

**Excerpts from The National Conference of Catholic Bishops,
The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace (1993)**

2. *Just War: New Questions.* The just war tradition consists of a body of ethical reflection on the justifiable use of force. In the interest of overcoming injustice, reducing violence and preventing its expansion, the tradition aims at: (a) clarifying when force may be used; (b) limiting the resort to force; and c) restraining damage done by military forces during war. The just war tradition begins with a strong presumption against the use of force and then establishes the conditions when this presumption may be overridden for the sake of preserving the kind of peace which protects human dignity and human rights.

In a disordered world, where peaceful resolution of conflicts sometimes fails, the just war tradition provides an important moral framework for restraining and regulating the limited use of force by governments and international organizations. Since the just war tradition is often misunderstood or selectively applied, we summarize its major components, which are drawn from traditional Catholic teaching.

First, whether lethal force may be used is governed by the following criteria:

- **Just Cause:** force may be used only to correct a grave, public evil, i.e., aggression or massive violation of the basic rights of whole populations;
- **Comparative Justice:** while there may be rights and wrongs on all sides of a conflict, to override the presumption against the use of force the injustice suffered by one party must significantly outweigh that suffered by the other;
- **Legitimate Authority:** only duly constituted public authorities may use deadly force or wage war;
- **Right Intention:** force may be used only in a truly just cause and solely for that purpose;
- **Probability of Success:** arms may not be used in a futile cause or in a case where disproportionate measures are required to achieve success;
- **Proportionality:** the overall destruction expected from the use of force must be outweighed by the good to be achieved;
- **Last Resort:** force may be used only after all peaceful alternatives have been seriously tried and exhausted.

These criteria (*jus ad bellum*), taken as a whole, must be satisfied in order to override the strong presumption against the use of force.

Second, the just war tradition seeks also to curb the violence of war through restraint on armed combat between the contending parties by imposing the following moral standards (*jus in bello*) for the conduct of armed conflict:

- **Noncombatant Immunity:** civilians may not be the object of direct attack and military personnel must take due care to avoid and minimize indirect harm to civilians;
- **Proportionality:** in the conduct of hostilities, efforts must be made to attain military objectives with no more force than is militarily necessary and to avoid disproportionate collateral damage to civilian life and property;
- **Right Intention:** even in the midst of conflict, the aim of political and military leaders must be peace with justice, so that acts of vengeance and indiscriminate violence, whether by individuals, military units or governments, are forbidden.

The use of military force

As part of its broader effort to combat terrorism, our nation has undertaken military action in Afghanistan and may be considering intervention elsewhere. As we pray for our service men and women who are risking their lives and for all those in Afghanistan who are suffering, we also consider how the

Church's long and rich tradition of ethical reflection on war and peace might help guide the momentous decisions being taken.

National leaders bear a heavy moral obligation to see that the full range of non-violent means is employed. We acknowledge, however, the right and duty of a nation and the international community to use military force if necessary to defend the common good by protecting the innocent against mass terrorism. Because of its terrible consequences, military force, even when justified and carefully executed, must always be undertaken with a sense of deep regret.

Every military response must be in accord with sound moral principles, notably such norms of the just war tradition as non-combatant immunity, proportionality, right intention and probability of success. [See [Appendix](#)]

Even if the cause is just, the grave moral obligation to respect the principles of non-combatant immunity and proportionality remains in force and must govern our nation's political and military decisions. Indiscriminate attacks on innocent people, whether by terrorists or in war, threaten the common good. The continuing priority must be to ensure that military force is directed at those who use terror and those who assist them, not at the Afghan people or Islam. We welcome the stated commitment to do everything possible to avoid civilian casualties, a commitment that must be sustained over the long-term. We must not only act justly but be perceived as acting justly if we are to succeed in winning popular support against terrorism.

In light of the Church's teaching that the use of arms must not produce disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated, the effect of military action on the Afghan people must be closely monitored on an ongoing basis. At the same time, there is a special need to maintain and fortify our efforts to do everything possible to address the long-standing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, especially the risk of mass suffering and starvation this winter. This humanitarian effort should continue to be primarily in response to the overwhelming human need rather than in the service of military and political objectives. The United States and other nations have a moral responsibility to continue aid to Afghan refugees and displaced persons and to assist them in returning to their homes in safety where possible, or offer them other durable solutions.

We must do what we can to work with the United Nations and all interested parties to help Afghans rebuild the political, economic, and cultural life of their country after this war is over. The actions of our nation and other nations must ensure a just war now and a just peace later.

Probability of success is particularly difficult to measure in dealing with an amorphous, global terrorist network. Therefore, special attention must be given to developing criteria for when it is appropriate to end military action in Afghanistan.

Policy makers and all citizens must struggle with serious moral questions and make informed judgments about how our nation can respond justly to a terrifying threat. While we have offered our own judgment about aspects of this question, we recognize that application of moral principles in this situation requires the exercise of the virtue of prudence. Some Christians profess a position of principled non-violence, which holds that non-military means are the only legitimate way to respond in this case. This is a valid Christian response. While respecting this position and maintaining a strong presumption against the use of force, the Church has sanctioned the use of the moral criteria for a just war to allow the use of force by legitimate authority in self-defense and as a last resort. Those who subscribe to the just war tradition can differ in their prudential judgments about its interpretation or its application.

True peacemaking can be a matter of policy only if it is first a matter of the heart. Without both courage and charity, justice cannot be won. In the absence of repentance and forgiveness, no peace can endure. We need to do more to share the Church's teaching on war and peace, and to foster Christian communities where peaceable virtues can take root and be nourished. We need to nurture among ourselves *faith and hope* to strengthen our spirits by placing our trust in God, rather than in ourselves; *courage and compassion* that move us to action; *humility and kindness* so that we can put the needs and interests of others ahead of our own; *patience and perseverance* to endure the long struggle for justice; and *civility and charity* so that we can treat others with respect and love.

Pursuing Justice and Peace After September 11

September 11 made ever more clear that globalization is a reality requiring greater moral scrutiny. If the problems of Afghanistan or Central Asia seemed irrelevant to Americans before, that is no longer the case. Our nation, as a principal force for economic globalization, must do more to spread the benefits of globalization to all, especially the world's poorest. The injustice and instability in far away lands about which we know too little can have a direct impact on our own sense of peace and security. Maintaining a strong military is only one component of our national security. A much broader, long-term understanding of security is needed. In a world where one-fifth of the population survives on less than \$1 per day, where some twenty countries are involved in major armed conflict, and where poverty, corruption, and repressive regimes bring untold suffering to millions of people, we simply cannot remain indifferent. We should also recognize how the export of some negative aspects of our culture can help undermine other societies as well as our own.

Our nation must join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive. Years ago, Pope Paul VI declared, "if you want peace, work for justice." This wisdom should not be misunderstood. No injustice legitimizes the horror we have experienced. But a more just world will be a more peaceful world. There will still be people of hate and violence, but they will have fewer allies, supporters and resources to commit their heinous acts.

Each situation must be addressed on its own merits. Stopping terrorism must be a priority but foreign policy cannot be wholly subsumed under this campaign. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the suffering of people in Iraq, the lack of participation in political life, the abuse of human rights, endemic corruption, grinding poverty amidst plenty, and threats to local cultures are sources of deep resentment and hopelessness which terrorists seek to exploit for their own ends. Regardless of terrorists' claims, creative and constructive U.S. engagement, particularly with the Arab and Muslim worlds, in resolving these problems will help restore a peace based on justice. Given the prominence of our country, it is incumbent upon our citizens to pursue in whatever ways they can a more just international political, social and economic order. Reasonable persons may differ on the means to employ, but Catholics cannot remain neutral with respect to that goal. Moreover, the means chosen must be consistent with this goal, since unjust means cannot ultimately result in justice. We must work for the common good, measured not just in economic, political, or security terms, but also in terms of culture, basic human rights such as religious freedom, and all that is needed for a virtuous and spiritual life consistent with authentic human dignity. While our first responsibility is to the common good of our own society, we have an inescapable obligation to promote the global common good as well.

We highlight here a few specific aspects of the common good that deserve special attention. These are matters our bishops' conference has addressed before and in greater depth, but they take on added urgency at this time.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. This decades-old conflict must receive urgent attention from all parties, including the United States, to put an end to the violence and to return to comprehensive negotiations leading to a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that respects human rights and international law. We support real security for Israel and the establishment of a viable state for Palestinians. We recognize that each side in this conflict has deep, long-standing and legitimate grievances that must be addressed if there is to be a just and lasting peace. Engagement by the U.S. government and the international community is necessary and must continue. This urgent engagement should respond respectfully to the legitimate claims of both parties and not acquiesce in unilateral actions which undermine prospects for a return to negotiations.

Iraq. The continuing massive suffering of the Iraqi people over the past decade is simply intolerable. As we have done in the past, we deplore the unconscionable policies which have led to the death, from disease and malnutrition, of hundreds of thousands of children. The leaders of the Iraqi regime bear a heavy responsibility for this suffering, not least because of their misuse of resources. They have a moral responsibility to comply with the reasonable international obligations, especially to end efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the comprehensive economic sanctions, even as modified by the "oil-for-food" program, are causing horrendous suffering and must be brought to an end without delay. The goal is not to reward the Iraqi government, but to relieve a morally unacceptable situation where innocent civilians suffer for the actions of a regime over which they have no control.

Sudan. As the U.S. seeks Sudan's cooperation in the campaign on terrorism, our nation cannot ignore the systematic campaign of terror waged by the government in Khartoum against its own people, especially Christians and practitioners of African traditional religions. Stopping the war in Sudan and finding a peaceful settlement to this conflict is of urgent importance.

The scandal of poverty. Intolerable extremes of misery and a growing gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots" characterize much of today's world, and breed hostility towards economic globalization. This hostility can be addressed, in part, by a comprehensive development agenda, including substantially increased foreign aid, more equitable trade, and continuing efforts to relieve the crushing burden of debt. We who have so much have a responsibility to the world's needy. We cannot remain last among donor countries in development aid. The United States contributes just one-tenth of one percent of its gross national product in official development assistance, as compared with the international development target of 0.7% of GNP, a target endorsed by our country many times.

Overcoming poverty in our own nation requires a continuing commitment as well. The needs of the jobless, hungry and homeless cannot be ignored or neglected. New spending in response to September 11 and a declining economy will place new pressures on international and domestic programs that serve poor and vulnerable families. The poor abroad and in our own country must not be asked to bear a disproportionate burden of the sacrifices that will have to be made.

Human rights. The necessity of maintaining an international coalition against terrorism must not lead our government to give less public attention to religious liberty and human rights violations around the world. As a nation committed to promoting human rights, we cannot compromise these priorities for temporary alliances that would overlook them.

Weapons of mass destruction and the arms trade. The world is apprehensive about the threat of terrorist attacks using weapons of mass destruction. It is a moral imperative that the U.S. government work to reverse the spread of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, pursue progressive nuclear

disarmament, take concrete actions to reduce its own predominant role in the conventional arms trade, and work with other nations to do the same.

Strengthening the UN and other international institutions. Each of these problems will benefit from participation of the United Nations and other appropriate international institutions. The United States should play a constructive role in making the United Nations and other international institutions more effective, responsible and responsive. Our government's recent decision to pay its dues to the United Nations is a welcome step.

Having said all this, it is necessary to reiterate that no cause, no grievance can justify flying civilian aircrafts into office towers or infecting postal workers and public figures. Rectifying this injustice will demand prudent action to build a safer, more just and more peaceful world.