smite us on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Each man wrote these things before he consented to the compromise of a union between Church and State and the establishment of all-inclusive State churches. After their change of mind, their attitudes and behaviours were very different. Luther, in complete disregard of the words of Jesus, incited severe violence against peasants, Anabaptists and Jews, while Zwingli died on the battlefield of Kappel in 1531 with a gun in his hand.

John Calvin, a later leader of the Reformed Church, adopted similar Augustinian views on Church and State as those of Luther and Zwingli. Seeking to put them into practice, he established a quasi theocracy in the city of Geneva making the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, the foundation for civil law, with

severe penalties for all transgressors. Under his leadership over fifty people were executed for violations. (Interestingly, a similar attempt to set up a theocratic-style government based on the Old Testament, was made by the Puritans in early America, and with similarly tragic results. After twenty innocent people had been executed, most having been burned at the stake on the charge of witchcraft, the whole idea was abandoned).

Returning to Luther: In order to make the Church an effective partner with the State, he developed and defended a peculiar view regarding Christians and violence which continues to be held by many Protestant theologians today. He taught that a Christian individual is to be strictly non-resistant to evil and cannot have any part in violence and bloodshed, be it in self-defence or war. That is, no one can do so *as a Christian*. However, a Christian, he said, is also a “world person,” or a citizen of the State, and as such *he is under duty* to use violence in the service of the government, as a magistrate, an officer, or a soldier. When in such capacities he acts contrary to the precepts and example of Christ, it is not a sin to him, but is his duty. He does this not as a Christian, but as a citizen of the State. Thus, Luther divided up the Christian into two distinct personalities, the citizen and the Christian, the duty of the one often being the opposite to that of the other. According to Luther, when a Christian is acting as a citizen of the State, he is exempt from the example of Jesus and from many of His commands.

But Jesus never once said that we were “world persons” as Luther maintained. Rather, He said that we were in the world, but not of it, and He called us to live in the Kingdom of God and not the kingdom of the world. Furthermore, Jesus never gave us even a single exemption to His commands or His example. He never once gave us permission to kill or use violence against anyone on behalf of the State, or for any other reason under any circumstances. And He certainly never said that it was our *duty* to do so, as Luther insisted.

Luther, like Augustine, split up the Christian’s life into two distinct and separate parts. This compartmentalisation allowed Luther to believe that he could live by two vastly different standards of righteousness at the same time, all the while thinking he was doing God’s will. With Luther, the chasm between these two standards of righteousness was immense, and herein lay the power of the deception. The same man who prayed to God two to three hours every day and who wrote wonderful, inspiring devotional material, also wrote the most vicious, blood-chilling, indeed, murderous diatribes against peasants, Anabaptists and especially Jews. After reading Luther’s *Preface to the Letter to the Romans* and his book *On the Jews and Their Lies*, one simply cannot believe they were authored by the same person. Yet, they were. In 1543, Luther wrote the following advice to the Princes and Lords of Germany regarding how they should treat the Jews under their control. Keep in mind that he wrote these words not as a hot-headed novice preacher who was still working out his practical theology, but rather, as a mature Christian leader

who was well into his ministry.

They [the Jews] have been blood thirsty bloodhounds and murderers of all Christendom for more than fourteen hundred years in their intentions, and would undoubtedly prefer to be such with their deeds. Thus they have been accused of poisoning water and wells, of kidnapping children, of piercing them through with an awl, of hacking them in pieces, and in that way secretly cooling their wrath with the blood of Christians, for all of which they have often been condemned to death by fire....[Here Luther appears to be approving of the past burning of Jews].

What then shall we Christians do with this rejected and condemned people, the Jews? Since they live among us, we dare not tolerate their conduct, now that we are aware of their lying and reviling and blaspheming. If we do, we become sharers in their lies, cursing and blasphemy. Thus we cannot extinguish the unquenchable fire of divine wrath, of which the prophets speak, nor can we convert the Jews. With prayer and the fear of God *we must practice a sharp mercy* to see whether we might save at least a few from the glowing flames....

I shall give you then my sincere advice: First, set fire to their synagogues and schools and bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians... In Deuteronomy 13:12 ff. Moses writes that any city that is given to idolatry shall be totally destroyed by fire, and nothing of it shall be preserved. If he were alive today, he would be the first to set fire to the synagogues and houses of the Jews.... Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed, for they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues.... Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them. Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth, *on pain of death* and loss of limb (*On the Jews and Their Lies*, pp. 263, 267-68).

Consider this: these horrendous words were written by the same man whom God used to rediscover the simple truth of the Gospel and to lead the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Luther's positive impact was immense. None less than John Wesley had a life-changing experience of the Holy Spirit simply by listening to Luther's preface to Romans. How, we ask, could such blessing and life, and at the same time, such cursing and death come from the same heart? The answer is this: such a thing can only happen when we split up our lives into two separate parts and make Jesus the King of one part, but not the King of the other. This is the deception which has plagued the Church since the days of Constantine and Augustine, and Martin Luther was no exception.

Tragically, Luther's deadly words against the Jews were taken up and used to great affect by Adolf Hitler and his Nazis prior to and during World War II and the Holocaust. Four hundred years after being penned, these words reaped their

bitter harvest as millions of German Christians were led astray by them.

The Radical Reformation

While it is outside of the scope of this paper to discuss the events of the *Radical Reformation*, we need to say at least a few words about it. At the same time as Luther and Zwingli were leading the “mainline” Protestant Reformation, which gave rise to the Lutheran and Reformed Churches, a much smaller group of church fellowships known as the Anabaptists was emerging. These churches, which included groups such as the Swiss Brethren, the Mennonites, the Hutterites, and later the Moravians, Quakers, and others, sought to model themselves strictly on the example of the New Testament Church. They used the words and example of Jesus as their final authority for faith and practice in all matters of life.

This “radical” approach to the Christian life (normal for the first 300 years of the Church), naturally placed them outside of mainstream Christianity in a number of ways, and limited their involvement in society to only *partial participation* based on the words and example of Christ. Among other things, they refused to be involved in any activity or vocation that would require them to violate the example or commands of Jesus. As a result, they did not hold high public office, sit as judges, or serve as soldiers. As well, they called for the complete separation of Church and State and refused to join State Churches; they refused to take oaths, including oaths in law courts or oaths of allegiance, (they simply let their yes be yes and their no, no); and, they would not use violence or take up arms for any reason under any circumstance.

As a result, they were often deeply hated and violently persecuted by the rest of the Church, and by governments who suspected their loyalty. Yet, they proved themselves to be loyal citizens throughout their history wherever they lived, up to and including today. Many Anabaptists were burned at the stake for their convictions or lost their lives in various other terrible ways at the instigation of both the Catholic Church and the newly-formed Protestant Churches. These churches of the *Radical Reformation* succeeded in recovering much of the authentic Christian way of life of the Early Church, and have tried to maintain this perspective over the 500 years since. Unfortunately, a zeal for evangelism has been largely lost.

Still with us Today

It is important to realize that while few Christians today, if any at all, would call for a Crusade, an Inquisition, or use the kind of hate-filled words which Luther used against the Jews, the basic Church-State theology initiated by Constantine and formalized into Church doctrine by Augustine, is still held by 95 percent or more of Christians today. For example, in 1987, former Whitehouse Presidential

Assistant Charles Colson, wrote *Kingdoms in Conflict*, which is a good example of a modern-day re-statement and re-affirmation of Augustine's teachings on Church and State. So are the writings of Francis Schaffer and a host of others. Dominion Theology, Reconstructionism, the Moral Majority-type ministries, and countless ministries using 2 Chronicles 7:14 as a foundational theme, are also based on the Constantinian-Augustinian model of Church and State. The fact that Augustinianism is still the prevailing theology in the Church today means that all the theological and political implications of Jesus as a violent, military god of war, and the Cross as a symbol of conquest and killing, are still in effect today. We see different examples of this on an on-going basis.

A recent example was a televised visit to the Canadian military cemetery in Hong Kong by our Prime Minister and the Provincial Premiers in the Fall of 1999. As the camera panned the location it focused in on the main monument in the centre of the grounds. There, on a large inscribed concrete base stood a huge Christian cross made of concrete. Superimposed and fastened onto the cross was an almost equally huge warrior's sword. Thus, 1,700 years after Constantine's vision and dream, we are still joining together the Cross of Christ and the warrior's sword to send an unmistakable message — that Jesus is a god of war, indeed, Jesus is *our* god of war fighting for us and our cause. Once we are sensitized to the presence of this message and its symbols, we will begin seeing examples of them everywhere.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

One final case needs to be mentioned because it is so well-known and significant to our discussion. It has to do with the person of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a young German pastor and theologian who died at the hands of the Nazis for opposing Hitler during the closing days of the WWII. What makes Bonhoeffer's case significant is that he is considered by many people from many different theological stripes to be a true modern-day Christian martyr. However, in light of our discussion, is this really a justifiable designation? I have read most of Bonhoeffer's works and have found him, as have others, to have had a tremendous insight into the mind and ways of God and the human condition. There is no doubt that Bonhoeffer's works rank among the great contributions of our time. As well, his compassion for others, his gentleness of spirit, his deep prayer life, his genuine honesty and sheer strength of character, made him a truly remarkable person. Yet, the reason he was arrested and ultimately executed was not because of a refusal to disavow Christ, or any uniquely Christian conviction or practice, but rather, because of his involvement in the failed plot to blow up and assassinate Adolf Hitler.

How, we ask, does Dietrich Bonhoeffer's death differ from the death of any other combatant who was a Christian and died for using the means of warfare to oppose Hitler and the Germans? For ourselves, we can see no difference. And so,

to us it is not only incorrect, but also tragic, that the designation of Christian martyr should be applied to someone for his part in a planned act of violence with the intent to kill, no matter how beneficial one may believe the results would have been if successful.

To try to put this into some kind of New Testament perspective, let us imagine that just before King Herod tried to execute the Apostle James (which he did, see Acts 12:1-2), the disciples armed themselves and resisted. And let us imagine that in that process Thomas was killed and was immediately declared a martyr and then revered as such ever since. Or again, let us imagine that forty years later during the Roman invasion and destruction of Jerusalem, an event that was vicious and brutal beyond description, Christians took up arms and joined the fight, dying in the process, and being revered as Christian martyrs for centuries afterwards. It didn't happen. Yet, today we have held up Dietrich Bonhoeffer as the quintessential model Christian for this very reason. What does this say about our own understanding of Jesus, His words, and His example?

Interestingly Bonhoeffer did not always think this way. He, like Luther, Zwingli, and presumably many others before him, began his Christian life and ministry thinking very much along the lines of the Early Church. Only when the harsh realities of WWII put him to the test did he change his views. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship* published in 1937, two years before the war broke out, we get a clear picture of Bonhoeffer's views on many issues. In a nutshell, he believed that the authentic Christian life could only be found by living in complete and total obedience to the words and example of Jesus as presented in the New Testament. He thoroughly rejected all forms of violence for Christians, and openly challenged the Reformer's splitting up of the Christian life based on private life and public "duty." In his exegesis of the Sermon of the Mount he wrote:

The right way to requite evil, according to Jesus, is not to resist it. This saying of Christ [Matt. 5:38-41], removes the Church from the sphere of politics and law. The Church is not to be a national community like old Israel, but a community of believers without political or national ties. The old Israel had been both: it had been the chosen people of God *and* a national community, and it was therefore His will that they should meet force with force. But with the Church it is different: it has abandoned political and national status, and therefore it must patiently endure aggression....

The Reformers offered a decisively new interpretation of this passage and contributed a new idea of paramount importance. They distinguished between personal sufferings and those incurred by Christians in the performance of duty as bearers of an office ordained by God, maintaining that the precept of non-violence applies to the first but not the second. In the second case we are not only freed from obligation to eschew violence, *but if we want to act in a genuine spirit of love we must do the very opposite, and meet force with force in order to check the assault of evil.* It was along

these lines that the Reformers justified war and other lethal sanctions against evil. *But this distinction between person and office is wholly alien to the teaching of Jesus. He says nothing about that.* He addresses His disciples as men who have left all to follow him, and the precept of non-violence applies equally to private life and official duty. He is the Lord of all of life, and demands undivided allegiance (*The Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 141, 143, emphasis added).

The Lord alone knows the full extent of the inner struggle Bonhoeffer must have gone through during those difficult years to cause him to reject his own former convictions. Nonetheless, just a few years earlier, when he was free to consider the words and example of Jesus, and the witness of the Early Church, which he approvingly commented on in the book, he chose the plain, straightforward teachings of Jesus as the only way to live. And he consciously rejected the Constantinian-Augustinian model of Church and State along with the Reformers' acceptance of it.

We must realize that by calling Bonhoeffer a Christian martyr for his involvement in a violent action (it was for this that he was killed), we are saying a number of important things. We are saying that: 1. We reject the plain, straightforward meaning of the words of Jesus in the Sermon of the Mount and His example of non-violence and non-resistance. 2. We reject the model and witness of the Early Church in this regard. 3. We affirm the Constantinian-Augustinian model, and with it, we are declaring that Jesus is indeed a violent, military god of war, and that His Cross is a symbol of conquest and killing. When we call Bonhoeffer a Christian martyr rather than simply a combatant and a casualty of war we are saying all these things.

It is fitting to conclude this discussion with a comment from Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy, after having killed several men in war, after having lived a riotous life of gambling and carousing, after having written *War and Peace* and other great books, and after having become a world-famous author-celebrity, returned to the faith of his childhood and became a radical follower of Jesus. He insisted that only the words and example of Jesus mattered for anything, and that obedience to them was everything. This uncompromising stance ultimately led to his excommunication from the Russian Orthodox Church. Regarding the use of violence by Christians for the common good, he wrote the following:

We can think about the structure and the workings of the world as we please; we can do what is advantageous and agreeable for us to do; and we can use violence against people under the pretext of doing good to men. However, in doing so, it is absolutely impossible for us to assert that we are professing the teaching of Christ, for Christ cast down forever that very deception (*Letter to E. H. Crosby*, 1896).

Interpreting the Scriptures

As mentioned earlier, Augustine's primary justification for Christians participating in violence and warfare on behalf of the State came through appealing to the Old Testament Scriptures. So central was Augustine's use of the Old Testament that Cambridge Church Historian Frederick Russell commented on how "heavily inspired" he was by it. This same appeal to the Old Testament in support of violence against enemies was made repeatedly by Martin Luther (and most theologians before and after him), as we saw in the example regarding his proposed treatment of the Jews. In fact, as early as the beginning of the third century, Tertullian, who strongly opposed Christians in any activity involving idolatry or bloodshed, remarked that those Christians who were arguing in favour of being in the army, were using Old Testament examples such as Moses, Joshua, Gideon and David as their reason for doing so.

This is a crucial issue for the Church and it brings us to the central question of "How do we interpret the Bible?" How does the New Testament relate to the Old Testament? Jesus said "Love your enemies," but Joshua, David and other Old Testament heroes killed their enemies. And they were doing the will of God when they did so. As Christians, whose words and example should we follow, and why? These questions are crucial to our theology, that is, to what we think and believe, and to our ethic, that is, how we live and behave. The following is an outline of the simple, straightforward method of Biblical interpretation we believe is witnessed to in the New Testament. This method was used by the Early Church for 300 years, and has been used consistently by the churches of the *Radical Reformation* for the last 500 years.

Progressive Revelation and Rightly Dividing the Word of God

The first thing we need to do in developing our method of interpretation is to realize that God did not reveal everything about Himself or about His plans for humanity at one time. Rather, He revealed the fullness of His character and the details of His plans in various ways and at various times throughout history. Theologians call this process *Progressive Revelation*. In other words, God progressively revealed more and more of Himself and more and more of His plans to man over time. Scholars generally agree that God did this in three distinct ways at three distinct times in history, and they were as follows:

1. God's first self-revelation came at the time of creation through the creation itself (Rom. 1:20), through the impartation of the human conscience (Rom. 2:14-15), and through God's providential care for all humanity (Acts 14:17). Everyone, through observing the awesomeness of creation, listening to his

conscience, and experiencing God's provision, was given enough revelation about His existence and of His character to know that He was righteous, just and good, and that He required them to be likewise. Theologians call this *General Revelation*. Every human being was accountable to receive, value and respond to this basic self-revelation of God. Those who did experienced blessing, and those who didn't experienced judgment (see Rom. 1:20-25). God called Nineveh to repent on the basis of *General Revelation*.

2. God's second self-revelation came through giving His Law to Israel, a nation whom He created for the purpose of further revealing Himself and His plans to the world by making her a "Light to the Nations." God created and chose this one small nation out of all the others in order to reveal more of His character and His plans to humanity than He had previously revealed through creation, conscience and providence. And while the other nations were not expected to follow the Law — that task had been given to Israel alone — they were expected to pay attention, "to observe" and "be warned" as God taught the whole world lessons in righteousness by the way He blessed and judged Israel. (Ezek. 5:15; Jer. 6:18-19).
3. Finally, the third and most extensive self-revelation of God's righteous character and plan of salvation came through His own Son, Jesus Christ. When Jesus began His public ministry at the age of thirty the first words out of His mouth were: "The time has come! Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Then He shocked His listeners by adding that He was the doorway into that Kingdom. He pointed to the ancient prophecies and said that the prophets had spoken of Him. And while Israel had always pointed to the Law and called on men to turn to God, Jesus stunned his audience by pointing to Himself and calling them to turn to Him. He said that He and He alone was the way to God, and no one could get to the Father unless they came through Him (John 14:6).

Understanding the progressive nature of God's self-revelation to humanity is crucial to rightly interpreting and using the Scriptures. Many Christians, as they seek to gain understanding of a certain subject, or formulate a teaching, begin in the Old Testament and then indiscriminately jump back and forth between the Old and New Testaments without regard to the dynamic of progressive revelation in the Scriptures. This often leads to confusion at best, and at worst, false teaching. It is also the surest way to find whatever proof texts we need to support our own particular view on a subject, and is the main reason behind the statement that "you can make the Bible say anything you want."

Five Key Steps to Biblical Interpretation

Since God's full and final revelation of Himself, His love for us, His plan of salvation, and His righteous standard for all humanity came through His Son, the words of Jesus must always be our starting and our ending point. All other Scriptures must be interpreted in the light of what Jesus said and did. And while all the Scriptures are the Word of God, and therefore true, they do not all carry the same authority because what came later supersedes and completes the former. David Stern, eminent Messianic Jewish scholar and translator of the *Jewish New Testament* puts it this way: "The New Testament is built upon and completes the Hebrew Scriptures (*Jewish New Testament*, rear cover quote)." Jesus made this clear when He repeatedly said to His listeners: "You have heard it said. . .", referring to some aspect of the Old Testament Law, "but I tell you. . .", replacing it with the new standard of righteousness revealed by the Father through Him.

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,' [He was referring to the Law]. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matt. 5:43-45).

The author of the book of Hebrews echoes this truth when he writes:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days *he has spoken to us by his Son*, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe (Heb 1:1-2).

The Father Himself said about Jesus,

This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. *Listen to him* (Matt. 17:5).

The new revelation which Jesus brought did not nullify the Law: it completed it, bringing it to its ultimate goal. As well, there were still many ancient prophecies in it that would not be fulfilled until the time of the consummation and the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth.

I tell you the truth, *until* heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law *until everything is accomplished*. (Mat 5:18).

Even though the words of the Law will remain until the present heaven and earth pass away, Jesus' own words are *eternal*. He told His listeners:

Heaven and earth will pass away, *but my words will never pass away*. (Mat 24:35).

Equipped with this fundamental understanding of progressive revelation we are now ready to consider a simple five-step process in interpreting the Scriptures.

Step One

Our first step in the process of Biblical interpretation on any subject, must always begin with the words and example of Jesus on that subject. Here we diligently study the four Gospels to discover everything that Jesus taught and modeled concerning this subject. How important is this first step? Best-selling author and pastor, Francis Frangipane, tells of a three-year period in his life when the Lord had him read nothing but the words of Jesus. Author Dr. John White in his book *Flirting with the World*, writes that the single greatest reason why the Church has become so worldly in our day is because we have largely ignored the words of Jesus. Professor Dallas Willard, a leading writer on Christian Discipleship, writes in his recent book *The Divine Conspiracy*, that the root problem in the Church today is that we do not take the words and example of Jesus seriously. It is crucial that we begin with Jesus.

Step Two

Next, we study the remainder of the New Testament writings to discover all that the New Testament saints like Paul and Peter wrote and modeled on this subject.

Step Three

Only after we have thoroughly completed steps one and two, do we then go to the Old Testament Scriptures. In this step we survey the Old Testament and make a note of all the references regarding our subject of enquiry.

Step Four

In this step all the relevant Old Testament references that were found in step three are interpreted, and where necessary, superseded in the light of what Jesus said and did and in light of the teachings of the rest of the New Testament. Thus, the Old Testament is carefully interpreted by the New Testament, and not the other way around. And so, the authoritative teaching and example regarding violence and war comes from Jesus, not Moses or Joshua or David.

Step Five

Our last step, which is our final check and most important safeguard, is to return once again to Jesus to see whether our conclusion, doctrine, teaching, etc., which we have been developing, is still in *complete conformity* with His words and example. Many of the Church's ethical teachings both past and present, dealing with

everything from money to the use of power, when they are put to this test, fail miserably. They do not conform *completely* to the words and example of our Lord. This is the root cause of why the Church has acted so much like the kingdom of the world down through the centuries.

As we said earlier, many Christians when they come to the Scriptures simply begin in Genesis and then jump back and forth between the Testaments with no regard to the reality of progressive revelation. The end result is a subjective interpretation of the Scriptures, where Jesus' words and example are often subordinated to Old Testament teachings or examples, while claiming that the conclusion arrived at is "Biblical." This is how Christians in the time of Tertullian desiring to be in the army justified their position. By ignoring progressive revelation, which makes Jesus' words and example the final authority for faith and practice, they based their argument on Old Testament examples such as Joshua and David, and thereby claimed that their position was Biblical. However, what they really did was put David's example regarding enemies side-by-side with Jesus,' and then they chose David's.

This, in fact, is what Constantine did, what Augustine did, what Luther, Zwingli and Calvin did, and what most of us still do today. Unfortunately, when we do this, that is, when we base our teachings and examples primarily on the Old Testament, we are left with a serious problem. That problem is how to reconcile the words and example of Jesus in the New Testament with what we are trying to promote from the Old Testament. This is why we are forced into all kinds of fanciful spiritualization and reinterpretation of problematic Scriptures, in order to transform the Jesus of the New Testament into a military god of war, a prosperity preacher, or many other things which He is not. Thus, by incorrectly interpreting the Bible and giving the Old Testament pre-eminence over the New, we are forced to create false images of Jesus, idols which are not real and deceive us even further.

Many of us, and many of our forefathers have built false images of Jesus and worshipped and followed them. The words of the Son of God are profoundly challenging and require the Holy Spirit's empowerment, great faith and self-denial to live out. Yet, they alone will bring us life in the Kingdom of God. Side-stepping the truth of progressive revelation lets us conveniently side-step much of what Jesus has commanded, and thereby side-step Him. When we don't like an aspect of the new standard of righteousness which the Father has revealed through His Son, we simply side-step the words of Jesus and rummage around the Old Testament until something more suitable is found. It is this kind of side-stepping of His words which allows us to construct false views of Jesus to our own liking, and is the single greatest reason why the institutional Church and many individual Christians have contributed so greatly to the world's unrighteousness and injustice since Constantine 1,700 years ago.

Former televangelist Jim Bakker is a living testimony to what we are saying regarding progressive revelation and properly interpreting the Bible, in this case with respect to the issue of money. In the 1980s Jim and his wife Tammy built and headed up one of the biggest, richest, glitziest Christian television empires in the world. Bakker, self-admittedly spent his days smiling for the cameras and his nights worrying about whether he could raise the millions of dollars needed to build his next hotel at the Heritage USA resort. The Bakkers were, without a doubt, among the world's leading advocates of the "prosperity gospel."

Then, suddenly, the dream became a nightmare and whole thing came crashing down. The PTL Ministry went bankrupt, several criminal charges were laid, including fraud and breach of trust, and in the end, Bakker was sent to prison. After spending almost 5 years in jail, Bakker was released, apparently a changed man. In February, 1997, *Charisma Magazine* published an interview with a chastened Jim Bakker. When I read what he had to say, I felt certain that he had indeed changed, and I rejoiced! Here is why I believed his change was authentic. Bakker told *Charisma*,

I didn't realize the corrupting power of money.... While I was in prison, the Lord showed me He wanted me to study the words of Christ in the Bible. So I began to write out in long-hand every word that Christ spoke. I spent two years doing this.... While I studied Jesus' words, I couldn't find anywhere in the Bible where He said anything good about money.... What I am saying is that when I was alone with God in my prison cell, God showed me I was wrong.

And how did God show Jim Bakker he was wrong? By leading him to the words and example of Jesus; the same Jesus who lived a simple life of self-denial and said, "you cannot serve both God and money." I knew that Jim Bakker had indeed experienced an authentic change of heart and mind, not only because of the genuine tone of his words, but because he had adopted the correct method of interpreting the Scriptures, one based on progressive revelation making Jesus' words and example the final authority for all of life.

Conclusion

Changed by His Majesty: Making Jesus King of our Whole Life

The title and sub-title of this paper convey what we believe is the calling of the Lord on His Church today. We believe that Jesus is calling us to examine ourselves, to repent where needed, and to consciously make Him the King of our whole life. As we obediently respond to this call, we will be changed by His Majesty, step by step and day by day. Jesus wants us to become like Him, not only in the personal part of our life, but in the corporate part as well. And as we have seen, it is in this corporate part of life, as members of our people groups and

citizens of our nations, that we Christians have historically been so deceived and acted so much like the world — often with disastrous consequences.

In the beginning pages of this paper we asked the following questions: “How do we account for the fact that multitudes of Christians throughout history have held attitudes and been involved in practices which Jesus Himself would never have supported or participated in? What deception operates in the hearts and minds of Christians which makes this possible? Where did it come from? When did it enter the Church? Why has it found so welcome a home in the hearts and minds of believers in virtually every generation? And most important of all, how can we, the Church in *this* generation, get free from it and live the kind of *Life* Jesus has called us to live?” In the course of this paper we have tried to answer the first four questions, but in concluding, we now need to address the final two.

However, before doing this, in order to be absolutely clear on what we are saying let us restate this deception one last time. It is this: As Christians, we have an unconscious tendency to compartmentalize our lives into two separate spheres of existence — our personal life and our corporate life — and then we try to live by two different standards of righteousness at the same time. Without even thinking about it, we split up our lives into these two separate parts and make Jesus the King of the one but not the King of the other. This is the deception we are talking about, the false belief that we can live our public corporate life in ways that are not consistent with the words and example of Jesus.

To begin then, why has this deception found so welcome a home in the hearts and minds of believers throughout the centuries? We believe there are several reasons for this. The first and primary reason, in our opinion, is the desire to avoid persecution. As we have seen, whenever Christians have tried to faithfully live out all the words of Jesus in every part of their life, they are usually ridiculed, criticized and eventually persecuted, often by other Christians. As frail human beings, we have a natural tendency to want to avoid rejection, pain and suffering, and so, this is one of the most fundamental forces acting on us to cause us to conform to society and accept the lie.

The second reason is closely related to the first, that is, our natural desire to be safe, secure, comfortable and in control regarding the material aspects of our lives, our families, our communities and our nations. To live by the literal words of Jesus in the corporate part of life puts us in a position of depending completely on God for our finances, our provision, our plans, our safety, and many other aspects of our life. Yet, our natural man, and all that we have been taught in our societies war against this kind of trusting dependence of our heavenly Father who knows all our situations and our needs.

The third reason is because of our sense of needing to act “responsibly.” There is a widespread unspoken belief in the Church that to take Jesus words literally in

the public corporate part of our life is not only naïve and idealistic, but downright irresponsible, even foolish. When examined closely, this turns out to be a combination of fear and pride. What we are actually saying by this is that we know better than Jesus what is needed and what right for life, both personally and corporately. This need to act “responsibly” led Augustine to say that the Church’s role is to transform society, although Jesus never said that, and in the process twist the words and example of Christ beyond recognition (i.e. how to love your enemy and kill him at the same time).

The fourth reason we believe this deception has found so welcome a home in the hearts and minds of believers is simply because most of the Church has taught this lie for so long that few Christians ever question its validity. The sheer momentum created by 1,700 years of tradition can carry away all but the most resolute Christians who are troubled by the inconsistency between the words and example of Jesus and the historical witness of the Church.

These then, are the four main reasons why we believe this deception has been so well received and so tenaciously held by believers since the days of Constantine.

Finally, let us briefly consider our last question — how can we, the Church in *this* generation, get free from this deception and live the kind of *Life* Jesus has called us to live?

The first step to getting free is realizing there is a problem. Sooner or later, we must come to a point of being deeply troubled by the tragic, and at times terrible witness of the Church throughout history, and even today. The fact that multitudes who have named Jesus as their personal Saviour have been engaged in some of the most deplorable corporate evil imaginable, should profoundly disturb us. We must come to the place of crying out, “Lord, how could this be?”

Next, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our understanding. This particular deception is without a doubt the most pervasive and powerful deception to ever entrap the Church, and each individual person will need a revelation from God to actually see it and understand it.

Third, we need to read and study. We need to read and study both the Scriptures, especially the four Gospels, and we need to read and study articles and books that address this particular problem. We need to rationally see and consider the historical evidence that much of what the Church has done, has not been in conformity with the words and example of our Lord.

Fourth, we need to pray for the grace to be made willing to obey our Lord’s commands and follow His example in the whole of our life, especially the corporate part. The Apostle Paul wrote that “It is God who works in you to will and to do according to his good purpose (Phil 2:13).” Even to be willing, we need God’s

grace. But if we are willing to be made willing, He will indeed change our hearts.

And finally, we need to make a few resolute decisions. First, we need to decide to believe that Jesus said what He meant and meant what He said: that is, that the meaning of His words and example are exactly what the plain, straightforward words on the page say. In other words, we must be like the man of whom John wrote, "He took Jesus at His word and departed" (John 4:50). Next, we need to decide that Jesus knows best about every aspect of our life, our family, our community, our nation and the world, and that His words are true and they are *Life*. In other words, we need to decide that living fully in the Kingdom of God in every part of our life is the very best thing we could ever do. Lastly, we need to decide that more than anything else in the world, we want to love and please Him and the Father in the way He has prescribed for us, and that is to obey all His commands in every part of our life. The Lord said that there is only way to know if His words are true, and that is to obey them. He said, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32)."

Lord Jesus, come and touch your people.

(Footnotes) * Note: Cornelius in the Book of Acts is a unique case requiring more detailed discussion than is possible in this paper.