

STUDIES IN CHURCH HISTORY

EDITED BY W.J. SHEILS

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THE CHURCH AND WAR

For the Ecclesiastical History Society
BASIL BLACKWELL

The Church and War

Edited by W.J. Sheils

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Since the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, the existence of warfare has faced individuals and institutions with many questions, of both a theoretical and a practical nature, concerning their religious beliefs. Hostilities involved a clear breach of Christian peace, which theologians from St Augustine to Reinhold Niebuhr have attempted to reconcile to the gospels. In much of this thinking the idea of the Just War has been elaborated in order to determine those conditions in which warfare can properly be waged in a world in which violence appears to be endemic. Thus the Italian city states and the crusading armies of the middle ages could appeal to the theory, as indeed have many 20th-century churchmen, some of whom, moreover, have seen in the experience of war, however regrettable it may be in itself, an opportunity for spiritual renewal. In opposition to this view, Christian pacifism has always found some following, and the scale of 20th-century warfare has led to a redefining and a revival of that position. In earlier centuries too such views were heard, among some 16th-century Dutch protestants and among the Waldensians, whose objection to killing in war was extended to embrace abhorrence of judicial killing.

In the middle ages the temporal involvement of the Church meant that it had to share in the financial and military burdens of war, both in Norman Italy and during the Hundred Years' War, when ecclesiastics were at the heart of most diplomatic activity. In later centuries churchmen were

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W.J. SHEILS

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BASIL BLACKWELL

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