

"The Christian tradition possesses two ways to address conflict: *nonviolence* and *just war*. They both share the common goal: to diminish violence in this world" (U.S. Bishops, *A Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*).

The Church's Tradition of Nonviolence

The Church has always taught peace and discouraged war. In fact, for the first three hundred years of Christianity, the Church's most influential theologians held the position that Christians should never kill, not even in war. This changed in the 4th century, but throughout the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and up to modern times, the Catholic theological tradition has had a special regard for those who refuse war in all circumstances. John Paul II and Benedict XVI have especially encouraged nonviolence. The following sample of quotations from saints, Catholic theologians, bishops, popes, and the Bible illustrates the Church's tradition of nonviolence.

As I live, says the Lord God, I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live (Ezekiel 33:11).

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:38-9, 43-5).

One of those who accompanied Jesus put his hand to his sword, drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:51-2).

Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them... Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Rather, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good (Romans 12:14, 17-21).

And we who delighted in war, in the slaughter of one another, and in every other kind of iniquity have in every part of the world converted our weapons into implements of peace, swords into ploughshares, our spears into farmer's tools, and we cultivate piety, justice, brotherly charity, faith and hope, which we derive from the Father through the crucified Savior (St. Justin Martyr, + 165 AD).

The Church is an army of peace which sheds no blood. In peace, not in war, we are trained (St. Clement of Alexandria, + c. 215 AD)

The world is soaked with mutual blood. When individuals commit homicide, it is a crime; it is called a virtue when it is done in the name of the state. Impunity is acquired for crimes not by reason of innocence but by the magnitude of the cruelty (St. Cyprian of Carthage, + 258).

For when God forbids us to kill, He not only prohibits us from open violence, which is not even allowed by the public laws, but He warns us against doing things which are considered lawful

among men. Thus it will not be lawful for a just man to engage in warfare, since the kind of fighting appropriate to him is to do justice (Lactantius, + 320).

I am a soldier of Christ. It is not permissible for me to fight (St. Martin of Tours + 397).

It is unbecoming for [the clergy] to slay or shed blood, and it is more fitting that they should be ready to shed their own blood for Christ so as to imitate in deed what they portray in their ministry. For this reason it has been decreed that those who shed blood, even without sin, become irregular. (St. Thomas Aquinas +1274).

War is such a monstrous pursuit that it's proper only for beasts, not men; so crazy that even the poets suppose Furies bring it upon us; so infectious that it spreads moral corruption far and near; so unjust that it's most effectively waged by the most cruel of thieves; so impious that it's utterly detestable to Christ (Desiderius Erasmus, + 1536).

Men and women are becoming more and more convinced that disputes which arise between states should not be resolved by recourse to arms, but rather by negotiation... We grant indeed that this conviction is chiefly based on the terrible destructive force of nuclear weapons and a fear of the calamities and frightful destruction which such weapons would cause. Therefore, in an age such as ours which prides itself on its atomic energy it is contrary to reason to hold that war is now a suitable way to restore rights which have been violated (Pope John XXIII).

Nonviolent means of resistance to evil deserve much more study and consideration than they have thus far received. There have been significant instances in which people have successfully resisted oppression without recourse to arms. Nonviolence is not the way of the weak, the cowardly, or the impatient. (U.S. Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*).

The vision of Christian nonviolence is not passive about injustice and the defense of the rights of others. It ought not be confused with popular notions of nonresisting pacifism. For it consists of a commitment to resist manifest injustice and public evil with means other than force (U.S. Bishops, *A Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*).

Wars generally do not resolve the problems for which they are fought and therefore, in addition to causing horrendous damage, they prove ultimately futile (Pope John Paul II).

“Oppression has been overcome by the nonviolent commitment of people, who, while always refusing to yield to the force of power, succeeded time after time in finding effective ways to bear witness to the truth . . . May people learn to fight for justice without violence, renouncing class struggle in their internal dispute(s) and war in international ones” (Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*).

Given the new weapons that make possible destructions that go beyond the combatant groups, today we should be asking ourselves if it is still licit to admit the very existence of a “just war” (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI).