

JUST WAR DOCTRINE

The Catholic Church has developed a longstanding moral tradition concerning war and peace known as **Just War Doctrine**. Recognizing the reality of conflict in a world marked by injustice, this tradition begins with a strong presumption against the use of force. War is understood as a grave moral matter that must never be entered lightly. The just-war tradition, therefore, seeks both to define the limited circumstances under which force may be morally justified and to strictly regulate its use.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2309:

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:

- **The damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain**-- *This means that the threat must be real, serious, and ongoing—not merely feared or imagined. The aggression must cause significant harm, such as the loss of innocent lives, widespread destruction, occupation of territory, or severe violations of human rights. A nation cannot go to war because of minor offenses, political disagreements, or uncertain future threats. There must be clear evidence that the danger is substantial and that innocent people continue to suffer if no action is taken.*
- **All other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective** --War must always be the **last resort**. *Before military action is considered, every peaceful option should have been sincerely attempted. These alternatives include diplomacy, negotiations, mediation, sanctions, economic pressure, international cooperation, peacekeeping efforts, and legal action. Only when these nonviolent measures have genuinely failed—or clearly cannot stop the aggression—may the use of armed force be morally considered.*
- **There must be serious prospects of success**--*A nation should not wage war if there is little or no realistic chance of achieving a just peace. Sending soldiers and civilians into a conflict that is almost certain to fail would needlessly sacrifice lives and increase suffering. Military action should only be undertaken if there is a reasonable hope that it can protect the innocent, restore justice, and establish lasting peace. Wars fought without a realistic possibility of success are considered morally irresponsible.*

- **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.** -- *This principle is known as **proportionality**. Even when a war has a just cause, the harm caused by military action must not exceed the harm it seeks to stop. Modern weapons—including nuclear, biological, chemical, and other highly destructive technologies—can devastate entire populations, destroy infrastructure, create refugee crises, and inflict long-lasting environmental damage. Because today's weapons have unprecedented destructive power, governments must carefully judge whether military action would create greater suffering than the original injustice. If the consequences of war are likely to be worse than the aggression itself, then the use of force cannot be morally justified.*

Summary

The Catholic Church does not view war as a good or desirable solution. Rather, Just War Theory serves as a **strict moral framework that limits the use of force and places the protection of human life at its center**. These four conditions remind nations that military action is justified only in the rarest circumstances—when there is a grave injustice, peaceful solutions have failed, success is reasonably possible, and the use of force will not create greater evil than the one it seeks to overcome. The ultimate goal is always the restoration of justice and the establishment of a lasting peace.