

**THE PRIMITIVE  
CHRISTIAN'S ESTIMATE OF  
WAR AND SELF-DEFENSE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649313112

The Primitive Christian's Estimate of War and Self-defense by Josiah W. Leeds

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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THE  
PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS'  
ESTIMATE  
OF  
*War and Self-Defense.*

BY JOSIAH W. LEEDS.

Justin Martyr.	Tertullian.
Athenagoras.	Arnobius.
Irenæus.	Lactantius.
Clement, of Alexandria.	Epistle to Diognetus.
Cyprian.	Ignatius, of Antioch.

NEW VIENNA, OHIO:  
*Peace Association of Friends in America.*  
1876.

Int 6822.7

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I.

*Justin Martyr.*

Justin was born at Neapolis, of Samaria—the modern Nablouse—about A. D. 114. He was diligent in studying the various philosophies, especially those of the Stoics, Platonists, and Pythagoreans; but finally, having discovered the emptiness of them all, was converted to Christianity. He traveled much, and hence was well-informed as to that whereof he wrote. At Rome, in the year 165, and in the reign of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, he suffered martyrdom. Of his writings, the most valuable now extant are the two Apologies in behalf of the Christians, and the Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew. The first Apology was addressed to the Roman Em-

peror Antoninus Pius and the people; the second Apology, to the Roman Senate. The extracts which follow are from those writings:

“And when you hear that we look for a kingdom, you suppose, without making any inquiry, that we speak of a human kingdom; whereas, we speak of that which is with God, as appears also from the confession of their faith made by those who are charged with being Christians, though they know that death is the punishment awarded to him who so confesses. For if we looked for a human kingdom, we should also *deny our Christ, that we might not be slain*; and we should strive to escape detection, that we might obtain what we expect. But, since our thoughts are not fixed on the present, we are not concerned when men cut us off; since also death is a debt which must at all events be paid.

We who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them, and pray for our enemies, and endeavor to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the good precepts of Christ, to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God, the ruler of all.

And when the Spirit of prophecy speaks as predicting things that are to come to pass, he speaks in this way: ‘For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.’ And that it did so come to pass we can convince you. For from Jerusalem there went out into the world men, twelve in number, and these illiterate, of no ability in speaking: but by the



power of God they proclaimed to every race of men that they were sent by Christ to teach to all the word of God ; and we who formerly used to murder one another, do not only now refrain from making war upon our enemies, but also, that we may not lie or deceive our examiners, willingly die confessing Christ. But if the *soldiers* enrolled by you, and who have taken the military oath, prefer their allegiance to their own life, and parents, and country, and all kindred, though you can offer them nothing incorruptible, it were verily ridiculous if *we*, who earnestly long for incorruption, *should not endure all things*, in order to obtain what we desire from Him who is able to grant it.

And we who *were filled with war and mutual slaughter*, and every wickedness, *have each through the whole earth changed our warlike weapons*—our swords into plowshares, and our spears into implements of tillage—and we cultivate piety, righteousness, philanthropy, faith and hope, which we have from the Father himself, through him who was crucified. Now, it is evident that no one can terrify or subdue us who have believed in Jesus over all the world, . . . but the more such things happen [persecutions and deaths], the more do others and in larger numbers become faithful, and worshipers of God through the name of Jesus."

The next citation is from the Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew :

"For verily your hand [the Jews'] is high to commit evil, because ye slew the Christ, and do not repent of it ; but so far from that, ye hate and murder us who have believed through him in the God and Father of all, as often as ye can ; and ye curse him without ceasing, as well as those who side with him, while all of us pray for you, and for all men, as our Christ and Lord taught us to do, when he enjoined us to pray even for our enemies, and to love them that hate us, and to bless them that curse us."

## I I.

*Anthénagoras,*

an Athenian philosopher, who, according to Eusebius, was won over to Christianity while reading the Scriptures to controvert them. He was an able and elegant writer, though the only works of his which are now known are his Plea (or "Embassy," as he styles it) for the Christians, and his Treatise on the Resurrection. The Embassy was presented A. D. 177, to the Roman Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. The following are extracts:

"What, then, are those teachings in which we are brought up? 'I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you,' etc.—but who of them [teachers of philosophy] have so purged *their* souls, as, instead of hating their enemies, to love them; and instead of speaking ill of those who have reviled them—to abstain from which is, of itself, an evidence of no mean forbearance—to bless them; and to pray for those who plot against their lives? But among us you will find [even] uneducated persons, and artisans, and old women, who, if they are unable in *words* to prove the benefit of our doctrine, yet by their *deeds* exhibit the benefit arising from their persuasion of its truth; they do not rehearse speeches, but exhibit good works; when struck, they do not strike again; when robbed, they do not go to law; they give to those that ask of them, and love their neighbors as themselves.

Not even the governors of the provinces, sent by you, suffice for the hearing of the complaints against those [the

Christians] to whom it even is not lawful, when struck, if they do not offer themselves for more blows, nor when defamed, not to bless: for it is *not enough to be just*—and justice is to return like for like—but it is incumbent on us to be good, and patient of evil.”

## III.

*Irenæus.*

Irenæus was born about A. D. 130, probably in Smyrna, and died about the last year of the century. In early youth he was acquainted with Polycarp, the illustrious Bishop of Smyrna; and, as the latter is believed to have known the Apostle John, so the author of the great work “Against Heresies,” was only two links removed from the immaculate Expositor of Truth. Irenæus became Bishop of Lyons; though previous to that, while yet a presbyter, he was sent with a letter from certain members of the church of Lyons, who were awaiting martyrdom, to Eleutherus, Bishop of Rome. It was during the episcopate of that bishop that the above-named treatise (from which the extracts following are taken) was written. He says:

“But from the Lord's advent, the new covenant which