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Attitudes Toward the Use of Force
and Violence in Thomas Muentzer,
Menno Simons, and Martin Luther

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Editorial Comment

Christ and His disciples lived and died during the reign of the Julian Caesars. The Savior was born in the reign of the first and crucified in that of the second. St. Peter and St. Paul died in the reign of the last. Accordingly, everything Christ and His disciples said about the higher powers involved one or the other of these rulers. What kind of men were they? Though their virtues were at best but shining vices, they were not devoid of civic righteousness. However, their vices outweighed their virtues. Caesar Augustus established a despotic empire under republican forms. His stepson Tiberius was the gloomy tyrant the fear of whose wrath drove cringing Pontius Pilate to commit a judicial murder. Caligula, the grandnephew of Tiberius, exclaimed in a sadistic outburst of mad humor: "Would that the Romans had all one neck!" so that he might at one stroke behead the people, whom he hated. Claudius, the uncle of Caligula, divorced two of his wives, murdered one, and was himself poisoned by the fourth. Nero, his stepson, murdered his teacher, his young wife, his half brother, and Agrippina, his ambitious mother. To turn attention away from himself when half of Rome was laid in ashes, he ordered a bloody persecution of the Christians. Many of the subsequent emperors were no better than the Julian Caesars.

But despite the weakness or wickedness of the men who constituted the government, the Roman Empire enjoyed many years of peace and prosperity. By fire and sword (*ferro ignique*), the dreadful instru-

ments of war, the *pax Romana* was preserved. Neither Christ nor His apostles dulled the Roman sword, not even by refusing to pay tribute to Caesar. Christ extolled the faith of the centurion at Capernaum, though this soldier commanded a hundred swords. The Holy Ghost fell upon Cornelius, a Roman captain, as well as on the noncombatants in his house. Be it a Julian Caesar or any other power ordained of God, Christ says: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." The minister of God bears not the sword in vain. Christians, of course, are subject not only for wrath but also for conscience' sake.

"War is hell," said General William T. Sherman. The sword hurts people; fire destroys homes. War is one of God's severest judgments on earth's sinful inhabitants. Therefore God's people, though submitting themselves to every ordinance of man which is not contrary to His will, first of all, make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority, that they may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. In the light of Scripture neither Thomas Muentzer nor Menno Simons was correct in his attitude toward war. But if Christians must choose the company of the one or the other, they will surely choose that of the man who eschewed war and blessed the peacemaker. Better still, they will avoid the mistakes of both and follow the example of Luther, who hated war but insisted on paying his taxes in defense of his country against invasion by its ruthless enemies.

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