

Just War Tradition and the Popes: From Pius X to Francis

A Tradição da Guerra Justa e os Papas: de Pio X a Francisco

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INTRODUCTION¹

In a recent book called *The Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War Against Hitler*, Mark Riebling (2015) recalled how Pope Pius XII helped plotters in Germany who were trying to kill Hitler. Pius XII took part in many secret arrangements with members of the *Wehrmacht* (army force of the Nazi Germany), represented mainly by the plotters General Ludwig Beck, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, to have Hitler ousted by assassination.

Before Pius XII, Pope Benedict XV proposed a Peace Plan to First World War in August of 1917, which was used by Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points for Peace. After Pius XII, many historians highlight the importance of Pope John Paul II speech in Poland in 1979 to the end of communism in Europe, and also Pope John Paul II's support to groups of liberation against communist regimes, during his pontificate.

The Catholic Church, in her long history, said something to every aspect of the human activity. Her Doctrine related to war issues, subject of this article, is one of the oldest, inasmuch as the Bible has plenty of verses on war and military service. Even before Saint Augustine, considered the founder of the just war theory, the Catholic theologians discussed war and peace and whether Christians could be soldiers.²

Despite being complex, the just war theory is highly valued in academia and even in politics, even by those leaders who are not known to follow the precepts of this theory. For example, President Obama, who continued the wars of his predecessor and uses drones to kill terrorists

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(sometimes also killing civilians), when received the Nobel Peace Prize in his first year in office, gave praise to precepts of the Christian just war. He recognized the importance of the concept of just war, saying that “over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers and clerics and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. The concept of a “just war” emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when certain conditions were met: if it is waged as a last resort or in self-defense; if the force used is proportional; and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence. Of course, we know that for most of history, this concept of “just war” was rarely observed.”³

In the academic world it is very common to see exaltations to the theory of just war. Coates (1997) stated that the just war tradition is not only a tradition among many, it is the dominant tradition when it comes to the morality of war. According to him, the Christian just war has monopolized the debate on the morality of war, at least in the Western world. Russell (1975) declared that the just war presents a set of assumptions that are interrelated and form an important part of the political and intellectual history of Western civilization. Corey and Charles (2012) argued that the just war tradition is the only structure that offers a rich language, a set of categories and concepts developed in centuries of reflection in which the morality of war should be examined.

In an interview in 2001, the then cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (future Pope Benedict XVI), when asked about just war, said that “This is a major concern. In the preparation of the Catechism [in 1992], there were two problems: the death penalty and just war theory were the most debated” (Zenit 2005). The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) (Vatican 2015) respects the long tradition of *bellum justum* (just war) when discussing the Fifth Commandment ‘you shall not kill’. The Catechism says that peace is not the absence of war, peace “is the work of justice and the effect of charity” (§ § 2303 and 2304). Justice and charity are the two pillars of the just war. The CCC uses arguments made by St. Augustine and by St. Thomas Aquinas. St. Augustine, in his *Letter to Marcellinus*, argued that war can be a “benevolent severity”, like the father correcting his son. Also, in his book *City of God*,⁴ he said that the wise man will wage war, since war is a necessity because of human sin. Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*,⁵ said that Christ condemns those who use sword without authority. And against the pacifists, Aquinas argued that one should act against evil for the common good or the good of others.

Following Augustine, the just war theory has mainly the following principles: 1) a just war can only be waged as a last resort. All non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified; 2) a war

is just only if it is waged by a legitimate authority; 3) a just war can only be fought to redress a wrong suffered; 4) a just war can only be fought with “right” intentions: the only permissible objective of a just war is to redress the injury; 5) the ultimate goal of a just war is to re-establish peace, and 6) the violence used in the war must be proportional to the injury suffered.

But why should international relations’ scholars care about what the Catholic Church thinks?

To begin with, one can say that the Vatican City State has diplomats in almost all countries. Popes have sent diplomats to different regions since the fourth century, much time before the emergence of the idea of modern state. Popes are the heads of the Vatican City State and the heads of the Holy See, which is a permanent observer at the United Nations since 1964, besides taking part in many international organizations.

Additionally, scholars should consider that the Catholic Church is the oldest institution in the world, the largest charitable institution on earth, and that virtually all of the oldest and renowned universities in the world were founded by the Catholic Church, like the universities in Bologna, Salamanca, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge. If international scholars consider that cultural, religious or institutional aspects are relevant to analyze the world, he or she must recognize the Catholic Church’s importance.

Also, one can use numbers. The institute of research called Pew Research, in 2012 (Pew Research 2012), considering more than 2,500 censuses, surveys and population registers, found that majority of world population is Christian (31,5% of the world’s population), followed by Muslims (23,2%). And Christians are the most evenly dispersed, among religious groups. Roughly equal numbers of Christians live in Europe (26%), Latin America and the Caribbean (24%) and sub-Saharan Africa (24%). Catholics are the majority of Christians in the world, with 16% of the world’s population.

This article evaluates what the popes said on war since the twentieth century, the bloodiest century of world history. The idea is to observe if there is any change in their doctrines related to war. I am taking into consideration papal encyclicals and famous speeches concerning to war since the twentieth century.

POPES AND WARS SINCE THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

In 1979, Walter F. Murphy published a best seller called *The Vicar of Christ*. The novel’s protagonist, Declan Walsh, goes from war hero to become pope. Walsh, as pope, took the name Francis I. This Francis I changed radically the Church teachings regarding contraception, di-

voiced, celibacy, sold Vatican Treasures to feed poor people and flirted with Arian heresy. Walsh demoted summarily the conservative members of the curia who opposed his changes. Notably, he was killed when trying to change the Church's stance regarding war. He was extreme pacifist and was planning an encyclical named *Monstrum Bellum*, which argued that the Church Fathers who established the just war tradition were wrong.

Oddly enough, thirty-seven years later, the current Pope Francis has some similarities with Murphy's Pope Francis I. The current pope also seems to consider changes in the Church's approach regarding marriage and sacraments, conservatives cardinals, like Burke and Pell, are in pain with his pontificate, and he has presented strong inclination to pacifism. In April 2016, it was even reported that Pope Francis was planning global peace as topic of next synod of bishops (National Catholic Reporter 2016).

The first encyclical relevant to the subject just war since the beginning of the twentieth century is the most famous encyclical of Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* of 1907. This encyclical did not deal specifically with war and peace issues. It is on the vigilance of the deposit of the faith against the "enemies of the Cross of Christ", called Modernists. It is relevant here, because of his defense of the Catholic tradition. Just war theory has a long tradition in the Church, the first Christian theologian to deal with the subject was Clement of Rome in the first century. Then, in this sense, as a tradition, the just war theory has solidity, it is doctrinally difficult to change it.

The next pope, Benedict XV, had a long career as a papal diplomat. In his first encyclical, *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum*, in the beginning of the First World War, in 1914, Pope Benedict XV highlighted the absence of the Christian Doctrine in the states. The root cause for the First World War was, for him, that "the precepts and practices of Christian wisdom ceased to be observed in the ruling states" (Pope Benedict XV 1914).

During the First War, he declared neutrality and remained attached strictly to diplomatic solutions. Duffy (2006) pointed out that Benedict XV did not condemn the belligerents even before well-documented atrocities, like the "rape of Belgium" made by the Germans in 1914.

In August 1917, Benedict XV suggested a Peace Plan for war. It had seven points: 1) Cessation of hostilities on behalf of justice and law; 2) Reduction of armaments; 3) International Arbitration; 4) Freedom of navigation in the seas; 5) Forgiveness of all war costs; 6) Return the occupied territories, with evacuation of Germany in Belgium and France; 7) Resolution of territorial disputes by negotiation.

Because the Peace Plan contained no compensation for war costs, the Allies, such as France, considered that the Pope was on Germany's side. England wanted to explore the possibilities of the Plan, but in the United States, President Woodrow Wilson saw the proposals of Benedict XV as a return to the pre-war status quo, and denied it completely. Notwithstanding, five months later, in January 1918, Woodrow Wilson launched his Fourteen Points for world peace, with points from Benedict XV's Peace Plan, such as free navigation, the evacuation of Germany in Belgium and France, and the reduction of armaments.

Benedict XV did not like the way the First World War ended, he saw a lot of revenge against the losers. He was right; vindictiveness was an important factor for the Second World War, twenty years later.

The next pope, Pope Pius XI, saw the rising of Nazism. The most famous encyclical of Pope Pius XI is *Mit Brennender Sorge*, of 1937, written in German, against the Nazism, after Pius XI understands that Hitler repeatedly broke the *Reichskonkordat* of 1933 signed by the Nazi German and the Holy See, which tried to protect the Church from the Nazi regime. This encyclical was smuggled into Germany for fear of censorship and was read from the pulpits of all German Catholic churches. In *Mit Brennender Sorge*, Pius XI condemned the Nazism in all his aspects (racism, paganism, statism, and totalitarianism).

Pope Pius XI died in the first year of the Second World War, leaving an enormous task to his successor. Pope Pius XII is the most controversial pope of the twentieth century. Still today, many debate his words and actions during the Second World War. The Church always emphasizes: i) the actions of Pius XII in defense of the Jews during the war, using various institutions of the Church to shelter Jews fleeing Nazism; ii) that during the war, the belligerents knew which side was Pius XII; and iii) his explicit words of condemnation of the Nazis before the war.

Some historians also use to point out the active participation of Pius XII discreetly in the shadows. Pius XII took part in the secret plots that tried to kill Hitler, along with members of the *Wehrmacht*, the German Military Intelligence (*Abwehr*) and the Catholic resistance, which came especially from Jesuit priests.

On the other hand, some highlight Pius XII's public silence regarding Nazism during the war. Why he showed silence in the face of so many atrocities, as the killing of Polish Catholic priests early in the war as well as the genocide of Jews?

Pope Pius XII was also aware of the impact of nuclear weapons much before the attack on Hiroshima. The site of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (2016) recalled that in 1941 he reminded those present that, in

the hands of man, science can become a double-edged weapon capable both of curing and killing. In particular, in response to a suggestion made by the scientist Max Planck, in 1943, he warned (Pope Pius XII 1943) the world about the imminent dangers of atomic war.

Pope John XXIII's most famous encyclical is, without doubt, *Pacem in Terris*. *Pacem Terris* is extremely relevant to the way the Church understands war nowadays. It puts the Church in the direction of pacifism. However, *Pacem in Terris* is theologically shallow. Even when someone agrees with the contents sees that. For instance, Teichman (2006) pointed out that the Catholic priest (at that time) and philosopher Anthony Kenny, who argued for disarmament, privately believed that *Pacem in Terris* was "muddled, ambiguous, and unworthy" for the debate on warfare.

In *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII condemned the arms race, asking for proscription of nuclear weapons, despite recognizing that this thoroughgoing disarmament was impossible if it does not reach "men's very souls". John XXIII reached to the point of condemning war all together in paragraph 127 of *Pacem in Terris*, saying that "in this age which boasts of its atomic power, it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice." (Pope John XXIII 1963).

Regarding Pope Paul VI, the most important contribution to warfare by Paul VI was his speech at United Nations in 1965. The UN had granted the status of permanent observer to the Holy See in April 1964. Like *Pacem Terris*, this speech has a lasting impact in the popes.

In this speech, Paul VI (1965) appealed to the end of war entirely, saying "Never war again". His words were stimulated by John Kennedy's words, former president of the United States, and first and only Catholic president in the US, who, by the way, cannot be considered a pacifist leader. John Kennedy participated in the Second World War as lieutenant and was awarded for his actions. As president he was responsible for the invasion of Bay of Pigs, increased the US involvement in the Vietnam War, and he was in office when the world came closer to a widespread nuclear conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

The Pope did not pay attention to these facts related to John Kennedy. In his 1965 speech at the UN, Pope Paul VI said that the world should "listen to the clear words of a great man who is no longer with us, John Kennedy, who proclaimed four years ago: "Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind" (Pope Paul VI 1965a) and reached to the point of saying "never again war, never again war!" (Pope Paul VI 1965a).

Also, Pope Paul VI seemed to think that the United Nations is capable to reach the peace on earth. He implied in his speech that the United Nations and the modern age were enough to determine peace for mankind.

Pope Paul VI was also responsible to close the Second Vatican Council. Regarding war, the documents of the Second Vatican did not bring novelties to the just war theory, and they did not ask for the end of the war entirely. Instead, *Gaudium et Spe*, the pastoral constitution of the Council, argued that “as long as the danger of war remains and there is no competent and sufficiently powerful authority at the international level, governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted. State authorities and others who share public responsibility have the duty to conduct such grave matters soberly and to protect the welfare of the people entrusted to their care” (Pope Paul VI 1965b).

Pope John Paul II had huge prominence in the twentieth century, along with US President Ronald Reagan and the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, for their participation in the collapse of Soviet communism that dominated Eastern Europe, including his land, Poland. Many historians point out that communism began to die after John Paul II’s speech of June 2, 1979 in Warsaw, when the Polish people under Communist rule, hearing the words of the Pope, shouted “We want God”. Another important aspect concerning military conflict was the renowned stance of John Paul II against Iraq war. He presented his position during his address to the Diplomatic Corps. There are some phrases from this speech that are continuously remembered, like “War itself is an attack on human life”, or “War is always a defeat for humanity” (Pope John Paul 2003).

Pope Benedict XVI is very well known for arguing that the Second Vatican Council represented continuity for the tradition of the Church. But he also articulated criticism to Council’s documents. In 2012, for instance, he criticized the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which is part of the Council. Pope Benedict XVI (2012) highlighted that “In the process of active reception, a weakness of this otherwise extraordinary text has gradually emerged: it speaks of religion solely in a positive way and it disregards the sick and distorted forms of religion which, from the historical and theological viewpoints, are of far-reaching importance” (Pope Benedict XVI 2012). This is important to mention since nowadays Islamic terrorism is a great threat to world security.

Six years before discussing how *Nostra Aetate* failed to follow Christian tradition in not presenting the evil aspects of religion, Pope Benedict XVI had addressed his most famous speech. It was during a meeting with representatives of science at University of Regensburg. The Islamic world

reacted badly to this speech. Muslims bombed churches, carried out acts of violence and beheaded Fr. Boulos Behnam in Iraq (Tooley 2006).

The main theme of the speech was that “not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God’s nature”. But what offended Muslims was Benedict XVI’s use of Theodore Khoury (1967)’s book, which presents the dialogues between Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian. The emperor said in the occasion: “Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” (Pope Benedict XVI 2006).

Regarding just war, Pope Benedict XVI is well aware of the Catholic tradition, he wants to keep the tradition’s understanding of war, but was ready to update it. In the interview of 2005, the then cardinal Ratzinger said that:

I’d say that we cannot ignore, in the great Christian tradition, and in a world marked by sin, any evil aggressions that threatens to destroy not only many values, many people, but the image of humanity itself... I think that the Christian tradition on this point has provided answers that must be updated on the basis of new methods of destruction and of new dangers. For example, there may be no way for a population to defend itself from an atomic bomb. So, these must be updated. But I’d say that we cannot totally exclude the need, the moral need, to suitably defend people and values against unjust aggressors. (Zenit 2005).

In his address to the UN in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI gave emphasis to the responsibility to protect (called R2P), defined by the UN in 2005 to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It must be said that R2P have had extreme difficulties to be implemented at the UN. It is not hard to see nowadays that its third pillar (international intervention if states fail) has not been implemented, we just need to look what is going on with Syria nowadays. The R2P did not determine yet the limits of national sovereign and how to intervene.

Regarding Pope Francis, his pontificate is marked by the Christian persecution carry out by the terrorists of Islamic State, Boko Haram and Al-Shabab, which decapitate, kidnap, expel and even crucify Christians in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia. Besides bombing thousands of Christian Churches, even historical ones. When dealing with this huge and terrible persecution, Pope Francis always argues for the need of dialogue.

It is said that Pope Francis, when cardinal, was outspoken against Pope Benedict XVI’s lecture at the University of Regensburg, arguing that this

speech destroyed the relationship between Islam and the Church that had been built by John Paul II.

In April 2015, the Italian police revealed that there was a plan to assassinate Pope Benedict XVI, five years before, by a suicide attack. There were nine arrests suspects planning this attack. The suspects were of Pakistani and Afghan origin and had links to the terrorist group al-Qaeda. But is it the fault of Regensburg speech?

Following the terrible Paris terrorist attacks, in December 2015, the Italian police arrested four Islamic terrorists who wanted to kill Pope Francis (Mchugh 2015). Also, in April 2016, Italian authorities arrested people suspected of extremism (Moore 2016). Authorities said one of the suspects is a Moroccan-born national living in Italy who had received orders from the Islamic State to conduct an attack in Rome during the Holy Year, a period announced by Pope Francis that lasts from December 2015 to November 2016. And the Pope Francis always speaks of reconciliation with Muslims.

Very important, however, is when, in August 2014, Pope Francis said that it is legitimate to stop Islamic militants from attacking religious minorities in Iraq. But he added: "I can only say that it is licit to stop the unjust aggressor. I underscore the verb 'stop.' I don't saying to 'bomb' or 'make war,' (but) stop it." (Holdren e Gagliarducci 2014). He did not clarify how to stop terrorism.

Routinely, Pope Francis has reinforced the dialogue even between terrorists and states and has showed himself against war in any form. This stance, however, is not shared by many in Vatican and among the clergy, especially those who saw conflicts against Christians up-close. For instance, Pope Francis sent Cardinal Fernando Filoni two times to Iraq to bring comfort to victims of the Islamic State. Back to Rome, in May 2015, Filoni argued that "The time to act has come...words and good intentions are no longer enough to protect people in the Middle East. We need political action and proportional military action" (Rome Reports 2015). Cardinal Filoni was nuncio in Baghdad from 2001 to 2006. Yohanna Mouche, archbishop of Mosul, in June 2015, said that "war is the best solution against Islamic State" (Pontifex, John 2015). In October 2014, in a Vatican Summit (Glatz 2014) convened by Pope Francis, the participants claimed for sanctioned military force against Islamic State and extremist groups in the Middle East. Those called to the summit included nuncios based in Syria, Jordan-Iraq, Egypt, Israel-Palestinian territories, Iran, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as top officials from the Vatican Secretariat of State.

At the UN, in September 2015, Pope Francis made the most political papal speech of all the other four speeches of previous popes at the UN,

as Francis reaches to the point of advocating changes in the UN Security Council and international financial institutions. Also, he said that he wish that the governments around the world provided the “basic” for everyone: house, land and labor, in addition to education. But the centerpiece of the speech Francisco at the UN was the environmental issue. He comes to the point of declaring the need for a “right to the environment”. The environment is so important to the Pope that wars were condemned especially because they destroy the environment. In his speech, terrorism is a consequence of environmental degradation and economic inequality. He said “Our world demands of all government leaders a will which is effective, practical and constant, concrete steps and immediate measures for preserving and improving the natural environment and thus putting an end as quickly as possible to the phenomenon of social and economic exclusion, with its baneful consequences: human trafficking,...,the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime” (Pope Francis 2015). The religious aspect of the international terrorism was not mentioned by the Pope.

CONCLUSION

Following the popes regarding war issues, since the beginning of the twentieth century, one cannot avoid noting that the doctrine of just war is absent in their encyclicals and speeches. And the silence and neutrality became the norm. Also, one can argue that after nuclear weapons and the *Pacem in Terris* by John XXIII we have a stronger turning point. Before them, we witnessed popes speaking against the “spirit of the age”, arguing that states should adopt the teaching of the Gospel and of the Church, and emphasizing the Church’s stances against Nazism and Communism. After John XXIII, we have a stronger pacifism, and popes saying that the UN is the only institution that could determine the need for wars, even facing huge Christian persecutions.

Benedict XVI, however, can be view as a pope who tried in some sense to come back to a stance before John XXIII. He highlighted the tradition established by the Church Fathers and accentuated that the human sin is the ultimate cause to wars. Pope Francis, on the other hand, is much more close to, even deepening, the spirit of the *Pacem in Terris* that his immediate predecessors.

Summing up, the epistemology of war showed by the popes leads us to ask ourselves whether the Catholic Church would move to the Pope Francis I of the fiction by Walter F. Murphy. Murphy’s Pope Francis I understood correctly that to favor pacifism in any circumstance the Church should disregard altogether the Church Fathers’ position related to war.

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NOTAS

1. I would like to thank the referees for their excellent contributions for this article, remembering that I have responsibility for any mistake or omission in this article.
2. See Swift (1983) or Eppstein (2012).
3. See New York Times, the (2009).
4. Book 19, Chapter 7.
5. Question 40, Part II-II.

A TRADIÇÃO DA GUERRA JUSTA E OS PAPAS: DE PIO X A FRANCISCO

RESUMO

Quais são as maneiras de conhecer, compreender e justificar a guerra pelos papas desde o século XX? A Igreja Católica tem uma longa tradição para determinar a necessidade de guerras, a chamada Guerra Justa Cristã foi fundada por Santo Agostinho. Desde o século XX, no entanto, os papas mostraram hesitação, contradição e negligência na abordagem da guerra justa.

Palavras-chave: Igreja Católica; Papas; Guerra Justa; Defesa.

ABSTRACT

Which are the ways of knowing, understanding and justifying war by the Popes since the twentieth century? The Catholic Church has a long tradition to determine the need of wars, called the Christian just war founded by St. Augustine. Since the twentieth century, however, the popes have showed hesitation, contradiction and negligence towards just war approach.

Keywords: Catholic Church, Popes, War, Defense.

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