

## PIERRE VIRET'S CONCEPT OF A JUST WAR\*

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For as long as people have discussed war, they have talked about it in terms of right and wrong. The sixteenth century was no exception. That century was an age of upheaval, unrest, and war. The religious leaders of the period could not avoid discussing the moral implications of the military conflicts of the time. Thousands of followers looked to them for guidance as they made their way through the moral quicksand of such questions as whether or not it was permissible for "a true Christian" to take arms and shed blood—and if so, under what circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For an excellent introduction to the sixteenth-century political world in which Viret lived and moved, see Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France, 1555-1563* (Geneva, 1956); Kingdon, *Geneva and the Consolidation of the French Protestant Movement, 1564-1572* (Geneva, 1967); and J. H. M. Salmon, *Society in Crisis: France in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1975). For the historical, theological, and ethical background of the just-war theory in Western thought, see the following: C. J. Cadoux, *The Early Christian Attitude to War* (London, 1919); Robert H. W. Regout, *La doctrine de la guerre juste de saint Augustin à nos jours, d'après les théologiens et les canonistes catholiques* (Paris, 1934); Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Toward War and Peace: A Historical Survey and Critical Re-Evaluation* (New York, 1960); Paul Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?* (Durham, N.C., 1961); M. D. Chenu, "L'evolution de la théologie de la guerre juste," in Chenu, *La parole de Dieu*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1964), 2:571-592; Paul Ramsey, *The Just War: Force and Political Responsibility* (New York, 1968); L. B. Walters, Jr., "Five Classic Just War Theories: A Study in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas, Vitoria, Suarez, Gentili and Grotius" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 1971); Walter Bense, "Introduction," in Gerrit Jan Herring,

Pierre Viret (1511-1571), long-time friend and close associate of John Calvin, was such a leader. One of the most popular of the first-generation Calvinist reformers, Viret's words carried great weight with the faithful in Western Europe—especially in the French-speaking areas. Therefore, what he had to say about war and peace interested and influenced large numbers of people.<sup>2</sup>

More than fifty of Viret's works appeared in at least seven different languages in the sixteenth century. Many of these books went through numerous printings.<sup>3</sup> Among them, his monumental two-volume theological discourse entitled the *Instruction chrestienne*, published in 1564, contains an interesting discussion of the concept of a just war and represents his mature thought on the subject.<sup>4</sup> In addition, he discussed the issue in several other books,

*The Fall of Christianity: A Study of Christianity, the State and War* (original ed., 1930; reprint ed., New York, 1972), pp. 5-47; L. B. Walters, Jr., "The Just War and the Crusade: Antitheses or Analogies?," *The Monist*, Oct., 1973, pp. 584-594; James T. Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War: Religious and Secular Concepts, 1200-1740* (Princeton, N.J., 1975); Yehuda Melzer, *Concepts of Just War* (Leyden, 1975); Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Eng., 1975); Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (New York, 1977); and James T. Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton, N.J., 1981).

<sup>2</sup>The best of a number of biographies of Viret is one published in the early twentieth century by Jean Barnaud, a scholarly minister of the French Reformed Church: *Pierre Viret, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Saint-Amans, 1911). Barnaud's work is sympathetic and somewhat uncritical, but still generally sound and useful. For a more recent assessment of Viret's life and work, see Robert D. Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret* (Geneva, 1964), esp. pp. 11-51 and 177-179.

<sup>3</sup>Viret wrote in both French and Latin. In addition, Viret himself translated a number of his French works into Latin, while others rendered many of his books into various other languages, including English, German, Dutch, Italian, and Spanish. Thus, Viret had a rather widespread international audience and influence. For one specific example of this, see Robert D. Linder, "Pierre Viret and the Sixteenth-Century English Protestants," *ARG* 58 (1967): 149-171. For a systematic listing of all of Viret's known works, see Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, pp. 181-191.

<sup>4</sup>Pierre Viret, *Instruction chrestienne en la doctrine de la loy et de l'Evangile; et en la vraye philosophie et theologie tant naturelle que supernaturelle des Chrestiens; et en la contemplation du temple et des images et oeuvres de la providence de Dieu en tout l'universe; et en l'histoire de la creation et cheute et reparation du genre humain*, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1564). Hereinafter cited as *Instruction chrestienne*. In this

including his important *L'Interim*, first published in 1565.<sup>5</sup> These two treatises and several others appeared and circulated widely during the difficult and tense first years of the so-called Wars of Religion in France.<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Sixteenth-Century Views of War and Peace

Viret's century was a time of transition in both religion and politics in European history. This was true in terms of the way religious leaders viewed the issues of war and peace, as well as in several closely related areas of thought, such as the right of political resistance to established authority. In the case of the issue of war and peace, the sixteenth century saw a shift from the dominant crusading ideology of the late Middle Ages to an effort to recover early Christian pacifism by Desiderius Erasmus, Thomas More, and the Anabaptists, as well as a much more widespread attempt to revive and perhaps reformulate the Augustinian just-war theory on the part of many Roman-Catholic and Protestant thinkers.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) officially retained the crusading ideal, decreeing that "the enemies of the Church are to be

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work, Viret brings together in a more or less systematic manner a great deal of his thought on a variety of subjects, including politics. The date 1564 distinguishes this work from two previous and much less complete editions (1556 and 1559) of one of his books with almost exactly the same title.

<sup>5</sup>Pierre Viret, *L'Interim, fait par dialogues* (Lyon, 1565).

<sup>6</sup>The first three of the Wars of Religion in France occurred in 1562-1563, 1567-1568, and 1568-1570, respectively. Viret served as a pastor and evangelist in southern France from 1561 until his death of 1571. Therefore, he was present and active in that country during the first three religious wars. In addition to his important *Instruction chrestienne* of 1564 and his *L'Interim* of 1565, Viret published several other influential works during this period, including *De l'authorite et perfection de la doctrine des saintes Escritures, et du ministere d'icelle; et des vrais et faux pasteurs, et de leurs disciples; et des marques pour cognoistres et discerner tant les uns que les autres* (Lyon, 1564); *De la providence divine, touchant tous les estats du monde et tous les biens, et les maux qui y peuvent advenir, et adviennent ordinairement, par la volonte et le juste jugement de Dieu* (Lyon, 1565); *De l'estat, de la conference, de l'authorite, puissance, prescription et succession tant de la vraye que de la fausse Eglise, depuis le commencement du monde, et des Ministres d'icelles et de leurs vocations et degrez* (Lyon, 1565); and *Response aux questions proposees par Jean Ropitel, minime, aux ministres de l'Eglise Reformee de Lyon* (Lyon, 1565).

coerced even by war."<sup>7</sup> However, most leading Catholic political theorists agreed with the majority of Protestant thinkers who wrote on the topic that some kind of adaptation of the Augustinian just-war theory was more compatible with Christian doctrine and contemporary developments. Thus, for example, just-war advocates like Francisco Suarez, Francisco de Vitoria, and Noel Beda all seemed to operate within the natural-law framework, which was to characterize the Catholic position on war and peace in the post-Tridentine period. This was true even though throughout most of the century the practical result of this theory was to desacralize the war against the Muslim Turks and redirect the crusading spirit against Protestantism.<sup>8</sup>

For their part, most Protestant thinkers embraced a similar just-war position. Martin Luther's 1529 treatise *On War Against the Turk* appeared to be more pacifist than it really was. His later writings were much more in the just-war camp, and, together with a growing body of other Protestant literature on the subject, they signaled an end to the medieval model of a Christendom united under the cross and papacy. They also marked the beginning of the more modern model of a community of independent states whose autonomy was grounded in natural law and whose bond of union was more vaguely cultural than specifically religious.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to popular opinion and many American high-school history texts, first-generation Calvinism did not continue the medieval concept of the crusade to establish the true religion. To be sure, within the larger Reformed community of faith, Zwinglianism started out as a militant expression of Protestantism with a belligerent policy much in the spirit of some of the earlier portions

<sup>7</sup>John Eppstein, *The Catholic Tradition of the Law of Nations* (London, 1935), pp. 82-83; and Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte, *Die Geburtsstunde des souveränen Staates* (Regensburg, 1952), pp. 101-106 and 239-245.

<sup>8</sup>Bernice Hamilton, *Political Thought in Sixteenth-Century Spain: A Study of the Political Ideas of Vitoria, De Soto, Suárez, and Molina* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 135-157; and Walter F. Bense, "Paris Theologians on War and Peace, 1521-1529," *CH* 41 (1972): 168-185.

<sup>9</sup>Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 292-308; J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1929), pp. 1-30; and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Eng., 1978), 2:3-19. Skinner's work is based on the most recent scholarship and provides the best available introduction to sixteenth-century political thought.

of the OT. Also, some second- and third-generation Calvinists in France and the British Isles, as well as some self-proclaimed twentieth-century theological descendants of Calvin in Northern Ireland, have assumed a crusading mentality in terms of defending and/or spreading the faith by force. But neither Calvin nor most of his closest associates—including Viret—sanctioned war as a legitimate means of spreading the gospel. In fact, Calvin was reluctant even to approve of war as a means of defending the true Reformed faith, although his successor at Geneva, Theodore Beza, did. Even so, it is well worth noting that Geneva maintained official neutrality during the period of the Wars of Religion in France in the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Both Calvin and Viret discussed the Christian's role in organized combat in terms of a just war. Viret, as much or perhaps even more than Calvin, demonstrates that first-generation Calvinism was much less aggressive than many in the past have supposed. In fact, if anything, Viret might be said to have advocated a position which, relatively speaking, could be called liberal Calvinism. In order to demonstrate this, I want first to look at Viret's view of a just war, then point out what he says about waging war with

<sup>10</sup>Calvin's just-war theory can be found in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1960), 2:1499-1501. For a critical evaluation of the older view that Calvin sanctioned war as a means of spreading the gospel, see Bense, "Introduction," in Heering, *The Fall of Christianity*, pp. 14-18.

For examples of the interpretation that Calvin and Calvinism represented an illiberal, intolerant, bellicose strand of Protestantism, see such works as Sebastian Castellio, *Concerning Heretics: Whether they are to be persecuted and how they are to be treated*, ed. and trans. Roland H. Bainton (New York, 1935); and Hoffman Nickerson, *The Loss of Unity* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961). In the former work, Bainton writes of Calvin in the Introduction (p. 74): "He had had no liberal period like Luther and Brenz. If Calvin ever wrote anything in favor of religious liberty it was a typographical error." In his *Loss of Unity*, Nickerson entitled his chapter on Calvin "Devil-Worshipping Genius," indicated that Calvin taught that it was all right to kill for religious reasons, and observed that in the struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism in the sixteenth century, Calvin added a note of contempt to a note of hatred generated by Luther and the Catholics (pp. 186-212). It is fair to point out that Bainton's perception of Calvin is far less harsh and rigid than is that of Nickerson (e.g., see Bainton in Castellio, *Concerning Heretics*, p. 75). However, this essentially negative view of Calvin and Calvinism on such issues as toleration, war, and peace has been picked up by others and widely disseminated in high-school texts and in popular literature.

other Christians and with the Turks, note his approval of resistance to oppressive political regimes, and cite a few of his proposals for peace.

## 2. *Viret's View of a Just War and Conditions Governing It*

In general, Viret's ideas concerning war and peace follow the guidelines for a just war laid down by Augustine in the fifth century.<sup>11</sup> That is, in order for Christians to wage a "just war," five conditions must be met: (1) a proper authority must conduct the war; (2) there must be a just cause for the conflict; (3) the war must be entered into with the right intention, namely, to establish a just peace; (4) military discipline must be maintained during the conflict; and (5) justice must be preserved during wartime as it would be in peacetime. In addition, both Augustine and Viret agreed that wars were always evil, though on some occasions they might be necessary in order to prevent worse evils. Finally, both agreed also that a war should never be waged to exterminate the enemies of the faith and that there was no room for private initiative in waging war, just or otherwise.

Viret's most clear exposition of his concept of a just war occurs in his *Instruction chrestienne*. Using the dialogism so common to much of his literary output, Viret discussed this issue in the context of the sixth of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not kill."<sup>12</sup> After reviewing what might be called the conventional exceptions

<sup>11</sup>Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York, 1963), pp. 154-171. St. Augustine's just-war theory comes from his *City of God*, Books IV and XIX. For further insight into Augustine's views on war and peace, see Walter F. Bense, "Introduction," in Harald Fuchs, *Augustine und der Antike Friedensgedanke* (original ed., 1926; reprint ed., New York, 1973), pp. 5-19.

<sup>12</sup>Exod 20:13. See Viret, *Instruction chrestienne*, 1:482-509. Viret did not cite Augustine directly in this passage in his *Instruction chrestienne*, but it is obvious that he followed the great Church Father's guidelines for establishing the justness of any given war. This is hardly surprising, since Viret knew Augustine's work well and cited him frequently elsewhere in his own writings, including this particular book. Moreover, Viret had been exposed to the teachings of Augustine and his sixteenth-century disciples while a student at the University of Paris in 1527-1530—the very time when the outspoken champion of scholastic orthodoxy, Noel Beda, was faculty syndic there. See Bense, "Paris Theologians on War and Peace," pp. 168-170, 175-180.

to this divine prohibition, Viret's two interlocutors moved on to the related subject of war. Daniel is Viret's chief spokesperson and Timothy is his amiable, pious foil. The two friends agree that the chief purpose of the magistrate is to preserve the peace and that princes and magistrates also can be murderers, *if* they kill the innocent.<sup>13</sup>

Timothy observes:

I conclude from what you have said that, just as the magistrate wields the sword of God for the defense of the good and the punishment of evil according to the justice ordained by God, so he is also given the right to wage a just war, when he has to deal with someone who, having trampled right and reason under foot, resorts to force and violence.<sup>14</sup>

Daniel responds:

If it is lawful for a magistrate to punish a small group of evil-doers using a small number of his subjects and officers, then is it not lawful for him to punish a great multitude of evildoers with a great number, when it is necessary to restrain them? But a prince ought to be well advised when he undertakes a war, after having explored all means at his disposal to avoid conflict and maintain peace, that he recognize the great and terrible evils which ordinarily accompany any war, so that the medicine be not worse than the evil that he desires to remedy.<sup>15</sup>

Timothy continues:

It should be clearly understood that all war is evil, in that in waging war it is nearly impossible to avoid the commission of sin or great injustice in one way or another. If they are both present, then it is even worse. But they are part of a larger good when the war is grounded in right and in justice, in order to maintain the honor of God and the Church and the public welfare and to correct intolerable evils, and in so far as God, by his just judgment, uses such an instrumentality to punish the sins of men.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Viret, *Instruction chrestienne*, 1:504-506.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:506.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

And Daniel adds:

You have said it very well. It then follows that those princes and magistrates who wage war without regard to these things, but only because of their own ambition, or because of a desire for revenge, or because of avarice, rapacity or tyranny, they then are the public brigands and the grand chiefs and captains of the other brigands.<sup>17</sup>

All of this is a fairly straightforward Augustinian explanation for a just war in which a Christian may participate. This is not surprising, since Viret studied at the Collège Montaigu at the University of Paris from 1527-1530 when Montaigu was dominated by Noel Beda and his Augustinian views concerning natural law and war and peace. As in the thought of Augustine and in Beda's *Annotationum* of 1526 on war and peace, so in Viret there is the insistence that the just war must meet the conditions traditionally assigned to it, and also an indication that these conditions would quickly show the injustice and evil consequences of most wars.<sup>18</sup>

But the aforementioned dialogue is not all that Viret had to say about just and unjust wars. In his *Instruction chrestienne*, he continued his analysis of those conditions under which a princely subject could participate in war. As he proceeds, some differences between Viret and the Augustinians begin to appear, especially in terms of permissible disobedience based upon the soldier's individual conscience. Timothy picks up the dialogue where it left off. He asks: "If those who lead are the chiefs and captains of brigands, are not those who fight under them guilty of their crimes?"<sup>19</sup>

Daniel's response to this inquiry begins as a conventional explanation of the matter. He declares:

There are two things to consider here. The first is that the subject ought to ignore the grounds for the cause of the war and not worry about whether or not it is just or sinful, just as Joab ignored the reason why David commanded him to kill Uriah. For

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Noel Beda, *Annotationum . . . in Iacobum Fabrum Stapulensium libri duo Et in Desiderium Erasmum Roterodamum liber unus, qui ordine tertius est* (Paris, 1526). See also Robert D. Linder, "Pierre Viret's Ideas and Attitudes Concerning Humanism and Education," *CH* 34 (1965): 25-26; and Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>19</sup>Viret, *Instruction chrestienne*, 1:506-507.



he did not know what David had in mind, and thus was not able to make a judgment concerning David's reasons for the order; thus he had no other choice but to obey his prince. The other thing that should be considered is that the subject has no authority to compel his prince to give him reasons for his princely commands and actions. For what kind of order would that be if a prince had to give reasons to his officers and subjects for all of his commands?<sup>20</sup>

But at this point in his exposition, Daniel opens up a very large hole in the moral dike—one through which the proverbial large chariot can be driven. Daniel continues:

The subject then has no alternative but to obey his prince, for he has no means of judging the prince's decision *except* when the sin involved in obedience is so great and so obvious that it constitutes an open contravention of the informed Christian conscience. For a man is not obligated to go to war to kill simply to satisfy his prince's appetite merely because the prince commands it. What if a prince commands his subject to kill an innocent man or to ravish his wife or to persecute or murder the faithful who follow the Word of God—is he then obligated to obey?<sup>21</sup>

The answer appears obvious in this context, and Timothy, as anticipated, replies:

I think not. For I cannot believe that God approved the actions of the citizens of the town of Naboth when they killed that good person at the instigation of Queen Jezebel in order to carry out her will and command. But if it is a matter of dealing with a tyrant, and I refuse to obey, then I certainly will put my body and my general welfare in great jeopardy.<sup>22</sup>

But to this, Daniel solemnly responds:

It may be that you will lose your life and your goods in such a situation, but it is better than offending God and losing your immortal soul. For we should always adhere to the apostolic rule in such cases: "It is always better to obey God than men." (Acts 5:29) And as Jesus Christ said: "Do not fear those who are able to

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 1:507. The allusion to the murder of Uriah the Hittite is from 2 Sam 11.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. Italics mine.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. The story of the killing of Naboth is found in 1 Kgs 21:1-16.

kill the body but cannot kill the soul, rather fear him who can send both soul and body to the fires of hell." (Matthew 10:28)<sup>23</sup>

The example of the murder of Naboth in Viret's discussion of this issue appears to have been carefully chosen. According to the ancient account found in 1 Kings 21, Naboth had owned a highly desirable vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab, the King of Israel (died ca. 853 B.C.). When Ahab tried to purchase it or trade him for a "better vineyard" elsewhere, Naboth declined, citing an ancestral attachment to the piece of real estate in question. When Ahab's queen, Jezebel, saw that her husband was extremely depressed over this turn of events, she told him not to worry, because she would take care of it. She wrote letters in Ahab's name to the city fathers of Naboth's town, directing them to arraign Naboth on a trumped-up charge of treason and blasphemy. The notables of Jezreel followed the queen's orders and Naboth was tried, convicted, and executed in a duly established court of law. Thus, Ahab obtained his coveted vineyard! The fact that the death of an innocent, God-fearing person occurred on orders from a lawfully constituted but wicked prince by means of lawfully constituted court procedures that produced an unjust verdict could hardly have been lost on Viret's biblically literate readers.

Thus, there is in Viret room for disobedience based upon the citizen's or soldier's individual decision that the command received is unjust or illegitimate. And, unlike Augustine, there is in Viret no talk of being able to kill in love. Instead, Viret urges his readers to obey the magistrates and princes as a matter of course, for they "are ordained by God to preserve the peace."<sup>24</sup> Still, that obedience is not absolute, but qualified, as the previously cited examples demonstrate. Either the magistrate and prince operate to establish justice and preserve the peace and to wage war for the same purposes, or they do not. And when it is necessary and just to wage war against those who do evil, there is no suggestion in Viret that this can be done out of love for the wrongdoer even as correction and chastisement are imposed upon a son by a loving father, as Augustine believed. To the contrary, Viret teaches that the individual Christian should never be the aggressor in the act of killing,

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 1:504.

and that if he must act in self-defense, he should ask God to forgive him for what he must do because of the hardness of the human heart and the sin of the human condition.<sup>25</sup> One may, according to Viret, kill in self-defense or perhaps in a truly just war, but not seek to mask that killing in love.

### 3. *Viret's View on War with the Turk and with Christians*

In several other places in his writings, Viret mentions specific instances which throw light on his concept of a just war. Viret agreed with Luther that Christians should not wage war against the Turks, but gave as his primary reason for this something different from Luther. Viret agreed with the German Protestant leader that religiously motivated crusades were wrong, but he did not join Luther in condemning the Turkish wars because of the financial drain involved or because he felt that military efforts would be fruitless apart from a general repentance. Rather, Viret stressed the fact that both the medieval crusades and the Christian war against the Muslim Turks of his day degraded the Christian religion. Viret argued that the Christian faith should be spread by persuasion and that genuine conversion could not be forced. Thus, the proper way to deal with the Turks was to send them missionary preachers, not the sword!<sup>26</sup>

In a like manner, Viret criticized the use of coercion against Anabaptists. Under no circumstances would he support a crusade against them, and he argued that persecution was something in which Reformed Christians should not participate. He called persecutors "tyrants," and clearly opposed wars against the Anabaptists and other alleged heretics. This does not mean that Viret felt that the Anabaptists and similar groups should go unopposed. To the contrary, he believed that they were wrong and should be confronted—but with words and argumentation, not with swords and inquisitions.<sup>27</sup>

Further, Viret agreed with Erasmus and most of the other Christians who wrote on this topic in this period that there should be no war between "true Christians." However, "true Christians"

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 1:502.

<sup>26</sup>Viret, *L'Interim*, p. 182.

<sup>27</sup>Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, pp. 154-155.

meant different things to different writers on the subject of war and peace. Most Roman Catholic writers regarded true Christians as those in a state of grace. Others, such as Beda and Josse Clichtove, thought of the wrong done in such a conflict between Christians in more natural or secular terms. For Viret, it was a different matter. Viret readily admitted that there were Christians in many different communions, but argued that this was a matter of an individual's faith in Christ, which was between the individual and God. However, he pointed out the inconsistencies of papal policy concerning Catholic crusades against Protestants. How can the Pope wage war, he asked, against fellow Christians, while tolerating Jews and certain other non-Christians in papal territories? He argued that Christians should not be guilty of killing other Christians under any circumstances, and that ultimately coercion did no good, anyway, in terms of true religion.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. *Viret on the Question of Resistance to Political Regimes*

Consistent with his views on the possibility of Christian participation in a just war in certain carefully identified circumstances was Viret's endorsement of the right of resistance in certain unusual situations. Like Calvin, Viret urged obedience to legitimately constituted kings and magistrates and to civil laws, as a general principle for the Christian life. In this respect, he was like most of his fellow Calvinists, who followed the traditional Christian teaching (based mostly on Rom 13) that resistance to superiors and the civil government was wrong. He maintained that it was the duty of the individual Christian to obey the non-spiritual edicts and decrees of the secular state. In many places in his writings, he counseled caution, moderation, and peace in all things.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Viret, *L'Interim*, pp. 219-225. This later became a fairly common argument used by French Huguenots against continued Roman Catholic persecution of Protestants in that country. Viret appears to have been the first to articulate it. It was probably based on his own observations of what was fairly obvious to any Protestant familiar with the situation in southeastern France between Lyon and Nîmes in the mid-sixteenth century, since in the nearby papal enclave around Avignon, papal forces both protected a Jewish ghetto and tried to exterminate Protestants in nearby towns like Orange.

<sup>29</sup>See, e.g., Viret, *Instruction chrestienne*, 1:447-454; Viret, *De l'authorite et perfection de la doctrine des saintes Escritures*, pp. 67-69; Viret, *Response aux*

However, just as obedience to the princes and the magistrates was conditional in the case of war, so obedience to them in the ordinary political process also was conditional. According to Viret, only after all other expedients had been tried—such as prayer, persuasion, or passive resistance—could a Christian believer take up arms against an established government. And then it would be done only in defense of the gospel and only when led by duly constituted inferior magistrates who already possessed a measure of legitimate political authority. As in the instance of waging war, there is no room for private initiative here. Further, Viret taught that in order for these inferior magistrates to resist a tyrant legitimately, they in some measure had to derive their authority from the people they were supposed to be leading and serving. This responsibility to a political constituency was in addition to the personal accountability which every civil official had to God. In such an event, the good magistrate was lawfully fulfilling his office by taking up arms in order to protect the innocent from the wicked.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, Viret made it clear in his 1547 *Remonstrances aux fideles* that in this context he meant any duly constituted inferior magistrate—hereditary, appointive, or elective. However, as was true with most of his published works, in this case Viret was not writing for a scholarly and international audience, but for a more

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*questions proposees par Jean Ropitel*, pp. 57-58; and Viret to the Council of Geneva, dated Feb. 6, 1563, at Lyon, letter no. 13, P. H. 1169, Archives d'État, Geneva.

<sup>30</sup>Pierre Viret, *Remonstrances aux fideles qui conversent entre les Papistes; et qui ont offices publiques, touchant les moyens qu'ilz doivent tenir en leur vocation à l'exemple des anciens serviteurs de Dieu* (Geneva, 1547), pp. 236, 331-338; and Robert D. Linder, "Pierre Viret and the Sixteenth-Century French Protestant Revolutionary Tradition," *Journal of Modern History* 38 (1966): 125-137. It is also significant that Viret was the first of the Calvinist writers to authorize active political resistance to tyranny. For a full discussion of this and related matters, see pp. 132-134 in my article cited above. It is interesting to observe that Viret was apparently the first Calvinist leader to address the issue of the right of resistance to legitimately ordained magistrates who were guilty of ungodly behavior. Here, he appears to abandon the Augustinian assumption that, even if a ruler fails to discharge the duties of his office, he must still be regarded as wielding power ordained by God. In this respect, Viret seems to have been the hinge between Calvin and Beza, on the one hand, and the more radically minded John Ponet, Christopher Goodman, and John Knox, on the other. See Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2:225-238.

general, popular, and French readership; therefore he was not as meticulous and detailed in his presentation as he otherwise might have been. He probably had in mind the Swiss mountain cantons, which chose their own leaders; the largely independent and republican city-states of Switzerland; the great, semi-autonomous cities of France, which elected municipal magistrates; and perhaps the various provinces and petty principalities within the kingdom of France, political units which enjoyed a large measure of self-government.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the focus of Viret's remarks concerning the right of resistance was somewhat different from that of a just war, but the basic issues and principles involved were the same in Viret's thought. There were times when a just cause allowed deviation from the generally accepted and divinely appointed behavior patterns of Christian believers. Moreover, his views on a just war and on the justification for political resistance to tyrants appear to be consistent with one another.

### 5. *Viret's Proposals for Peace*

Viret discussed war and peace, but did he have a program for peace? No, not in the sense that he wrote a comprehensive tract on "peace and how to obtain it." However, scattered throughout his writings there are suggestions calculated to promote peace in the world, especially within Christendom.

For example, and perhaps most obvious, Viret felt—like most Christian thinkers of his age—that the "main cause of wars in our time is our own sins."<sup>32</sup> According to him, Christian believers

<sup>31</sup>Viret's further comments on the subject seemed to fit these particular political entities: "I wish to say that we have many examples of those of whom I speak in many countries where the people have great liberty and freedom. For they are like lords unto themselves, except for some small recognition or obligation which they owe to some princes." *Remonstrances aux fideles*, p. 337. Also see Viret, *Traitez divers pour l'instruction des fideles qui resident et conversent es lieux et pais esquels il ne leur est permis de vivre en la pureté et liberte de l'Evangile* (Geneva, 1559), Part V, pp. 287-288. For more information on the subject of provincial and local government in France and Switzerland in the sixteenth century, see Gaston Zeller, *Les Institutions de la France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1948), pp. 37-56; *Histoire de Genève des origines à 1798*, published by the Société D'Histoire et D'Archéologie de Genève (Geneva, 1951), *passim*.; and Robert M. Kingdon, "The First Expression of Theodore Beza's Political Ideas," *ARG* 46 (1955): 88-89.

<sup>32</sup>Viret, *Instruction chrestienne*, 2:1-6.

should pray for peace and actively repent of their sins. The world cannot give true peace. Only God can give true peace through faith in Jesus Christ, and that experience is the foundation of any real peace to be established on earth.<sup>33</sup>

But there was more to Viret's suggestions for peace than the theological admonition to trust Christ and forge ahead. He often spoke movingly concerning the plight of the poor and pleaded for what today would be called social and economic justice as a basis for true peace on earth and good will among all peoples. He occasionally denounced the rich who lived off the sweat of the poor, and he called for laws which would protect workers from economic exploitation by the wealthy. He firmly believed that poverty could be overcome with hard work, while at the same time championing the right of the poor to obtain meaningful employment. He even suggested that the Reformed churches in the area of Orbe, Switzerland—his native land—should organize a program of systematic help for the poor: "For what better way is there to bring peace to the land and to show the true love of God than to provide the poor and oppressed with an opportunity to engage in the dignity of labor."<sup>34</sup>

Viret frequently made a third suggestion which he felt would help establish the public peace, and that was for all people of good will everywhere to tolerate the religious beliefs of other people. Indeed, he never went so far as the Anabaptists and never advocated full-blown religious liberty, but he did recommend toleration within reasonable limits. His more moderate outlook may have been the result in part of his own kindly nature and gentle disposition—often mentioned by those who knew him best—or it may have grown out of his humanist training as a young man. Whatever the case, he was much sought after as an agent of conciliation, and his reputation for fairness was widely known to Protestants and Catholics alike. He not only advocated religious

<sup>33</sup>Pierre Viret, *Exposition familiere sur le symbole des apostres, contenant les articles de la foy et un sommaire de la religion chrestienne* (Geneva, 1560), pp. 21-25.

<sup>34</sup>Pierre Viret, *Instruction chrestienne et somme generale de la doctrine comprise ès saintes Escritures, ou les principauz pointcs de la vraye religion sont familièrement traittez par Dialogues* (Geneva, 1559), p. 21. For similar sentiments, see Viret, *Instruction chrestienne* (1564), 1:575-663 and 2:701-702; and Pierre Viret, *Le monde a l'empire et le monde demoniacle, fait par Dialogues* (Geneva, 1561), pp. 113-115, 161-165, 212-221, and 273.

toleration as a cornerstone to true peace in the world (especially among Christian nations), but he was also, in fact, among the most tolerant of the first-generation Calvinist reformers.<sup>35</sup>

One of the weaknesses of Viret's suggestions for establishing and nourishing the public peace was, of course, that he was not a man of politics but a man of the pulpit. He could propose, warn, counsel, advise, teach, and advocate, but he could not make the key decisions reserved for statesmen and politicians. On the other hand, while he lived, Viret exercised considerable influence over a number of important Calvinist lay leaders, including several powerful figures in sixteenth-century French politics.<sup>36</sup> To be sure, like most of the key Protestant clergy of his day, Viret could only point out that God offered his peace to all people, delineate ways in which they could appropriate that peace (in both a religious and political sense), and emphasize that it was potentially universal—on the condition that they accept God's peace and conform their will to his. But that was often a powerful influence in an age of religion and religious commitment!

<sup>35</sup>Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, pp. 143-176; and Robert D. Linder, "Calvinism and Humanism: The First Generation," *CH* 44 (1975): 179-181. On the other hand, Viret could be a moving preacher and a tough opponent, as many Roman Catholic leaders in southern France found out in the period 1561-1571. He was not a mild-mannered personality nor a milk-toast liberal. But he could debate an issue vigorously, without malice toward those with whom he disagreed. Both Catholics and Protestants regarded him as one of the few to whom they could turn when they needed a respected arbiter. E.g., see Salmon, *Society in Crisis*, pp. 136, 178-182; and Ann H. Guggenheim, "Beza, Viret and the Church of Nîmes: National Leadership and Local Initiative in the Outbreak of the Wars of Religion," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance*, 37 (1975): 33-47.

<sup>36</sup>Viret died at Pau, France, on April 4, 1571. His passing was the cause of great lamentation among the Protestants of France. For instance, Jeanne d'Albret, Queen of Navarre, wrote to the Council of Geneva concerning his death: "Among the great losses which I have sustained during and since the last war, I place in the fore-front the loss of Monsieur Viret, whom God has taken unto Himself." Jeanne d'Albret to the Council of Geneva, dated April 22, 1571, at Pau, *Papiers Herminjard*, the Musée historique de la Réformation, Geneva. For other examples of Viret's relationships with powerful sixteenth-century French political figures, see Viret, prefatory letter to Gaspard de Coligny, dated Sept. 25, 1565, at Lyon, in *L'Interim*, Sigs. [1.i. to 2.x. verso.]; Nancy L. Roelker, *Queen of Navarre: Jeanne d'Albret, 1528-1572* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 230-231, 273-274; and Linder, *The Political Ideas of Pierre Viret*, pp. 111-112.



As for Viret himself, he definitely advocated a political position which might be properly called the Calvinist left: namely, revolution led by the inferior magistrates, but only under extreme provocation; and war waged, but only under the most pressing circumstances and only in order to establish a just peace. He believed that a just war must meet all of the conditions traditionally assigned to it by Augustine, and he held that a rigorous insistence on these conditions would quickly show that most wars were unjust. Moreover, he taught that a believer need not participate in an unjust war which violated the informed Christian conscience and/or threatened to compromise that believer's primary commitment to God. Viret's position illustrates that first-generation Calvinism was far less monolithic than is often thought and that, contrary to popular notions, Calvinist leaders could be extremely sensitive to such issues as war and peace.

#### *6. Implications of Viret's Approach*

Christians today can learn a great deal from Viret's thoughtful approach to the problems involved in embracing the doctrine of the just war. It is obvious that he was concerned that Christian believers observe two basic guidelines that are today referred to as "the principle of proportion" (which requires that the good achievable or the evil prevented be greater than the values destroyed or the destruction involved in any resort to arms) and "the principle of discrimination" (which stresses that some acts are not permissible even when fighting a so-called just war). Moreover, Viret linked Christians in the just-war tradition to their roots—roots which emphasize that all wars are evil and which restrain the participants in those wars which are deemed just and therefore necessary to be fought. There appears to be no room in Viret's thought for an aggressive first-strike mentality, or for warfare that is total and unrestrained.

Finally, Viret's ideas concerning a just war once again bring to the fore the issue of the responsibility of the individual versus the power of the secular state. Can the two ever be reconciled? In particular, should Christians participate in the martial activities of today's secular state under any circumstances? If so, what constitutes a just war in this age, especially in pluralistic societies? And under what circumstances is it permissible for Christians of one

nation to kill Christians of another nation—or for that matter, for Christians of any nation to kill anybody else—during time of war? Or did Jesus in principle disarm all Christians?

What is the responsibility of the individual Christian today in relation to the modern secular state and its military ventures? Pierre Viret has not provided any definitive answers to this important question, only the hope that individual responsibility and the power of the state can be made compatible in the case of a truly just war. But it is clear that he preferred that Christians be known as peacemakers!