

AUGUSTINE’S THEORY OF THE JUST WAR: ITS LEGACY IN THE CHURCH’S TEACHING TODAY

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Abstract

The name of Augustine is closely tied to the “Theory of the Just War”. Although Augustine is the chief exponent of the theory, it would seem that discussion about the evaluation of war as just or not predates him. However, given the complication related to the vast panorama in which Augustine expresses his mind to address the question of just war or the use of violence to curb insurgency, we shall limit our focus to a few of his writings. In addition, we will try to note the influence that Augustine’s ideas have impacted on the doctrine of the Church as evident in the magisterial teaching especially in recent time. Before taking on our discussion, I will refer to some of the scriptural texts on wars.

Keywords: Augustine, Just War Theory, Legacy, Church, Teaching

Introduction

War is a long standing problem that has wreaked havoc and still continues to devastate human history. It is a gruesome reality that destroys lives, paralyses human relationship, and leaves places in desolate waste. Yet, war is sometimes retained as necessary, an intrinsic part of human existence. One of the dilemmas in ethical reflection is the justification of war as means to restore peace and order. Can war be ever just? What really makes it to be just? The brutality of war and its trauma leave the mind in wonder.

The name of Augustine is closely tied to the “Theory of the Just War”. Although Augustine is the chief exponent of the theory, it would seem that discussion about the evaluation of war as just or not predates him.¹⁷⁷ Ancient thinkers in the likes of Socrates, Plato, and Cicero had had to handle the problem of war. Plato approves of war executed by the State to maintain social order.¹⁷⁸ The State legitimates the use of war to protect her inhabitants and defend her territorial

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Plato, Alcibiades 109c.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *Idem*, Laws I. 625e-626b.

confine. Cicero holds that the corporate existence of the State is the basis for any human civilization. When this is at risk from external hostilities and all diplomatic strategy employed to forestall the threats fails, the State may be compelled to adopt reasonable armed measure to ensure her defence.¹⁷⁹ Here, the proposal for an exception is granted whereby war could and should be given consideration.

Given the complication related to the vast panorama in which Augustine expresses his mind to address the question of just war or the use of violence to curb insurgency, we shall limit our focus to a few of his writings.¹⁸⁰ In addition, we will try to note the influence that Augustine's ideas have impacted on the doctrine of the Church as evident in the magisterial teaching especially in recent time. Before taking on our discussion, I will refer to some of the scriptural texts on wars.

The Biblical Teaching on War

Old Testament Perspective

The Old Testament, in particular the historical books, is replete with accounts of fatal armed conflicts. Various scenarios of blood bath abound. The people of Israel, chosen by God as his own, fought in defence of their territory, the land apportioned to them by the Lord as an inheritance and for prosperity. The need for expansion, conquest, dominion also led them into warfare with neighbouring nations. The Lord God is believed to command wars against enemies for which absolute compliance to His words is unquestionable. Hence, it is in Lord's name that battles are fought. These battles are understood as concrete sign of God's active involvement in the affairs and history of His people. God makes a Covenant with His People on a term of reciprocal faithfulness and obedience¹⁸¹ respectively. Any war waged in this context acquires a theological significance: it is sacred or holy. At this point, I will present some narratives of wars recorded in the Holy Scripture. A critical examination of the narratives does not fall within the scope of this piece.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Augustine, *City of God* XXII, 6.

¹⁸⁰ I must admit that this is a difficult terrain to navigate on. An in-depth reading of Augustine's writings on this subject is essential. The City of God is central to Augustine's thinking on the mystery of man in relation to God. In this work, Augustine also deals squarely with the problem of war and violent uprising in the earthly city. He interprets armed conflict as linked to the sin of Adam and Eve which dents human nature. The correspondences he had with Boniface, Darius and Faustus are also interesting for analysis.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Deuteronomy 7, 6-10.

“Now Jericho was shut up from within and from without because of the people of Israel; none went out and none came in. And the Lord says to Joshua, See, I have given into your hand Jericho, with its king and mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all the men of war going around the city once... As soon the people heard the shout of the trumpet, the people raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city. Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen and sheep, and asses, with the edge of the sword.”¹⁸²

The story recounted in the above appears to conceal the description of brutal killings with fire arms; it lays emphasis on the capturing of the city of Jericho. The Lord delivered Jericho into the hands of his people with little effort from them.

In a different episode, David stands out for his valour as a successful combatant.

“Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. And David rose early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took provisions, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the encampment as the host was going forth to the battle line, shouting with the war cry. And Israel and the Philistines drew up for the battle, army against army. And David left things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, and ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. And as he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gad, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before... When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone, and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine, and killed him; there was no sword in the hand of David. Then David ran and stood over the Philistine, and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath, and killed him, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and Judah rose with a shout and pursued the

¹⁸² Joshua 6, 1-21.

Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron, so that the wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim as far as Gath and Ekron. And the Israelites came back from chasing the Philistines, and plundered their camp.”¹⁸³

The picture of the fierce clash depicted in the aforementioned passage beats human imagination. The physical stature of Goliath intimidated the Israelites except David who, humanly speaking, was unskilled compared to his main adversary. David subdued and killed Goliath before the Israelites regained confidence to participate in the rest of the battle. Indeed David was victorious neither on account of his might nor prowess but because of God’s faithfulness to his promise and David’s faith and undivided submission to the Lord God.¹⁸⁴ The true protagonist of this fight ranks outside the realm of mortals. A human being could have been defeated before the start of the war. But since the Lord was the one fighting, he conquered the enemies. Furthermore, the reign of David as king of Israel was characterized by battles against the enemies whom Israel defeated.¹⁸⁵

Prophet Elijah had a share in battle. He slayed the servants of Ba’al with the sword after the Lord answered his prayers by consuming with fire the burnt offering laid on the erected altar.¹⁸⁶ “And Elijah said to them, seize the prophets of Ba’al; let not one of them escape. And they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and killed them there.”¹⁸⁷

Some of the emerging facts from the biblical accounts that we exposed so far have shaped the understanding of the Church Fathers in interpreting warfare as the act of God’s direct intervention in the life situations of his Chosen People so as to liberate them from their foes and lead them under his protective arms to the land of safety and fruitfulness. Ordinarily speaking, some of the events described could be a dread but God’s participation changed their course in favour of his people. Whatever the combat is, it is not just human but rather divinely inspired and guided; God is personally the chief executor of war. Joshua, David, Elijah, and so on are only instruments the Lord uses in order to accomplish his design. The incident of the crossing of the red sea showed the people of Israel in a passive state while God intervenes to wade off Pharaoh, and his cohorts who got

¹⁸³ 1Samuel 17, 19-55.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Ibid, 17.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. 2 Samuel 1-10.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. 1Kings 18.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 18, 40.

drowned in the water. The ancient people of Israel were saved without fighting.¹⁸⁸ No one can contest what God has ordered for execution.¹⁸⁹

New Testament Perspective

It can be argued that Jesus' message contained in the New Testament is sometimes at variance with the Old Testament. His life and approach contrast with the violence wrought in the name of God. At the birth of Jesus, the angels raised their voices in chorus of praise "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased."¹⁹⁰ The Nativity of Jesus signifies an era of peace among people. St. Paul captures it succinctly that God in Jesus Christ "is our peace."¹⁹¹ God has brought and inaugurated peace in the midst of all those who labour for peace.

Jesus provides a new orientation that is a shift from the old teaching and ways.

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, you shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment. But I said to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.... You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also;"¹⁹²

At the arrest of Jesus, one of his followers drew out the sword in order to defend him. But Jesus ordered the follower to desist from the use of sword: "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."¹⁹³ Jesus disapproves of the use of violence for his personal defense. He could have done it without engaging human aid if he wanted. He appeals for the non-violent approach. This falls in line with the will of God. In the account of Luke, Jesus shows his peaceful attitude contrary to the violent method and healed the injured person. "But Jesus said, No more of this! And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, have you come out against a robber, with

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Exodus 14.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. Ibid, 14, 13-14.

¹⁹⁰ Luke 2, 14

¹⁹¹ Ephesians 2, 14.

¹⁹² Matthew 5, 21-22, 38-39.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 26, 52.

swords and clubs?"¹⁹⁴ The healing gesture is a touch of God's mercy that the wounded experienced. He exchanged injury with wholeness.

Jesus put up with wickedness, endured the evil of violence and did not retaliate to maltreatment. He submits willingly to violence without reacting to it. "Jesus answered, my kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from this world."¹⁹⁵ St. Peter adds: "Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly."¹⁹⁶ Jesus was a suffering servant who never subscribes to nor yields to violence but adopted a meek attitude; he also recommends that blessings should be invoked on those who are violent.¹⁹⁷

While Jesus, the visible image of the Unseen God perfects without condemnation, it is apparent that he makes a move away from the old dispensation. He is the authentic fulfillment and the interpretation of the Old Testament. In and through Jesus God became human to save man: Life adopts life. The interpretation of the Old in the light of Jesus' event makes more sense and renders an appreciable understanding of God's manifestation in the Old Testament.

Augustine's Theory of the Just War

As far as the theory of the just war is concerned Augustine is often taken as a controversial figure and viewed with certain suspicion. However, he is an indisputable authority on this subject. Cicero played a crucial role in the formation of Augustine's mental outlook on war.¹⁹⁸ The Old Testament, specifically some of the texts we earlier examined, influenced Augustine's perspective on war. As a Christian thinker, Augustine casts his mind on the sack of Rome and the other problematic rampages of his period that upset the natural peace and order in the Greco-Roman world and the society. Humanity is ruined by the evil actions which arrogant men perpetrate. Augustine's reflections to address the question of war and armed contests were born out of his solicitude for the common good. In seeking to explain the problem of war and violence, he

¹⁹⁴ Luke 22, 51-52.

¹⁹⁵ John 18, 36.

¹⁹⁶ 1 Peter 2, 21, 23.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Romans 12, 14, 18-19.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Augustine, *City of God* II, 21; III, 5-31.

situates it within a theological framework of the original sin.¹⁹⁹ Sin has inflicted wound on human nature thereby causing a disorder in humanity. There is a continuous inner tension mankind must always deal with, i.e. the war between the flesh and the spirit. As St. Paul espouses,²⁰⁰ Augustine believes that the interior wrangling in man is the consequence of the rebellion against God.²⁰¹ Man's misuse of free will could also be manifested in violence.²⁰²

In the *City of God*, Augustine illustrates that wars are features of the temporal city.²⁰³ Wars reveal the pride humankind display in the quest to exercise their might and dominion over others.²⁰⁴ As pilgrims, Christians find themselves in the earthly city and must journey amongst the citizens of the worldly city; they are to be steadfast and witness through faithful obedience to God by virtuous life²⁰⁵ until when they reach perfect peace of the blessed life in the heavenly city of God. The justice of war as Augustine conceives and endorses consists principally of God's command of it²⁰⁶ and of a remedy to injustice inflicted and the hard path for the restoration of peace.

"I know the objection that a good ruler will wage wars only if they are just. But, surely, if he will only remember that he is a man, he will begin by bewailing the necessity he is under of waging even just wars. A good man would be under compulsion to wage no wars at all, if there were not such things as just wars. A just war moreover, is justified only by the injustice of an aggressor; and that injustice ought to be a source of grief to any good man, because it is human injustice. It would be deplorable in itself, apart from being a source of conflict."²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁹ Augustine dwells on Genesis 2, 17, 3, 7-10 and Galatians 5, 17 as the interpretative key to unravel the puzzle of conflict. Man turned away from God his Creator in search of affirming his autonomy with the hope of becoming god. He did not become what he ambitioned to be and instead lost his original status. Cf. *Ibid.*, XIII, 13-15.

²⁰⁰ Cf. Galatians 5, 17. "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, and to prevent you from doing what you would."

²⁰¹ Cf. Augustine, *City of God* XIII, 13. "The fact is that the soul, which had taken perverse delight in its own liberty and disdained the service of God, was now deprived of its original mastery over the body; because it had deliberately deserted the Lord who was over it, it no longer bent to its will the servant below it, being unable to hold the flesh completely in subjection as would always have been the case, if only the soul had remained subject to God. From this moment, then, the flesh began to lust against the spirit. With this rebellion we are born, just as we are doomed to die and, because of the first sin, to bear, in our members and vitiated nature, either the battle with or defeat by the flesh."

²⁰² *Ibid.*, XIII, 14.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, I, 2; XV, 4.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, XV, 4.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 8-9.

²⁰⁶ Augustine holds that it is just "to wage war at God's bidding, or for the representatives of the State's authority to put criminals to death according to the law or the rule of rational justice." *Ibid.*, I, 21.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, XIX, 7.

Augustine sets out in the preceding formulation to lay some parameters for the justification of wars. The description of the genuine motivations he offers should be the inspiration for a good ruler to engage in just wars. He acknowledges that even such wars generate anguish in a good man but who must, out of the necessity of responsibility, act in order to redress the grave injustice done. Injustice is a serious offence committed against the victim which also extends to all mankind by the virtue of humanity common to all rational beings. Hence, just wars are not carried out for revenge or retaliation but rather for punishment to restrict harm. In any case, war overtly serves a purpose. Augustine is convinced that there is “no war that does not suppose some kind of peace.”²⁰⁸ In a similar vein, he observes:

“The purpose even of war is peace. For, where victory is not followed by resistance there is a peace that was impossible so long as rivals were competing, hungrily and unhappily, for something material too little to suffice for both. This kind of peace is a product of the work of war, and its price is a so-called glorious victory; when victory goes to the side that had a just cause it is surely a matter for human rejoicing, and the peace is one to be welcomed.”²⁰⁹

The consideration of an intervention of just war must ensure that the prospect of armed opposition be ruled out to avert disastrous consequence. This provides a basis to wage war that will guarantee durable peace. The good effect of a just war rids of tension between the rival parties and reinforces peace. In an epistle to Boniface, Augustine admonishes him and underscores peace as the sole aim of war.

“Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may by it deliver men[women] from the necessity and preserve them in peace. For peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged in order that peace may be obtained. Therefore, even in waging war, cherish the spirit of a peacemaker, that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace....”²¹⁰

In the proposal of Augustine, war serves as an instrument that God in a ruler employs to achieve peace. One may be tempted to apply a criticism that may be

²⁰⁸ Ibid., XIX, 13

²⁰⁹ Ibid, XV, 4.

²¹⁰ Idem, *Letter to Boniface* 189, 6

unkind to Augustine's affirmation. When one subjects Augustine's assertion to scrutiny, there is a moral discrepancy between the intention and the act. The intention is the pursuit of peace while the act is war. In truth, the means does not fit in well with the intention but for Augustine it is permissible for the realisation of the good goal. Thus, the means in this context becomes proportionate to the intention.

One of the basic premises of Augustine that attracts criticism is his unequivocal justification of violence to deal with troublemakers and get the situation under control. In a correspondence he sent to Faustus the Manichaeon, he articulates some salient points on war.

"What is the evil in war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars, when they find themselves in such a position as regards the conduct of human affairs, that right conduct requires them to act, or to make others act in this way."²¹¹

Augustine emphasizes the need for an intervention by a competent authority to quell trouble. It may be claimed that Augustine exalts in the cited text the use of arms to resolve conflicts without giving much thought to the catastrophe inherent in war. The innocent victims normally pay a costly price. The rhetorical interrogation is apparently unattractive and troubling "Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection?" Some will inevitable be sacrificed in order that peace could be attained. Nevertheless, he makes a distinction between war executed out of lust and wickedness by evil men and that which stability imposes as a duty on rulers to enforce in conformity to God's command and for the sake of common good. Where conflict disrupts order, Augustine retains it necessary to be countered with the required severity.

Augustine, though he approves of war and the use of violence in extreme circumstances, nonetheless he is ambivalent. It is heartbreaking. War is horrible enough no matter the circumstance surrounding it.

²¹¹ *Idem, Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon 22, 74/75*

“Any man who will consider sorrowfully evils so great, such horrors and such savagery, will admit his misery. And if there is any man who can endure such calamities, or even contemplate them without feeling grief, his condition is all the more wretched for that. For it is only the loss of all humane feeling that could make him call such a life the happy life.”²¹²

The gory experience of war urges one to appeal to reason. Good thinking reminds us of our common nature. It becomes evident that Augustine cautions about the use of arms for the settlement of disputes. Prudence informs the careful study of possibly harmless options rather than taking a drastic measure. Where peace can be achieved without bloodbath, he suggests trailing the path of non-aggression. He writes in an appeal to Darius:

“But it is a higher glory still to stay war itself with a word, than to slay men with the sword, and to procure or maintain peace by peace, not by war. For those who fight, if they are good men, doubtless seek for peace; nevertheless it is through blood. Your mission, however, is to prevent the shedding of blood.”²¹³

From this letter, he states clearly his preference for peace which should be sought by dialogue and non-violence. He sees war only as the last option where and when its avoidance could turn a bad situation to the worst. The engagement of Augustine with the complexity and the discussion of war are to proffer solution to conflicts, to contend violence triggered by miscreants and to mitigate the devastating effect of injustice for the establishment of peace. Peace is indispensable for any human development, mutual coexistence and social progress. In like manner, effective propagation of faith, a divine project that commands human collaboration, is impossible where peace is lacking.

Its Legacy in the Church’s Teaching Today

The Church has never been indifferent to the challenge which war poses to humanity. The doctrine of Augustine’s just war which we investigated shapes the official teaching of the Church. In fact, it forms the nucleus of the magisterium of the Church on the topic over the centuries. Turning to the theory Augustine developed on war, the Church deepens her knowledge and gains more insight into the question. Her perspective in tackling the problem of armed

²¹² Idem, *City of God* XIX, 7.

²¹³ Idem, *Letter to Darius* 229, 2.

strife is well broadened. She mediates with competence and objectivity in order to address political restlessness that at times tends to destabilize nations with international repercussions. Her pronouncements are always invitation to walk the path of dialogue and peace.

In the wake of the First World War, Benedict XV reminded world leaders to consider dialogue and eschew war of any sort.²¹⁴ War does not bring any good out of incomprehensible stand. War contradicts the continuous search to build a just and harmonious world. Pius XII warned against the danger of another war. “The calamity of a world war, with the economic and social ruin and the moral excesses and dissolution that accompany it, must not on any account be permitted to engulf the human race for a third time.”²¹⁵ Pius XII’s words are a clarion call on world leaders to learn from the bitter past experience and let reason prevail over arms. The need to rise up from the distress of war, inspires him to reecho Augustine who advocated for a change of heart as the basis for new social transformation in order to create a more fraternal and peaceful relationship among peoples of all nations.²¹⁶ Irrespective of this, Pius XII agreed that war could also be vindicated in an unresolved conflict which can degenerate to unimaginable catastrophe. John XXIII advocated for peace through the laying down of weapons and the embrace of non-violent means “Men nowadays are becoming more and more convinced that any dispute which may arise between nations must be resolved by negotiation and agreement, and not by recourse to arms.”²¹⁷ The propositions of John XXIII have some resemblance to the epistle of Augustine to Darius.²¹⁸ John XXIII uttered his concern regarding the competition among nations to develop and construct atomic nuclear weapons which do not serve the purpose of peace.

“Hence justice, right reason, and the recognition of man’s dignity cry out insistently for a cessation to the arms race. The stock-piles of armaments which have been built up in various countries must be reduced all round and simultaneously by the parties concerned. Nuclear weapons must be banned.”²¹⁹

²¹⁴ “We implore those in whose hands are placed the fortunes of nations to hearken to Our voice. Surely there are other ways and means whereby violated rights can be rectified. Let them be tried honestly and with good will, and let arms meanwhile be laid aside.” Benedict XV, *Appealing for Peace Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1914, n. 4.

²¹⁵ Pius XII, Broadcast Christmas Message 1941. Cf. also Benedict XV, *Exhortation to Rulers of the Belligerent Powers*, August 1, 1917.

²¹⁶ Cf. Idem, Encyclical Letter *Communium interpretes dolorum*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1945, n. 2.

²¹⁷ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1963, n. 126.

²¹⁸ Cf. footnote 37.

²¹⁹ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, n. 112.

The Second Vatican inevitably dedicates space to the discussion on war and armed conflicts.²²⁰ The Council documents:

“War, granted, has not ceased to be part of the human scene. As long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defence, once all efforts have failed.”²²¹

The Council is realistic in its analysis of the political situation of the world. It makes an implicit appeal to heads of government to set up an impartial international body vested with authority to intervene in cases of disputes among nations. This tally well with one of the criteria that Augustine put forward for the qualification of just war when it is ordered by a legitimate authority.²²² An international body can offer a good avenue for open dialogue and sincere negotiation instead of leaving the belligerent countries to deal with the problem on their own. When peaceful reconciliation is unfeasible and there is deadlock between the disputing States, the strong may likely take advantage of her superior power to the detriment of the weak. On the other hand, the mediation of a neutral competent body will broker peace to prevent war and at the same time to uphold the sovereign integrity of both.

Although the Council recognises the possibility of war undertaken for self-defence in the absence of any reasonable solution, it explicitly condemns destructive war that spares no one.

“... the council, endorsing the condemnations of total warfare issued by recent popes, declares: Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and humanity, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation.”²²³

From this remark, one could see the subtle pervasiveness of Augustine’s ideas in the Council’s document. The bishop of Hippo acknowledges that war provokes misery which every good person feels²²⁴ because of the destruction it brings whether on those whose evil conduct incites it, and for which they are to be

²²⁰ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 79-82.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, n. 79.

²²² Cf. Augustine, *City of God* XIX, 7; Cf. Footnote 33.

²²³ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 80.

²²⁴ Cf. footnote 36.

punished, or on those who wage it and also on the innocent who will suffer it directly or indirectly.

John Paul II maintained an inflexible stand against the use of arms to settle differences. During his first apostolic visit to the United States, John Paul II, in a speech to the assembly of the United Nations, repeated what his predecessor Paul VI had said: “No more war, war never again! Never one against the other, or even one above the other, but always, on every occasion, with each other.”²²⁵ John Paul II did not hide his aversion to war; he condemned war in all its manifestation. Nevertheless, he was favourable to the principle of recourse to war when all diplomatic effort turns futile and due provision to the non-combatant group is cared for.²²⁶ The exception he indicated is restrictive and regards the situation where and when all peaceful attempts to settle conflict fail.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Church maintains her teaching on war. This magisterial document considers lawful the right of States to use military force for self-defence when they are under threats and all diplomatic negotiation to avoid aggressive attack proves abortive.²²⁷ Even in this instance the stringent conditions traditionally laid down in the just war doctrine must be upheld.²²⁸ The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church replaces war with legitimate defence. This slight change, though relevant, seems to be more at the level of terminology. Substantially, the Church’s teaching remains immutable. The document reaffirms what the Second Vatican Council states: “it is one thing to undertake military action for the just defense of the people, and something else again to seek the subjugation of other nations. Nor, by the same token, does the mere fact that war has unhappily begun mean that all is fair between the warring parties.”²²⁹ It reiterates the fundamental importance of

²²⁵ John Paul II, Address to the 34th General Assembly of the United Nations, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, n. 42, 4th October 1979, 1, 8-12. During his subsequent apostolic journey to the United States 16 years from the first, John Paul II repeated verbatim what his predecessor Paul VI said in 1965 “No more war, never again! Peace is, it is peace which must guide the destinies of people.” John Paul II, Address during the Welcoming Ceremony at Newark International Airport, (Newark-New Jersey), 4th October 1995. Cf. Paul VI, Address to the United Nations Organisation, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 6th October, 1965, 4.

²²⁶ Citing the Charter of the United Nations, John Paul II asserts: “war cannot be decided upon, even when it is a matter of ensuring the common good, except as the very last option and in accordance with very strict conditions, without ignoring the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations.” John Paul II, “Address to the Diplomatic Corps” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, n. 3, 13th January 2003, 4-5.

²²⁷ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1997², n. 2308.

²²⁸ The Catechism notes that “the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave and certain; all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; there must be serious prospects of success; the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in the evaluation of these conditions. These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the just war doctrine.” *Ibid.*, n. 2309

²²⁹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2004, n. 500. Cf. also Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 17.

adopting the strict conditions as criteria for evaluating the truthful claim of using armed weapons by governments to defend their States.²³⁰ Additionally, it makes allowance through prudential judgment for a nation under threat of attack to possess sufficient means of defending herself as an act of responsibility and a guarantee of world peace.²³¹ Benedict XVI denounced wars and conflicts²³² but he did not alter the doctrine of legitimate defence. In his message for the World Day of Peace, Pope Francis enjoins all to give up arms and engage in dialogue.

Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you! From this standpoint, it is clear that, for the world's peoples, armed conflicts are always a deliberate negation of international harmony, and create profound divisions and deep wounds which require many years to heal. Wars are a concrete refusal to pursue the great economic and social goals that the international community has set itself."²³³

From what we have seen thus far, it is certain that the Church rejects war. But does that mean that she has turned back on the teaching on the just war which is part of her tradition? There seems to be a sharp difference between praxis and theory in the teaching of the Church on war. In practice, she strongly opposes and condemns war. But theoretically, she speaks of "borderline" cases, extreme circumstances in which war can rightly be contemplated when certain elements²³⁴ are in place. Even at that, it is still practically difficult if not impossible to fulfill the conditions required for the legitimation of war as just and its execution.

²³⁰ Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 500. Cf. footnote 48.

²³¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

²³² Cf. Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2006, n. 13.

²³³ Francis, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014, n. 7.

²³⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2309. The Church lists out elements which serve as guide in the moral evaluation of instances where war can be considered as legitimate: "the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave and certain; all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective; there must be serious prospects of success; the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition."

Conclusion

Despite the unfair criticisms often leveled against Augustine on his theory of just war, his legacy is perennial. No Christian scholar before or after him had confronted the question with the required intellectual concern and profundity as he did. His thought serves as an inexhaustible fountain of wisdom from which the Church and men/women of good will can always refer to for the resolution of conflicts. It may be true that his reasoning will not resonate with the present reality. Be that as it may, it served the purpose for which he intervened to illuminate the minds of those entrusted with the responsibility of public administration in the resolution of wars and conflicts.

Augustine's theory offers remedy without which the brutality of war would have easily been invoked to deal a serious blow to the human race. His was to serve as deterrent to troublemakers for the preservation of peace and harmony. For Augustine, war that is a chastisement is not bad; it is corrective. As such Augustine's theory cannot be ignored nor discarded as obsolete. Perhaps its relevance today lies in the stimulation to ponder on the right cause of action to be taken in situations of conflict considering the abundance of sophisticated atomic, biochemical and nuclear weapons at man's disposal today which can easily annihilate millions within seconds. Importantly, it should be observed that Augustine was a great man of dialogue, a true lover, seeker and promoter of peace. His writings eloquently testify to this claim. The interventions he made were aimed principally at finding appropriate solutions to the violent clashes so that peace can reign in the society.