

It is impossible to be a christian and joined the armed forces essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



War is defined as armed hostilities between peoples, frequently different nations, sometimes between different parties within a nation, as in a civil war, or between one small group and the state, as in a guerrilla war.

For followers of world religions often caught up in conflict, war poses fundamental questions about human worth and dignity.

Many have questioned the ethics of the great bombing raids of WW II, When British and American bombers rained down fire and destruction on millions of German women and children, and the use by America of the Atomic bombs on Japan. In addition, when the Americans waged war in Vietnam in the 1960's, their express desire was not to kill the enemy but to 'incapacitate' as many civilians as possible.

At one time individuals like Alexander and Rameses II were given the title 'the Great' for slaughtering human beings on the battlefield, but today few would view the killing of vast numbers of non-combatants for no rational purpose as anything other than a crime against humanity.

The German Protestant reformer Martin Luther, alluding to the story of Samson in the Old Testament, suggests that few of us are in any position to decide another persons fate, let alone take his or her life.

The English philosopher Bertrand Russell pointed out that 'patriots always talk of dying for their country, but never of killing for their country'.

If we apply the Golden Rule ('Do unto others as you would wish them to do to you') we have to ask if we would like to be shot or gassed, if we would like

to see our grandparents bombed or our children burned to death in a firestorm caused by carpet-bombing.

Albert Camus said: ' We are asked to love or hate such and such a country and such and such a people. But some of us feel too strongly our common humanity to make that choice.'

Jesus' love was an active benevolence cutting against barriers of class, race and nation. In the sermon on the mount he taught his followers to love their enemies, to forgive those who had wronged them, and to respond to violence with non-violence, returning good for evil:

" You have heard it said ' Eye for eye, tooth for tooth' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also." - Matt 5: 38-9

Whilst the church's view has been that it may be proper for a Christian to fight justice, pacifism has been a significant enough minority view for it to be taken seriously, and a right to conscientious objection is recognised by many nations.

Even Pope John Paul II, not usually a pacifist, has eloquently expressed the pacifist position:

" Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, and the freedom of human beings. Violence is a crime against humanity, for it destroys the very fabric of society... To all of you 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 Christ.”

Pacifists maintain that early Christian pacifists perceived war to be incompatible with their Christian obedience; the requirement to love our enemy is absolute and the authority and function of the state is incompatible with this.

“ We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world. The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing of evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdom of this world. - Declaration of the Quakers to Charles II 1661

Reinhold Niebuhr criticised the naivety of absolute pacifism as neglecting the equally important biblical principles of justice and the wrath of God whilst over emphasising peace and reconciliation. He argued that pacifists equally shirk their responsibility for striving for justice and are sometimes guilty, therefore, of accepting tyranny and oppression rather than fighting against evil.

Although war is a monstrous evil and killing is an appalling offence against Jesus' teaching, nevertheless it may be more evil not to take up arms in some.

Beginning with Ambrose, strengthened by Augustine and elaborated by Aquinas in the 13th century and others later, the very ancient notion of the 'just war' was steadily refined as the main tool with which Christians tried to assess the morality of wars.

There has been three main themes of Christian reflection - that of allowing there to be some just wars which could declare and in which Christian soldiers could fight; that of reckoning some wars to be of divine command, crusades; that which has declared all wars and participation in them to be wholly anathema to the Christian.

Christian members of organizations such as CND argue that the Just War theory may have applied in a pre-nuclear age but in the nuclear, biological and chemical age, modern weapons of mass destruction make nonsense of the theory.

For those who hold that the principle of the sanctity of life demands that all deliberate acts of killing - including those in war - are forbidden, the just war theory can never legitimise military action which is nothing more than state approved and state sponsored murder.

" It is my conviction that killing under the cloak of war is nothing but murder." - Albert Einstein

In my opinion Omar Bradley sums up our world's attitude to war in one paragraph:

“ Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants, we know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we do about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atomic bomb and rejected the Sermon on the Mount.”

John Stott proposes that Christian peacemakers should pray, set an example as ‘ a community of peace’, promote public debate on issues of peace and war, and maintain a confident stance that peace is a realistic and desirable goal.

Personally, I believe that this can be achieved much more easily if one is a part of the armed forces than if one is a protester or a campaigner.