

Letter to NCR re JWT: God's Dream for Earth Foresees an End to War

Michael Sean Winters' article last month defending the just war theory is sincere, yet deeply disappointing. I suspect that underneath his plea not to "toss aside the just war theory" is fear. Fear of loss of power. Fear of the guilt that rises if we look at war's depravity and its consequences for the innocent. Fear that if this theory is suppressed, nations would go to war without any reference to the criteria that a just war requires.

Yet, this is already happening. We cannot point to a war in this century that conforms to just war criteria. In Kuwait, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Ukraine, in Israel, in Gaza, in Iran, in Sudan, in Yemen, efforts to avoid war have never been exhausted. Proportionality has never been measured or observed. Moreover, as citizens of the only country ever to employ a nuclear weapon, I suggest we have lost all legitimacy to defend war. If we are being truthful, we can see that the possibility of using nuclear weapons is closer than it has ever been before.

It is time to look ahead and redouble our efforts to build peace in this present moment of terrible danger. Our country has invested billions in preparing for and waging war. Just a fraction of that amount has been invested in building peace—diplomacy, conflict prevention, economic pressure, reconciliation and rebuilding of civil society, to name but a few.

Mr. Winters' theme throughout his article is his objection to "tossing aside" the just war theory. Tossing is a most unfortunate word. It suggests that Pope Leo's work, with the American bishops' collaboration, is a careless and casual action, like tossing aside an old shirt. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Mr. Winter's would have done well to include the entire quote from *Magnifica Humanitas*:

Today, more than ever, without prejudice to the right to self-defense in the strictest sense, it is important to reaffirm that the "just war" theory, which has all too often been used to justify any kind of war, is now outdated. Humanity possesses far more effective and capable tools for promoting human life and resolving conflicts, such as dialogue, diplomacy and forgiveness. The use of force, violence and weapons reflects a relational poverty that always has disastrous consequences for civilian populations. #192.

Pope Leo invites us to activate our imagination, to envision peace, to move closer to God's dream for Earth. He has laid out an exquisitely logical and compelling treatise on how this might be achieved. No one believes that the task is easy, but it must be recognized as the only way forward for humanity. To name the just war theory as outdated is a necessary and helpful step in the right direction.

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