

**The work of Christian Peacemaking**  
Lesson 3: Should Christians fight in wars?

## St Thomas Aquinas

Thomas was a priest, philosopher, and theologian. He was born in Italy in 1225, ordained a priest in 1250, and died in 1274.

Declared both a saint and a Doctor of the Church, Thomas is considered to be the Church's greatest theologian and his influence on Western thought is considerable.



### St Thomas and Just War:

Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430) was amongst the first theologians to support the idea that one could be both a Christian and a soldier – serving God and country with honour. Nine centuries later Thomas Aquinas, building on Augustine's work, developed the list of conditions by which a war could be judged to be just. These are:

1. The war must be declared by a proper authority, i.e. the state.
2. It must be for a good purpose (e.g. restoring order, punishing evil, or self-defence) rather than for selfish gain (e.g. land grabbing).
3. The war must be motivated by a desire for peace.

Thomas's conditions for a Just War inform the Catholic Church's *Just War Doctrine* today. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (paragraph 2309) four strict conditions are listed for *legitimate defence by military force*.

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- there must be serious prospects of success;
- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

This last condition underlines the Church's view that the means by which a war is waged must be morally legitimate. The innocent (civilians, non-combatants) must not be killed by indiscriminate slaughter.

### In his own words

*"...those who wage wars justly have peace as the object of their intention, and so they are not opposed to peace, but only to that evil peace which the Lord did not come on earth to bring." (Matt 10:34)*

### More information

St Thomas Aquinas and the Just War taken from *Summa Theologica* (Vol. 20) is available here: <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/politics/pg0029.html>

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## **Bert Brocklesby**

Bert Brocklesby was a Methodist and a teacher from Conisbrough, South Yorkshire.

During the Boer War (1899-1902) an eleven-year-old Bert was confused when he realised that both sides were praying for victory to the same God.



### **Bert Brocklesby and Conscientious Objection**

When the First World War broke out in 1914 Bert Brocklesby refused to enlist. In 1916, when conscription was brought in, Bert applied for dispensation as a conscientious objector. As a Christian he considered it unthinkable to take another man's life. He preached a sermon in his local church in which he explained that since it was impossible to imagine Christ bayonetting a German soldier then Christians – trying to live as Christ – could never do that either.

Bert was an *Absolutist* – he would not help the war effort in any way. Ordered to join the Non-Combatant Corps, where many conscientious objectors did alternative work to aid the war effort, Bert refused.

Bert was imprisoned with 15 others in Richmond Castle while pressure was put on them to join in the war effort. Remaining steadfast in their conscientious objection, they were secretly moved to France where they could be tried under military law because in the war zone their resistance was a much more grievous offence. Bert and his companions were sentenced to death – commuted to 10 years hard labour.

### **In his own words**

*“God had not put me on earth to go destroying his own children.”*

### **More information**

Bert was profiled as part of journalist Ian Hislop's programme *Not Forgotten*, broadcast on Channel Four and available (in five parts) on youtube: [http://youtu.be/Na\\_qVy\\_NI-4](http://youtu.be/Na_qVy_NI-4)  
[Bert's story is told in parts 2 and 3]

The *White Feather Diaries* includes the story of Bert and many other First World War conscientious objectors: <http://whitefeatherdiaries.org.uk>

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## St Martin of Tours

Martin was born in the fourth century in what is now Hungary and was brought up in Northern Italy where his father, an officer in the Roman Army, was stationed. Against his parents' wishes the young Martin decided to become a Christian. He was baptised aged 18.



### Martin in the army

As the son of an officer was expected to follow his father into the military, at 15 Martin joined the cavalry - although the unit to which he belonged was mostly ceremonial and would not have faced much combat.

One day, before a battle, Martin announced that his Christian faith meant he could not fight. Charged with cowardice he was jailed, but he offered instead to go unarmed ahead of the troops. Although his military commanders planned to accept his offer, the invaders sued for peace, the battle was called off, and Martin was released from his military service.

He went on to become a priest before being appointed Bishop of Tours (France) in the year 371 and remained bishop there until his death in 397.

### In his own words

*"I am a soldier of Christ. I cannot fight."*

### More information

There are several hagiographies of St Martin available online including:

Catholic Online: [http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=81](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=81)

New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09732b.htm>

EWTN: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/marty/martin.htm>

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**Fr George Zabelka**

Fr George Zabelka was a Catholic Chaplain with the US Air Force during the Second World War. In all he served 22 years as a military chaplain and retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Fr Zabelka died in April 1992.



**Fr Zabelka and the Atomic Bomb**

In 1945 Fr Zabelka was chaplain to the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group on Tinian Island in the South Pacific – the group that dropped the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

His duties as a chaplain included celebrating Mass and the sacraments for the military personnel and listening to, counselling, and supporting the troops. It did not cross his mind to question the actions of the US military.

After the war, as he reflected on the destruction caused by these bombs and the deaths of innocent civilians, Fr Zabelka deeply regretted not speaking out against what he now considered to be gravely immoral.

He repented of his inaction in 1945 and dedicated the rest of his life to working for peace.

**In his own words**

*“All I can say today is that I was wrong. Christ would not be the instrument to unleash such horror on his people. Therefore no follower of Christ can legitimately unleash the horror of war on God’s people... All I can say is: I was wrong!”*

**More information**

Read an interview with Fr Zabelka here:

[http://www.centerforchristiannonviolence.org/data/Media/Fr.%20George%20Zabekla%20Interview%20\[02\].pdf](http://www.centerforchristiannonviolence.org/data/Media/Fr.%20George%20Zabekla%20Interview%20[02].pdf)

A film, *Zabelka: The Reluctant Prophet*, tells the story of Fr Zabelka. It is available in full here:

<http://vimeo.com/48820359>

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## **Pope Benedict XV**

Giacomo della Chiesa was born in Genoa, Italy, in November 1854. After studying for a doctorate in law he trained to be a priest and was ordained in December 1878.

It was as Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna that he attended the conclave in 1914 after the death of Pius X - at which he was elected pope, taking the name Benedict XV.

Pope Benedict XV died in January 1922.



### **Pope Benedict and the First World War**

Five days after his election as Pope, Benedict issued his first plea for the end of hostilities, urging the warring nations to “leave nothing undone to hasten the end of this calamity”. Throughout his short Papacy he would continue to expend considerable energy on work for peace and reconciliation.

The most important of his works for peace is his Peace Note sent to the leaders of the nations at war, urging them to cease hostilities, and proposing a series of resolutions which would build a just and lasting peace. The initiative failed as it was rejected by those leaders and, in common with many of his other peace initiatives, it was greeted with hostility within those nations. Even the Catholic bishops in the warring countries failed to support the Pope’s calls for peace.

Pope Benedict’s work for peace continued after the war. He was a critic of the Treaty of Versailles, considering that this peace, based on victory and guilt, was inferior to peace based on forgiveness and compromise.

### **In his own words**

*“In the holy name of God, in the name of our heavenly Father and Lord, by the precious Blood of Jesus, the price of man’s redemption, we adjure you, whom Divine Providence has placed in authority over the nations now at war, to put a final end to the butchery which has been disgracing Europe for a whole year.”*

*(Pope Benedict XV, 28 July 1915)*

### **More information**

Benedict XV and World War I: Courageous Prophet of Peace by Fr Ashley Beck – a CTS booklet available at <http://www.ctsbooks.org/benedict-xv-and-world-war-i> or from Pax Christi.

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## The Unknown Soldier

On 7<sup>th</sup> November 1920 three anonymous British soldiers who had died in the First World War were laid on stretchers in the chapel of Saint-Pol-sur-Ternoise in Northern France.



These were draped in Union flags and one body was chosen at random by a senior officer. This body was placed in a coffin, returned to Britain, and buried in Westminster Abbey on 11 November 1920, Armistice Day.

### For God, King, and Country

When the First World War broke out in 1914 there was a rush of men wanting to sign up and “do their bit”. Amongst them were many thousands of Christians who were motivated by a profound sense of duty to God, King, and Country.

There was an instinctive theology. They believed that to stand up for right in the face of evil, to respond to the call of the government for warriors in this time of crisis, and to join their friends and colleagues in the struggle was all part of what was necessary to be a good Christian. With very few exceptions their church leaders supported and encouraged these men.

*“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)*

### Quote

*“Thus are commemorated the many  
multitudes who during the Great  
War of 1914-1918 gave the most that  
man can give life itself  
for God  
for King and country  
for loved ones, home and empire  
for the sacred cause of justice and  
the freedom of the world.*

*They buried him among the kings because he  
had done good toward God and toward His house.”*

*(From the Inscription on the tomb of the Unknown Warrior, Westminster Abbey)*

### More information

The Story of the Tomb is on the Westminster Abbey website  
<http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/unknown-warrior>