

Just War Theory in the Catholic Tradition: A Short History

The attitude toward war has been quite varied in the Judeo-Christian tradition and is still the subject of lively debate within our country and the Catholic Church. The respect for differences in the attitude toward war of the individual citizen and Church members is reflected in the allowance of the choice of total conscientious objection by the State and selective conscientious objection by the Church. What are the roots of this ambiguity?

In an attempt to explore these roots, we will consider a brief history of the development of the Catholic tradition toward war by attempting to outline the attitudes toward war and violence in the Old Testament, the New Testament, Christianity in the first three centuries and Catholic Christianity since the 4th century. The focus will be on the later attempts of Christians to formulate a “just war theory” in light of the many wars in which Christians and Christian States were involved.

War in the Old Testament

A short history. Scriptural accounts of the early wars of Israel describe them as offensive in nature and quite fierce and destructive by any measure. For example, immediately following the Exodus, it is recorded that as the Israelites fought their way through the desert peoples and nations on their way to the Promised Land, they did battle with the Amalekites. With Joshua in charge of the Israelite forces they “mowed down Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.” Then it is reported that “the Lord said” that he would “utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven....and will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” Here they used their primitive concept of God to justify their violence.

The wars continued and later the Israelites would have to defeat the Amorites and the Kingdom of Bashan before settling in the territory west of the Jordan - the Transjordan. In Numbers 31:1-18, again we find “the Lord telling Moses” to “Avenge the people of Israel on the Midianites”. They defeated the Midianites and “slew every male” and burned their cities. They took the women, children and livestock into captivity. When they brought the captives to Moses he instructed them to “kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves”.

Of course, there is no “just war theory” operating here. In these wars, the Israelites justify themselves by claiming to be operating under the “command of the Lord” who, in this case, permits them to kill all males, some children, some women and take the rest as slaves. A fundamentalist reading of these Scripture accounts would seem to support the most horrific kind of warfare possible as being according to the “will of God”. To say the least, the OT reflects a very primitive understanding of the God who will be fully revealed in Jesus - the God who commands that we love our enemies.

Later, in the Book of Joshua, under the leadership of Joshua they cross the Jordan and

enter the Promised Land in the famous battle at Jericho. Next they wage successful wars in the south and in the north. Thus through a process of war and peaceful assimilation they finally “settled” in their new territories west of the Jordan. During the 12th century, many of their wars or armed conflicts were now defensive in nature, led by Judges who organized the tribes to fend off various enemies from their conquered territories. With the coming of the monarchy in the 11th century, there were again some offensive wars of expansion, especially under David. No wars were recorded under the rule of Solomon. After Solomon, the northern tribes split from the South.

In the 8th century the Assyrians conquered the northern territories or “tribes” of Israel and in the 6th century the Babylonians conquered the rest of the country and took many of the Israelites into exile. In the latter part of the 6th century, when the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians, Cyrus, the king of the Persians, allowed the Israelites to return to their homeland. Then after the great conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4th century, the Israelites, now known as the Jews (from Judea), came under the rule of the Greeks. They had some success in freeing themselves from the Greeks in the Maccabean Revolt in the 2nd century. Then in 63 BC Pompey marched into Jerusalem and the Romans took local control.

However, sometime after the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century, there was developing a deeper, more peaceful, understanding of the “will of the Lord”, as we find in the Book of Isaiah (2:1-4). Here the prophet sees all the nations eventually coming to Jerusalem “to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways”. God will then judge (lead) the nations and “they 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.”

During their long history up until Isaiah, many violent offensive wars seem to be fought according to the “will of God” and the wars that crushed Israel are seen by some of the prophets to be the result of the “wrath of God”, incited by their unfaithfulness to the covenant. They would have to wait for the revelation of the will of God in the teachings of Jesus to see an alternative way of treating one’s enemies and of understanding Jewish military defeats.

Israel’s concept of a “holy war”. Like all the other peoples of ancient antiquity, we have seen that Israel linked war with their religion. In their early history, their God, Yahweh, either commanded war or at least approved of the conduct of war, plus He helped them attain their victories. The enemies of Israel, were the enemies of Yahweh. Thus, in a broad sense, every war was a holy war, however, unlike the later Moslem *jihad*, Israel’s wars were not fought to spread their faith, but to establish and/or maintain their national existence. In other words, it was Yahweh who was seen as fighting for Israel, not Israel fighting for Yahweh.

The visible sign of God’s presence during war was the Ark of the Covenant, which often accompanied the armies. It was carried around the walls of Jericho and they were victorious (Jos 6:6f). However, when they battled the Philistines at Apheq, they did not

bring the Ark at first and the battle went against them. They finally sent for the Ark, but it was too late and they were defeated and the Ark captured. (1Sam 4).

A special rule of holy war. In wars which they won early in their history, often the last act of these holy wars was known as the *herem*. This described the process of taking captives and other spoils of war and “consecrating them to God”. Interestingly, this “consecration” resulted in the destruction of all surviving males, animals and often all women who were not virgins. The *herem* is mentioned mainly in the early wars of the nation and disappears soon after their entry into the Promised Land. In fact, the idea of a “holy war” itself disappeared about the time of the monarchy, which was established under David around the year 1,000 BC, and did not return until the 2nd century BC in the Maccabean Revolt.

The Teaching of Jesus

In his brief ministry Jesus does not teach directly about war. During his lifetime, the *pax Romana* (peace of Rome) had settled over the vast Roman Empire. Jesus and his contemporaries had to deal with issues connected with Roman occupation, not Roman wars -- “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” etc.

Central to Jesus’ teaching was His announcement of a coming earthly Kingdom of God when the world would come under the rule of God. However, in the teachings of Jesus, this Kingdom would not be established by the hands of a Messiah leading an army against the Romans, as was envisioned in some Messianic hopes. Rather, it would be established by the power of God and open to those who had repented of their sins and committed themselves to the love of self, neighbor and God - those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, etc..

If Jesus said nothing specifically about war, He did specify a new way to treat one’s enemies. His sayings about enemies are found in the context of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the “sermon on the plain” in Luke. In Matthew, Jesus indicates that He gives a new teaching:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
(Mt.5:43-48)

But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate

you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. (Lk 6:27-8)

How do these sayings relate to war? First of all, it is always important to note what Jesus did not say. He did not say that the Jews should make war on their enemies and when victorious should burn their cities, slay all males (including children) and married women. Jesus indicates that past “teachings” are to be replaced by His own teaching.

Does this command to love one’s enemies rule out self defense or defense of the nation? Jesus does not comment directly on this issue. However, later Christian commentators would concede that while, in general, we must love our enemies -- treat them justly and help them when they are in need -- nevertheless, when our enemies threaten our individual lives or the entire nation, self defense is permissible. Nevertheless, love of enemies demands that taking their lives in self-defense must be a last resort, after all other defenses fail. Further, in the conduct of war between nations, love of enemies excludes the killing of prisoners, torture and killing the innocent and/or noncombatants of the enemy nation. This became part of the “just war” theory as we shall see later.

There is another saying of Jesus, also in Matthew Chapter 5, that has led some Christians to adopt pacifism:

(38) You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. (39) But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; (40) and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; (41) and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. (Mt. 5:38-41)

Catholic commentators do not see this saying as a requirement that all Christians be pacifists or becoming “doormats for Jesus”.. However, given our developing understanding of the culture of the first century AD, this saying is now understood by some biblical scholars as indicating that Jesus was promoting the concept of non-violent resistance, as adopted in our times by such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

How do scholars come to this conclusion? All too briefly, it goes this way. We shall consider the sayings verse by verse:

Verse 38 -- This famous saying reflects an OT law concerning revenge and retaliation for injuries endured. It is known as the *lex talionis* (legal rule) found in Ex.21:23-25; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21. This law was intended to limit retaliation to a one-for-one exchange, rather than a blood feud with tribe set against tribe. It was also seen as a modification of the seven-fold punishment declared by God for anyone slaying Cain (Gen 4:15) or the seventy-sevenfold punishment described by Lamech (Gen 4:24). Most scholars see the *lex talionis* as a sign of genuine moral progress in OT thought in the area of human conflict.

Verse 39 -- Why the right cheek? The first century AD was a right-handed world. Even

to gesture with your left hand in the Qumran community carried a penalty of tens days' penance. Thus, any blows, either exchanged by peers or directed toward inferiors, would be delivered with the right hand. The most natural way to hit someone on the right cheek with the right hand was with the back of the hand. The intention of such a blow was to humiliate or put someone in their place. This was the usual way of dealing with inferiors -- masters to slaves, husbands to wives, parents to children, men to women and Romans to Jews.

Peers did not hit peers on the right cheek and if they did they incurred fines, for example, cuffing with a fist cost 4 days wages, slapping 200 days wages, and with the back of the hand 400 days wages. A peer hitting another peer on the left cheek, however, carried only a small fine, if any.

So when Jesus instructs his followers about what to do when, for example, a Roman or a master hit one of them on the right cheek, he was aware that any retaliation in kind would probably result in death. He does not recommend an all out fist fight. Neither does he recommend simple cowering submission.

Instead, He recommends that they turn the other (left) cheek. Why? This is interpreted by scholars as a form of non-violent resistance, because it is a way of saying "I will not be humiliated, I am a human being and thus equal to you in status. You may be able to hit me again because of your position of power over me, but next time you will have to hit me as an equal (peer)." So if his tormentor hits him again it will be as he would hit a social equal, i.e. on the left cheek. This act of non-violent resistance robs the "superior" of his power to dehumanize his social "inferior". Even though his social superior may punish him in other ways, the non-violent resistance has made its point - we are all equal under God.

Verse 40 -- In the interest of time, we will skip a full analysis of this verse. However, this can also be interpreted as a form of non-violent resistance. It concerns one sued in court for debt payment. (The poor were often placed in unmanageable debt by the rich.) It was customary to give one's outer coat (*himatio*) in pledge (see Ex. 22:25-27; Deut 24:10-13, 17; Amos 2:7-8). If the outer coat was left as a pledge, the only clothing left was the cloak (*chiton*) a garment worn next to the skin.

Thus Jesus recommends stripping naked to protest the injustice of the poor man's debt. Nakedness was taboo in Judaism and not only the naked, but those who saw or caused the nakedness were also condemned as related in Genesis 9:20-27, where all the children of Ham, (the Cannanites), are punished because Ham saw Noah naked.

Again, Jesus recommends a fairly powerful form of non-violent resistance to oppression.

Verse 41 -- This saying is judged to refer to the rules regulating Roman soldiers in implementing their right to extract forced labor (*angareia*) from subject peoples throughout the Roman empire. In the passion narrative, Simon of Cyrene is "compelled" (*angareuesthai*) by Roman soldiers to help Jesus carry his cross. While many soldiers had

slaves to help carry their packs, many did not and would force anyone found in the towns or countryside to carry their heavy packs, weighing 70 to 80 pounds. Because of all the hostility generated toward the prevalence and misuse of this practice, Roman law finally limited this type of forced service to the equivalent of one mile.

For a soldier who broke this rule, punishment was meted out by his centurion. It could be as minor as a rebuke or a variety of other punishments selected by the centurion, which could include fines, reduction in rank and even the common punishment of flogging. These punishments were not codified and so the soldier was never sure what punishment his centurion might freely inflict.

Again, Jesus recommends standing up and taking some measure of control away from an oppressor. This is a form of non-violent resistance. When a person forced into service volunteers to carry a soldier's pack another mile (illegal under Roman law) he is not doing so to draw him aside and stick a knife in his ribs, this is violent resistance and would result in instant death. Rather, the tactic is to let the soldier's own Roman law punish him. This is a non-violent way to stand up to oppression. We can envision an almost comic scene of a surprised soldier running down the road trying to take back his pack from this lowly Jew whom he has forcibly pressed into service.

Summary - After a thorough reading of the NT, what do we think that Jesus would have said or done about war? Of course we do not know. However, my sense is that He would not have joined the army. It is true that in dealing with the Roman centurions, He is not recorded as objecting to their profession, but I have a difficult time seeing Him in the ranks of the legions. He did rebuke Peter for using his sword in the Garden to cut off the slave's ear and then He said "all who take the sword will perish by the sword". That hardly sounds like the stuff of an U. S. Army recruiting poster.

Perhaps when asked about war, Jesus would have said that it is a sign of the failure of humans to promote justice and to love one another. Note that He did accept crucifixion rather than lead an armed rebellion against Rome. Given His examples of non-violent resistance, is it possible that today He might be found in the ranks of war protesters, denouncing war, calling for justice and loving all those involved? Maybe not. You decide.

Summary: The Evolution of OT and NT Attitudes Toward War and Violence

A strictly fundamentalist reading of some of the Old Testament Scriptures would see God as ordering and approving of the most violent kinds of war and then during the time of the prophets like Isaiah beginning to "change His mind" and finally coming to a seeming complete reversal in attitude as revealed in teaching of Jesus that God is love and wishes us to love one another, even our enemies.

The non-fundamentalist interpretation of modern scripture scholars would rather point to a gradual evolution in the human understanding of God, beginning with the primitive religious experience of Moses, developing through the prophets and finally coming to a

definitive revelation of God in Jesus.

The most primitive approach to war is expressed first in an excessive reaction to violence and death approved of in Genesis with Cain and Lamech and the holy wars of the OT, including the *herem*, (recorded as approved by God), an evolution in the approach to violence is seen in the adoption of the *lex talionis* with punishment equal to the offense, then the vision of Isaiah that God would bring about the end of war and a universal peace, and finally the words of Jesus recommending love of one's enemies and a position of non-violent resistance to injustice.

(This is only a very brief and incomplete summary of what should be included in any exhaustive examination of the Scriptures on this issue.)

The Christian Response to War in the First Three Centuries

Given their commitment to the teachings of Jesus, the early Christians had to decide how to react to military service and war within their cultural setting. Among many others, the question arose about whether or not followers of Jesus could become members of the Roman army and perhaps participate in war.

It is well to note that at the time of Jesus, Jews were not required or even asked to join the Roman army. Julius Caesar (d.43 BC) had exempted the Jews from military service in response to their support against his enemies. Furthermore, Jews did not make the best of soldiers, because most of them in strict observance of the Law would not fight on the Sabbath. It was not deemed helpful to fill the army with soldiers who would only fight six days of the week.

Certainly not all early converts to Christianity were Jews, nevertheless, there are no Christian writings from the first three Christian centuries that we know of that condoned Christian participation in war. Some Christians held that all bloodshed, whether as soldiers or as public executioners, was un-Christian. The Church of Alexandria had misgivings about admitting soldiers into its congregation and permitted enlistment in the legions only in exceptional circumstances.

In Rome, the presbyter Hippolytus (170-236?) wrote that the apostolic tradition required that if a soldier joined the Church, he must promise to refuse to kill, even if commanded by his superiors, and also refuse to take the oath to the emperor. In order to enter the catechumenate in preparation for baptism, military commanders were required to resign their commission. Any member of the Church who sought to enlist as a soldier was to be cut off from the community.

The influential writer and apologist Tertullian (160-225) argued that Christians could not be soldiers because their oath to the emperor and/or military commander (*sacramentum*) put them under a master other than Christ and that they might be asked to become involved in idolatrous rites. He also claimed that by taking up the sword, even in a peace time army engaged in police actions, soldiers would be engaged in inflicting punishments

and that was forbidden by Jesus. He argued that when Jesus disarmed Peter in the Garden, he “ungirdled every soldier”.

Evidence of the reluctance of Christians to join the army was seen in the writings of the pagan polemicist Celsus, where he ridicules Christianity for many things, including their reluctance to join the army. He argued that if all citizens felt this way the Empire would immediately fall victim to the wild barbarian hordes.

In replying to Celsus, the great theologian and biblical commentator Origen (185-254) did not deny that Christians were pacifists. Rather, he argued that if the Gospel was allowed to spread to all people, that even the barbarians would become pacifists. Furthermore, he contended that while Christians were still a minority, their love, labor and prayers were doing more to preserve the Empire than Roman armies.

For most of these first three centuries Christian pacifism was largely theoretical because Christians were a tiny minority (about 5% at the beginning of the 4th century) and unable to influence state policy. Furthermore they were not the target of recruitment for the legions, because early on Christians were seen by the Romans as members of a Jewish sect and as mentioned above, Jews were exempt from military service. However, by the 3rd century more and more Christians were giving up their strict pacifism and joining the legions. This was especially true on the frontiers of the Empire where Roman citizens and subjects were experiencing armed invasions by the barbarians.

Christian Response to War Changes After the Third Century

Constantine became the Roman Emperor in 306 AD and ruled until 337 AD. After a dream or heavenly vision before doing battle at the Milvian Bridge in 312, he adopted the Chi-Rho, a Christian symbol. After his victory, which he attributed to divine assistance, he issued the Edict of Milan in 313, which ended the persecutions of Christians and granted religious tolerance to all, including Christians. While it seems that he was not baptized until just before his death, he was pro-Christian in his policies. He restored Christian properties taken during time of persecutions and placed Christians in positions of power. He also called the Council of Nicaea in 325 to help unify Christian teachings. He saw Christianity as a potential unifying force for the Empire. And indeed, at the end of the 4th century, the Emperor Theodosius I would make Christianity the official religion of the Empire.

Given its new political status, the Christian Church experienced rapid growth and by the end of the 5th century, nearly 50% of the Empire was at least Christian in name. With the Emperors now Christian and more and more public officials Christian the attitude of Christians toward protecting and promoting the Empire changed. Many Christians now viewed the interests of the Church and State as identical and were willing to take up arms to protect them both.

War was thus seen in a new light. Soldiers were now in the business of protecting and promoting “God’s Empire”. As early as 314, the Synod of Arles condemned Christians

who deserted from the army. St. Athanasius (d. 373), the great defender of the Council of Nicaea, went so far as to declare that it was lawful and even meritorious to kill enemies in time of war.

However, not all violence perpetrated by the state was condoned. In 390, St. Ambrose the bishop of Milan, excommunicated Theodosius I for ordering the slaughter of some seven thousand people for a civil disorder in Thessalonika. Ambrose accepted the emperor back in the Church after he performed public penance at the door of the cathedral of Milan. Nevertheless, pacifists were now in the minority and most Christians thinkers had come to believe that war was not intrinsically evil and that some, if not most, wars were probably just wars. By the time of Theodosius II only Christians were permitted to serve in the army.

This concept of a “just war” was elaborated by St. Augustine (354-430) at the beginning of the 5th century. Augustine did not advocate a “presumption against war”, but held that Christian love must respond to those threatened by force. Wickedness must be restrained, by force if necessary, and that “the sword of the magistrate is divinely commissioned”. However, Augustine held that not all wars were just. To be declared a just war, the war must be: 1) waged under the legitimate authority (emperor, prince), 2) it must be directed toward the punishment of injustice and/or the restoration of peace, 3) it must be fought without vindictiveness or unnecessary violence, 4) it must be conducted with an attitude of inward love. (These principles laid the foundation for the concept of a “just war” which has endured, with some modifications, until our own time.)

Augustine was not an advocate of war and he deplored violence. In a letter to Boniface in 417 he said:

For peace is not sought in order to kindle war, but war is to be waged in order to obtain peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those who you war against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace.”

Augustine specifically ruled out as permissible motives or justifications for war “the passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance...the lust of power”. He also held that monks and religious must be exempt from the military. He even held that without the blessing of civil authority, at the highest level, no civilian could use force even to defend even his own life.

War and Peace - Christian Attitudes from the 6th Century to the Middle Ages

War and the Spreading of the Gospel - Constantine had moved the seat of power of the Roman Empire to the East (Constantinople) in the 4th century. From that time on the Western part of the Roman Empire had to deal with wave after wave of “barbarians” entering the Empire and establishing control over various parts of the Western Empire. In the Western power vacuum created by the Eastern Emperors, the popes stepped in to take

leadership and used the Church to provide some stability among the various “nations”.

The Church’s response to the barbarians was to convert them and make them look to the Pope for leadership. With the conversion of the powerful Franks, the stage was set for the establishment of Christendom - Church and State linked - with pope and emperors vying for supreme power over the centuries. Christendom was said to have begun on Christmas Day in the year 800 when Pope Leo III placed the crown on Charles’ head with these words; “ Hail to Charles the Augustus, crowned of God, the great and peace-bringing Emperor of the Romans”.

Charles the Great - Charlemagne - had established peace by means of war. He was blessed for this by the popes. He conquered the Lombards who threatened Rome, the Saxons, the tribes of Northern Spain, the Avars, the Danes and the Slaves. Most of these peoples “converted” to Christianity, some by force (the Saxons). In an dramatic turn around from the teachings of Jesus and the evangelization methods of the early Christians, war was now seen as an effective way to spread the Gospel.

Medieval Peace Movements - As time went on, the feudal system of the Middle Ages developed. It became divided into three classes: Those who prayed (religious orders), those who worked (the peasants) and those who fought (the nobles). The violence of the nobility, as they fought among themselves and terrorized the peasantry, was one of the great social problems within medieval society.

As a reaction to this violence, peace movements began in France during the 10th century. These peace movements were initiated by a group of reformed French Benedictines from their abbey at Cluny and were called: The Peace of God (989) and the Truce of God (1027).

The “Peace of God” was decreed at the Council of Charroux in 989 in order to make the roads safe for pilgrims and merchants. It set out codes of behavior for knights and soldiers that stipulated the rights of the noncombatant peasants and established churches as “sanctuary”, where those attacked could seek safety. Any who violated the rights of noncombatants and broke sanctuary were banned from all the sacraments and/or faced excommunication.

Leagues of Peace were then established whose members (oddly enough) were pledged to take up war if necessary to suppress those who made war! Supposedly seven hundred clerics died in one such “war of peace”.

Cluny also promoted the “Truce of God” . It established “closed seasons” on fighting. These included the seasons of Lent and Advent (through Epiphany), holydays, and every week of the year “from sunset on Wednesday to sunrise on Monday”.

While most historians view these peace movements as largely ineffective, they were signs that at least some in the Church recognized the madness of war and its radical departure from the Gospel. While some wars were blessed, in the 11th century, it was considered a grave sin to kill a man in battle waged only for secular purposes. In 1045

the Council of Marbonne stated that: “A Christian who kills another Christian spills the blood of Christ.” In an odd twist, while the Battle of Hastings in 1066 was blessed by the pope, severe penalties were given to the victors for any deaths they caused. Later, as we shall see, several theologians would also attempt to revive St. Augustine’s “just war” theory.

Holy Wars Against the Infidels - The Crusades -- It is in this setting of internal medieval violence that the Crusades were born. They were largely a papal enterprise begun in 1095 by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont. When he addressed the Christian nobles he first reminded them of the Truce of God and that they were to live at peace with one another and then he called them to turn their violent behavior away from their fellow Christians and direct to the infidel Moslems who occupied the Holy Land:

...reenact the law of our ancestors known as the Truce of God. And now that you have promised to maintain the peace among yourselves you are obligated to succor your brethren in the East, menaced by an accursed race, utterly alienated from God....wrest that land from the wicked race and subject it to yourselves.

Armed with a holy purpose, guaranteed of eternal rewards if they died, blessed with the first plenary indulgence and marked with red crosses on their tunics (crusade means, “taking the cross”), thousands of knights and soldiers embarked on the first Crusade shouting “God wills it”.

There were a wide variety of reasons why the crusaders took up their swords. Besides, “doing the will of God”, they probably also looked forward to the spoils of war which could include treasure and territory. Many serfs and peasants joined them as a way to escape their feudal responsibilities and the grinding drudgery of medieval peasant life.

There were seven Crusades yielding various success and failures. There was even a Children’s Crusade in 1212 in which the children from France and Germany expected the Mediterranean of part to let them cross “dry-shod” as in the Exodus account. Their senseless journey was one of misery and death. They died by the thousand from disease, starvation and slaughter. Most of the survivors were sold into slavery by the Turks and taken to Egypt.

The Crusades-- An Evaluation -- Whatever can be said for the view that all popes are indeed the Vicar of Christ on earth, it is impossible for any thoughtful Christian to picture the Jesus of the Gospels initiating a “holy war” of mass destruction against anyone. The Crusades were clearly a perversion of the message of Jesus. Jesus had taken up the cross as an example of one who overcomes evil, not by reflecting it back, but by overcoming evil by the power of love. Jesus was the defining example of nonviolent resistance to evil.

Military Monastic Orders -- In this climate of “God approved” violence there was another interesting development, the rise of military monastic orders. The four most famous were

the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre (1095?), The Templars (1119), the Knights of the Hospital of St. John (1120) and The Teutonic Knights (1190). They were formed to protect certain sites in the Holy Land, offer aid to pilgrims and to fight Moslems and even to “spread the faith” by war and terror.

The Advent of the Modern Just War Theory

For centuries after Augustine’s death, his just war theory was largely ignored by theologians. Finally, important theologians like Thomas Aquinas (1231-74), Francisco de Vitoria (1486-1546), and Francisco de Suarez (1548-1617) revived Augustine and tried to apply his just war theory to the conflicts of their age.

Thomas Aquinas was greatly influenced by Greek thinkers like Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle made this observation: “We make war so that we may live in peace, but as the aim of peace is won at the very heavy price of war, it must be the aim of peace alone that is envisaged.”

Following Aristotle and Augustine, Thomas Aquinas developed a natural law theory of just war which remains with us today as the core of the modern just war theory:

In order for a war to be just, three things are necessary. First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is to be waged, for it is not the business of a private individual to declare war, because he can seek for redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior. Secondly, a just cause is required, namely that those who are attacked should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault. Thirdly, it is necessary that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so that they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil. There are different considerations applicable to the justification for going to war -- the *Jus ad Bellum*, and the justified actions that take place in war, the *Jus in Bello*.

Current Catholic Just War Theory

Over time, reflecting the insights of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, modern just war theory developed within the Catholic Church. It begins with a strong presumption against war which can be overridden under certain conditions which fall into two main groups: the right to declare war (*jus ad bellum*) and what is right in war (*jus in bello*). *jus ad bellum* -- 1) just cause - defense against aggression, 2) declared by competent authorities, 3) right intention, excluding revenge and hatred, 4) last resort after all reasonable non-violent means fail, 5) proportionality, the good achieved outweighs the harms caused, 6) reasonable hope of success where defeat is highly unlikely and wrongs can be righted, 7) comparative justice, considers a wide range of differences between the parties.

jus in bello -- 1) discrimination, the issue of avoiding killing the innocent

(noncombatants) either directly or indirectly. Total war and the destruction of civilian population centers is forbidden. 2) proportionality, forbids harm to either military personnel or civilians that is unnecessary or excessive (torture and employment of weapons of mass destruction - nuclear, biological or chemical).

For many scholars, the last war that “qualified” under the modern just war theory was W.W.II. Years ago, John Courtney Murray maintained that Pope Pius XII had reduced the just cause for war to one category: defensive war to resist aggression. In reaction to the failure of some wars to measure up to the just war criteria, the popes and the bishops have reacted in protest to several wars, including the Iraq War, which they concluded did not comply with elements of the just war theory (1,4,5,6,7) as outlined above.

The U S Catholic Bishops on War and Peace - 1983 -- “*The Challenge of Peace*” : The 1983 Pastoral Letter on War and Peace drafted by a committee of five bishops chaired by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. It was finally approved by a vote of 238-9 by the U.S. Catholic Bishops.

In 1983 wars raged in El Salvador, Afghanistan, Lebanon and between Iran and Iraq. Solidarity was leading massive unrest in Poland. Egyptian president Anwar Sadat had been killed and Regan and pope John Paul had been wounded by assassination attempts.

Regan had authorized the largest peacetime arms buildup in history which included research on the neutron bomb and Star Wars. The financial commitment to this effort had a damaging effect on social programs for the needy. There was a popular anti-nuclear movement and serious policy debates over first-strike strategies and the nature of weapons systems.

In their letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, the bishops noted that “peace is both a gift and a human work”, an “enterprise in justice”. They spoke of two Christian responses to aggression: the just-war approach and the non-violence approach. They stated that “governments threatened by armed, unjust aggression must defend their people” and this defense could include armed defense as a last resort. However, citing the just-war theory, they declared that the use of nuclear weapons against civilian populations to be immoral, any first-strike use of nuclear weapons to be morally unjustifiable and any “limited” use to be morally “highly skeptical”. A policy of nuclear deterrence was accepted only as a step toward disarmament. Deterrence does not preserve “genuine peace”.

They supported both general and selective conscientious objection and cited three modes of non-violent resistance: gospel-based non-violence; gospel-based affirmative reconciliation with enemies; and an “active non-violence” to resist aggression. They cited Gandhi, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King. They stated that the “pacifist option” complements the just-war tradition and that any teaching on war includes “a presumption against the use of force as a means of settling disputes”.

Non-violence is not passive about injustice and is “not the way of the weak, the cowardly or the impatient”. It can be expressed in diplomacy, negotiation, compromise, resistance,

and peaceable non-compliance and non-cooperation.

In 2005, the Catholic Bishops of the United States issued a letter entitled: *“Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility.”* In the section on protecting the dignity of all human life, the Bishops said that while individuals and nations can protect their lives from aggressors, Catholics must work to avoid war and especially the preemptive or preventive use of force. “We must promote peace and find more effective way to resolve conflicts other than war”. They spoke of a “new moment” in the Church’s teaching on war that includes “a presumption against the use of force as a means of settling disputes”.

Even when war is judged to be justified, it must be “discriminate and proportionate”. “We can never intentionally attack civilians or put them in mortal danger by the use of weapons of mass destruction”. The alarming increase in the percentage of casualties in war that are civilian -- WW I 5%, WW II 50%, Vietnam 80% -- increases the obligation to find alternatives to war. They urged the United States to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and strengthen barriers against the use of nuclear weapons. They also urged the U.S. to join the international treaty to end the use of land mines and to reduce our nation’s role in the scandalous global trade in arms.

Put simply, the Catholic hierarchy teaches that a war that is not necessary is not just. Thus, in modern Church teaching the case for a just war has become more and more difficult to make and atomic war is simply ruled out.

Challenges to Current Church Teaching

Two catholic scholars, Michael Novak and George Weigel, now argue that the Church’s position of a “presumption against war” has strayed from Augustine’s view that Christian love demands a response - even war if necessary, albeit a just war - to those threatened by force or evil. In their view the war on Iraq is a just war, responding to the needs of an oppressed people.

This new debate on a changing theory of just war is long and complicated, but, briefly, it argues that in our modern world, the Church’s just war theory must go beyond self-defense as defined in the past. Instead of a presumption against war and an undue respect for national sovereignty, decisions about making war against nations must also take into account humanitarian needs of peoples, the advent of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Whatever weight is given to these arguments, the adoption of such modifications in the just war theory could shift the context of decision making about making war from an initial presumption against war and a search for alternatives other than war, to an analysis of conditions that allow or demand a nation to go to war.

Novak and Weigel are correct in pointing out that humanitarian needs, terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are issues that ought to be addressed in our

modern world, however it could well be argued that these issues should be addressed within the context of a presumption against war. This does not exclude a just war, but the presumption against war helps to focus on other means to resolve the issues until war becomes truly a last resort.

At any given time on our modern history, the humanitarian needs of people - starvation, AIDS, genocide, etc.- are overwhelming and no single nation could hope to solve them, much less by wars of intervention all over the globe. The official Catholic Church, especially recent popes, has long held that only an international organization like the United Nations could even begin to effectively deal with these problems.

The counter argument has been that the United Nations is historically inadequate and organizationally inept and thus unable to effectively deal with these issues. One response to this argument is that more effort needs to be invested in the United Nations to make it more effective. If this sounds romantic or unrealistic at best or simply stupid, it might be suggested that the alternative of the “strongest” nation being able to solve all of these world problems is equally romantic, unrealistic and perhaps stupid.

If we give up on the United Nations, what we are left with is the strongest nation - at this time the U. S. - making selective judgments about where to intervene, given that even the strongest nation has limits on funds and manpower. Furthermore, there is a great temptation for the strongest nation to give, perhaps, inordinate weight to the economic and political outcomes that are in its own best interests when deciding where to intervene with force, rather than simply responding to the greatest need.

Some would argue that this has happened, because during the last thirty years there have been ongoing issues like AIDS, genocide and terrorist activities in certain parts of the world to which the U. S. has not responded. Cynics would say that this might be due to the fact that these countries were politically insignificant and were not producers of oil. I believe that such remarks are too cynical because the U. S. has responded to several crisis situations, but the temptation is there if unilateral action by the strongest country is to be the first choice in solving international problems.

In all probability, the official Catholic Church will continue to support the concept of an international organization such as the United Nations as the best vehicle to respond to violence and the injustices in the world. The official Church also will no doubt continue to approach these problems in the context of a presumption against war and the theory of a just war. And if war seems to be the last resort, given the just war principles (*ad bellum*), the principles of what is right in war (*jus in bello*) will still be applied. And as mentioned above, in light of our experiences in Iraq, the Church may call for the establishment of norms to govern the way we end war (*jus post bellum*).

The official Catholic Church now finds its current position of a presumption against war and its traditional just war theory challenged by the modern advent of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and expanded calls for humanitarian intervention. Will a new just war theory emerge? Only time will tell and only serious scholarly and public dialogue will

give us proper guidance.

However, in the mean time, what is the individual Catholic to do? Individual Catholics are left to form their own consciences on the matter, understanding that all sides to the issue have good points and there seems to be no definitive answer or position at this time.

Individual Formation of Conscience Concerning War

While Novak and Weigel have objected to official position of the Catholic Bishops as a “species of functional or *de facto* pacifism”, the reality is that the majority of American Catholics actually exhibit a strong presumption *for* war. While the American Bishops have condemned “uncritical conformism” and “exaggerated nationalism”, American Catholics, including the bishops, have long offered strong support to their nation’s wars - “my country, right or wrong”.

This presumption in favor of one’s country is fairly easy to understand and even defend. Ordinary citizens are not aware of all the details and intelligence information that are available to the decisions makers in Washington. These are our elected officials, we trust them, we support our country and if war is declared we will support it. Good citizens support their country.

However, the existence of a “just war theory” makes no sense if no wars declared by one’s country could ever be judged unjust. (what about German Catholics in WWII?). Why then do we have a just war theory in Catholic thought? It seems logical to conclude that some wars, when judged by the just war theory, might well be judged to be unjust. The next logical step is that which was taken by the Second Vatican Council, that is, the option of selective conscientious objection.

Selective Conscientious Objection -- By definition, the just war theory holds that some wars can be judged to be unjust and that Christians should not participate in them. Furthermore, the advent of modern warfare and weapons of mass destruction raised the question of the justification of any modern war. In his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, (1963), Pope John XIII said: “In this age, which boasts of atomic power, it is senseless to think of war as a tool for redressing the violation of rights.”

Because of the problems of judgment and individual conscience in applying the principles of the just war theory, especially to modern warfare, the issue of selective conscientious objection was considered by the Catholic Church. While selective conscientious objection was rejected by Pope Pius XII (1939-58) and only total pacifism is recognized by the U. S. government, its validity was clearly affirmed by Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (n.79) and in the letters from the American National Conference of Catholic Bishops, i.e., *Human Life in Our Day* (1968) and *The Challenge of Peace* (1983) which recognize total pacifism and selective conscientious objection as valid options which Catholics can adopt in good conscience.

Summary

Serious arguments for and against war can be very compelling. In the Catholic view one can, in good conscience, either be a conscientious objector or a conscientious warrior. It can be argued that both serve themselves and others in Christian love. In our ambiguous world we must allow for both.

So in Catholic thought the individual can make such a decision. What about a call from the Catholic Bishops to resist war as a moral obligation if some war is judged to be blatantly unjust? Historically, that has never happened. Maybe all our wars have been just. However, Rome and the Catholic Bishops did voice concerns about the war in Iraq.

It seems that the individual Catholic is left to form his or her individual conscience and act upon it and accept the consequences. The just war theory and the example of Jesus can be of some help. There seem to be no clear answers, but we will all be called to justify our moral choices as we seek entrance into the Kingdom.