

Respect for life and the dignity of the human being is the foundation of all Catholic Social Teaching. It is at the basis of all that we do. In our day to day existence a command to protect life and never take the life of a human being seem easy to follow, but when it comes to discussions of war and peace the issues become cloudy for many people. When, if ever, is violence allowed? Is war, which involves intentionally killing others, ever permissible? Can peace, which is clearly the ideal, ever be achieved practically? These are questions that many of us ask ourselves.

Catholicism holds two distinct traditions that can teach us how to think of war and violence. The tradition of Just War originated with St. Thomas Aquinas and has been used by the Church since. Just War should not be seen as an excuse for war, however, but as rules limiting when violence is acceptable. Under Just War Doctrine, war is only allowed as a last resort.

The early Church, though, followed a tradition of nonviolence, and in recent years this position has grown in popularity. Nonviolence theory does not imply passive acceptance of injustice or attacks, but it believes that violence only begets violence and courageous, but peaceful, resistance is the only path which affirms the dignity of all human beings. Above all, those who follow nonviolence are guided by the cry of Pope Paul VI, "No more war! War never again!"

Additional Resources

For further readings on this topic try:

<http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/offices/peacejustice/docs/PeaceArchiveIndex.html>

Educational and liturgical peace resources provided by the Arlington Diocese Peace and Justice Commission.

http://www.osjspm.org/the_challenge_of_peace_1.aspx

"The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983

<http://www.silk.net/RelEd/justice.htm>

This site provides readings with a range of views on Catholic Social Teaching and Peace

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/warandpeaceind.shtml>

The USCCB's collection of documents on war and peace.



*Peace, Just War, and Catholic
Social Teaching*

Principles of Just War

- **Just Cause:** There must be a real danger to innocent life and to the conditions necessary for decent human existence and the protection of human rights. Wars of retribution are not justifiable.
- **Competent Authority:** The use of force is always related to and in service of the common good. War can only be declared by those who have responsibility for the common good.
- **Right intention:** The intention for entering into war must be to protect human life and human rights. Its ultimate goal must be peace and reconciliation.
- **Last Resort:** One may only start a war when it is clear that there are no other options. All peaceful alternatives must have been explored and exhausted before war can be justified.
- **Probability of Success:** When the result of entering war will clearly be disproportionate suffering or obvious defeat, it must be rejected.
- **Proportionality:** In deciding whether or not to enter into war, the principle of proportionality requires that the cost of war in damage and human suffering must be proportionate to the good that will be achieved.

Peace Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.



O Divine Master, grant that I may not
So much seek to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to
eternal life.

Nonviolence

*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.
—Isaiah 2:4.*

- **Nonviolence is not passive**, but requires courage.
- **Nonviolence seeks reconciliation**, not defeat of an adversary.
- **Nonviolent action aims to eliminate evil**, not to destroy an evil-doer.
- **Nonviolence includes a willingness to suffer** for a cause if necessary, but never to inflict suffering.
- **Nonviolence is a rejection of hatred**, animosity and violence of the spirit.
- **Nonviolence is based on faith** that justice and righteousness will prevail.

In the nonviolent tradition, we are called to follow the way of Jesus, who did not use violence or weapons to bring about the new kingdom, but called on us instead to love our enemies. In "The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace," the USCCB points out that while "nonviolence has often been regarded as simply a personal option or vocation, recent history suggests... it can be an effective public undertaking as well."