

a cause is “just” can lead to the kinds of military overreach that can doom a government completely. A serious conversation about the many failures of justice in war can help drive the quest for alternatives—and JWT is precisely a way for us to articulate those past failures and potential future failures.

Cardinal Cupich modeled a helpful approach recently when he wrote about Trump’s budget proposal: “The question is not whether there should be military spending, but what is the needed proportion so that other ways of making us safe, secure, and whole are not neglected.”⁵⁷ We need to talk about how disproportionate military spending is, and how disproportionate most military endeavors are. And we need to talk about other, better ways of promoting safety and peace. By showing clearly the limits of what war can accomplish and the possibilities of what nonviolence can achieve—through storytelling and even humor—there is room for Christian ethics to speak about limiting war in a way that does not detract from our duty to be peacemakers.

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IV.

Practical Implications of Abandoning Just War

This final section focuses less on theory, theology, and ethics and more on the practical implications if the church were to abandon JWT. After such sustained critique, it is crucial to reiterate the points made earlier regarding how many just-war thinkers, like ourselves, affirm what is in the *Appeal*. We agree with and support most of what it says. Where we part company with the *Appeal* is over the two sentences and one bullet point (forty-five words) outlined above.

⁵⁷ Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, “Witnessing to a Consistent Ethic of Solidarity,” *Commonweal*, June 2, 2017, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/cardinal-blase-cupich-signs-times>.

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The prospect of abandoning JWT is not merely theoretical. It has real-world implications that could potentially increase human suffering, death, and destruction. In the interest of space, I highlight three of them.

First, abandoning JWT reduces the church's influence in international affairs. Just-war language is embedded in international humanitarian law (or the law of armed conflict), the military codes of many nations, and UN statutes and agreements (such as R2P). Just-war language entered into international law from church teaching. If the church were to no longer use the language, concepts, and ideas of JWT, it would no longer be speaking the language of international affairs. Its "place at the table" would no longer be needed, since a peace church has only one position on war: it is wrong, always. Furthermore, as a steward of JWT for centuries, the church provides an alternative JWT to the more hawkish political realist approach, which often uses just-war language as moral camouflage. Contemporary JWT is far more restrictive than its secular counterparts. The church serves as a referee, outside reader, or critic of those who employ just-war language. In the past three decades Christian JWT has become "practically pacifist" with its presumption that all wars are unjust, tighter interpretation of just cause, insistence that the last resort be conservatively interpreted, and attention to both *jus ante bellum* and *jus post bellum*. Should the church abandon JWT, it also surrenders its role as a moral authority in the interpretation and application of just-war principles in international affairs, which makes it easier for those who abuse the theory for national self-interest to wrap *realpolitik* in a veil of moral legitimacy.

Some examples illustrate how the Christian JWT provides an alternative (and more restrictive) approach to secular just-war reasoning. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops' 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, affirmed nonviolence, including pacifism (though these two are not synonymous⁵⁸), and JWT. It then went on to condemn use and possession of nuclear weapons (including the deterrence argument) utilizing the criteria of JWT. In so doing, the bishops adopted a form of Christian realism that was committed to Christian peacemaking while remaining attentive to the concrete realities of the Cold War. More recently, Kenneth Himes has used JWT to criticize the use of drones by the US military and CIA, Mark Allman has engaged just-war criteria in a critique of the use of depleted uranium

⁵⁸ In their respective essays, Christiansen and Winright allude to this distinction between pacifism and nonviolence. In my view, while these two terms are often used interchangeably, scholars tend to distinguish pacifism (as a rejection of war and violence based on a commitment to moral principles) from nonviolence (as a commitment to doing no harm or the least amount of harm).

in Iraq, and Tobias Winright has drawn on JWT to condemn the use of cluster munitions and, elsewhere, to provide better care for combat veterans experiencing “moral injury.”⁵⁹ In each of these instances JWT allowed the church to enter the debate regarding methods of war and offer alternative criticism to prevailing might-makes-right approaches. The church’s commitment to JWT allows it to act as a moral gadfly, forcing political and military leaders to justify their actions, and maintains a standard for judging behavior after the fact.

Second, if the church were to abandon JWT and its criteria, the church would lose a subtle instrument for morally evaluating reasons for going to war (*jus ad bellum*) and behavior in combat (*jus in bello*). In short, pacifism is a blunt instrument for morally evaluating war: all war is wrong, therefore all behavior in war is sinful. While the criteria of JWT are often derided as casuistry in the highest order or Jesuitical (with no offense intended to our Jesuit coauthor), they do require nuanced evaluation of cause, intent, and consequences. One of the great strengths of JWT is that it forces deeper reflection. Contemporary just-war thinkers are often criticized that such a strict interpretation of the criteria makes it impossible to call any war just, to which we reply, “Good! It should not be easy to justify war.” Likewise, we are challenged that the strict interpretation of the criteria means that no war has ever been a just war, and therefore the whole theory is meaningless. However, the categories and criteria necessitate asking probing questions of those who want to justify deadly force. To abandon JWT is to also relinquish the criteria that force nation-states and military leaders to stop, think, and justify their actions, as well as hold them accountable after the fact.

Forsaking JWT also raises a number of pastoral questions. What becomes of Catholics who serve in the military? Catholics who feel called to serve their country would be forced to choose between love of nation and their faith. What becomes of military chaplains? Just as one could not imagine a Catholic chaplain assigned to an abortion clinic in an official capacity (since such a role is tantamount to a kind of endorsement), so too if the church were to declare that war can never be justified, then those who

⁵⁹ Kenneth Himes, *Drones and the Ethics of Targeted Killing* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015); Mark Allman, “Postwar Justice,” *America*, October 17, 2005, www.americamagazine.org/issue/546/article/postwar-justice; Tobias Winright, “The Morality of Cluster Bombing,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 22, no. 3 (2009): 357–81; and Tobias Winright and E. Ann Jeschke, “Combat and Confession: Just War and Moral Injury,” in *Can War Be Just in the 21st Century? Ethicists Engage the Tradition*, ed. Tobias Winright and Laurie Johnston (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 169–87. Other contributors to this latter volume also offer creative treatments of issues and questions, including in the Global South, from a just-war perspective.

minister to men and women in the armed services would have to be removed, thereby denying pastoral care on bases, on ships, and in the field of battle. How would priests and deacons preach on war and peace? JWT provides a moral framework for evaluating calls to war, actions in war, and postwar obligations. Enshrining the criteria of JWT in church teaching equips preachers with the tools and authority to foster deeper reflection on the critical topic of war and guards against facile dismissal of church teaching as overly idealistic and irrelevant to the real world. In short, JWT enables the church to bring the faithful to embrace peacemaking more effectively than an exclusively pacifist position.

Third, the proposal that the church “no longer use or teach ‘just war theory’” makes the principal aim of the project, namely, to get the church to embrace peacemaking more robustly and seriously, *more* difficult, because it alienates a wide swath of bishops, priests, scholars, and laity who view the use of force as morally justified in restrictive situations, such as humanitarian intervention. Peacemaking is already hard enough, and the church is already “outnumbered” by the political realists on the international stage. In pursuing the abolition of JWT in church teaching, pacifist peacemakers lose a key ally in the struggle to end violence, namely, contemporary just-war thinkers, and they have to devote time and energy to engaging in debate and dialogue with the likes of us, who would rather spend our time and energy implementing all that is good in this statement. This is the wisdom of Glen Stassen’s just peacemaking project, which quickly learned that pacifists and most just-war thinkers have more in common than what divides them.⁶⁰

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Conclusion

The *Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-commit to the Centrality of Gospel Non-Violence* is a welcome effort to move the church toward more robust and proactive peacemaking. This move accords with the trajectory of church teaching since Vatican II, which has placed increasing emphasis on just and lasting peace. Where we part company with the *Appeal* is in its call to abandon the church’s centuries-old just-war tradition. In the past few decades, this tradition has been moving toward a position that is

⁶⁰ Glen H. Stassen, ed., *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*, 3rd ed. (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008).

increasingly stricter in its interpretation and application of just-war criteria. Our use of the phrase “contemporary just war theory” is an intentional effort to distinguish this approach from more hawkish versions of JWT that are more lenient in the interpretation and application of the criteria. Indeed, one might even label our stance as “just-war peacemaking.” This movement toward just-war peacemaking aligns very closely with the principal aims of the *Appeal*. We echo the *Appeal*'s call for a papal encyclical on just peace, but it should be one that is consistent with the church's fuller tradition, affirming the movement toward peacemaking, while avoiding the removal of the church from playing a practical role in global affairs.