



"He that is the author of a war lets loose the whole contagion of hell and opens a vein that bleeds a nation to death."

—Thomas Paine

26-Aug-05

Open Mouth, Reveal Heart

The news of the week involved the latest verbal blunder of televangelist Pat Robertson. The 700 Club and Christian Broadcasting Network founder has felt the fury of the media before, particularly just after 9/11 when he and Jerry Falwell agreed that America's tolerance of homosexuality, feminism, and abortion, among other sins, made her deserving of some divine punishment. This time, he forayed into American foreign policy, opining during Monday's broadcast:

You know, I don't know about this doctrine of assassination, but if [Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez] thinks we're trying to assassinate him, I think that we really ought to go ahead and do it.

It's a whole lot cheaper than starting a war. And I don't think any oil shipments will stop. But this man is a terrific danger and . . . this is in our sphere of influence, so we can't let this happen. We have the Monroe Doctrine, we have other doctrines that we have announced. And without question, this is a dangerous enemy to our south, controlling a huge pool of oil, that could hurt us very badly.

We have the ability to take him out, and I think the time has come that we exercise that ability. We don't need another \$200 billion war to get rid of one, you know, strong-arm dictator. It's a whole lot easier to have some of the covert operatives do the job and then get it over with.

On Wednesday, Robertson defended his comments, saying:

I didn't say 'assassination.' I said our special forces should 'take him out.' And 'take him out' can be a number of things, including kidnapping; there are a number of ways to take out a dictator from power besides killing him. I was misinterpreted by the [Associated Press], but that happens all the time.

His belated and rather limp justification does nothing to explain why a supposedly Christian minister would advocate removing foreign heads of state from power, either by assassination, kidnapping, or some other method. Another "Christian" leader, Marvin Olasky, editor of *World Magazine*, said in a recent interview in which Robertson's comments were discussed, held that assassination was biblically justified in time of war. The only problem is that no one seems to be able to find the chapter and verse where such views are condoned.

This thinking has its roots in the "just war" doctrine, the brainchild of the Catholic theologian, Augustine, in the late fourth or early fifth century. In it, he posits that war is sometimes necessary and just, and that, in such just wars, [Christians](#) must comport themselves in a moral fashion. Not all "Christian" nations have subscribed to this teaching, but most give it lip-service to justify its military actions. Strangely, religious conservatives—especially in the last four years—have embraced it almost wholesale in support of the Bush administration's pre-emptive war on Iraq. "Stand by Your Man" comes to mind.

Despite so many religious leaders' endorsement, the "just war" doctrine is antithetical to Christianity. The sixth commandment absolutely forbids it. Jesus' teaching in the four gospels and the apostles' teaching in the rest of the New Testament clearly stand against it. What can be simpler than "Blessed are the [peacemakers](#)" ([Matthew 5:9](#)), "You shall not murder" (verse 21), ". . .

turn the other [cheek]" (verse 39), and ". . . [love](#) your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (verse 44)? And these plain instructions are from only one chapter!

The apostles are similarly of one voice in this matter. Paul writes:

Repay no one evil for evil. . . . If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath: for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord [[Deuteronomy 32:35](#)]. Therefore "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head [[Proverbs 25:21-22](#)]." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. ([Romans 12:17-21](#))

He later says that "we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" ([II Corinthians 10:3-4](#)), meaning Christians do not fight with physical arms but spiritual powers. James calls Christians who "fight and war" "adulterers and adulteresses" who make themselves enemies of [God](#) by applying the unrighteous methods of [this world](#) ([James 4:1-4](#)). Finally, John writes, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" ([I John 3:15](#)).

Some may contend that these teachings do not apply because they are instructions to individuals—but are not nations merely large, organized groups of individuals? The principles apply just as well in a macrocosm as in a microcosm. Killing on a national scale is just as ungodly as killing on a personal one.

The Robertson fiasco only highlights a major problem in today's Christianity, even among so-called fundamentalists: hypocrisy. The vast majority of supposedly Christian ministers and churches have traded the truth of the Bible—the Word of God—for unrighteous mammon, political gain, or popularity. Their unregenerate hearts are revealed by what comes from their mouths, "for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders . . ." ([Matthew 15:18-19](#)). Rather than walk the difficult path to eternal life, they have taken the broad way that leads to destruction ([Matthew 7:13-14](#)), the

way that is "right in [their] own eyes" ([Judges 21:25](#)), the "way that seems right to a man, . . . the way of death" ([Proverbs 14:12](#)). [Jesus Christ](#) will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" ([Matthew 7:23](#)).

There is a great deal of [wisdom](#) in the old saw that religion and politics do not mix.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

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by Martin G. Collins

Some social analysts consider war as a basic social system (in what biblical prophecy would identify as the over-arching Babylonian system). Our forebears entered into this Babylonian system after the fateful choice in I Samuel 8, replacing dependence upon God with a dependency upon military might. Conscientious objection to military action requires exercising mature faith, involving submission, loyalty, dedication, and truthful conscientious obedience to God's Law. God has promised that when we (individuals or nations) obey Him, He will fight our battles for us. By not trusting God, Israel and its descendants brought about a perpetual curse.

From the Archives: Featured Article

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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