



# Theology Corner

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*Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation*

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## “Is War acceptable by the Church?”

The Catholic Church makes very clear that our goal should always be to promote peace whenever possible. We refer to Jesus Christ as the “Prince of Peace.” Christ himself says, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” At Mass we say, “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, *grant us peace.*” When we talk about war, we have to take into consideration a couple of things. First, what exactly *is* war? War is defined as a state of conflict between two sovereign nations by force of arms. This should be avoided at all costs since war is directly opposed to peace. But is there ever a case in which war would be considered just? St. Augustine was the first in the Church to offer a theory on war and justice, and St. Thomas Aquinas made it more definitive. In the *City of God*, Augustine taught that war is sometimes a necessity due to the fallen world that we live in. In other words, we have to consider the fact that while we should always aim for peace, there are times when we have a moral obligation to protect our basic human rights or the rights of others. If we have exhausted all efforts to keep peace, and still have an unjust aggressor wanting to cause us grave harm, we have a just cause to defend ourselves.

As always, there is a need to develop a criteria by which we can determine whether a war is just or unjust, or else we would just make up our own rules as we go. If any of you have been in my classes, you’ll know that I always say we tend to find our own justifications for the wrong things we do. This is because by nature, we cannot possibly do something against our conscience, so we justify it in some way. Here are the principles developed by St. Thomas Aquinas: **1) War must be a last resort.** In other words, all attempts at peace must have been made. **2) It must be made by a legitimate authority.** What this means is that we as individuals cannot decide to wage war, but that it must be decided on by a legitimate authority or government. Remember, war is a conflict between two nations, not between two individuals. **3) There must be a just cause.** We cannot wage war because we want to take over someone’s land, but it must be in defense of the innocent or simply the protection of our basic human rights. **4) There must be a rational probability of success.** If it is certain that we will not win, then it cannot be considered just, due to the fact that we would be putting others into harm’s way for a hopeless cause. **5) There must be right intention when we seek justice.** For example, we cannot wage war with the intention to go to war out of vengeance or pure hatred. This would make it a sin since you are not going to war for the right reasons; i.e., to protect our human rights. **6) We must consider the principle of proportionality.** This means that we have to consider the limits of our action. We cannot take military action that is disproportionate to the injustice being committed. We must only use the amount of force absolutely necessary. For instance, dropping a nuclear bomb on a whole city would be violating this principle. **7) We must avoid civilian casualties.** We have to ensure that our use of force is toward the militia and not innocent civilians. The only way that civilian casualties would be considered just (although tragic), is if they were unavoidable victims in the attack, and of course if it was an unintended consequence. For more information on this topic, please refer to the Catechism in paragraphs 2263-2267 and 2302-2317.