

On Saying “No” to War

*On January 17, 2006, as he reflected on the ongoing war in the Middle East, Doug Soderstrom, Ph.D. wrote this to advise young people in the United States. Hill Connections added this in recognition of the 3rd anniversary of the Iraqi War, which started March 20, 2003. In conjunction with this piece, you are invited to reflect on Dr. Soderstrom’s poem, *A Soldier*, as well as on *Our Country Right or Wrong*.*

As the father of a thirty-one year old son — and as a college instructor who has spent the past forty years teaching students how utterly important it is to think for themselves, how vital it is that they have the courage to challenge the status quo — I pray that the president of this country will not lead our nation into an expanded war in the Middle East. This would be a war that could so easily degenerate into a world war, one that it seems may well necessitate a reinstatement of the draft, forced conscription into military service.

However, if our president chooses to do such a thing, my advice to you, the young people of this country, is the same I have given my son.

The lesson of Nuremberg was quite clear. As human beings we are sacred. We are more than mere citizens, more than the holders of a simple deed on “a petty piece of property.” We are shareholders in a much greater assemblage. We are members of the human race, each having claim to the one and same God.

As such we must not allow ourselves to be constrained by the laws of our own land. The only law large enough to contain the heart of a human being is that which serves the best interests of the human race.

Each of us will be held accountable for upholding the laws of justice, peace, and love. There are no exceptions. Sooner or later *(in this life or the next)* we will each be held responsible for our own actions. No one *(even if a citizen of the United States of America)* will be allowed to escape judgment simply because we, for whatever reason, assumed that we had no choice but to follow orders, the commands given to us by our leaders, our so-called superiors, the government.

The Nazis learned this the hard way. The people of Germany should have known better than to

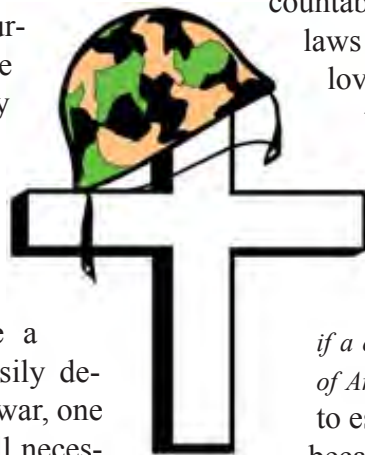
follow in the footsteps of a mad man.

Surely we, as a people, have learned from the horrors of an earlier age. Surely we will not allow the president of our country to do the same. Surely we understand that the only sure response to evil is to say no!

Once I was asked if I had any ideas concerning how to resolve the problem of war. I responded by saying, “Of course I do..... all war will end when young people tell their leaders they will no longer go to war, that they will no longer continue to kill, that if war is allowed to continue it must be fought by those who make the decisions to go to war!”

As such, it is essential that we exhibit the courage to follow the inner call of our conscience, the higher calling of God. Anything less than this will destroy the fabric of a nation, desecrate the human spirit, and lead to perdition.

So, if called upon, that is, if you, as a young adult, are conscripted into military service, ask yourself this question: would it be better for me to appease my country by choosing to kill others in the name of a coin-engraved, cookie-cutter, American-sized God, or might it be more appropriate, more noble even, to choose to be an advocate for life by manifesting the



courage to say "Yes" to humanity and by having the guts to make a determined stand against the God-awful madness of war?

Someday when you, as I, have reached the twilight years of your life, you will have the opportunity to look back upon your time on earth. And when you do, you will wonder about the things you did, the way you chose to live your life. It is then you will be assessed the task of fig-

uring out if you, in fact, lived a good and decent life.

So, when that moment arrives, that time when you must decide if you will go to war for your country, do the right thing. Do that which will enable you to stand tall as a person of true integrity, one who has



chosen life over death, one who will be proud of whom you have chosen to become as a human being: an old man, or woman, who will not be afraid to look at yourself in the mirror and say, "Yes Lord, take me, for I have lived my life, and I am not afraid to die."