



Home Topics News Departments Bible Catechism Readings Movies Bookstore Bishops Dioceses

Social Development and World Peace

Search

GO

Excerpts from *The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace*

A statement by the United States Catholic Conference, November 1993.

The just-war tradition consists of a body of ethical reflection on the justifiable use of force. In the interest of overcoming injustice, reducing violence and preventing its expansion, the tradition aims at:

- (a) clarifying when force may be used,
- (b) limiting the resort to force and
- (c) restraining damage done by military forces during war.

The just-war tradition begins with a strong presumption against the use of force and then establishes the conditions when this presumption may be overridden for the sake of preserving the kind of peace which protects human dignity and human rights.

In a disordered world, where peaceful resolution of conflicts sometimes fails, the just-war tradition provides an important moral framework for restraining and regulating the limited use of force by governments and international organizations. Since the just-war tradition is often misunderstood or selectively applied, we summarize its major components, which are drawn from traditional Catholic teaching.

First, whether lethal force may be used is governed by the following criteria:

- *Just Cause*: force may be used only to correct a grave, public evil, i.e., aggression or massive violation of the basic rights of whole populations;
- *Comparative Justice*: while there may be rights and wrongs on all sides of a conflict, to override the presumption against the use of force the injustice suffered by one party must significantly outweigh that suffered by the other;
- *Legitimate Authority*: only duly constituted public authorities may use deadly force or wage war;
- *Right Intention*: force may be used only in a truly just cause and solely for that purpose;
- *Probability of Success*: arms may not be used in a futile cause or in a case where disproportionate measures are required to achieve success;
- *Proportionality*: the overall destruction expected from the use of force must be

outweighed by the good to be achieved;

- *Last Resort*: force may be used only after all peaceful alternatives have been seriously tried and exhausted.

These criteria (*jus ad bellum*), taken as a whole, must be satisfied in order to override the strong presumption against the use of force.

Second, the just-war tradition seeks also to curb the violence of war through restraint on armed combat between the contending parties by imposing the following moral standards (*jus in bello*) for the conduct of armed conflict:

- *Noncombatant Immunity*: civilians may not be the object of direct attack, and military personnel must take due care to avoid and minimize indirect harm to civilians;
- *Proportionality*: in the conduct of hostilities, efforts must be made to attain military objectives with no more force than is militarily necessary and to avoid disproportionate collateral damage to civilian life and property;
- *Right Intention*: even in the midst of conflict, the aim of political and military leaders must be peace with justice, so that acts of vengeance and indiscriminate violence, whether by individuals, military units or governments, are forbidden.

During the last decade, there has been increasing focus on the moral questions raised by the just-war tradition and its application to specific uses of force. We welcome this renewed attention and hope our own efforts have contributed to this dialogue. We also recognize that the application of these principles requires the exercise of the virtue of prudence; people of good will may differ on specific conclusions. The just-war tradition is not a weapon to be used to justify a political conclusion or a set of mechanical criteria that automatically yields a simple answer, but a way of moral reasoning to discern the ethical limits of action. Policy-makers, advocates and opponents of the use of force need to be careful not to apply the tradition selectively, simply to justify their own positions. Likewise, any application of just-war principles depends on the availability of accurate information not easily obtained in the pressured political context in which such choices must be made.

The just-war tradition has attained growing influence on political deliberations on the use of force and in some forms of military training. Just-war norms helped shape public debate prior to the Gulf War. In addition, the military's call for civilian leaders to define carefully objectives for the use of force is in keeping with the spirit of the tradition. At the same time, some contemporary strategies and practices seem to raise serious questions when seen in the light of strict just-war analysis.

For example, strategies calling for use of overwhelming and decisive force can raise issues of proportionality and discrimination. Strategies and tactics that lead to avoidable casualties are inconsistent with the underlying intention of the just-war tradition of limiting the destructiveness of armed conflict. Efforts to reduce the risk to a nation's own forces must be limited by careful judgments of military necessity so as not to neglect the rights of civilians and armed adversaries.

In light of the preeminent place of air power in today's military doctrine, more reflection is needed on how traditional ethical restraints should be applied to the use of air forces. For

example, the targeting of civilian infrastructure, which afflicts ordinary citizens long after hostilities have ceased, can amount to making war on noncombatants rather than against opposing armies. Fifty years after Coventry, Dresden, Hamburg, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ways must be found to apply standards of proportionality and noncombatant immunity in a meaningful way to air warfare.

Moral reflection on the use of force calls for a spirit of moderation rare in contemporary political culture. The increasing violence of our society, its growing insensitivity to the sacredness of life and the glorification of the technology of destruction in popular culture could inevitably impair our society's ability to apply just-war criteria honestly and effectively in time of crisis.

In the absence of a commitment of respect for life and a culture of restraint, it will not be easy to apply the just-war tradition, not just as a set of ideas, but as a system of effective social constraints on the use of force. There is need for greater public understanding of just-war criteria and greater efforts to apply just-war restraints in political decision making and military planning, training and command systems and public debate.

Ten years after *The Challenge of Peace*, given the neglect of peaceable virtues and the destructiveness of today's weaponry, serious questions still remain about whether modern war in all its savagery can meet the hard tests set by the just-war tradition. Important work needs to be done in refining, clarifying and applying the justwar tradition to the choices facing our decision makers in this still violent and dangerous world.

* Excerpted verbatim from *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc. pp. 5-7. *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace* was published in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Bishops' landmark pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*.

Office of Social Development & World Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194 (202) 541-3000

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