

The Theory of the Just War in Catholicism **by: Todd S. Bindig**

For more than a thousand years, the Catholic Church has attempted to balance its eschatological and amelioristic interests. However, in the attempt to both be concerned with the next world and the final end of humanity, and at the same time be concerned with this world and how to make it a better place, there is occasionally a danger of ending up with contradictory teachings. Such seems to be the case when one views the teachings of Jesus, as they are found in the Gospels, as contrasted with Church teachings which give a set of conditions under which a nation is considered justified in going to war, namely “the Theory of the Just War.”

The role of the Gospels

The relevance of the Gospels to Catholicism is made overwhelmingly clear in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It states: “The Gospels are the heart of all the Scriptures ‘because they are our principle source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior.’” (Catechism 125)

In other words, the Gospels are important because it is primarily there that we find the teachings of Jesus Christ. “The Church holds firmly that the four Gospels, ‘whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully hands on what Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up. (Catechism 126)

Therefore, the Gospels have a very important function in Catholic teaching, namely that they are believed to express the teachings of Jesus Christ which he gave while he was alive. It is important to make the distinction that the Gospels hold the teachings of Christ *while he was alive* instead of simply stating that the Gospels hold the teachings of Christ *in their entirety* because Catholicism teaches that Christ continues to teach his people through the Church – a fact which later becomes extremely important to this argument.

Clearly then, the role of the Gospels in Catholicism is to express the teachings of Jesus Christ. The question then must be raised as to why these teachings are so overwhelmingly important.

The role of Christ

The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus Christ, as the person of the *Son* in the Trinity, is not merely a great teacher but is in fact God.

The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the ‘consubstantial Trinity.’ The divine persons do not share one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire: ‘The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is i.e., by nature one God.’ (Catechism 253)

This makes whatever Christ taught profoundly important to one who adheres to Catholic teaching. When one believes that the teacher is in fact an omni-benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient being, i.e. God incarnate, the message of this teacher must be absolutely accepted and adhered to at all times. In other words, if the teacher is God it is very important to do what he says to do.

The position of Christ as found in the Gospels

When one reads the teachings of Christ, as found in the Gospels, it becomes rapidly clear both that large portions of these teachings are eschatological in nature – largely concerned with humanity’s ultimate end and the “other world” – and that Jesus clearly and repeatedly stands opposed to physical violence.

A powerful example of Jesus’ opposition to physical violence can be found in the Gospel of Matthew. “You have heard that it was said, ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.” (Mathew 5:38-9) A similar statement is found in the Gospel of Luke. “But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To a person who strikes your right cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic.” (Luke 6:27-9)

It seems that there is no other way to understand the above quotes than in pacifistic terms. In other words, Jesus seems to be telling his followers that they should not fight, or in any way oppose, those who attack them. In fact he even makes the radical statement that his followers should “love their enemies.” Nothing here suggests that there is ever any good reason to fight or kill – as opposed to loving – one’s enemies. In fact, there is no place in the Gospels where Christ even remotely suggests that it might be acceptable for one of his followers to use violence against another human being for any reason whatsoever. Rather, on every occasion where he discusses violence or his followers suggest violence Christ opposes this as an acceptable action.

A possible explanation for this pacifism is the eschatological nature of much of what Christ was saying. For example, Christ says: “And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.” (Matthew 10:28) The point is that what happens to you in this world is not as important as what happens to you in the next world. In other words, if your enemies come to slaughter you and your people, that danger is not nearly as great as the danger of going to Hell after you die; which it seems that one risks if one opposes these enemies with violence as opposed to loving and praying for them. It is important to remember that Jesus tells his followers: “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)

An objection to this interpretation

One might object to this reading of the Gospels as taking them far too literally. Part of this objection is completely correct. If one takes the words of Christ, as found in the Gospels, literally it seems that there can be no doubt that the teachings of Jesus are opposed to physical violence. If this were the only ground upon which this argument stood there would be a problem because a merely literal interpretation of Scripture is misleading and often contradictory for reasons ranging from problems with translation to an intended allegorical meaning in given texts. However, the interpretation proposed here - that Christ is teaching non-violence - is not merely consistent with a literal interpretation of the Gospels but it is also consistent with the spirit of the Gospel teachings taken as a whole.

When one reads the entirety of the message of Christ, as found in the Gospels, it becomes quite clear that there is an overall message of love contained in these teachings.

The followers of Christ are called to love God and all other people, both in the letter of the teachings of Christ and in the spirit of the teachings of Christ. When one is called to love people, it is clearly contrary to this teaching to kill people. Therefore, the interpretation of the teachings of Christ, as found in the Gospels, here given is consistent with not only a literal interpretation of said teachings, but also with the overall message – the spirit – of said teachings. With this having been made clear, one can safely conclude that the teachings of Christ as found in the Gospels express a message of non-violence.

Having established that the Gospels contain a message which opposes violence and supports pacifism, and having further established that the Catholic Church teaches both that the Gospels accurately contain the teachings of Christ and that Christ - in the person of the *Son* in the Trinity - is God, it seems safe to conclude that a Catholic who follows these teachings ought to be a pacifist and that the Church as a whole ought to support pacifism in order to follow teachings which come directly from God. However, it is clear that some of the most famous theologians of the Catholic Church – namely St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas - have proposed conditions under which going to war is just, i.e. the “Theory of the Just War.” Additionally, the modern Catholic Church teaches – in its Catechism of the Catholic Church - that war can be just and that citizens even have a *duty* to fight in these wars.

The position of St. Augustine

The first prominent Catholic theologian to discuss the Theory of the Just War was St. Augustine. In his book, City of God, Augustine states: “A just war, moreover, is justified only by the injustice of an aggressor; and that injustice ought to be a source of grief to any good man, because it is human injustice.” (Augustine 447) From this quote one could say that it is Augustine’s position that it is only just to fight a war to combat injustice. It might also be assumed that Augustine would say that these just wars were very good things in themselves. However, it is clear upon further examination that St. Augustine believes that war is a most regrettable reality.

Augustine states: “I know the objection that a good ruler will wage wars only if they are just. But surely, if he will only remember that he is a man, he will begin by bewailing the necessity he is under of waging even just wars. A good man would be under compulsion to wage no wars at all, if there were not such things as just wars.” (Augustine 447)

It seems clear by the above statement that Augustine believes that there exist such things as wars which are just, as we have already seen, but it is also clear that he believes that these wars are a regrettable necessity. It is not Augustine’s position that just wars are good *per se*, rather it is his position that they are acceptable wrongs done for a greater good, namely to combat injustice. This position is further indicated in the following statement. “Any man who will consider sorrowful evils so great will admit his human misery. And if there is any man who can endure such calamities, or even contemplate them without feeling grief, his condition is all the more wretched for that. For it is only the loss of humane feeling that could make him call such a life ‘the happy life.’” (Augustine 447)

Clearly, Augustine believes that a war to combat injustice is acceptable only for amelioristic reasons. However, he makes it clear that there is certainly something preferable to war. “We may say of peace what we have said of eternal life – that it is our highest good.” (Augustine 450) He also states later: “The trouble with peace is that, even on the level of earthly and temporal values, nothing that we can talk about, long for, or finally get, is so desirable, so welcome, so good as peace.” (Augustine 451)

Further, he seems to tie peace with eternal life, as is seen in the above quote. He makes this connection more apparent in the following statement: “It would be simplest for all concerned if we spoke of ‘peace in eternal life,’ or of ‘eternal life in peace,’ as the end or supreme good.” (Augustine 451) Therefore we can see that Augustine has made an eschatological or otherworldly connection in his argument and has connected this final human end and ultimate human good with peace.

We can then make some conclusions about St. Augustine’s position on war. Clearly he is stating that the highest good is peace. It also seems that he is saying that, *prima facie*, war is wrong. It is only because of injustice that it becomes necessary for wars to be fought and then only regrettably. A “just war” then is seen as a justifiable wrong, rather than a good *per se*. In other words, only wars to combat injustice are just and even then they should not be thought of as good but rather as a wrong, the commission of which is justified out of necessity.

The position of St. Thomas Aquinas

Another prominent Catholic theologian who discussed the Theory of the Just War was St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas believed that it was possible for a war to be just, and he articulated three conditions which must be met in order for a war to be just in Summa Theologica.

The first condition which must be met, according to Aquinas, is, “the authority of the sovereign by whose command the war is waged.” (Aquinas 1353) This is important for a number of reasons. To begin with, St. Thomas argues that, “it is not the business of a private individual to declare war.” (Aquinas 1353) In addition, Aquinas argues:

And as the care of the common weal is committed to those who are in authority, it is their business to watch over the common weal of the city, kingdom or province subject to them. And just as it is lawful for them to have recourse to the sword in defending that common weal against internal disturbances, when they punish evil-doers ... so too, it is their business to have recourse to the sword of war in defending the common weal against external enemies. (Aquinas 1353-4)

Aquinas has here made a clear distinction between those in positions of authority and those who are not in positions of authority. Those who are not in positions of authority may not declare war. It seems that the reason for this is that it is not their function to defend the general population while it certainly is the function of those in positions of authority to take up this defense. Perhaps one could add to this argument that those not in positions of authority do not have access to the information which those in positions of authority have and are therefore unqualified to make the decision to go to war, but Aquinas does not make this argument.

Aquinas would have read and fully accepted statements found in the New Testament of the Bible which clearly state that the authority of those in positions of power comes from God and must be obeyed. “Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been established by God.” (Romans 13:1) Therefore, it is easy to understand how

Aquinas would believe that it is the business of those in positions of authority to do things which are forbidden to those not in positions of authority because of the fact that those with authority have that authority because it is given to them by God. It is also easy to see that, for this same reason, people ought to obey those who have authority.

The second condition which must be met for a war to be just, according to Aquinas, is that, “a just cause is required, namely that those who are attacked should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault.” (Aquinas 1354) This is obviously similar to St. Augustine’s position. Both are arguing that the reason to fight must be based on the inequities of the group to be fought. Augustine seems much more specific in this case in that he refers specifically to, “injustice,” while Aquinas refers only to, “some fault,” and, “that they deserve it.”

The vagueness in this condition presents a problem, namely how is one to know when “they deserve it?” There is no mention of the required gravity of the fault necessary to merit war. Is it just to attack greedy nations which charge too much for needed resources, or is something much more significant than money required to go to war? It seems that the cause must be some issue of great importance but this is not clearly stated by Aquinas. Rather, he seems to assume that those in authority will know this and not go to war for petty reasons. Perhaps it is a mistake to make this assumption and it would have been better to state not merely that it is required that those attacked deserve attack but rather what constitutes deserving to be attacked.

A major difference between Aquinas and Augustine here is that Augustine’s position seems to imply a requirement that a just war be defensive whereas Aquinas seems to imply that he is writing specifically about an offensive action, i.e. attacking rather than defending. This is importantly different in that Aquinas does not seem to view war as being as intrinsically wrong as we see in Augustine. Augustine seems to be taking the position that war is to be avoided at almost all costs while Aquinas would seem to allow a great many more wars to be seen as just.

The third condition which must be met for a war to be just, according to Aquinas, aims to solve the vagueness problem found in the second condition. Aquinas states that, “it is necessary that the belligerents should have a rightful intention, so they intend the advancement of good, or the avoidance of evil.” (Aquinas 1354) This statement seems to make it much clearer that a war can only be fought for legitimately good reasons.

Aquinas goes on to say: “for it may happen that the war is declared by the legitimate authority, and for a just cause, and yet be rendered unlawful through a wicked intention.” (Aquinas 1354) This emphasizes the fact that the reason to go to war must be clear. If the powers in command have ulterior, unjust motives the war is also unjust. This removes a great deal, though not all, of the vagueness found in Aquinas’ second condition.

We can then make some conclusions about St. Thomas Aquinas’ position on War. Clearly, Aquinas believes that there is such a thing as a just war. Aquinas supports the position that war is right when fought for a greater good, though he does not seem to view war as negatively as does Augustine. Aquinas’ position relies almost entirely on amelioristic thinking, i.e. that the goal of war is to make the world a better place. In his discussions on war, Aquinas makes very few, if any, references to the “other world” or the ultimate end of humanity. Ultimately, Aquinas is arguing that though violence is a

bad thing in itself, in order to make the world a better place it is just to wage war under a given set of conditions.

The position of the Church as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the collection of the teachings of the Church officially sanctioned by the Vatican. If one seeks to learn the Church's official position, on a wide variety of topics, one ought to consult this book to find the answer. Pope John Paul II has written, in *Apostolic Constitution: Fidei Depositum* (which may be found at the beginning of the Catechism of the Catholic Church):

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, which I approved June 25th last and the publication of which I today order by virtue of my Apostolic Authority, is a statement of the Church's faith and of catholic doctrine, attested to or illuminated by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic tradition, and the Church's Magisterium. I declare it to be a sure norm for teaching the faith and thus a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion. (Catechism 5)

When one locates the section in the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the topic of war one finds several interesting statements. Even the sub-heading of the section is revealing: "Avoiding War." From the first glance it is clear that the Church believes that war is something to be avoided. However, the Church does make allowances for the waging of war under certain conditions.

At the beginning of this section it states:

All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war. However, 'as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self defense, once all peace efforts have failed.' (Catechism 2308)

Many important things have here been clearly expressed. First of all, it is the Church's position that war is to be avoided. Secondly, governments have the right to defense, but not the right to aggression. And thirdly, governments may only resort to war after making efforts to maintain peace. These teachings certainly seem to be expressing the view that war is a very bad thing and that every other option must be exhausted before resorting to it.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church goes on to outline further limitations on the conditions which must be met for a war to be seen as just or even allowable.

The strict conditions for *legitimate defense by military force* require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time: 1) the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave and certain; 2) all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; 3) there must be serious prospects of success; 4) 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. The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good. (Catechism 2309)

The Catholic conditions for a just war, as outlined above, are the most restrictive of the theories we have here discussed which make any allowance for war. It seems overwhelmingly clear that the Church views war as an absolute last resort to be avoided at nearly all costs. The conditions listed above, if met, insure that war would be waged only when it is the single possible alternative and would be fought with the utmost discretion. However, it is clear that even though the Church views war as a terrible thing which ought to be strongly avoided it still considers war a legitimate option in extreme cases.

Additionally, The Church makes a statement about the ability of governments to impose military service on their citizens, an aspect absent from earlier discussion on the topic of war. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “Public authorities have the right and duty to impose on citizens the *obligations necessary for national defense*.” (Catechism 2310)

Clearly, it is the Church’s position that a nation must not only have the ability to defend itself but rather it must actually defend itself. This is an important distinction because it is not only the theoretical possibility of defending the people to which the nation has a right. Rather, a nation has a duty to defend its people as well as a duty to force its citizens to participate in this defense.

There are two points being made here. The first is that a nation must be in a position which allows it to wage war in the regrettable case when this becomes necessary. The second is that if the citizens of the nation will not willfully assist in the defense of the nation, the nation is actually required to force the citizens to defend the nation. As we have seen before, the Scriptures teach that the citizens are required to obey the authority of the nation so this becomes an extremely strong position. The most likely reason for taking this stance is that though war is to be avoided, when it becomes necessary it will be *absolutely* necessary. In other words, because the Church is teaching that war is an absolute last resort, she recognizes that when war becomes necessary there will be the greatest possible urgency for a nation to defend itself and has thus made this clear.

Interestingly, however, the Church makes one further statement on this matter which is very different than the last. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “Public authorities should make equitable provision for those who for reason of conscience refuse to bear arms; these are nonetheless obliged to serve the human community in some other way.” (Catechism 2311)

Here the Church is making an important provision. She is stating that if an individual’s conscience dictates that he ought not to take up arms to defend the nation through violent means that the nation must make provisions for him such that he is not required to fight. It is important to add, however, that this does not release the individual from all responsibility to serve the nation. Rather, the individual must serve in some other – one may assume, non-violent - way.

This is consistent with the Church’s teachings on the conscience of the individual. “Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. ‘He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters.’” (Catechism 1782)

The point of this statement is that if an individual is moved by his conscience to pacifism, his right to act accordingly must be assured. It seems that the Church recognizes that some will see problems with even the few cases where a war is considered just and has made provisions in her teachings to safeguard the individual’s right to act according to his conscience.

Thus far, we have seen only the amelioristic elements of the Church’s position on the issue of war. However, there is a strong eschatological basis to this position.

Injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust, and pride raging among men and nations constantly threaten peace and cause wars. Everything done to overcome these disorders contributes to building up peace and avoiding war:

Insofar as men are sinners, the threat of war hangs over them and will continue until Christ comes again; but insofar as they can vanquish sin by coming together in charity, violence itself will be vanquished and these words will be fulfilled: '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 anymore.' (Catechism 2317)

We can then make some conclusions about the Catholic Church's official position on war. Though the Church teaches that there are conditions when a war can be seen as just, these conditions are rather extreme; making the waging of a war an absolute last resort. This seems to make it clear that the Church believes that war is intrinsically wrong but in desperate cases of self-defense it is considered a necessary and justifiable wrong. The thinking involved seems to both have its basis in eschatology as well as being amelioristic in nature; the ultimate solution will be achieved in the end of time but now there are ways to make the world a better place. In the end, the Catholic position is not entirely pacifistic but it does view peace as intrinsically valuable and teaches that peace ought to be the ultimate goal of nations, worked towards and preserved at nearly all costs.

Possible contradictory positions

At this point we can begin to compare two different major positions within the body of the teachings of the Catholic Church. On the one hand there is the position of the teachings of Christ as found in the Gospels. This position makes it quite clear that violence is wrong and can easily be interpreted as taking a stance of extreme pacifism, i.e. not resorting to violence even in cases of self-defense. On the other hand we have the position of theologians and the Church Magisterium as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This position makes allowance for violence in some cases, though it ultimately agrees that violence is generally wrong.

It is here that we find a possible problem. If the positions are formulated in a precise way, it seems that they are contradictory. The position of the Gospels can be phrased: "All violence is wrong," or "All P is Q." The position of the Catechism of the Catholic Church can be phrased: "Some violence is not wrong," or "Some P is ~Q." If this is truly what these positions are claiming, then we have found a direct contradiction and the truth of a direct contradiction is logically impossible. In other words, one of the two positions would therefore be necessarily untrue.

The problem is that it is unacceptable to the Catholic Church that one of the positions be untrue. As we have seen before, the Church believes the Gospels to accurately contain the teachings of Christ while he was on the Earth. In reference to the Church Magisterium, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

'The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.' This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome." (Catechism 85)

In other words, the Magisterium interprets the message God sent, the authority to do so has come from God. However, there is more to this belief.

Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it listens to this devotedly, guards it with dedication, and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed is drawn from this single deposit of faith. (Catechism 86)

It seems that the Church would insist based on this statement, that the Magisterium cannot be mistaken in its interpretation of the message of Christ. In other words, there can't be a contradiction.

Solving the problem

If it is true that there cannot be a contradiction, there must be some way to reconcile the two positions such that they are compatible. It seems that the way to reconcile these two positions is for there to be found in the Scriptural teachings of Christ a case where two standards of conduct, one ultimately preferable and one conditionally acceptable, are proposed by Christ. It is important that it come from the Scriptures instead of the Magisterium because the Church has clearly stated in the above quotation that the Scripture is superior to the Magisterium.

Such a case can be found in a portion of both the Gospels of Matthew and of Mark, where Jesus is questioned concerning the matter of his teachings seeming to contradict the Law of Moses. It is important to note that the Jews of that time – and as it so happens, all Catholics throughout history – believed that the Law of Moses came directly from God. The passage reads:

Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatsoever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so." (Matthew 19: 3-8) The same account is found in (Mark 10: 2-9).

The significance of this quotation is that we have two seemingly contradictory positions, one where a man may divorce his wife under certain conditions and another where a married couple may not be divorced. Jesus explains that the reason for the Law allowing an act that is ultimately wrong is the intrinsically sinful nature of humanity, and that the rules which Jesus is proposing are ultimately the proper rules. This is essentially identical to the reasoning behind the explanation for the allowance of a Just War found in section 2317 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (quoted above).

It seems that precedence can be found in Scripture which allows for two different standards and thus vindicates the Church from the feared contradiction. The solution can be phrased as follows: It is ultimately wrong to commit acts of violence. However, there are some cases – due to man's sinful nature – where there is no other reasonable choice but to commit acts of violence in self-defense; hence the two standards. Therefore, under these special conditions it is seen as justifiable to commit violent acts, though violence is still seen as ultimately wrong.

The acts of violence and killing committed in a Just War seem to fall under the rule of double-effect, i.e. though both results are foreseeable, but only one is intended. The way it would work would be that the intended result is the defense of the innocents in the nation from the attackers, the unintended and regrettable – though ultimately foreseeable – outcome is that enemies are killed. Though the second effect is wrong it is seen as justifiable in order to produce the first effect which is absolutely necessary.

Conclusion

War is a terrible reality of our world. The Catholic Church ultimately opposes war and supports peace. However, the Church and many prominent Catholic theologians have proposed theories under which it is seen as justifiable to wage wars, i.e. the Theory of the Just War. When the Theory of the Just War is seen in contrast with the teachings of Christ, as they are found in the Gospels, it seems at first that these two positions form an irreconcilable contradiction within the teachings of the Church. We have, however shown that this is not the case.

The Church is ultimately teaching that there are three possibilities in reference to war. The first possibility is the position of pacifism. This is a Saintly, and Christ-like position which focuses primarily on the next world rather than the realities of this world and is ultimately the best possible solution. The second possibility is the position of the Just War. This position recognizes war as an absolute last resort and enters into conflict only in the most extreme cases. It is extremely realistic and amelioristic, though it is regrettable and should, at most, be considered a “second-best” option. The third possibility is that of an un-Just War. This is any violent conflict which does not meet the conditions of a Just War. This possibility is seen as intrinsically wrong, entirely sinful and never to be entertained by one who accepts Catholic teaching.

It is the hope of every rational and moral human being that there will one day be an end to war and that instead we will all live in peace. Until that time, the teachings of the Catholic Church offer the most morally acceptable conditions under which war may be waged. The irony is that if every nation accepted the Theory of the Just War, as proposed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, there would no longer be a need for such a set of teachings. The reason for this is that by universally adhering to the position outlined above there would never be a case when tensions and aggression rose to a level which would merit a war of any kind.

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