

# WAR: CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS

‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.’

(Matthew 5:9)

All Christians would prefer nations to settle their differences peacefully. All Christians strive to live in a world where there is no war. Christians are essentially pacifists. However, as with all belief systems that are different degrees of pacifism within Christianity. A **pacifist** is a person who believes that war and any other form of violence are best avoided.

A number of Christian groups reject war altogether. For these Christians, war is never acceptable - there can be no such thing as a justified war. These Christians are **absolute pacifists**: for them, there can be no circumstances where war is a suitable solution.

Other Christians are **contingent or relative pacifists**. This means their support for war or peace will be contingent on or relative to the situation concerned. These Christians accept the permissibility or even necessity of war in some circumstances but will reject it in others. These Christians usually judge each war on a case-by-case basis. An example of this type of thinking within Christianity is **Just War Theory**.

## Just War Theory

**St. Augustine of Hippo** (354-430 CE) was the first prominent advocate of Just War Theory from within Christianity. Augustine claimed that while individuals should not resort immediately to violence, God has given the sword to government for good reason. His initial ideas were then added to later by other prominent Christian thinkers such as **St. Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274 CE).

Just War Theory establishes a series of criteria by which to judge the morality of going to war in each particular instance. All of these rules must be met for a war to be considered acceptable or “just”. Classical forms of Just War Theory organise these principles under two categories: ***jus ad bellum*** and ***jus in bello***. Modern versions of Just War Theory also add a secondary set of regulations under the heading ***jus post bellum***.

### Activity:

- Match the terms. Type or write out.

*Jus ad bellum*

What is to happen to establish justice after a war.

*Jus in bello*

The reasons why a war can be fought.

*Jus post bellum*

How to conduct a war in an ethical manner.

**Activities:**

- Type or write the headings: *jus ad bellum*, *jus in bello*, and *jus post bellum*.
- Identify which standards are examples of *jus ad bellum*; *jus in bello*; *jus post bellum*.

Thought must be given to the political reconstruction of defeated states.	
There must be a reasonable chance of success. It is unjust to ask people to fight a war if it is probable that the war will be lost and they will be killed.	
The war must have a just cause. This may include self-defence or defending someone else. The war must not be thought to gain territory or resources. The war must not be retaliatory or aim to exact revenge.	
The war must end once the rights of a political community have been vindicated.	
The war must be fought by just means. Innocent people and civilians may not be targeted or harmed.	
The war must be declared by the correct authority. This should be the government or lawful rulers of the country.	
The terms of peace must be made by a legitimate authority, and the terms must be accepted by a legitimate authority.	
The methods used to fight the war must be proportional to achieve success. Excessive force should not be used.	
The intention of the war has to be to defeat wrongdoing and promote good. The good achieved must outweigh the evil that led to it.	
Punitive measures are to be limited to those directly responsible for the conflict.	
Peace terms must be proportionate and there should be constraints on what can be demanded from the defeated belligerent.	
Peace negotiations must be conducted fairly and involve all participants.	
Only appropriate force may be used. This includes the type of force and how much is used.	
Fighting must be a last resort. All other ways of resolving the issue such as diplomacy, must have been attempted before war can be declared.	
A state may terminate a war if there has been a reasonable vindication of the rights that were violated in the first place. Or, the aggressor is willing to negotiate the terms of surrender.	
A state may end a war if it becomes clear that any just goals of the war cannot be reached at all. Or, the aims cannot be achieved without using excessive force.	

There is some basis for Just War Theory in the Bible.

<i>Jus ad bellum</i>	‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. There is no authority except from God.’ (Romans 13:1)
<i>Jus in bello</i>	‘Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise.’ (Micah 7:8)
<i>Jus post bellum</i>	‘For everything there is a season ... a time for war, and a time for peace.’ (Ecclesiastes 3:1;8)

**Activity:**

- Match the terms with the quotations. Type or write out.