

PEACE POINTS

Lutheran Peace Fellowship

Peace in our world • Peace in our nation • Peace in our neighborhoods • Peace in our homes • Peace in our hearts

Just War?

The phrase “Just War” is often used by politicians, the media, history teachers, and church leaders in discussions about a possible war. However, we do not often hear the actual criteria of just war theory — or see how it is applied. As Christians, we must understand the just war tradition that has been the main moral language in both secular and religious debates about war if we are to evaluate the reasoning offered by political leaders. This resource can help you and your group to examine just war thinking, and as well, to explore Jesus’ teachings about peace. (*See What is Christian Peacemaking for a good companion session.*)

THE JUST WAR CRITERIA

Before a war:

1. The war must be a **LAST RESORT**. Every effort at negotiation and arbitration must have been tried.
2. The war must have a **JUST CAUSE** — to protect the innocent and defend against unjust demands and threats of force.
3. The war must be waged by a **LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY**.
4. It must be **FORMALLY DECLARED**.
5. It must be fought with **PEACEFUL INTENTIONS**. It cannot be waged by a crusade mentality, self interest, or pride, but must be for the well-being of all people.
6. There must be a reasonable **HOPE OF SUCCESS**. The goals must be achievable without squandering the life and property of the people.
7. The means used must be **PROPORTIONATE** to the ends sought. War mustn’t cause unnecessary destruction that outweighs the final good the war seeks to achieve.

During a war:

1. **NONCOMBATANTS** must be given immunity. No harm is to be done to those who can do no harm (i.e. civilians).
2. **PRISONERS** must be treated humanely.
3. **INTERNATIONAL TREATIES** and conventions must be honored.

After a war:

1. The defeated are to be shown **MERCY**. This includes assistance with rebuilding what has been destroyed.

If we made full use of the principles of just war, the quality of our moral deliberation about conflict would be greatly improved. These criteria can help us think critically of the tendency of any society to justify its own violence. They can also help us to confront the various effects of violence and to encourage us to be creative about alternatives.

But as Christians, we must also critically examine these criteria in light of the Christian ethic of love, forgiveness, and the sanctity of every human life. We look to Jesus, who lived a life of love and taught his followers to use nonviolence as they struggled for justice. For many Christians, Jesus’ message calls us to transcend just war thinking and to embrace alternatives like Just Peace thinking and Christian Nonviolence.

In the past our justifications for war have been flawed. One example:

Following the Spanish-American war, the Philippines were handed over from Spanish to U.S. control. When Philippine citizens resisted, the U.S. went to war against them from 1899-1902.

At the time, Filipinos were depicted as an uncivilized people who would benefit from the hand of the U.S. government and Christianity. Victory, it was said, would also open up new economic markets. To growing protest at home, the U.S. army wiped out dozens of towns. An estimated one-third of the population was killed.

What was once considered a justifiable war is now seen by most historians as a bloody war of self interest.

In fact, it is difficult to find a war that **was not** considered just by the leading political and religious figures of the day.

The debate about Iraq has included almost no discussion of an important alternative to war. Consider: In the last 60 years, two-thirds of the world’s people experienced change by nonviolent movements that were successful beyond anyone’s expectation. They worked against some of the most ruthless regimes of the century: apartheid in South Africa, Ceausescu in Romania, Marcos in the Philippines, the Nazis in Denmark and Norway.... The most successful route to “regime change” of our time has been absent from the debate about Iraq! We owe it to ourselves, the Iraqi people, and our future to examine the power of this option. [For more on this alternative and the *Wall of Hope* with further examples; see www.LutheranPeace.org.]

1. Applying the criteria:

War with Iraq: January 2003

For this activity, set the calendar two months before the war with Iraq. Break up into small groups, and assign each group one or several Just War criteria below. Each group has the task of applying their criteria to Iraq, and deciding whether the war did or did not meet that standard. Share the questions below, and encourage the group to ask questions of their own. After 10-15 minutes, have each small group share their conclusions. Invite the rest of the group to raise questions too. Conclude with a group reflection on the main question: Is this war just?

1. **War must be a Last Resort:** Did we try negotiation and nonviolent intervention before using violence? Are there any alternatives we haven't tried?
2. **War must have a Just Cause:** What is a just cause? Who has authority to decide? What if both sides think their cause is just?
3. **War must be waged by a Legitimate Authority:** What role should the UN play? How do citizens give their government authority?
4. **War must be Formally Declared:** Has the US Congress declared war? What should the process be? What are the pros and cons of the US process so far?
5. **It must be fought with Peaceful Intentions:** How could war affect the long-term well-being of people in Iraq, the US, the world? What might be our motivations?

6. **There must be reasonable Prospect of Success:** What is the goal? What could be the costs and for whom? Who decides what success is?

7. **The means must be Proportionate to the ends:** What does proportionality mean? Will the goal outweigh the destruction?

8. **Noncombatants must be given Immunity:** Will the lives of civilians be protected? How will this be done?

9. **Prisoners must be treated Humanely:** What does humanely mean? What should their rights be?

10. **International Treaties must be Honored:** Are we breaking any international agreements? How would we find out? Why should we honor such agreements?

11. **The defeated are to be shown Mercy:** Are we confident the US public supports the cost of reconstruction?

2. Deciding for ourselves

The Christian and Just War Thinking

Whether or not a war meets Just War criteria, violence has drastic consequences for us as humans, and for our society, our earth, and our faith. Use these quotes and bible texts as discussion starters for a deeper exploration of the gospel call to be peacemakers. Can be used in small groups or all together.

"If we are honest, we find the temptation to vengeance in our own hearts. Yet we know that the first real victim of violence is the perpetrator. What Gandhi said is true: 'An eye for an eye results only in two blind persons.'"

- Mary Evelyn Jegen (see also Matthew 7:1-5)

"All discussions of 'just war' start with the assumption that war can be justifiable. This is a reprehensible assumption. What if we had discussions of 'just slavery' or 'just sexism'?"

- John Stoner (see also Matthew 5: 38-45)

"Violence can never stop violence because its very success leads others to imitate it. Ironically, violence is most dangerous when it succeeds." - Walter Wink (see also Matthew 26:52)

The followers of Christ have been called to peace.... And they must not only *have* peace but *make* it. To that end they renounce all violence and tumult. In the cause of Christ nothing is to be gained by such methods."

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer (see also 1Peter 3:11)

"You can no more win a war than you can win an earthquake."

- Jeanette Rankin (see also Micah 4:2-4)

"It all really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

- Martin Luther King, Jr (see also Isaiah 65: 19-20a)

Web sites with particularly useful and relevant materials: www.LutheranPeace.org www.sojo.net www.salsa.net/peace Two especially concise and insightful books: *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking* by John Howard Yoder, and *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium* by Walter Wink, especially chapters 5-8. Contact Lutheran Peace Fellowship (LPF) about advocacy updates, upcoming workshops, and peace education resources: LPF, 1710 11th Ave, Seattle, WA 98122, 206-720-0313, lpf@ecunet.org www.LutheranPeace.org