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Alexander Campbell, Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb: A Nineteenth-Century Anti-War Triumvirate

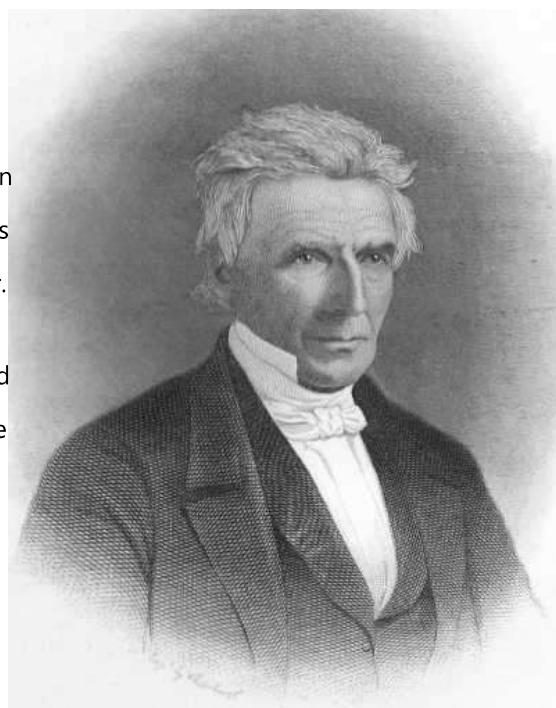
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A shorter version of this essay was presented at the 2013 Austrian Economics Research Conference at the Mises Institute.

Alexander Campbell, Tolbert Fanning, and David Lipscomb had three things in common. They all lived during the nineteenth century. They were all ministers in the Church of Christ denomination. And they were all vehemently anti-war.

To the historic Peace Churches must be added, at least for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, and the Christian Churches that came out of the [Stone-Campbell] "Restoration Movement" of the early nineteenth century. One of the largest groups of religious conscientious objectors during World War I was from the Church of Christ.

Campbell, Fanning, and Lipscomb were three outstanding nineteenth-century opponents of war and proponents of peace. All wrote well before the horrors of World War I, with Campbell and Fanning writing their anti-war works even before the carnage of the so-called Civil War. My



Alexander Campbell, Age 65

paper explores the connection between the anti-war views of Campbell, Fanning, and Lipscomb and modern libertarians and examines to what extent their overall political, economic, and religious philosophy paralleled their libertarian anti-war views.

Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) was born in Ireland, attended the University of Glasgow, and immigrated to America in 1809 with his family to join his father, Thomas Campbell, a Presbyterian minister who had immigrated to Pennsylvania two years previously. The elder Campbell soon left the Presbyterians, forming a Christian society in 1809 and a church in 1811. Alexander began preaching in 1810, and was ordained in 1812. He was soon acknowledged as the leader of what became known as the Restoration Movement. Campbell embarked on preaching tours, engaged in religious debates, and, in 1840, founded Bethany College in what is now Bethany, West Virginia, where he lived until his death. He also edited and published two journals, the *Christian Baptist*, from 1823-1830, and the *Millennial Harbinger*, from 1830 until his death in 1866. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Campbell expressed grief and disgust at the willingness of Christians to slaughter and destroy. He wrote in the *Millennial Harbinger* to not only dissuade Christians from participating in the Civil War, but to condemn the war as a monstrosity that "caps the climax of human folly and gratuitous wickedness." Campbell reminded his readers that "no Christian man who fears God and desires to be loyal to the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, shall be found in the ranks of so unholy a warfare."

I shall present Campbell's anti-war views from his famous "Address on War" that was originally delivered in May, 1848, in Wheeling, Virginia, published in the *Millennial Harbinger* in July the same year, and printed in the Congressional Record in 1937 at the request of Rep. Joseph B. Shannon (D-MO).

Tolbert Fanning (1810-1874) was born in Tennessee, and raised in Tennessee and Alabama. He began preaching at age 19, and made several preaching tours with Alexander Campbell. He graduated from Nashville University in 1835, established a school for girls in Franklin, Tennessee, in 1837, and then founded and served as the first president of Franklin College. He began the *Christian Review* magazine in 1844 and, with William Lipscomb, the brother of David, the *Gospel Advocate* in 1855. Like Campbell, Fanning opposed Christian participation in the Civil War at its outbreak.

I shall present Fanning's anti-war views from his March 1847 article in the *Christian Review* titled simply "War."

David Lipscomb (1831-1917) was born in Tennessee, lived briefly in Illinois and Georgia, and then spent the rest of his life in Tennessee. His family was active in the Restoration Movement before he was born. Lipscomb was baptized by Tolbert Fanning in 1845. He graduated from Franklin College in 1849, and, with James Harding (the namesake of Harding University), founded the Nashville Bible School in 1891. The school was named in his honor as Lipscomb University after his death. Lipscomb began preaching in 1856, and made numerous preaching tours throughout the South. In 1866, Lipscomb began again to publish the *Gospel Advocate*, which his brother and Fanning had edited until it was forced to suspend publication at the start of the Civil War. He served as the magazine's editor for fifty years. The magazine is still published today. Like Campbell and Fanning, he

opposed Christian participation in the Civil War at its outbreak. During the war, he was to Southerners a traitor; after the war, he was to Northerners a Southern sympathizer. Although Lipscomb was Alexander Campbell's most noted disciple, and their lives overlapped, there is no evidence that the two ever met.

I shall present Lipscomb's anti-war **DO NOT** from his 1889 book, *Civil Government: Its Origin, Mission, and Destiny*, and the Christian's Relation to It (<https://libertarianchristians.com/donate>) (<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1610978730/?tag=libchr-20>), which was originally published as a series of articles in the *Gospel Advocate* from 1866 to 1867.

Campbell on War

I first turn to Alexander Campbell. Although he waited until the end of the Mexican War to speak out against it, Campbell says he often reflected with intense interest "on the desolations and horrors of war, as indicated in the sacrifice of human life, the agonies of surviving relatives, the immense expenditures of a people's wealth, and the inevitable deterioration of public morals."

Campbell builds his case against Christian participation in war slowly and punctuates it by a series of questions. He begins by asking: "Has one Christian nation a right to wage war against another Christian nation?" But after concluding that "in strict logical and grammatical truth, there is not, of all the nations of the earth, one properly called a Christian nation," he rephrases the question as: "Can Christ's kingdom or church in one nation wage war against his own kingdom or church in another nation?" Campbell answers his question with another question: "Where is the man so ignorant of the letter and spirit of Christianity as to answer this question in the affirmative?" But in reply to those who have some difficulty with the question and might hypothetically tell him that the form of his question "meets not the exact state of the case," Campbell posits another question: "What, then, says the Bible on the subject of war?" After briefly surveying the Jewish wars of the Old Testament, Campbell concludes that "what the God of Abraham did by Abraham, by Jacob, or by any of his sons, . . . is of no binding authority now" because of the "new administration of the universe" whereby "Jesus Christ is now the Lord and King of both earth and heaven." Having established this fact, Campbell shifts his focus to the participation of the Christian individual in war.

Again, he begins with a question: "Can an individual, not a public functionary, morally do that in obedience to his government which he cannot do in his own case?" He concludes that "we cannot of right, as Christian men, obey the POWERS THAT BE in any thing not in itself lawful and right according to the written law" of Jesus Christ. Campbell then advances a step further and affirms:

A Christian man can never, of right be compelled to do that for the state, in defence of state rights, which he cannot of right do for himself in defence of his own personal rights. No Christian man is commanded to love or serve his neighbor, his king, or sovereign more than he loves or serves himself. This conceded, and, unless a Christian man can go to war for himself, he cannot for the state.

Christians have no commandment as respects the works peculiar to a soldier or the prosecution of a political war. They are to "live peaceably with all men to the full extent of their power" because "the spirit of Christianity is essentially pacific."

But it's not just war, for, says Campbell, "a Christian man cannot conscientiously enter upon any business, nor lend his energies to any ~~cause~~ which he does not approve, and, in order to approve, he must understand the nature and object of the undertaking." ~~He then skillfully applies this dictum to war.~~

Nothing, it is alleged, more tends to weaken the courage of a conscientious soldier, than to reflect upon the originating causes of wars and the objects for which they are prosecuted. These, indeed, are not always easily comprehended. Many wars have been long prosecuted, and some have been terminated after many and long protracted efforts, before the great majority of the soldiers themselves, on either side, distinctly understood what they were fighting for.

To Campbell, "the most convincing argument against a Christian becoming a soldier may be drawn from the fact that he fights against an innocent person." If soldiers from warring sides meet in public out of uniform "they would, most probably, have not only inquired after the welfare of each other, but would have tendered to each other their assistance if called for." But if a uniform is their only introduction to each other, it serves as "the signal that they must kill or be killed." How could a Christian man, says Campbell, "thus volunteer his services, or hire himself out for so paltry a sum, or for any sum, to kill to order his own brother man who never offended him in word or deed."

Campbell had some harsh words regarding the soldier – "the professional and licensed butcher of mankind" who, with his "vulgar profanity, brutality, and debauchery" hires himself "to lay waste a country, to pillage, burn, and destroy the peaceful hamlet, the cheerful village, or the magnificent city; and to harass, wound, and destroy his fellow-man, for no other consideration than his paltry wages, his daily rations, and the infernal pleasure of doing it."

Campbell also laments the pernicious influence of the warrior spirit on society. Women are fascinated with soldiers "whose profession it is to make widows and orphans." Young mothers dress their boys as soldiers, training them "for the admired profession of a man-killer." The glorification of military leaders in schools and colleges also echoes this false spirit. Campbell is especially troubled that this delusion is found in the pulpit. He considers war prayers as "desecrating the religion of the Prince of Peace." He mocks the idea of chaplains on both sides of a conflict offering up prayers for "the success of rival armies, as if God could hear them both, and make each triumphant over the other, guiding and commissioning swords and bullets to the heads and hearts of their respective enemies." He is aghast that there would be a thanksgiving and rejoicing that God has caused "ten or twenty thousand of our enemies" to be sent to hell and myriads of widows and orphans to be made "at the bidding of some chieftain, or of some aspirant to a throne." In some cities, St. Paul has been "driven out of the church to make room for Generals and Commodores renowned in fight."

Campbell sums up his address with eight points.

1. The guilty generally make war and the innocent suffer its consequences.
2. The right given to the Jews to wage war is not vouchsafed to any other nation.
3. Prophecies indication that the Messiah would be the Prince of Peace.
4. The Gospel is a message which results in producing "peace on earth and good will among men."
5. The precepts of Christianity positively inhibit war.
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6. The beatitudes of Christ are not pronounced on patriots, heroes, and conquerors; but on peacemakers.
7. War is folly because it can never be the criterion of justice, it can never be a satisfactory end of the controversy, and because peace is always the result of negotiation.
8. War is wicked because soldiers engaged in killing their brethren have no personal cause of provocation whatsoever; soldiers seldom, or ever, comprehend the right or the wrong of the war; the innocent are punished with the guilty, wars constrain the soldier to do for the state that, which, he were to do in his own case, the state would condemn him to death; and because wars are the pioneers of all other evils to society.

Give me the money "that has been spent in wars," says Campbell, "and I will clear up every acre of land in the world that ought to be cleared – drain every marsh – subdue every desert – fertilize every mountain and hill – and convert the whole earth into a continuous series of fruitful fields, verdant meadows, beautiful villas, hamlets, towns, cities, standing along smooth and comfortable highways and canals, in the midst of luxuriant and fruitful orchards, vineyards, and gardens." "I would found, furnish, and endow, he continues, "many schools, academies, and colleges, as would educate the whole human race – build meeting-houses, public halls, lyceums, and furnish them with libraries adequate to the wants of a thousand millions of human beings."

Campbell's anti-war views were grounded in logic and Scripture. Based on Christ's declaration that his kingdom was not of this world, Campbell reasoned that if the cause of Christ should not be defended militarily, then surely no lesser cause would be sufficient for Christians to take up arms. If Christ would not have his servants take up the sword in defense of his life, for whose life ought it to be taken up?

Campbell concludes his "Address on War" with wonder and shame that he has not spoken out or written out his views. He laments that he might have "saved some lives" if he had published something two or three years previously.

Fanning on War

Tolbert Fanning begins by marveling that nations and individuals still settled their difficulties "by mortal combat – not questioning at all, the divine right of slaying their fellows." He says he writes not for savages or infidels, "but for the civilized nations of the earth, and for such professed Christians as feel authorized of God and their country, to take the life of their brother man." He then offers nine arguments against war, with the sixth argument itself containing nine reasons, based on the New Testament, why there is no such thing as "christian war."

Fanning doubts whether distinctions can be made among "just" wars, "offensive" wars, and "defensive" wars. No one has ever read in history of a people who acknowledge themselves the offending party – "all plead justification, on the ground of aggressions from the enemy." Indeed, "there is scarcely, in the annals of Time, an account of an important war, in which both parties did not operate, both offensively and defensively." As soon as war is declared, the technicalities of offensive and defensive war are forgotten.

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Fanning considered the causes of war to be love of conquest, territory, lust, and plunder. He lamented the "fame of military chieftains" that "exerts a vast influence" on the mind of youth. Because "all the causes of war are fleshly," the idea of "holy wars" is "utterly inadmissible."

In answer to the question of whether the Christian institution permits its subjects to engage in war, Fanning pointedly says: "Christians, as a nation, church, or individuals, have no divine authority for engaging in war, offensive or defensive, for fame, plunder, revenge, or for the benefit of themselves or their enemies."

The silence of Christ as to the particulars of worldly governments is to show "that his religion could exist, regardless of particular forms of civil governments." Christianity was "designed to flourish under every form of human government, and even without the form of human legislation."

Fanning offers nine reasons "for believing that Christians have no right to engage in war."

1. If the spirit of war had existed in the government of Christ, we might reasonably suppose he would have appealed to arms to establish it.
2. The command "Resist not evil" cannot be reconciled with the spirit or practice of war.
3. No people have engaged in bloody deeds without transgressing the precept of loving our enemies.
4. The idea of revenge is wholly incompatible with the spirit and genius of Christianity.
5. We are commanded to follow peace with all men.
6. The spirit that Christians are commanded to cultivate forever precludes the spirit and practice of war.
7. Christ's declaration that his kingdom was not of this world is demonstrable evidence that Christian war had no countenance from the Savior.
8. The early Christians did not feel themselves at liberty to fight and destroy the Almighty's creatures.
9. The early Christians did not even take part in civil government.

Because he believed that "the whole teaching of the New Testament, is to impress the spirit of long suffering and forbearance; and to sacrifice property and life itself, rather than deny the Savior," Fanning even eschewed Christian participation in wars of self-defense.

Fanning did not specifically mention soldiers or the institution of the military. But with all that he said in condemnation of Christians engaging in war, it is hard to believe that Fanning could ever be in favor of Christians "serving" in the military. The only thing he said that could be taken as a reference to this is simple yet profound: "We read no place in scripture, or in

history, of General Peter, Col. Paul, Capt. John, or even Ensign Luke.”

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Lipscomb on War



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Last, but not least, there is David Lipscomb. Because he is writing on the Christian's relation to government, he focuses on the state as the instigator of war. Just listen to these three statements:

The chief occupation of human governments from the beginning has been war. Nine-tenths of the taxes paid by the human family, have gone to preparing for, carrying on, or paying the expenses of war.

All the wars and conflicts of earth, all the desolation, ruin and blood-shed, between separated nations, or distinct peoples, are the fruits of human government.

The people of Maine and Texas, of England and India, could never become enemies or be involved in strife and war, save through the intervention of human government to spread enmity and excite to war. Individuals in contact might, through conflict of interest, or personal antipathy, become embittered, and engage in war with each other, but distinct nations or peoples could have no strife save as they should be excited and carried on by these human governments.

Lipscomb also brings the religious element into this: “All the wars and strifes between tribes, races, nations, from the beginning until now, have been the result of man's effort to govern himself and the world, rather than to submit to the government of God.”

He lamented the then-recent Civil War and the spectacle “of disciples of the Prince of Peace, with murderous weapons seeking the lives of their fellowmen.” He considered it “abhorrent to the principles of the religion of the Savior, who died that even his enemies might live,” that “brethren for whom Christ died” were found “imbruing their hands in the blood of their own brethren in Christ, making their sisters widows and their sisters' children orphans.”

Lipscomb thought it immoral to kill on behalf of government: “Christians cannot fight, cannot slay one another or their fellowmen, at the behest of any earthly ruler, or to establish or maintain any human government.” And neither can they vote to make others fight: “A man who votes to bring about a war, or that votes for that which logically and necessarily brings about war is responsible for that war and for all the necessary and usual attendants and results of that war.”

Echoing Alexander Campbell, Lipscomb concludes that “Christ disavows the earthly character of his kingdom,” declaring “that it is of a nature so different from all worldly kingdoms, that his servants could not fight for his kingdom.” And “if they could not fight for his kingdom, they could not fight for any kingdom.” And unlike Christian warmongers of today, for Lipscomb that included the kingdom of the United States.

Politics, War, and the State

My conclusion will focus on politics, war, and the state. It is impossible to be a libertarian and not be anti-war. War is not only nothing but state-sponsored terrorism, violence, and aggression; it is also the health of the state. The connection between the anti-war views of Campbell, Fanning, and Lipscomb and modern libertarians is a strong one. In fact, because they don't sanitize soldiers or call killing for the state serving the country, they are more consistent than some modern libertarians. Their shared religious philosophy certainly guided their anti-war views, but cannot be said to be solely responsible for such views

There remains to be seen the economic and political views of the members of this anti-war triumvirate and to what extent their overall philosophy paralleled their libertarian anti-war views.

Campbell received his early education from his father, an education steeped in the tradition of John Locke. He spoke favorably of Adam Smith and other classical liberals. He admired Thomas Jefferson. He was a fierce defender of the separation of church and state. He wrote in the *Christian Baptist* that "the clergy have ever been the greatest tyrants in every state, and at the present they are, in every country in Europe, on the side of the oppressors of the people who tramp on the rights of men." He defended the importance of private property. He used at Bethany College the works of Francis Wayland, the great Baptist champion of liberty, property, and peace that Campbell frequently references in the *Millennial Harbinger*. He opposed Christian participation in politics, considering it "a moral pestilence." "The spirit of politicians and the spirit of God," said Campbell, "are as antagonistic as flesh and spirit, as hatred and love, as heaven and hell; and he that would faithfully and truly serve the one, must abjure all allegiance to the other." Campbell considered patriotism to be a "pagan virtue" that had "no special place in the Christian religion." Although he believed that the state existed to punish crimes against men, he did not believe in using state power to punish sins against God. He was very critical of moral societies looking to the state to help stamp out sin. He considered the Church to be God's answer to the world's evils. Were it not for the prevalence of injustice and violence in the world, thought Campbell, "civil government would be wholly unnecessary." With these views on the nature and role of government, I don't see how we can describe Campbell as anything but a libertarian.

I have only a little information about Fanning's economic and political views. From his article on war we can see that he spoke favorably of the early Christians not taking part in civil government. Lipscomb wrote in a book on Franklin College in 1906 that Fanning "never voted or took part in the political and civil contests of the country." And in Lipscomb's book, *Civil Government*, he quotes from this statement of Fanning:

All the powers of the world are created by violence, and must necessarily be upheld by force; but the Lord established his kingdom by peaceable means – by love and kindness. Worldly governments are all under the prince of this world, and the government of Christians is administered by the Prince of Peace. These two characters of government are antipodal to each other. Spiritual government is to “break in pieces and consume” all of Satan’s principalities; but the great work is not to be accomplished by violence but by love. Christ was not of the world neither were his disciples, and Christians in the nineteenth century should not be instruments in the hands of the devil to carry out his purposes.

Based on what little information we have, and because he did not condemn government merely because of its war making, Fanning can certainly be classified as at least a classical liberal.

Lipscomb was as fervently anti-state as he was anti-war. He distinguished human government from the government of God. He believed that the “essential elements” of human government were “evil.” Human government, said Lipscomb, “bears the same relation to hell that the church bears to heaven.” Echoing Murray Rothbard and Hans Hoppe, Lipscomb described civil government as resting “on force as its foundation.” Civil power is “founded on force, lives by it and it is its only weapon of offence or defence.” Government is not benevolent. Its rulers oppress their subjects “for their own benefit.” Christians should submit to human government when doing so does not directly violate Scripture, but should also work “to seek its destruction.” This should be accomplished, not by violence and the sword, but by “spreading the religion of Christ and so converting men from service to the earthly government to service to the heavenly one.” Christians should neither participate in government nor vote. They should not use the civil powers “to promote righteousness, morality, or good to humanity.” Even more so than Campbell, we can’t describe Lipscomb as anything but a libertarian.

With examples like these, why is it that the greatest supporters of war and the military continue to be conservative Christians? I have given many reasons for this in my many articles and lectures on Christianity and war. But now we must add two more: ignorance or rejection of the nineteenth-century anti-war triumvirate of Alexander Campbell, Tolbert Fanning, and David Lipscomb.

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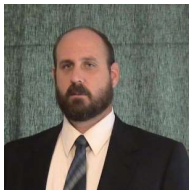

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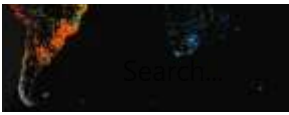
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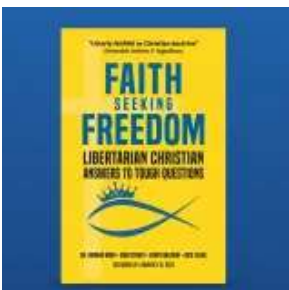


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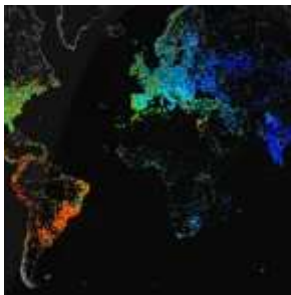
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