

“War as a method of settling international disputes is incompatible with the teaching and example of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Lambeth Conference, 1930

THE CURRENT TEACHING OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH ON WAR AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

The 1988 General Convention summarized previous Convention resolutions, affirming that “non-violent refusal to participate in or prepare for war is a faithful response of a member of this Church and that a decision to participate in or prepare for war should be made only after careful and prayerful consideration.” It also declared that persons making either decision under conscience have “the respect, the support and the ministry of the Church.”

Today, the Episcopal Church continues to maintain that all decisions regarding participation or non-participation in war or the preparation for war should be the fruit of mature and prayerful discernment informed by scripture, theology, and relevant knowledge of history and contemporary conditions. The Church, while affirming the discernment of those who choose military service or other participation, expresses unambiguous preference for non-violent approaches to conflict, condemning the aggressive use of war in national policy as contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE POSITION OF THE EPISCOPAL PEACE FELLOWSHIP

Most Christians outside of the Peace Church traditions, including most Episcopalians, have seen conscientious objection to war as a minority option, with consent and participation as the norm. On the

contrary, the Episcopal Peace Fellowship (EPF), together with its sister organization, the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship (APF), has advocated that “conscientious objection be seen as the normative response for Christians to the moral challenge of war,” urging that participation in war be seen as the exceptional choice and not the norm.

Attempts to end violence and to establish justice through more violence create conditions for future wars. The “spiral of violence,” familiar enough in past human history, is especially unlikely to be avoided within the context of modern institutions and technologies of warfare. Traditional “just war” limits on targets, on proportionality of force to objectives achieved, on clearly defined purposes and boundaries of military action, and on the accountability for decisions are far from clear or controllable. Consequently, the reasons to choose conscientious objection to war – objection that is not merely a statement that one will not participate in killing but that is part of a larger commitment to active, creative peacemaking – have become increasingly compelling.

True peacemaking of the Gospel is at the very heart of the mission of the Church. Peace with God through forgiveness leads on to the way of peace with one another and the breaking down of barriers. Empathy, dialogue, recognition of the real causes of dispute, seeking for common interest, the need for repentance, reparation, and reconciliation – these are the means to restoration and rehabilitation, toward wholeness and peace.” (Joint Submission of EPF and APF 1998 Lambeth Conference).

EPF Commitment

In loyalty to the person, teaching and Lordship of Jesus Christ, my conscience commits me to God’s way of redemptive love: to pray, study and work for peace and justice, and to renounce, so far as possible*, participation in war, militarism, and all other forms of violence.

In fellowship with others I will work to discover and create alternatives to violence and to build a culture of Peace. As a member of the Holy Catholic Church, I urge the Episcopal Church in accordance with baptismal vows, “to renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God,” and to wage peace across all boundaries, calling upon people everywhere to repent, to forgive and to love. * (EPF welcomes pacifists and non-pacifists who are committed to nonviolence.)

A BASIS IN BIBLICAL FAITH

Many individual Biblical passages memorably express God’s call to pursue the ministry of reconciliation by refusing to resist evil with evil, but rather with active, imaginative, courageous, and steadfast love. But the position that conscientious objection and active, nonviolent peacemaking provide the Christian norm depends on an ethic that pervades the life and teaching of Jesus and His followers as presented in the New Testament.

This vision of just, nonviolent peacemaking is grounded in the traditions of the Hebrew Prophets, such as Isaiah. For Christians, this culminates in Jesus’ vision of God’s Kingdom as Shalom (wholeness, harmony, justice, and peace), achieved not by force of arms but through Cross and Resurrection.

MATTERS OF PRACTICE

For those who decide that they wish to be recognized by the United States government as conscientious objectors, the Episcopal Church maintains a Register of Conscientious Objectors and provides materials, forms, and advice for creating a dossier of materials substantiating the authenticity of a claim to conscientious objection. Inclusion in the Register and the creation of a dossier do not assure registrants that the government will legally recognize their CO status, but experience has shown that the establishing official records acknowledged by denominational authorities greatly increases the chances of government recognition. Materials can be obtained from:

Registrar for Conscientious Objectors
The Episcopal Church Center
815 Second Avenue
New York, NY 10017-4503
www.episcopalchurch.org/myp/co/index.html

This Registry exists mainly for persons eligible for compulsory conscription. However, others may wish to be included as a matter of witness or of record, in the event that a National Peace Tax Fund bill might eventually be passed, enabling persons to direct their federal taxes exclusively to nonmilitary uses.

For more information on the Peace Tax bill, visit www.peacetaxfund.org or write to: National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund, 2121 Decatur Place, NW, Washington DC 20008-1923.

SOME RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

An informational packet for Episcopalians exploring the issues of conscientious objection is available through the Registrar for Conscientious Objectors, The Episcopal Church Center, 815 Second Ave., New York, NY 10017- 4503. This packet contains registration forms for those who decide to register as COs. An online version of the packet is available at www.episcopalchurch.org/myp/co/index.html.

“Cross Before Flag: Episcopal Statements on War and Peace” Compiled by the Episcopal Peace Fellowship, updated and reissued in 2003, this pamphlet summarizes and excerpts peace and justice related actions by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church and the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, together with selected statements from the Episcopal House of Bishops, from 1930 to the present. Copies are available through the Episcopal Peace Fellowship. An online version is on the national church website of the Episcopal Church USA, www.epfnational.org or www.episcopalchurch.org/myp/co/index.html.

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