

# Declaration of Sentiments

Adopted by the Peace Convention,  
Held in Boston, September 18-20, 1838

Assembled in Convention, from various sections of the American Union, for the promotion of peace on earth and good will among men, we, the undersigned, regard it as due to ourselves, to the cause which we love, to the country in which we live, and to the world, to publish a Declaration, expressive of the principles we cherish, the purposes we aim to accomplish, and the measures we shall adopt to carry forward the work of peaceful and universal reformation.

We cannot acknowledge allegiance to any human government; neither can we oppose any such government by a resort to physical force. We recognize but one King and Lawgiver, one Judge and Ruler of mankind. We are bound by the laws of a kingdom which is not of this world, the subjects of which are forbidden to fight; in which Mercy and Truth are met together, and Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other; which has no state lines, no national partitions, and no geographical boundaries; in which there is no distinction of rank, or division of caste, or inequality of sex; the officers of which are Peace, its exactors Righteousness, its walls Salvation, and its gates Praise; and which is destined to break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms.

Our country is the world; our countrymen are all mankind. We love the land of our nativity only as we love all other lands. The interests, rights, and liberties of American citizens are no more dear to us than are those of the whole human race. Hence, we can allow no appeal to patriotism to revenge any national insult or injury. The Prince of Peace, under whose stainless banner we rally, came not to destroy, but to save, even the worst of enemies. He has left us an example, [so] that we should follow his steps. "God demonstrates his love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

We conceive that, if a nation has no right to defend itself against foreign enemies or to punish its invaders, no individual possesses that right in his own case. The unit cannot be of greater importance than the aggregate. If one man may take life to obtain or defend his rights, the same license must necessarily be granted to communities, states, and nations. If he may use a dagger or a pistol, they may employ cannon, bombshells, and land and naval forces. The means of self-preservation must be in proportion to the magnitude of interests at stake, and the number of lives exposed to destruction. But if a rapacious and bloodthirsty soldiery, thronging these shores from abroad with intent to commit rapine and destroy life, may not be resisted by the people or magistracy, then no resistance ought to be offered to domestic [troublers] of the public peace, or of private security. No obligation can rest upon Americans to regard foreigners as more sacred in their persons than themselves, or to give them a monopoly of wrong-doing with impunity.

The dogma that all the governments of the world are approvingly ordained of God, and that the powers that be in the United States, in Russia, or in Turkey are in accordance with His will, is not less absurd than impious. It makes the impartial Author of human freedom and equality unequal and tyrannical. It cannot be affirmed that the powers that be, in any nation, are actuated by the spirit, or guided by the example of Christ, in the treatment of enemies. Therefore, they cannot be agreeable to the will of God, and, therefore, their overthrow by a spiritual regeneration of their subjects is inevitable.

We register our testimony, not only against all wars, whether offensive or defensive, but [against] all preparations for war; against every naval ship, every arsenal, and every fortification;

against the militia system and a standing army; against all military chieftains and soldiers; against all monuments commemorative of victory over a foreign foe, all trophies won in battle, and all celebrations in honor of military or naval exploits; against all appropriations for the defense of a nation by force and arms on the part of any legislative body; and against every edict of government requiring of its subjects military service. Hence, we deem it unlawful to bear arms or to hold a military office.

As every human government is upheld by physical strength, and its laws are enforced virtually at the point of the bayonet, we cannot hold any office which imposes upon its incumbent the obligation to do right on pain of imprisonment or death. We therefore voluntarily exclude ourselves from every legislative and judicial body, and repudiate all human politics, worldly honors, and stations of authority. If *we* cannot occupy a seat in the legislature or on the bench, neither can we elect *others* to act as our substitutes in any such capacity.

It follows that we cannot sue any man at law to compel him by force to restore anything which he may have wrongfully taken from us or others. But, if he has seized our coat, we shall surrender up our cloak rather than subject him to punishment.

We believe that the penal code of the old covenant, “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” has been abrogated by Jesus Christ and that, under the new covenant, the forgiveness, instead of the punishment, of enemies has been enjoined upon all his disciples in all cases whatsoever. To extort money from enemies, set them upon a pillory, cast them into prison, or hang them upon a gallows is obviously not to forgive, but to take retribution. “‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

The history of mankind is crowded with evidences, proving that physical coercion is not adapted to moral regeneration; that the sinful disposition of man can be subdued only by love; that evil can be exterminated from the earth only by goodness; that it is not safe to rely upon an arm of flesh – upon man, whose breath is in his nostrils – to preserve us from harm; that there is great security in being gentle, harmless, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy; and that it is only the meek who shall inherit the earth, for the violent, who resort to the sword, shall perish with the sword. Hence, as a measure of sound policy, of safety to property, life, and liberty, and of public quietude and private enjoyment, as well as on the ground of allegiance to Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, we cordially adopt the non-resistance principle; being confident that it provides for all possible consequences, will ensure all things needful to us, is armed with omnipotent power, and must ultimately triumph over every assailing force.

We advocate no Jacobinical<sup>1</sup> doctrines. The spirit of jacobinism is the spirit of retaliation, violence, and murder. It neither fears God nor regards man. We would be filled with the spirit of Christ. If we abide by our principles, it is impossible for us to be disorderly, plot treason, or participate in any evil work. We shall submit to every ordinance of man, for the Lord’s sake; obey all the requirements of government, except such as we deem contrary to the commands of the Gospel; and in no wise resist the operation of law, except by meekly submitting to the penalty of disobedience.

But, while we shall adhere to the doctrines of non-resistance and passive submission to enemies, we purpose, in a moral and spiritual sense, to speak and act boldly in the cause of God; to assail iniquity in high places and in low places; to apply our principles to all existing civil, political, legal, and ecclesiastical institutions; and to hasten the time when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, [when] He shall reign forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Transcriber’s note – The Jacobins, led by Robespierre, were members of a political club during the French Revolution that advocated the Reign of Terror as well as other extreme and violent measures.

It appears to us a self-evident truth that whatever the Gospel is designed to destroy at any period of the world, [due to its] being contrary to it, ought now to be abandoned. If, then, the time is predicted when swords shall be beaten into plough-shares and spears into pruning-hooks, and men shall not learn the art of war any more, it follows that all who manufacture, sell, or wield those deadly weapons do thus array themselves against the peaceful dominion of the Son of God on earth.

Having thus briefly, but frankly, stated our principles and purposes, we proceed to specify the measures we propose to adopt in carrying our object into effect.

We expect to prevail through the foolishness of preaching, striving to commend ourselves unto every man's conscience in the sight of God. From the press, we shall promulgate our sentiments as widely as practicable. We shall endeavor to secure the cooperation of all persons, of whatever name or sect. The triumphant progress of the causes of Temperance and Abolition in our land, through the instrumentality of benevolent and voluntary associations, encourages us to combine our own means and efforts for the promotion of a still greater cause. Hence we shall employ lecturers, circulate tracts and publications, form societies, and petition our state and national governments in relation to the subject of Universal Peace. It will be our leading object to devise ways and means for effecting a radical change in the views, feelings, and practices of society respecting the sinfulness of war and the treatment of enemies.

In entering upon the great work before us, we are not unmindful that, in its prosecution, we may be called to test our sincerity, even as in a fiery ordeal. It may subject us to insult, outrage, suffering, and even death itself. We anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and calumny. Tumults may arise against us. The ungodly and violent, the proud and pharisaical, the ambitious and tyrannical, principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places may combine to crush us. So they treated the Messiah, whose example we are humbly striving to imitate. If we suffer with Him, we know that we shall reign with Him. We shall not be afraid of their terror; neither [shall we] be troubled. Our confidence is in the Lord Almighty, not in man. Having withdrawn from human protection, what can sustain us but that faith which overcomes the world? We shall not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, as though some strange thing had happened unto us; [we shall] rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings. Wherefore, we commit the keeping of our souls to God, in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. "For everyone who forsakes houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for Christ's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

Firmly relying upon the certain and universal triumph of the sentiments contained in this Declaration, however formidable may be the opposition arrayed against them, in solemn testimony of our faith in their divine origin, we hereby affix our signatures to it; commending it to the reason and conscience of mankind, giving ourselves no anxiety as to what may befall us, and resolving, in the strength of the Lord God, calmly and meekly to abide the issue.

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