



# Human Conflict

## Teachings from the New Testament and early Christian fathers

By Francis Christian, MD

**E**arly Christians completely eschewed war, until the time of Constantine (AD 313). The quotations below are arranged in chronological order. The quotations from the New Testament (KJV) therefore appear first.

### Teaching about Revenge—Matt. 5:38–42 (See also Luke 6:29–30.)

*“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”*

### Love for Enemies—Matt. 5:43–45 (See also Luke 6:27–28, 32–36.)

*“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun*

*to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

### The Arrest of Jesus—Matt. 26:50–52 (See also Mark 14:43–50; Luke 22:47–53; John 18:3–11.)

*“And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”*

The following quotations are taken from “A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers,” edited by David W. Bercot (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998).

### Ignatius of Antioch (35–110 AD)

(Ignatius was the Bishop of Antioch. He is believed to have been taught by one or more of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, likely the apostle John. After Ignatius was arrested and while being transported to Rome to be martyred in the Colosseum, he wrote seven letters, six letters to churches (Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna) and one letter to Polycarp.)

*“Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. For when ye assemble frequently in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith. Nothing is more*

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*precious than peace, by which all war, both in heaven and earth, is brought to an end.”(110 A.D., The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians, Chapter XIII)*

### **Polycarp (69–155 AD)**

(Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna and is considered one of the apostolic fathers. His writings are some of the earliest writings of the Church fathers that have survived. He was the leading Christian figure in the Roman province of Asia in the middle of the second century A.D. In Ephesus, he was a disciple of the Apostle John, who appointed him to be Bishop of Smyrna. Polycarp's teaching of Jesus' pre-existence and incarnation are indicative of John's influence. Polycarp was burned at the stake for his faith.)

*“He who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also, if we do His will, and walk in His commandments, and love what He loved, keeping ourselves from all unrighteousness, covetousness, love of money, evil speaking, falsehood;” “not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, or blow for blow, or cursing for cursing, but being mindful of what the Lord said in His teaching: ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged; forgive, and it shall be forgiven unto you; be merciful, that ye may obtain mercy; with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again;’ and once more, ‘Blessed are the poor, and those that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God.’ (The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, Chapter II)”*

### **Justin Martyr (100–165 AD)**

(Justin Martyr was a Palestinian philosopher who was converted to Christianity, which he described as “the only sure and worthy philosophy.” One of the most venerated of early Christian philosophers, he traveled to Rome where he wrote several apologies against both pagans and Jews, combining Greek philosophy and Christian theology. He was eventually martyred.)

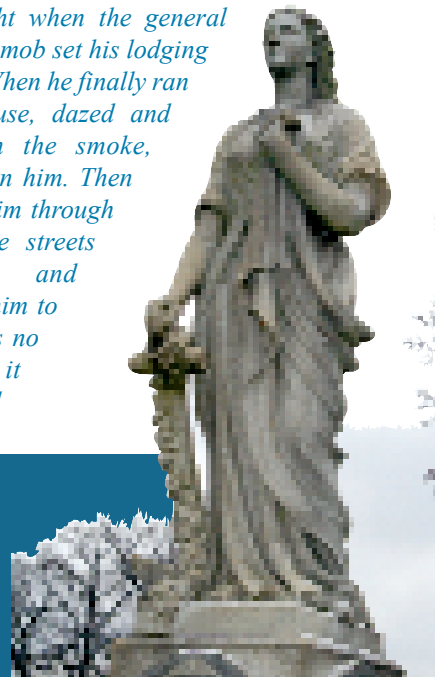
*“We who formerly murdered one another now refrain from making war even upon our enemies.”*

*“We used to be filled with war, mutual slaughter, and every kind of wickedness. However, now all of us have, throughout the whole earth, changed our warlike weapons. We have changed our swords into plowshares, and our spears into farming implements.”*

Later in his book, in the chapter, “How Early Christianity Was Corrupted,” Bercot (pages 124–126) describes what happened after Christianity had been implicitly endorsed as the state religion by Emperor Constantine in 313 A.D. (Edict of Milan):

*“The church was like a naïve young girl who had been suddenly swept off her feet by a rival suitor. The world wanted to be friends with the church, and the church saw no harm in reciprocating...However, the world's friendship utterly gutted the very soul of the church...One of the immediate effects of the church's friendship with the world was that it began adopting the world's methods...For example, the church changed its methods of coping with persecution and government oppression. In the past, Christians had to hide or flee from persecution. They refused to physically fight their persecutors or retaliate against them. However, the crowds of unregenerate persons who had bloated the church weren't about to meekly accept death, torture, or oppression.*

*For example, when Constantine's son sent one of his generals to Constantinople to depose the church's bishop, the congregation formed a mob. That night when the general was asleep, the mob set his lodging house on fire. When he finally ran out of the house, dazed and coughing from the smoke, they pounced on him. Then they dragged him through the cobblestone streets of the city and savagely beat him to death. This was no isolated case; it was the normal response of the fourth century church to*

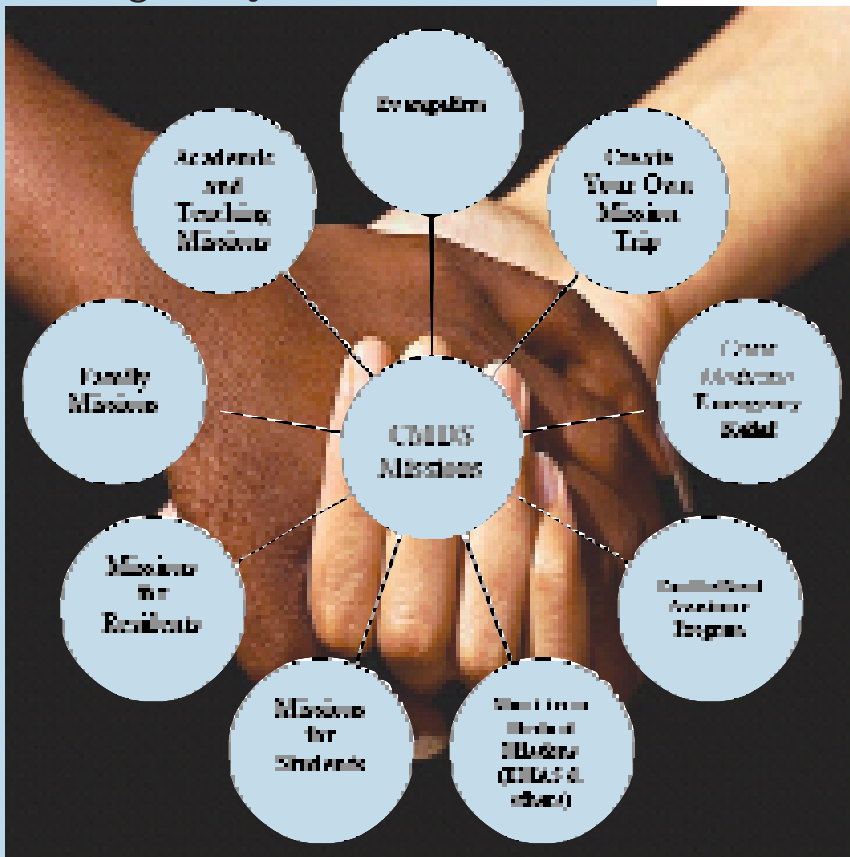


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# Opportunity for Service

## Missions Missions Missions Opportunities Opportunities Opportunities

Graphic by Shalea Piteau  
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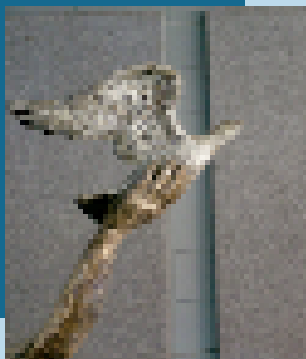


In January 2007, the *Focus* Editorial Board decided to initiate a new department, entitled “*Missions Opportunities.*” In retrospect this decision was timely, because the new executive director of CMDS, Dr. Roger Gingrich, has had a number of missions experiences and is networking with several organizations that can offer the CMDS membership a range of options for [medical or dental mission involvement](#). (Progress has been made, but no agreements have been signed yet.) The accompanying graphic provides a visual image of the kinds of opportunities that may be listed in future editions of *Focus*.

**For information on these missions opportunities, please contact the CMDS National Office.**

### Human Conflict

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*governmental oppression. The character of Christianity had changed!”*

To summarize, the words of Cadoux from the definitive work on the subject of early Christians and war ring as true today, as when they were first written:

*“It is quite true that the Christian Church stands in a very different position from that in which she stood in the first three centuries of our era. But the question is, ‘Is there anything in that difference, is there anything in our modern conditions, which really invalidates the testimony against war as the early Christians bore it, and as Origenes defended it?’”*

### References:

1. A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers, edited by David W. Bercot (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998).
2. The Catholic Encyclopedia. Herbermann, Pace, Pallen et al. The Encyclopedia Press Inc. Also, online at: [www.newadvent.org/cathen/index.html](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/index.html)
3. C. John Cadoux: The Early Christian Attitude to War: A Contribution to the History of Christian Ethics. London: Headley Bros. Publishers, 1919. Also, entire book online at: [http://oll.libertyfund.org/Texts/Cadoux0358/ChristianWar/0305\\_Bk.html](http://oll.libertyfund.org/Texts/Cadoux0358/ChristianWar/0305_Bk.html)