

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE ON JUST WAR DOCTRINE TODAY

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STRICT CONDITIONS

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At one and the same time . . .

LASTING, GRAVE, AND CERTAIN DAMAGE

The damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain.

There must be serious prospects of success

OTHER MEANS IMPRACTICAL OR INEFFECTIVE

All other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective.

GREATER EVILS?

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.

WHO DECIDES?

The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.

The Church's role

- Enunciating clearly the principles
- Forming the consciences of men
- Insist on the moral exercise of just war

The Church greatly respects those who have dedicated their lives to the defense of their nation

- "If they carry out their duty honorably, they truly contribute to the common good of the nation and the maintenance of peace. [Cf. *Gaudium et spes* 79, 5]" However, she cautions combatants that not everything is licit in war. Actions which are forbidden, and which constitute morally unlawful orders that may not be followed, include:

- Attacks against, and mistreatment of, **non-combatants, wounded soldiers, and prisoners;**
- **Genocide**, whether of a people, nation or ethnic minorities;
- **Indiscriminate destruction** of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants.

JUSTICE IN WAR

- The Church and human reason both assert the permanent validity of the moral law during armed conflict. The mere fact that war has regrettably broken out does not mean that everything becomes licit between the warring parties (CCC 2312).
- Non-combatants, wounded soldiers, and prisoners must be respected and treated humanely. Actions deliberately contrary to the law of nations and to its universal principles are crimes, as are the orders that command such actions. Blind obedience does not suffice to excuse those who carry them out. Thus the extermination of a people, nation, or ethnic minority must be condemned as a mortal sin. One is morally bound to resist orders that command genocide (CCC 2313).
- Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation. A danger of modern warfare is that it provides the opportunity to those who possess modern scientific weapons -- especially atomic, biological, or chemical weapons -- to commit such crimes (CCC 2314).

CONCLUSION

As the Second Vatican Council noted, "insofar as men are sinful, the threat of war hangs over them, and hang over them it will until the return of Christ" (Gaudium et Spes 78). The danger of war will never be completely removed prior to the Second Coming.

Christ's followers must be willing to meet this challenge. They must be willing to wage war when it is just and they must be willing to wage it in a just manner.

Simultaneously, they must work to establish a just and peaceful order among the nations. In so doing they seek to fulfill the words of the prophet, according to which the nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Is. 2:4).