



Witnesses of These Things: Ecumenical Engagement in a New Era

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**“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in one body”
Colossians 3:15¹**

I. Introduction

A Painful Wound in the Body of Christ

Dear Abby:

*My father is a businessman who travels.
Each time he returns from one of his trips,
His shoes and trousers
are covered with blood-
but he never forgets to bring me a nice present;
Should I say something?*

Signed, America²

The words of the poet disturb and provoke, yet there is a truth in them that can not be ignored. And what about the church?

The *central message* of the Church of Jesus Christ is the message of grace and peace (Lk 10:5; 2 Cor 5:19; Eph 2:17; Rom 1:7). Participating in God’s reconciling work is the *central task* of the Church of Jesus Christ (Jn 20:21; Col 1:20; 2 Cor 5:18; Eph 1:9-10, 3:10). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, followers of Jesus are called to love like Jesus, standing with those who are at the margins, loving even enemies, and forgiving. This is a love that precludes violence and killing (Mt 25:52). Even more, *in its very life together*, the church is a fellowship of people who were at one time strangers and aliens but now, through the grace of God, have become brothers and sisters (Eph 2:19-22, Gal 3:27-28; 1 Pet 2:9-10). The church delivers the

message of reconciliation not just by what it says, or even by what it does, but also by what it is. The Church of Jesus Christ is a peace church. This is both a gift and a calling.

Many Christians regularly recall the four marks of the church when they recite the Nicene Creed. The church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Peacemaking would be a fifth mark.³ Who are we? We are one, holy, catholic and apostolic fellowship (*koinōnia*), knit together as the body of Christ which embodies and carries the peace of Christ into the world.

But there are open and painful wounds in the church in our land. Our Sunday prayers are disconnected from our Monday realities. How do we hear the words “Be not afraid” while living on orange alert? We have said many things, but our position papers and pronouncements carry less and less weight, even among our own members. Every time we fill our gas tank, we are reminded how enmeshed we are in the projection of US military force into villages and homes on the other side of the globe. Parts of the church, often within the same denomination, are marching in very different directions, but rarely, if ever, do we listen and speak to each other. When Christians attack and kill others, sometimes even brothers and sisters in the faith, the depth of the wound is only fully known to the mind of God.

Putting on the Mind of Christ and Being Led by the Spirit

We take hope, however, that gathered together around the cross of Jesus Christ, we *have* become brothers and sisters and we are made new. He “is our peace, who has made us both one.” (Eph 2:14) Our life and witness is rooted in the One who ushered in God’s reign of shalom and who is uniting all things through the power of his saving love.

Together we testify that the grace and love of God has power to continue to transform us and our world. Only this power can help us move through our fears which so often immobilize us or keep us entrenched in old ways of thinking and being. Jesus is the One who poured out his life in love for us while we were weak, while we were yet sinners, even as we were God’s enemies (Rom 5:6-10). It is only as we enter more deeply into relationship with Jesus the Christ that we can hope to speak and act faithfully and effectively in a world racked by the horror, pain and suffering of war. Our peacemaking involves putting on the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5) and being led by the Spirit – apart from this it is impossible.

We confess how deeply enmeshed we are in systems of war. We rejoice at the times and places where God’s grace has broken through and empowered brothers and sisters to offer a word of truth, a deed of courage and a sign of God’s peace. We pray for an outpouring of God’s Spirit. We appeal to each other to be open to the new thing God wants to do in us and through us. God has been preparing us for such a time as this.

II. The Past

War and Christendom

In assessing our current moment, it is important to trace the long arch of history through significant historic and ethical shifts in the church's teaching and practice related to warfare.

The early church underscored the blessedness of the peace-builders' calling to love and serve the neighbor – and even the enemy. Church historians remind us that for much of its first three centuries the early church disapproved of war and military participation, because of how it understood the way God was at work in the world in light of the parables, prophetic teachings and pastoral ministry of Jesus. Through God's grace the church was a new community, a reconciled humanity, that in its very life together was a sign of what God intended for all of creation.

In the fourth century CE, Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. This moment has come to represent what was a more gradual but very profound shift. In less than one hundred years the early church went from a persecuted minority to the only legal religion in the Roman Empire. This new marriage with imperial power was a dramatic change in the relationship between church and state, and marked the beginning of the Christendom era. As the church moved from the catacombs to the cathedrals many related significant understandings and practices were profoundly altered, including Christian understandings of war.

A striking example of the shift in Christian ethics is illustrated in the story of St. Martin of Tours. "It is not lawful for me to fight," he declared when he left the Roman Army in CE 356. St. Martin understood his confession to be in harmony with the teaching and discipline of the pre-imperial church. He told his officers he would be willing to go to the front line, unarmed if necessary, but that, as a soldier of Jesus, he could no longer carry a sword against others. While still a soldier, St. Martin started reclaiming the visible witness of peace-building when he divided his fine military cloak with a knife and gave half of it to a scantily clad and hungry man. Martin later dreamt that the man was in fact Jesus.

Ironically, after his death St. Martin was declared a patron saint of the military and one king even carried Martin's famous cloak into battle trusting it would bring military victory. This is but one example of how the stories and symbols of early Christian faith were transformed and appropriated into a new piety where church and empire served a common cause.

The new, close relationship of the church and state in Christendom, combined with the threats to the Empire of barbarian invasions, led Christian leaders to ask how they could responsibly join Christian emperors in wars that might protect their interests, vindicate justice and preserve peace. Evolving Christian attitudes blended with the ideals of war and peace in classical antiquity and in the Hebrew Bible gradually developed into theories and theologies of 'just war.'

The intent of just war theory was never to simply license war but to place careful ethical limits on warfare in service of the eventual goal of peace and justice in society. But the marriage of cross and sword often led to the justification of war as a means of extending the reach and witness of the church, whether one considers the crusades, the Iberian conquistadors in the Americas or the aspirations of European colonists. In heart-wrenching examples we are witness to new practices and teachings about war which eclipsed the earlier Christian resistance to participation in war. Within Christendom the prophetic longing for peace and mandate to "seek the welfare of the city" (Jer 29:7; see 28:9) and the call of Jesus to "Love your enemies" (Mt 5:44) were reframed as subterranean ethical interests or naïve ideals of a simpler time.

Christendom utilized religious principles in order to reinforce structures of power and sanction violence against other human beings. This was a long way indeed, from the Jesus story of prophetic dissent and visionary peace-building. In the long arch, Christendom was an

immense detour from the church's self-understanding as a fellowship of the body of Christ, as a lived message of reconciliation and peace to the world.

War, Peace and the Ecumenical Movement

The last hundred years have likely been the bloodiest in human history. It is not surprising, then, that the modern ecumenical movement was shaped by periods of particularly intense conflict and often sought to bring the gospel of grace and peace to bear in war-ravaged settings.⁴ The Life and Work movement, one of the streams that formed the World Council of Churches (WCC), was born amid the debris of World War I. Those four years of carnage were, in effect, a Christian civil war: Protestant Britain, Roman Catholic France and Orthodox Russia aligned against Protestant Germany, Roman Catholic Austria and Orthodox Bulgaria – with no mechanism or platform for bringing the churches together for dialogue and possible common witness.

In a similar fashion the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State, meeting in 1937, declared: “If war breaks out, then pre-eminently the church must manifestly be the church, still united as the one Body of Christ, though the nations wherein it is planted fight each other.”⁵ Willem Visser 't Hooft, first general secretary of the WCC, called this “the charter of the ecumenical movement.”⁶ In the wake of World War II the WCC's First Assembly (Amsterdam 1948) declared that “War is contrary to the will of God”⁷ and the Second Assembly (Evanston 1954) declared that war is “inherently evil.”⁸

These declarations led some delegates to confess their perplexity about how such visionary statements might be acted on in the *real* world. They maintained that in this real world of violence and military aggression, nonviolent negotiation and peaceful conflict transformation remained an impossible ideal. While war may be “inherently evil,” it was nonetheless sometimes necessary. Some Christian pacifists likewise agreed that while nonviolence might be the most faithful response to conflict it was hardly a pragmatic political answer to the terrors of the times. Machiavelli's classic articulation of this position – where the practical needs of the state trump the idealism of the church – continued to shape the framework for many Christians.

But these statements also expressed an important point of convergence among Christians, that we should never identify our wars with God's purposes. ‘Crusade’ is not an acceptable Christian position and we can never go to war in the name of God. God's purpose is shalom and all churches and individual Christians are called to be peacemakers. This is an essential mark of Christian discipleship.

In the midst of the Cold War, with nuclear weapons aimed at Christians on both sides, newly created ecumenical networks helped the church be the church. The WCC's New Delhi Assembly (1961) noted that “the entry of the Orthodox Church of Russia into membership of the World Council is a dramatic confirmation of our faith that God is holding his family together in spite of human sin and complexity, and is a sign of hope for the world.”⁹

As Christians wrestled with their calling to be peacemakers in the real world, another hard won point of broad ecumenical agreement emerged. In the words of the WCC Central Committee, that “there are some forms of violence in which Christians may not participate and which the churches must condemn.” The committee, in a study published in 1973, listed the following: “...the conquest of one people by another, the deliberate oppression of one class or

race by another, any form of torture, the holding of innocent hostages, and the indiscriminate killing of non-combatants.”¹⁰ This last point is the primary basis for the broad ecumenical denunciation of nuclear weapons. The WCC’s Vancouver Assembly in 1983 declared that “The production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds.”¹¹

The endless wars, atomic and nuclear blasts, holocausts, genocides, ethnic cleansings and religious violence of the last hundred years, recent preemptive wars, the immense commitment of resources to procuring weapons of war while half the world’s people live in staggering poverty, have all called into serious question the ideology of military ‘realism.’ In a sobering way, the realistic Jesus speaks directly to us: “all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Mt 26:52) The dreams of justice and lasting peace secured through military force lie in waste in the cemeteries and forgotten graves of broken bodies around the world.

While the last century has been one of the bloodiest, it has also marked the development of nonviolence as a powerful tool for social change. Badshah Khan and Mahatma Gandhi first demonstrated the power of nonviolence on a mass scale. Numerous nonviolent victories over injustice during the past years, from the Southern Freedom Movement in the United States to Solidarity in Poland, have highlighted the power and effectiveness of courageous nonviolence. It is estimated that during this century more than half the world’s population has been involved in nonviolent struggles of liberation, from the Philippines and Korea, to Ghana and South Africa, from El Salvador and Guatemala to East Germany and Estonia.¹² Christians and Christian churches have been at the heart of many of these movements. The lived experiences of these movements and the preaching and teaching of their leaders have powerfully shaped the political and theological imagination of Christians around the globe. A new kind of realism is emerging which recognizes the power of nonviolence because it follows the grain of the universe.

The WCC picked up the conversation about nonviolent social change at its Fourth Assembly in Uppsala in August, 1968. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was scheduled to preach at the opening session, but his life had been cut short by an assassin’s bullet four months earlier. One year earlier, to the day, in a speech entitled “Beyond Vietnam – A Time to Break Silence,” he had called his own government “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”¹³ During the Uppsala assembly the delegates unanimously approved a resolution calling on member churches to hold up the example of Dr. King as a way of deepening their faith, and they initiated a process for studying nonviolent methods of social change. This process led to a five-day consultation on Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice in 1972 in Cardiff, Wales which involved fifty global church representatives and was chaired by James Lawson, Methodist minister and close friend and co-worker of Dr. King.¹⁴

In 1984 evangelical author and activist Ron Sider gave a powerful challenge to Mennonites to move beyond a passive rejection of violence to an active nonviolent engagement for justice and peace. He challenged pacifist Christians to take the same risks for peace that soldiers take in war. Out of this call was born Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), which now trains and fields teams of nonviolent peacemakers in communities from the West Bank and Iraq to Colombia. CPT and similar groups such as the Friends Peace Team, Peace Brigades International and the WCC initiated Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel are gathering experience in nonviolent intervention in war zones.

God is bringing forth a new heaven and a new earth, uniting all things in Christ (Eph 1:10). Throughout Christendom, the church aligned itself with the emperor’s way of uniting all

things – peace through superior firepower. Christendom freely told the just war story which claimed violence was the last resort. But a cloud of faithful witnesses reminds us that for followers of Jesus, the cross, and not the sword, is the last resort. It is bold, nonviolent service, confrontation and love empowered by God’s own Holy Spirit that has the power to unite all things and bring forth a kingdom of shalom.

We see these shifts in imagination and practice reflected in many places. The Catholic Church offers one striking example. During Vatican II Dorothy Day, Hildegard Goss-Mayr and numerous others prayed and wrestled with bishops and cardinals, to have the path of nonviolence and conscientious objection acknowledged as a faithful possibility, if still only a minority voice at the margins. In 1993 when the US Conference of Catholic Bishops revisited their pastoral letter on nuclear weapons, they stated that “The Christian tradition possesses two ways to address conflict: nonviolence and just war. They both share the common goal: to diminish violence in this world.”¹⁵ The bishops wrote that the nonviolent revolutions in places as diverse as the Philippines and eastern Europe “challenge us to find ways to take into full account the power of organized, active nonviolence.” Pope John Paul II spoke repeatedly about nonviolence as the path of Christian discipleship, with the use of violence being permissible only in certain extreme exceptions. Early in his papacy, while visiting Ireland he declared: “To all who are listening I say: Do not believe in violence; do not support violence. It is not the Christian way. It is not the way of the Catholic Church. Believe in peace and forgiveness and love; for they are of Christ.”¹⁶ In a 2008 homily, Pope Benedict XVI said that “Loving the enemy is the nucleus of the ‘Christian revolution.’”¹⁷ A 2008 joint Mennonite and Catholic Contribution to the World Council of Churches’ Decade to Overcome Violence initiative states that “We affirm Jesus’ teaching and example on non-violence as normative for Christians.”¹⁸

Ecumenical dialogue during the last hundred years and reflection together on experiences during that time have led to remarkable points of convergence in Christian understanding of war. Exceptions, questions and differences persist, but the possibilities of Jesus’ nonviolent way of righting wrong are being explored, practiced and promoted in unprecedented fashion.

II. Our Present Moment

The End of Christendom

Though Christians are a large and active majority in the United States, we increasingly recognize that we live in a pluralistic society. The Christian church no longer wields the kind of power and authority it once did within the broader culture and the political arena. Christianity is less ‘in charge.’ ‘Post-Christendom’ is one apt name for this change.

At deeper levels, many in the church are becoming aware of the ways the intimate alliance between the church and political power has been detrimental to the church’s life and witness. Too often, the church has accepted a role as chaplain to our culture, concentrating on ‘spiritual’ matters, while blessing the government and corporations as they shape public life. This has become more problematic as our nation bases its security on nuclear weapons, guards unjust global economic relations with hundreds of military bases worldwide. US military spending is more than 40% of the world total – equal to the next sixteen countries combined.

What future do we see for the cozy relationship between American Christians and the American imperial project?

This in no way means that Christians should be less engaged in the public sphere. In his earthly ministry, Jesus healed, taught, drove out demons, and challenged the powers – all without ‘taking over,’ legislating or governing. Even after his resurrection, the Roman empire continued to rule. That we are today in a post-Christendom world does not mean that we should withdraw; it means that we will be active in different ways.

Some may see the end of Christendom as a disaster. Others view it as an opportunity for the church in the US, noting that in some sense, ‘post-Christendom’ may have some similarities to the ‘pre-Constantinianism’ of the early church.

Still, within the church we are trapped in a Christendom mind set. We often believe that real change comes by moving the levers of power. We are convinced that the real actors meet in Washington, DC or on Wall Street. It strains our faith to believe that God’s transforming power breaks in dramatically where Christians gather together at the foot of the cross and allow their lives to be shaped by the Holy Spirit. We have a hard time imagining that ordinary Christians simply following Jesus might be effective in transforming our world.

Moving into a ‘post-Christendom’ context will bring uncertainties and anxieties, and require significant re-thinking and reorientation for the church to be able to navigate the challenges and opportunities of these new realities.

An Age of Terror

Since the awful events of September 11, 2001, many in the United States have come to think of our time as an age of terrorism. Thousands of fellow citizens were killed at their workplaces in several US cities in a matter of minutes. We struggled as a nation to make sense of these events. In a short time, our national shock and grief was transformed into fear and anger.

The root of the word ‘terror’ is ‘to frighten.’ In part, we are describing the spread of fear when we refer to our time as an age of terror. What happens to us when we are frightened? The physiological reactions of humans when they are frightened are pretty well understood – specialized organs in our bodies release chemicals into our bloodstream that change the functioning of our brains, our intestines, other organs and muscles. In a few situations, these changes may have survival value. The fear response often includes a drastic narrowing of focus, so that our brains ignore nearly everything except that which we perceive as a threat. Sometimes fear may cause us to freeze. The effect of fear is often not helpful in terms of creative thought or careful decision-making. Groups of people rarely act out their best intentions when they are frightened. How much more if the threat is vague -- and with no discernable end in sight?

We are not alone in experiencing terror. The events of 9/11 can link us to the experiences of earlier generations of African-Americans who watched family members be lynched, or Native Americans whose people were slaughtered. In the wars fought around the globe, terror is often a central feature. The silence between bombings, a period of protracted anxiety and dread, is often the most terrifying time. Many attempts to define terrorism hinge on the targeting of civilians: Perhaps the constant increase in the proportion of civilians among the casualties of war in the last

century must be described as the increasing terrorism of war in general. If terrorism is an aspect of all warfare, it is an inescapable consequence of living in a highly-armed world.

‘War on terror’ is a strange and confusing term. If terror is an emotion, how can you combat it with cruise missiles and smart bombs? A ‘war on terror’ involves an undeclared conflict with no clear beginning, without demarcated boundaries, against multiple (often invisible) adversaries. Without an address to appeal for a truce, with no enemy leader able to sign an armistice or surrender, the hope for peace has no discernable future nest. In this war, we soon encounter the limits of violence. It appears at times that the more casualties we inflict, the more enemies we have. In our own land, fear appears to be the sharpest implement in the ‘war on terror.’ A permanent state of fear mobilizes the populace and numbs the spirit.

Yet each week Christians gather and hear the words ‘Peace be with you’ and the biblical refrain ‘Be not afraid.’ In this context the church is challenged to nurture communities of hope whose members are saved from an immobilizing fear so we can be open to receive God’s gifts of creative imagination and hope.

Just Peacemaking

While just war theory has at times been used unjustly to promote and defend too many wars, Christian pacifism has likewise sometimes been an excuse to retreat from public responsibility into sectarian reservations of spiritual life which betray the biblical mandate to seek the peace of the city. Just war theologians and Christian pacifists alike agree that to love our neighbor means we have some responsibility for our neighbor’s welfare and well being. We want to serve the public good but the old debates between just war and pacifism no longer seem to capture Christian imaginations that are most alive and awake.

For many Christian ethicists and practitioners, Just peacemaking is pointing the way forward.¹⁹ It has examined and linked the various constructive initiatives necessary to prevent war and to create a just and enduring peace. This framework identifies ten key practices that help individuals and groups fan the flames of peace. Just peacemaking is the product of numerous scholars from a range of faith traditions who have collaborated over an extended period to specify the practical steps and develop the undergirding principles of this critical approach. A broad spectrum of the Christian church is ready to work together in initiatives of active peacemaking, from conflict mediation and nonviolent direct action to protecting human rights and supporting economic development. This approach challenges pacifists to be peacemakers and just war theorists to explore the resorts that should be tried before turning to the last resort.

III. The Future

As we look to the future, we again call to mind that we are one, holy, catholic, apostolic and peacemaking fellowship (*koinōnia*) knit together as the body of Christ. We are gathered together around the cross of Christ, trusting in the Holy Spirit to guide us and strengthen us as we seek to embody and live out the peace of Christ in our world. As we reflect on our

experience and listen to the voices of brothers and sisters, we hear God's invitation to consider the following steps into the future together.

1. A Christian Reassessment of Faith and Life in a Post-Christendom Context

The end of the Christendom era brings profound possibilities for the church to re-claim its calling as the body of Christ. But the church and its pastors, elders, theologians, sociologists, missiologists, and other thinkers and dreamers will need to rethink almost every aspect of church life through a post-Christendom lens – including Christian understandings of war. This is a task of vital importance and pressing urgency.

We envision:

- The NCC/CWS and other church bodies calling on their member churches to encourage their seminaries, mission agencies, denominational assemblies, synods, publishing houses and other church affiliated agencies to host and convene consultations, workshops and conversations on the Christendom legacy and new opportunities in a post-Christendom era.
- The NCC/CWS and other church bodies gathering and preparing accessible educational resources to help church members reflect on the end of the Christendom era.

2. Being the Body of Christ across the Divides on War and Peace

While there are significant convergences, the church is also deeply divided in its understanding of war. The barrier does not run so much between denominations, nor even between so-called 'historic peace churches' and churches that maintain some version of the just war theory. It is striking that in nearly every denomination there is a deep gulf even within the credentialed clergy and staff, which often separates those who minister as military chaplains to soldiers and their families from those who engage in the formal and informal peace and justice ministries of the church. There is a lack of familiarity and sometimes deep mistrust or even hostility between these parts of the church. Rarely do they meet and even more rarely do they listen to each other and wait together on the leading of the Spirit.

If we are indeed the church together, it is vital that these divided leaders within the church meet regularly and engage earnestly with each other. In prayerful attentiveness, these leaders should study scripture and Jesus' call to peace-building together, discuss the teachings and statements of the church on war, assess the ethics of nuclear weapons as well as particular military strategies, and explore with each other the challenges and opportunities in their ministry settings. This should be understood as an essential aspect of each of these ministries, not an optional distraction. At times participant-observers from the global church or from other traditions can be invited to help the conversation be accountable to the broader church.

The Spirit beckons:

- The NCC/CWS to request that each member communion convene at least annual gatherings and conversations between members of its military chaplain corps and church staff working on peace and justice issues, and that they report on their experiences and share them among the member churches.
- The NCC/CWS to periodically convene an ecumenical gathering for military chaplains and staff of member churches who are working on peace and justice issues, to build relationships and wrestle with each other and with the gospel invitation to be agents of God's peace and reconciliation.

3. Putting Just War Theory to the Test

The just war theory sets stringent conditions for when Christians might engage in lethal violence or support the use of such violence by the state. The entire thrust of the just war theory is to limit and restrain the use of violence. As noted above, this framework has been increasingly used to condemn certain forms of violence, most notably the use of nuclear weapons.

In an era of modern warfare, the proven effectiveness of active nonviolence, and a new appreciation in a post-Christendom context for the relevance of Jesus in the social and political arena, many are questioning whether the just war theory is still tenable.

Churches operating within the framework of the just war must engage the required discernment with integrity at the denominational level. Almost no Christian denomination in the US has formal structures or procedures for evaluating a proposed military action as to whether it meets the criteria for a just war, nor for evaluating ongoing military actions as to whether the criteria for just war are being met. Almost no Christian denomination in the US has procedures in place for giving teaching to their members in the military regarding the expectations the church has for them in case the nation pursues an unjust war or unjust military policies.

For the sake of integrity and credibility we plead that:

- The NCC/CWS and other church bodies examine previous statements critiquing particular aspects of modern war (such as condemnation of the deployment and use of nuclear weapons) and consider what these statements might ask not just of political decision-makers, *but also of church members*, including those serving in the military.
- The NCC/CWS request from member churches that subscribe to the just war theory a report of what structures or procedures are used in that communion to evaluate a proposed or ongoing military action or weapons system in light of the just war theory and what the practice is for offering teaching and counsel on these matters to members of the church, including those serving in the military. Follow-up conversations, consultations and actions could be encouraged.

4. Tending to the Injury of War and Supporting Christian Discernment and Conscience

Denominations and congregations have theologies pertinent to just war that have promoted men and women placing themselves in harm's way. This statement is not a moral condemnation of these denominations, but it is a clear recognition of both theological, ecclesial and pastoral responsibility. Thus, these communities must be further attentive to the emotional, spiritual, and physical harm visited upon returning veterans, and thereby offer resources to assist these men and women in their reorientation to the activity of community life.

Men and women serving in the US armed forces who claim allegiance to Jesus Christ and seek to adhere to just war teaching must also discern whether they can in good conscience participate in a particular war or obey particular orders. However, if they – like their churches – discern that particular wars or weapons systems are immoral, they have no legal means of exercising their conscience. The United States and other countries do not allow for selective conscientious objection.

Christian churches must much more vigorously stand with their members in the military who seek to follow church teaching. Churches should energetically support their members in uniform who face disciplinary measures for refusing to work with certain weapons systems or participate in particular military campaigns. Churches should further appeal to the US government (as the Christian Reformed Church in North America has done) to establish selective conscientious objector status. Without such status Christians may be assigned to work with nuclear weapons or be pressed to perform other duties that violate their conscience.

Until selective conscientious objector status is established churches may feel compelled to counsel men and women not to enlist in the military unless they are prepared to disobey military orders and face the consequences. For those who nonetheless enlist, a church will want to provide clear teaching about the grave moral danger of participating in the threatened use of nuclear weapons, or other military actions it deems unjust. Given the immense tension and contradictions of trying to both follow the One who died on the cross for his enemies and being an active participant in the largest military enterprise in world history, some churches may join their voices with the churches of former East Germany and counsel their members to choose conscientious objection as “the clearer witness” of God’s call to peacemaking.²⁰

We urge:

- The NCC Justice and Advocacy Commission to solicit information from member churches and fraternal church bodies about programs to assist soldiers in finding healing from the horror of war, and to explore further specific ecumenical ministries that tend to the emotional, spiritual, and physical healing for returning soldiers.
- The NCC/CWS and member churches to give special attention to the struggles of soldiers wrestling with conscience and support them by sharing their stories, holding them in prayer, and standing with them if they face disciplinary action.
- The NCC/CWS in partnership with member churches and fraternal bodies to make selective conscientious objection a priority for education and advocacy during the next five years followed by a consultation to evaluate and discern next steps for

supporting men and women in the armed forces struggling with issues of conscience as they seek to follow the Prince of Peace.

5. An Intensified Christian Commitment to Active Peace-Building

Inspired by the development of the numerous large-scale, effective nonviolent social change movements of the last decades, many churches or church-related groups have initiated training programs in active nonviolence addressing issues of personal conflict as well as communal and national conflicts. Several initiatives are training and fielding dozens of peacemakers in conflict zones.

But compared to the numbers of Christians who are each year extensively trained in war and killing through the military, these efforts can only be described as puny. Compared to the financial contributions American Christians make to war efforts each year through our tax payments, the resources devoted by churches to peacemaking efforts are likewise minuscule.

The moment has come for Christians to dramatically increase their commitment to active peacemaking, particularly to further developing the movement of unarmed Christian soldiers for peace, trained and disciplined to work creatively, sacrificially and courageously in high conflict situations. Can our churches imagine working together to field an army of one-thousand international, trained, disciplined Christian peacemakers who would be engaged in one or more situations of significant, long-term conflict? This would require the commitment of the most gifted and experienced peacemakers and trainers among us, the readiness of many ordinary Christians to take courageous risks, serious financial and spiritual support of the churches, the prayers of the faithful, and a powerful movement of God's own Holy Spirit.²¹ But this may be a *kairos* moment. It is as if the whole world has been waiting with eager longing for the sons and daughters of God to be revealed (Rom 8:19).

We want to embolden:

- The NCC/CWS to convene a two day consultation with key leaders, ten from churches that subscribe to the just war theory and ten from pacifist churches or movements, to consider together a dramatically increased commitment to active peacemaking.
- Christians in the just war tradition who have always taught that war must be a last resort will be challenged to engage in serious large-scale testing of nonviolent peacemaking.
- Pacifist Christians who reject violence and claim there are alternatives to war, will be challenged to be prepared to make similar sacrifices as soldiers as they engage in active and risky peacemaking.

Conclusion

The church is the body of Christ, a new humanity reconciled and united in Christ. The mission and witness of the church is to be a peace-building fellowship (*koinōnia*) of Christ in the world. Through the centuries and for manifold reasons, this central gift and calling of the church was minimized and manipulated. The wound to the church remains. The church today must reclaim its identity. Theologians and activists – laity and clergy – must forgo ideological answers and seek robust and sustainable models of witness and mission that address today's conflicts in practicable ways. Past centuries provide evidence for a thorough reassessment of the role of the church in a post-Christendom era. That is our moment. Together we are invited anew to explore, practice and promote Jesus' nonviolent way of righting wrong and establishing justice. If the church reclaims its gift and calling, it will serve as a powerful catalyst for peace and reconciliation in our world.

ENDNOTES

1. Unless otherwise noted, scripture references are taken from Bruce Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); also cited as NRSV. When noted, scripture passages are taken from Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); also cited as RSV.
2. The quotation is from the poem “Hard Rain” by Tony Hoagland in *Hard Rain*, (Venice, CA: Hollyridge Press Chapbook Series, 2005), p. ???. The son of an army doctor, Hoagland was born in Ft. Bragg, North Carolina and grew up on military bases across the South.
3. This is the conviction that emerged from conversations of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches reported in *The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking*, edited by Jeffrey Gros and John D. Rempel, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).
4. Much of this section is taken from “Being Church Together in a Time of War,” an unpublished paper by Michael Kinnamon presented to the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue on May 11, 2002 in St. Louis, MO.
5. *The Church Survey Their Task: The Report of the Conference at Oxford, July 1937, on Church, Community, and State*, edited by J. H. Oldham, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd, 1937), p. 59.
6. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs*, (London: SCM Press, 1973), p 73.
7. *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, edited by W. A. Visser 't Hooft, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 89.
8. *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1954*, edited by W.A. Visser 't Hooft, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers), 1955, p. 132.
9. *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961*, edited by W. A. Visser 't Hooft, (London: SCM Press, 1962).
10. “Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice”, WCC Central Committee 1973 in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* edited by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 217.
11. *Gathered for Life: The Official Report of the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, edited by David Gill, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), p. 137.
12. See Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

13. The text of the speech may be found at

www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm.

14. See H. Lamar Gibble, *Ecumenical Engagement for Peace and Nonviolence: Experiences and Initiatives of the Historic Peace Churches and the Fellowship of Reconciliation*, (Elgin, IL: Historic Peace Churches/FOR Consultative Committee, 2006), p. 43.

15. This and the following quotations come from *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/harvest.shtml>, §1.B from the Office of Justice, Peace and Human Development, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

16. John Paul II, “On my knees I beg you to turn away from violence” (homily preached at Killineer, near Drogheda, Ireland, October 29, 1979) and published in the *Irish Times* online, <http://www.irishtimes.com/focus/papaldeath/drogheda.htm> .

17. Benedict XVI, on Nonviolence, Angelus Address, February 18, 2007, Catholic Peace fellowship website, www.catholicpeacefellowship.org/nextpage.asp?m=2308 .

18. A Mennonite and Catholic Contribution to the World Council of Churches’ *Decade to Overcome Violence*, §III (3),

<http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/resources/documents/declarations-on-just-peace/contributions/from-confessional-bodies-councils/a-mennonite-and-catholic-contribution-to-the-wccs-dov.html> .

19. See Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*, (Pilgrim Press, 2008). The ten practices highlighted in just peacemaking theory are: 1) support nonviolent direct action; 2) take independent initiatives to reduce threat; 3) use cooperative conflict resolution; 4) acknowledge responsibility for conflict and injustices and seek repentance and forgiveness; 5) advance democracy, human rights, and religious liberty; 6) foster just and sustainable economic development; 7) work with emerging cooperative forces in the international system; 8) strengthen the United Nations and international efforts for cooperation and human rights; 9) reduce offensive weapons and weapons trade; 10) encourage grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.

20. One source is the presentation by Michael Haspel, Lecturer for Social Ethics, Theological Faculty, University of Marburg, “Foundations of Protestant Peace Ethics in the German Context”, p. 10 in the Report of a Anglo-German Conference held at the Evangelische Sozialakademie Schloss Friedewald.

21. This proposal is developed by Ron Sider in “Courageous Nonviolence”, *Christianity Today* (December 19, 2007), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/december/27.44.html> .