

WAR AND PEACE

195. War always involves the use of lethal force and results in the loss of life, not only of soldiers, but also of innocent civilians. The destruction to homes, crops and infrastructure and the presence of landmines and unexploded munitions also causes great hardship even after the war is over. All wars bring great evils, few wars bring great benefits. Nevertheless, for most of Christian history the Church has accepted the argument that unjust aggression should be resisted by legitimate political authorities so that these authorities can defend the common good and protect innocent life. Such resistance requires the use of force up to and including lethal force. While encouraging the work of peace and the building of competent international authorities to prevent warfare, the Catholic Bishops of the Second Vatican Council acknowledged that governments possess a right to lawful self-defence. (*The Church in the Modern World*, paragraph 79). This is known as the just war theory.

196. According to just war theory, the war must have a just cause. The only legitimate reason for waging war is to oppose a great evil that cannot effectively be opposed by any other means. It should always be an act of self-defence and not an act of aggression. The decision to go to war should be taken as a last resort after all other political, economic and diplomatic means have been exhausted. It must be waged by a legitimate ruler and, where this exists, be authorised by international law or mandate. It ought also to reflect a fair degree of popular support. It must have a reasonable prospect of success in military terms and be confident of achieving its objective without causing more harm than the evil it opposes. Finally, the intentions of those who fight the war must be for self-defence and not for the sake of strategic or economic gain, empire or conquest. There must also be an intention to use only legitimate means, for instance, discriminating between the combatants and non-combatants, not targeting the population as a whole and not using weapons of mass destruction.

197. What has never been accepted by the Church is usurping God's authority over life and death by deliberately killing those who are not engaged in unjust aggression. The killing of unarmed prisoners of war, indiscriminate bombing, the use of weapons of mass destruction, and the targeting of schools, hospitals or residential areas cannot be regarded as legitimate military tactics. These would not be acts of war but acts of terror.

198. Although war may sometimes be just, it is a scandal that throughout the world so much money is spent on armaments while so little is spent addressing poverty. Furthermore, the proliferation and accumulation of all these weapons makes the world a less secure and more dangerous place. According to the Second Vatican Council the arms race is 'one of the greatest curses on the human race and the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured' (*The Church in the Modern World*, paragraph 81).

201. To build a peaceful society, it is necessary to overcome gross economic, social and political inequalities in the world. Peace is threatened when governments or dictators are concerned with building a military arsenal rather than meeting the basic needs of their people. Overcoming war demands establishing a just international

order and building up of a culture in which life is cherished.

Questions

Was world war Two a just war in the group's opinion? Discuss

Are there any examples of unjust wars? Discuss.

Do you think, as many do, that religion is a major cause of war? Christianity, for instance is forever teaching about forgiveness and love? Discuss

Muslim extremists often cite as their reason for war 'the decadent west'. Do they have a point? Discuss