

An Appeal to Abolish War

To Christian Leaders and Theologians:

As Christians called out to serve the Church in differing Christian traditions we appeal to our Christian sisters and brothers to join in a campaign to abolish war as a legitimate means of resolving political conflict between states. Though our Appeal is addressed to the Christian community, we fervently believe that if our witness is true, many not part of that community may want to join our appeal to abolish war. God has, after all, created us all to desire the Kingdom of Peace.

To many theologians this call for the abolition of war will appear presumptuous (who are these people anyhow?). To others it may seem theologically flawed and practically futile. Yet with John Paul II's phrase from *Centesimus Annus*, "War never again," ringing in our ears and with Tertullian's succinct summary of early Church teaching before our eyes: "The Lord in disarming Peter henceforth disarms every soldier," we are driven back to that basic conviction that in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the destructive powers of this world, prominent among them *War*, were radically overcome. It is loyalty to the example and teaching of Jesus Christ which first and foremost summons Christians to renounce war and to seek with the wider religious and human communities to develop alternatives in protecting the innocent, restraining aggressors, overcoming injustice. Let us study war no more. Let us study peace.

From their fourth-century origins, Christian attempts at justifying war have always been intellectually and spiritually vulnerable and politically inadequate. It is very doubtful if any war during that period fulfilled the traditional criteria of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. In more recent times Christian leaders who still endorse the concept of a just war are finding it increasingly difficult to see how criteria such as having exhausted all nonviolent means ("last resort"), non-combatant immunity, and proportionality could be observed. In official documents and theological analyses alike, there is a discernible unease with the applicability of "just war theory" but even greater unease with its Christian authenticity.

This Appeal, based primarily on the behalf of the incompatibility of war with the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, wishes to draw all Christians into a serious conversation about the Christian and moral acceptability of war and indeed to draw all concerned humans into the examination and development of alternatives to war. Only in such a comprehensive enterprise can this Appeal's final goal of actually abolishing war hope to have any chance of success. We hope those committed to just war reflection will join us in calling for the abolition of war. For it surely must be the case that advocates of just war have as we do a stake in making war a doubtful enterprise.

Why now? We do not think so much that the peculiar horror of modern war is the primary reason or that people are so much more enlightened today that they will readily respond to such an appeal or that alternatives are already in the making, although these

may be auxiliary or indeed persuasive reasons for many. Rather, we call for the end of war now because all time is under God's judgment. So there is no time like the present (or the past) to say again in John Paul II's words, what has already been said by God in Christ, "War never again." Such a call seems all the more important, however, in a world where the uses of communication and its manipulation make war not only a greater possibility but more hidden.

We have no illusions that our call for the abolition of war will bring an immediate or even quick end to the massacres called war. So we are phrasing it in terms for interrogation and dialogue, seeking as we have said to promote serious conversation and analysis among Christian leaders and thinkers on the Christian roots and possibilities of the project. We hope to enlist university faculties in the theological and secular sciences, as well as research institutes in the search for the peaceful alternatives that would be more easily convincing of the immorality of war for a wider and (non-) Christian public by revealing it as also unnecessary.

This, of course, calls for an energetic and lengthy campaign of conversation and perhaps better than conversation, the conversion of Christians to the true anti-war dimension of their own faith and the conversion of all to the enriching potential of their fellow humans. Our call for the abolition of war will hopefully put us on the long hard road towards the hope of developing peaceful witness as well as developing attitudes and structures for resolving conflicts nonviolently. We believe the serious study of the process of peace will only begin once the necessity of war is denied.

There are encouraging precedents for the larger hope. It was once assumed that slavery was simply part of "the natural order." Those calling for slavery's abolition were thought to be foolish utopian dreamers. We are well aware that slavery still exists in multiple disguises, but no one thinks aloud that slavery can be justified, or that a public profit can be made from it. We know that what we call war will continue in various guises, but we trust that in the near future at least no Christian will be tempted to think that when they say "war" they are affirming the necessity of wars or giving them justification. Let the twenty-first century be for war what the nineteenth was for slavery, the era of its abolition, and let Christians give the leadership necessary in achieving that.

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