

## The Just War Theory

### Introduction

The issue of war and the conscience has been a long-standing problem. When asked about war some would allude to the Just War Theory. What is this theory and how did it come about? What are the arguments for and against a just war? These are the questions that we wish to investigate.

### War Defined

Before talking about a just war, one must define what is meant by war. It is defined as a state of conflict between two or more sovereign nations carried on by force of arms. Looking into this definition more closely we see that war involves a state of conflict contrasted with passing conflicts such as border skirmishes or momentary conflicts. It involves sovereign nations, which rules out civil wars and riots. A nation fights a nation and not a particular individual or group in a nation. Force of arms excludes for example trade embargoes and blockades. These make up the basic components of a war.

### Origin of the "Just War"

Augustine was the originator of the Just War Theory. When it came to individual self-defense Augustine contended that one's own life or property was never a justification for killing one's neighbor. Christian charity was the motivating force behind this statement. But when one speaks of rulers of nations they have the obligation to maintain peace. This obligation gives them the right to wage war. He says, "The natural order conducive to peace among mortals demands that the power to declare and counsel war should be in the hands of those who hold the supreme authority." Those subject to the rulers must obey unless they command something against a Divine Law. For Augustine the only reason for waging a war would be to defend the nation's peace against serious injury. He says, "A just war is wont to be described as one that avenges

wrongs, when a nation or state has to be punished, for refusing to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects, or to restore what it has seized unjustly." The intention of the war is very important for Augustine. He says, "The passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an unpacific and relentless spirit, the fever of revolt, the lust of power, and such things, all these are rightly condemned in war." Augustine emphasizes the idea of restoration of peace as the main motive of war. He says, "We do not seek peace in order to be at war, but we go to war that we may have peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those whom you war against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace." So in Augustine's thinking a war "was limited by its purpose, its authority and its conduct."

### Further Developments - Thomas Aquinas and the Middle Ages

A great impetus to the Just War Theory was Thomas Aquinas. He emphasized Augustine's statements about war and added a little to them. He followed a similar reasoning breaking up his argument into three necessary conditions for a just war: authorized authority, just cause and rightful intention. In speaking about who authorizes war Thomas emphasizes that the sovereign has the responsibility for the common good of those committed to his care. Only he can declare war. Moreover the sovereign has the lawful right of recourse to "the sword" to defend his people against internal strife by punishing those who do evil. Therefore it is his duty to defend the common good against external enemies by having recourse to arms. A just cause is required to wage war. Thomas considers such a cause to be "that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault." Finally Thomas discusses the right intention for waging war. Only two possibilities are presented: either the furthering of some good or an avoidance of some evil. The underpinnings of his arguments and most important contribution to Augustine's theory "would appear to

consist in his stress on the natural law."

The Middle Ages were occupied mostly with the right to wage war and restoring peace through mercy and justice.

#### Arguments For a Just War

As we have already seen Augustine argues from the natural order of peace to the right of rulers to declare war to maintain it. Thomas also sees the justification for war in the natural order but stresses more the common good of the people. Scriptural passages are used to defend the just war. Thomas cites another's commentary on the centurion that states, "If the Christian Religion forbade war altogether, those who sought salutary advice in the Gospel would rather have been counseled to cast aside their arms, and to give up soldiering altogether. . . If he ( John the Baptist) commanded them to be content with their pay, he did not forbid soldiering." Thomas argues that Paul, as already mentioned, gives those in authority the right to punish by the sword disturbers of their commonwealth's internal peace. Therefore it is also their duty to use arms against a commonwealth's external enemies. Thomas puts forward some counter arguments to war. The first argument says that God only punishes the sinner. Therefore when Jesus told Peter that he who takes the sword will perish by it all wars would be unlawful. Thomas quotes Augustine who says that taking the sword is to be understood as arming oneself to kill another without the permission of authority. In war the sword is taken with permission. The second argument refers to the Divine precept not to resist evil. Augustine is referred to as saying one should always such precepts are to be always kept in mind and when necessary put into practice. On the other hand, sometimes it is necessary, Thomas says, to act differently for the sake of the common good or the good of those one is fighting. Quoting Augustine a reference is made to sometimes having to punish people with a kindly severity even against their will to strip them of their sins. Finally an argument is put forward that sin is contrary to virtue. Since

peace is a virtue and war is contrary to it therefore it must be a sin. Thomas answers this similar to Augustine's thought that the purpose of war is to bring about peace. Therefore it is not contrary to it.

#### Arguments Against a Just War

"The basic lines of objection to relying on just-war theory seem to me to come down to three points: first, the pacifist thesis that the theory is theologically unacceptable and is incompatible with basic Christian values; second, the view that the theory effectively leaves out of consideration some aspects of either the particular situation or the general character of modern warfare that need to be considered if a satisfactory and conclusive verdict on the morality of a given war is to be reached; third, the view that the theory contains so many indeterminate elements and potentially contradictory considerations that we should not be surprised that applying it does not yield a determinate result.

First let us look at some of the pacifist arguments against all war. Starting with the Bible they say that the idea of hating one's enemies is clearly rejected and replaced by Jesus with loving one's enemies. The Tanakh had established love between neighbors. In the New Testament, according to Medieval thought, "Jesus establishes a New Law; he builds upon the old in a moral progression. Not only is one not to resist one's enemies, but one is to love them. This love applies not only to one's personal enemies but to public enemies and potential foes in battle. Ecthos, the Greek word for enemy, is used in the New Testament for both." So the arguments for war are undercut by seeing God as morally progressing His people toward the culminating point of the New Law. Also, the argument of a distinction between Jesus addressing His statements to personal enemies as distinct from public one's is not so clear from the Greek.

Gerardo Zampaglione examined the "imagery of violence in the New Testament

and finds that in all cases it is used either allegorically or in parable form." Violence in parables is never the main part of the story. The same author says that "it is difficult to justify even the just, defensive war if one takes seriously the message of the Sermon on the Mount, which is the heart of the Gospel."

During the Middle Ages while the Just War Theory was becoming more developed, and Crusades were being supported by Church leaders, peace movements among Christians flourished. Francis was a pacifist, and he lived as if he were; he was willing to risk bodily harm and even death to bring the Crusades to an end. A peace movement known as the "Great Alleluia" involving thousands of people took place in northern Italy in the 13th century. In 1233 the movement had grown to such proportions that 400,000 people gathered to demonstrate for peace and reconciliation. These protests helped to bring an end to the Crusades. Another Italian peace movement known as the "Bianchi" moved about in thousands from city to city. Peacemaking was their major work. One chronicler notes that by the time one of these processions reached Rome its numbers had swelled to 200,000. The city of Würzburg provides another example: the records of the city council's deliberations show that they considered the Crusades to be nothing more than an excuse for "rowdies" to engage in warlike and destructive activities, in direct contradiction to the Christian belief of helping one's neighbor.

### Conclusion

In this investigation we have tried to provide a general survey of the history of the Just War Theory with some of the arguments for and against it. As we have seen Augustine is considered the originator of the theory. Thomas Aquinas further clarified its justification. The proper authority, just causes and intentions for waging a just war were further elaborated on at this time. They distinguished between offensive and

defensive wars. Also they added two more conditions to the theory: war as a last resort and the proper manner of fighting a war.

On the question of the justification of war different arguments are put forward. Both the Tanakh and the New Testament are used to show war is not against the will of God. Also of importance related with this is the special authority given to government leaders to safeguard the natural order and the common good. Another argument put forward is to reason from the rights of the individual to those of the State. Finally an appeal is made to the history, teaching and practice of the Church.

Those against war argue mainly from the Tanakh and the New Testament. The main claim made is that Jesus taught and lived a nonviolent position. Paul and the primitive Church continued this tradition. The Constantinian era violated Christian thought by identifying the Church with the State. Nevertheless, examples of pacifist movements can be seen in later Church history. A different form of argument is the possibility of a just war in theory, but in reality it is impossible. Others attack a Just War Theory as irrelevant in modern warfare. Still others claim the theory is useless in coming to conclusions.