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Exhibitions on the History of Nonviolent Resistance

Editors: Christian Bartolf, Dominique Miething

Desiderius Erasmus

In commemoration of his writings against war:

Dulce bellum inexpertis (1515) and *Querela pacis* (1516)

***“War is sweet to those
who have no experience of it ...”***

Protest against Violence and War



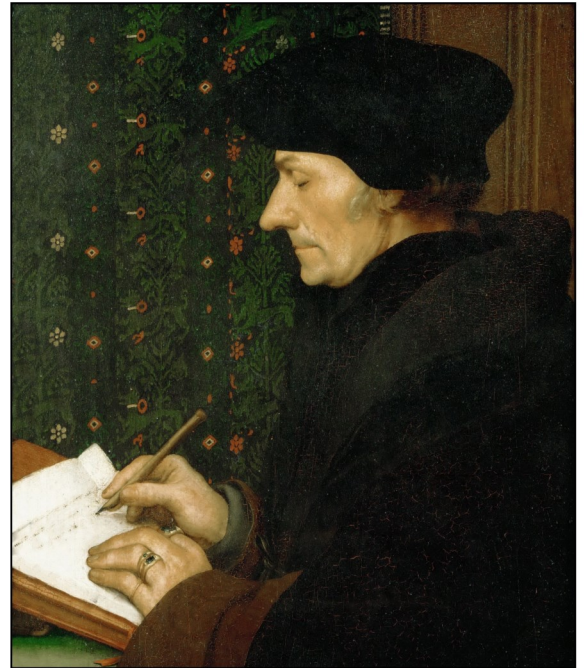
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**Desiderius Erasmus: “War is sweet to those who have no experience of it ...”
- Protest against Violence and War**

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[*Ausstellungen zur Ideengeschichte des gewaltfreien Widerstands*, Nr. 1]

Since classical antiquity, eminent persons, through their literature and science, have developed new notions of peace, freedom, justice and equality. These are not only of historical significance for civic education, but they also create ethical bases on which art, economics, pedagogy, philosophy, politics and law may build upon conceptually: the core of these exhibitions is the history of nonviolent resistance.

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Foreword

The exhibition “*War is sweet to those who have no experience of it ...*” - *Protest against Violence and War* is dedicated to the humanist and pacifist Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466-1536), whose anti-war writings *Dulce bellum inexpertis* (1515) and *Querela pacis* (1517) were published five hundred years ago.

“Erasmus, the conquered, has earned his fame here below because he broke trail in the world of literature for humanistic ideals. It is to him we owe this simplest of thoughts, and this most undying of thoughts, namely, that it is mankind's highest duty to seek to become humaner, more spiritual, and increasingly capable of sympathetic, of spiritual, understanding. [...] Schiller gave the message of world-citizenship a poetic dress; Kant demanded everlasting peace; again and again, down to the days of Tolstoy, and now with Gandhi and Romain Rolland, this same ideal has been reiterated with logical force, and the spirit of understanding has claimed its ethical and moral rights as a counterblast to the club-law of authority and violence.”

(Stefan Zweig: *Erasmus of Rotterdam*. New York: 1934. pp. 245f.)

These words of the writer Stefan Zweig on “Erasmus's Legacy” refer to the Dutch philosopher's interpretation of *Adagia* (adages) from classical antiquity. His interpretation established the modern literary forms such as the essay and the polemic. The French thinkers Étienne de la Boétie and Michel de la Montaigne carried forward this creative expression of independent thought. In so doing, they brought about intellectual and spiritual emancipation from religious authorities and engendered critical enlightenment.

Civic education and political philosophy at schools and universities shall be committed to the ethical principles of a global “Culture of Peace” (United Nations). Our *Exhibitions on the History of Nonviolent Resistance* give voice to the humanists and opponents of any war, for example Erasmus of Rotterdam and Dr. Albert Schweitzer.

Christian Bartolf / Dominique Miething
Gandhi Information Center
(Gandhi-Informations-Zentrum e.V.)

**This is one of the finest
of proverbs and is
widely used in
literature ...**

From Pindar we have:

**“War is sweet for those
who have not tried it,
but anyone who knows
what it is is horrified
beyond measure if he
meets it in his heart.”**



Vroesenpark, Gouda

ANTIPOLEMUS:

OR,
THE PLEA
OF
REASON, RELIGION, and HUMANITY,
AGAINST
W A R.

A F R A G M E N T.

Translated from *ERASMUS*; and addressed to
AGGRESSORS.

SED QUID AD NOS?

Hear him, all ye PEOPLE; and give ear, ye Nations of the Earth.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY.
1794.

ANTIPOLEMUS;

OR,
*The Plea of REASON, RELIGION, and
HUMANITY, against WAR.*

IF there is in the affairs of mortal men any one thing which it is proper uniformly to explode; which it is incumbent on every man, by every lawful means, to avoid, to deprecate, to oppose, that one thing is doubtless WAR. There is nothing more unnaturally wicked, more productive of misery, more extensively destructive, more obstinate in mischief, more unworthy of MAN as formed by nature, much more of MAN PROFESSING CHRISTIANITY.

Yet, wonderful to relate! in these times, war is every where rashly, and on the slightest pretext, undertaken; cruelly and savagely conducted, not only by unbelievers, but by Christians;

***Antipolemus: Against War
London, 1794***

**In the first place, what is there
in the whole world better and
sweeter than friendship?
Absolutely nothing.**

**But what is peace if not
friendship among many people?**

**Conversely, war is likewise
nothing but hatred between
large numbers.**



Erasmus Epitaph, Basel Minster



Erasmus of Rotterdam
Hans Holbein the Younger, 1538

I have no doubt that Pythagoras, wisest of men, foresaw this when he sought by his philosophical teaching to deter the inexperienced multitude from slaughtering flocks.

He could see that someone who, without any provocation or injury, was accustomed to shedding the blood of harmless animals, would not hesitate to kill a man when angry or roused by insults.

What is war anyway but murder and brigandage committed by many, all the more criminal because it is more widespread?



Erasmus House Anderlecht (Brussels)



Prisoners of all nations (1526)



Desiderius Erasmus
Grotekerkplein, Rotterdam

In times of peace it is just as if a fresh spring sun has begun to shine on human affairs; fields are cultivated, gardens turn green, flocks graze contentedly, farms are established and towns rise, fallen buildings are restored, others ornamented and enlarged, wealth increases, pleasures are nurtured, law is in repute, statecraft flourishes, religion is fervent, justice reigns, goodwill prevails, artisans practice their crafts with skill, the earnings of the poor are greater and the opulence of the rich more splendid. The study of the most noble subjects thrives, youth is educated, old age enjoys a peaceful leisure, girls are happily married ...



***Desiderius Erasmus
Hans Holbein the Younger***

But as soon as the raging storm of war irrupts, ye gods, what a monstrous sea of troubles rushes in, flooding and overwhelming everything. Flocks are driven off, crops trampled, farmers slaughtered, farms burned, flourishing cities built over so many centuries are overturned by a single onslaught, so much easier is it to do harm than good!

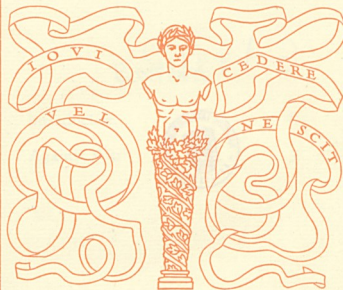
Citizens' wealth falls into the hands of damnable brigands and assassins; homes grieve with fear, mourning, and complaints; everything is filled with lamentations. The skills of craftsmen grow cold, the poor must starve or resort to wicked means.

The rich either mourn their plundered wealth or tremble for what they have left, much to be pitied in either case. If girls marry, they do so with sadness and foreboding. Deserted wives remain childless in their homes, the laws are silent, goodwill is mocked, there is no place for justice, religion is a subject of scorn, there is no distinction at all between sacred and profane.

Youth is corrupted with every sort of vice, the old weep and curse the length of their days. Study and learning are without honour.

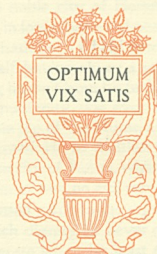
In short, we find more evils in war than any man's words can express, still less any words of mine.

ERASMUS
AGAINST WAR



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
J-W-MACKAIL
THE MERRYMOUNT PRESS
BOSTON, MDCCCCVII

OF THIS VOLUME
WHICH IS EDITED BY JOHN W. MACKAIL
WITH TYPES & DECORATIONS
BY HERBERT P. HORNE
CCCIII COPIES WERE
PRINTED



BY D. B. UPDIKE
AT THE MERRYMOUNT PRESS
BOSTON MASSACHUSETTS
IN THE MONTH OF
AUGUST
MCM
VII

Erasmus Against War
Boston, 1907

Imagine now that you see the cohorts that inspire terror by their very faces and the sound of their voices. On both sides iron-clad battle lines, the fearful clash and glitter of arms, the hateful roar of a great multitude, the threatening looks, harsh bugles, the terrifying blare of trumpets, the thunder of bombardons, no less frightening than real thunder but more harmful, the mad uproar, the furious clash of battle, the monstrous butchery, the merciless fate of the slain and those who kill, the slaughtered lying in heaps, the fields running with gore, the rivers dyed with human blood.

Sometimes brother falls on brother, kinsman on kinsman, friend on friend, as the general madness rages, and plunges his sword into the vitals of one who never harmed him even by a word.



***Hans Burgkmair:
Der Weisskunig (The White King)
1514 - 1516***

How much trouble in raising and keeping extra troops ... What trouble and expense too fitting out ships, building and repairing fortresses and camps, furnishing tents, constructing and moving machines, weapons, missiles, baggage, transport, provisions.

What labours must be put into raising walls, digging trenches and underground passages, in setting watches, posting sentries, holding manoeuvres.

I am still saying nothing of alarms and dangers - for what is not to be feared in war?

Who could possibly tell how many hardships these idiots of soldiers put up with their camps?

And they deserve worse just for being willing to put up with them.



***Hans Burgkmair:
Der Weisskunig (The White King)
1514 - 1516***

Food at which an ox would turn up its nose, sleeping quarters that would be scorned by a dung-beetle, few hours of sleep and those not of their own choosing, a tent that lets in the wind from every direction, or no tent at all. They have to endure an open-air life, sleep on the ground, stand in their arms, bear hunger, cold, heat, dust, rain.

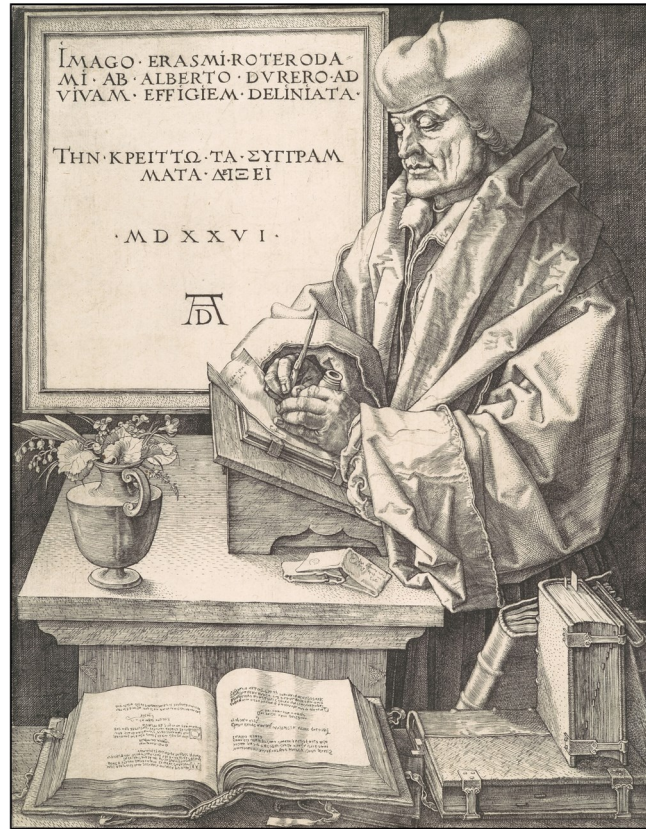
They have to obey their commanders, they have to bear floggings with rods; for no slave's bondage is more humiliating than soldiers' service.

Add to this that when the fatal signal is given you have to go and face up to death, either to kill mercilessly or to fall miserably.

We undergo all these woes in order to get to the most wretched part of all. We afflict ourselves first with these countless woes, just in order to inflict them on others.



***Hans Burgkmair:
Der Weisskuning (The White King)
1514 - 1516***



Erasmus of Rotterdam

Albrecht Dürer, 1526

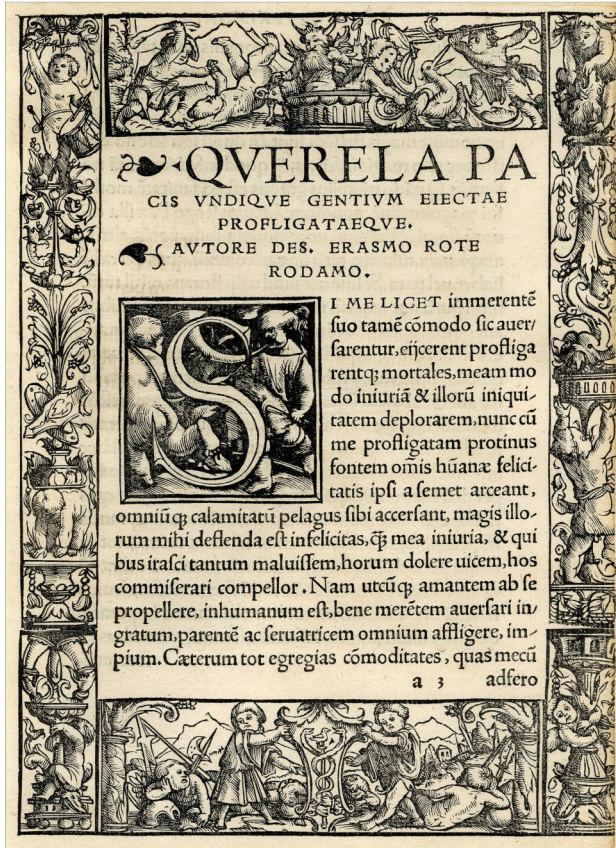


Dr. Albert Schweitzer
Oslo, 4 November 1954

The first to have the courage to advance purely ethical arguments against war and to stress the necessity for reason governed by an ethical will was the great humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam in his *Querela pacis* (The Complaint of Peace) which appeared in 1517.

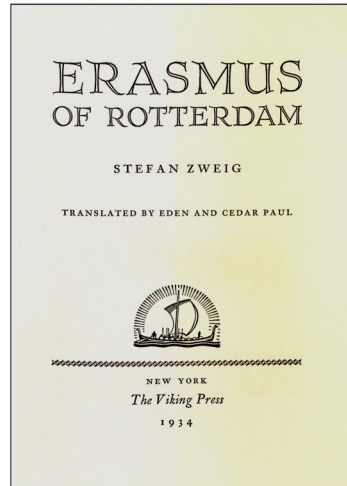
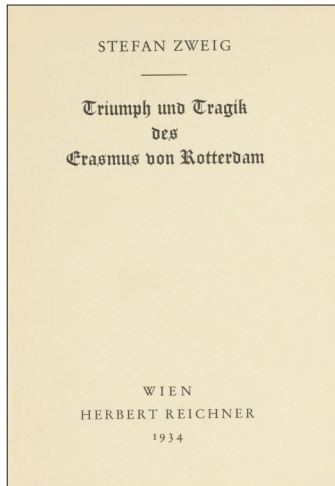
In this book he depicts Peace on stage seeking an audience.

**“The Problem of Peace“
Albert Schweitzer: Nobel Lecture
Oslo, 4 November 1954**



Complaint of Peace (Querela Pacis)

Desiderius Erasmus, 1517



As a matter of course the first thing Erasmus claimed, as champion of this and of his other projects for mutual understanding, was the disappearance of force and in especial the disappearance of war, “the reef upon which so many good things are shipwrecked.”

He was the first man of letters to advocate pacifist ideals. During an era of perpetual warfare he penned no fewer than five works attacking war; in 1504, an appeal to Philip the Handsome, King of Castile; in 1514, another to the Bishop of Cambrai in which we read, “as a Christian prince you might for Christ’s sake do your best to secure peace”; in 1515, the renowned essay in the *Adagia* which bears the eternally true title, “*Dulce bellum inexpertis*” (only to those who have never experienced it does war seem beautiful); in 1516 he addressed young Charles V in strong terms in the course of his *Instructions for a Pious and Christianly Prince*; in 1517 appeared the *Querela pacis*, which was issued in every language and circulated widely among the masses, this “plaint of Peace, rejected by all the nations and peoples of Europe, and driven forth and slain.”

Stefan Zweig: Erasmus of Rotterdam (1934)

For Erasmus, the humanist, Christ was the messenger of everything human, the divine being who had given His blood in order that the shedding of blood might disappear from the world, together with discord and quarrelsomeness. Luther, however, God's lansquenet, insisted on the literal rendering of the text "I come not to send peace, but a sword."

He who wishes to be a true Christian, says Erasmus, must live peacefully and act with forbearance in the spirit of the Lord Jesus. To which the inflexible Luther responded that the true Christian must never yield an inch of his ground so far as God's word is concerned even if the world should have to come to an end through such tenacity.

Stefan Zweig: Erasmus of Rotterdam (1934)



Stefan Zweig (1938)

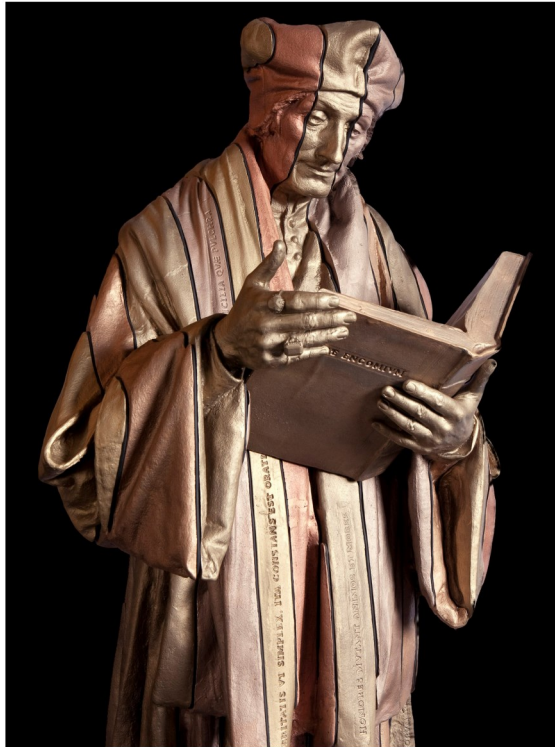
**Hence it is, I believe, that the word
'humane' is generally applied to
anything to do with mutual good will.**

**Man has also the capacity for tears,
proof of a disposition which is readily
persuaded, so that if some difference
has arisen and a cloud has overcast the
clear sky of friendship, a reconciliation
can easily be achieved.**

**Now take a look at all the reasons
Nature has provided for concord.**



***Freiburg im Breisgau
Erasmus Residence 1529 - 1531***



***Statue of Erasmus
Erasmus University Rotterdam***

Think of the mighty prophet Isaiah: when he was inspired by the divine spirit and prophesied that Christ would come to unite the world, did he promise a tyrant, a sacker of cities, a warrior, a conqueror? He did not.

**What then did he promise ?
A prince of peace. Isaiah wished it to be understood that his Prince was the best of all princes, and so he named him after that quality which he judged to be best.**



***Hans Burgkmair: Der Weisskunig (The White King)
1514 - 1516***

Finally, and what is most absurd of all, the cross is displayed in both camps, in both battle-lines, and the sacraments are administered on both sides.

What anomaly is this, when the cross fights the cross and Christ makes war on Christ !

Tell me, how can the soldier during divine worship pray in the words “Our Father”? What impudence, to dare call on God as Father, when you are making for your brother’s throat! “Hallowed be thy name.” How could the name of God be less hallowed than by your violence towards each other? “Thy kingdom come.” Is this how you pray, when you are planning so much bloodshed to get a kingdom for yourself? “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” But God’s will is for peace, and you are preparing for war. Do you ask for daily bread from our common Father when you burn your brother’s crops and would prefer them to be lost to you rather than to benefit him? And then, how can you say “Forgive us the debts we owe, as we forgive those who are indebted to us,” you who are hurrying to murder your kin ... Do you beg to be delivered from the evil one while you are plotting the worst of evils against your brother at his prompting?



***Hans Burgkmair:
Der Weisskunig (The White King)
1514 - 1516***

Finally, the greatest element in peace is a heartfelt desire for it.

Those who truly have peace at heart snatch at every opportunity for it; they ignore or remove the obstacles in the way and put up with a lot, so long as this greatest of blessings is unimpaired.



*Two Studies of the Left Hand of
Erasmus of Rotterdam;
Study of the Right Hand Writing*

Hans Holbein the Younger, 1523

The majority of the common people loathe war and pray for peace; only a handful of individuals, whose evil joys depend on general misery, desire war. Whether it is right or not for their wickedness to prevail over the will of all honest men is for you yourselves to judge ...

War springs from war, revenge brings further revenge. Now let generosity breed generosity, kind actions invite further kindness ...



Desiderius Erasmus



*Martin Buber
Erasmusprijs, 1963*



*Charlie Chaplin
Erasmusprijs, 1965*

All honour to those who have used their talents or wisdom for the prevention of war and the establishment of concord; in short, to the man who has directed all his efforts, not to procuring the greatest force of fighting men and engines of war, but to ensuring that there shall be no need of them.



Erasmus of Rotterdam

Albrecht Dürer, 1520

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[HolbeinErasmusHands.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1f/HolbeinErasmusHands.jpg).

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Photo (left): Martin Buber receives the Erasmus Prize from the hands of Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and Queen Juliana and Princess Beatrix, Amsterdam, 3 July 1963.

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Photo (right): Charles Chaplin receives the Erasmus Prize from the hands of Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands and Queen Juliana and Princess Beatrix, Amsterdam, 24 June 1965.

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**“War is sweet to those who have no experience of it,
but the hearts of those who have experienced war
tremble greatly on its approach.”** Pindar of Thebes

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