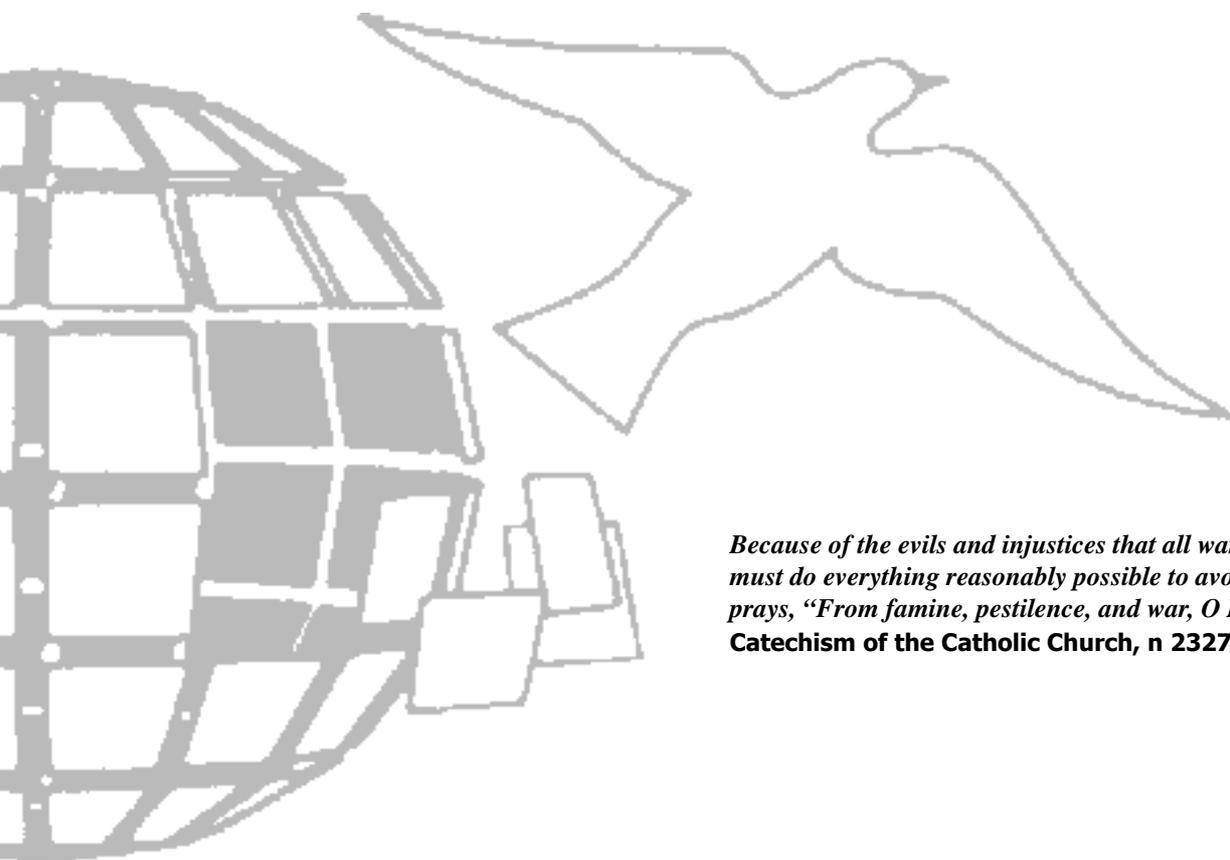


# ACSJC Position Paper: The Bombing of Afghanistan

The ACSJC has been shocked and saddened by the terrorist attacks on Washington DC and New York City on 11 September. We have watched with growing alarm as the military response to these events has unfolded. We are deeply concerned at this time for the welfare of Australian service personnel deployed in this conflict, and for the civilian population of Afghanistan.

The use of force, even where there is just cause, must respect moral principles. This Position Paper sets out the Church's teaching in relation to the use of force, and the reasons for the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council's opposition to the current bombing of Afghanistan.



*Because of the evils and injustices that all war brings with it, we must do everything reasonably possible to avoid it. The Church prays, "From famine, pestilence, and war, O Lord, deliver us".*  
**Catechism of the Catholic Church, n 2327**

# What the Catechism Says About War

## Respect for Life

Right at the start of its reflections about war and peace the *Catechism* recalls the commandment, you shall not kill (n 2302). All that follows must be read in the light of the Church's fundamental commitment to respect for life.

Respect for human life and its flourishing need peace. Peace isn't just the absence of war. It is a 'tranquillity of order' or state of well being that comes from respect for the dignity and rights of both individual people and whole communities. It requires justice but is also made possible by love (n 2304).

Jesus is our peace. It is his love for us that makes peace possible. By his death and resurrection he reconciled us with God and has made the Church a sacrament or sign of the unity of the whole human family. Among the beatitudes he proclaimed "Blessed are the peacemakers" (n 2305).

## Rejecting Violence

Pacifists renounce the use of violence. By doing this they bear witness to the serious physical and moral risks involved in the use of violence. In order to defend human rights they make use of non-violent means that are available to the weakest. It is a legitimate option for Catholics to be pacifists. In fact pacifism can be a way of bearing witness to evangelical charity, as long as the rights and duties of other people or communities aren't harmed (n 2306).

All war is accompanied by evil and injustice and so the Church urges everyone to pray and act so that we may be freed from the bondage of war (n 2307).

Everyone has a duty to work to avoid war. That applies to every person and every government. However, once all peaceful efforts have failed, governments have a right to lawful self-defence. This will be true as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power to perform what would be in effect police actions (n 2308).

## Criteria for a Just War

There are strict conditions for deciding if a military action is morally acceptable. These are set out in what is known as the 'just war' theory. All of the following conditions have to be met:

- 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 (n 2309).

Those who have responsibility for the common good must evaluate whether or not these conditions have been met. They then have a right to impose on citizens obligations that are necessary for the defence of the nation. Members of the armed forces who carry out their duties honourably are serving peace and security and contributing to the common good (n 2310). At the same time, public authorities must make fair arrangements for people who, for reasons of conscience, refuse to bear arms. Their consciences must be respected and other ways in which they can serve the community must be found (n 2311).

## Morality in War

Moral laws aren't suspended by the outbreak of war. All is not fair in war (n 2312). Non-combatants, wounded soldiers and prisoners are to be treated humanely. Actions that are against the law of nations are crimes and so are orders to commit such actions. Obeying orders is no excuse. The extermination of a people, nation, or ethnic minority are mortal sins. Everyone has a moral duty to resist orders that command genocide (n 2313).

Acts of war that indiscriminately destroy whole cities or vast areas and their inhabitants are a crime against God and against humanity. They are to be condemned firmly and unequivocally. Modern warfare provides an opportunity for the use of weapons like atomic, biological and chemical weapons to commit this kind of crime (n 2314).

## The Arms Race

The Church has strong moral reservations about the strategy of accumulating weapons in order to deter an adversary from war. The arms race doesn't ensure peace. It doesn't eliminate the causes of war but rather risks aggravating them. The accumulation of arms increases conflict and the danger of escalation. Spending on weapons diverts resources from the needy and impedes development (n 2315). Because the production and sale of arms affects the global common good, public authorities have a right to regulate them (n 2316).

## Address Causes of War

Injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust, and pride constantly threaten peace and cause wars. We must do everything we can to overcome these disorders so that we can build up peace and avoid war (n 2317).

# The Catholic Peace Tradition

There are two strands running through the Catholic Church's responses to questions of the use of force: a pacifist tradition and a 'just war' tradition. The pacifist tradition is the older of the two, and it has never been entirely displaced by the 'just war' tradition, which came to be accepted after the period of Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor. The 'just war theory' is what moral theologians call a theory of exceptions, that is a set of historical norms that describe exceptions to general prohibitions, such as the general prohibition of killing.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* systematically presents the teachings of the Catholic Church drawing on Scripture, the living tradition of the Church, the magisterial texts, and the spiritual heritage of the saints, Doctors of the Church and key leaders of the Early Church. Even though it is a large document, it does not present a complete history of the development of the Church's teaching on every issue. It provides a snapshot of current teaching rather than setting out how and why the teachings have developed through time.

For a short, easy to read history of the development of the Church's teachings on war and peace, see ACSJC Occasional Paper No 23, *The Peace of God*, by Paul Rule. It traces in only 30 pages almost 2000 years of Church teaching on war and peace.

The box at the left provides a summary of the *Catechism's* treatment of the Church's current teachings on war and peace. While the 'just war' criteria are clearly affirmed, the practical interventions of the Pope in concrete conflict situations during the 1990s and into the new century have consistently stressed the rejection of violence for the resolution of disputes. For example, on nearly fifty occasions from August 1990 to March 1991, Pope John Paul II spoke out urging a non-violent resolution of the conflict in the Persian Gulf. In these interventions he constantly called for dialogue, negotiation, respect for the rights of people and of nations. He emphasised the role of international law. He said that war was 'unworthy of humanity', an 'adventure without return'. He said that war could never adequately resolve the issues at stake and would only give rise to further hatred and injustice.

He emphasised the risk of escalation and the unpredictable magnitude of the consequences. He found the indiscriminate effects of modern warfare morally unacceptable.

Some suggest that, in practice, the Catholic Church currently exercises a kind of 'pacifism of the honest study of cases' through the application of the 'just war' principles, or a 'pacifism of Christian cosmopolitanism' by virtue of its stress on reconciling all members of the human family through means such as negotiation, or the arbitration of disputes by international authorities. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the Church regards the use of force in self-defence to be morally legitimate under certain conditions.

The texts of each of the Pope's interventions on the Gulf War are reproduced in *John Paul II for Peace in the Middle East* published by Liberia Editrice Vaticana in 1991. Texts of the Pope's interventions on the current conflict in Afghanistan can be found on the Vatican website [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va) or at [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)

## Responding to 11 September

In response to the tragic events of 11 September, the ACSJC called on the Catholic community to:

1. Pray: for the victims of terrorism around the world, and for their families; for world leaders that they will respond to terrorism with wise and principled action for the common good; for true justice, peace and security for the whole human family.
2. Support members of the Australian community being victimized at this time. Speak out against such violence and intimidation against Muslims and people of Middle Eastern background.
3. Urge the Australian Government to reject any use of force that does not meet the criteria of the 'just war' tradition.
4. Encourage world leaders to cooperate to bring those suspected of being responsible for these acts of terrorism before an international criminal tribunal.

In order to avoid feeding a spiral of injustice and violence, a principled response was called for. The starting point of the Catholic tradition's approach to this question is a fundamental commitment to respect for life. Respect for human life, and its flourishing, need peace. True peace and security come from respect for the dignity and rights of both individual people and whole communities. As well as meeting the 'just war' criteria relating to legitimate recourse to the use of force, all action during conflict must respect the 'just war' criteria relating to how force may be used.

Now that the use of force has been engaged in the response to the events of 11 September, let us revisit the criteria of the 'just war' theory and reflect on whether these conditions are met in this case or not.

## Just War Criteria & the Current Conflict

For the use of force to be justifiable, a number of conditions need to be met simultaneously:

1. It must be an act of self-defence against an unjust aggressor
2. The action must be initiated by a legitimate authority
3. It must be the last resort after all non-violent means have been exhausted
4. There must be a reasonable chance of success
5. The action must not cause greater evil than that which it sets out to address
6. The action must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants.

These conditions are a formulation of the 'just war' criteria. Let us reflect now on whether or not they are being met in the current military action.

## **Self Defence**

That responding to the events of 11 September is a matter of legitimate self-defence is conceded by most observers, especially in the light of concerns raised by the subsequent anthrax outbreaks and the possibility of future attacks.

## **Legitimate Authority**

The 'just war' tradition recognizes that states such as the United States of America have legitimate authority to act in defence of their citizens. All efforts should be made to involve the appropriate international authorities, especially the United Nations (*Gaudium et Spes* n 79, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n 2308). The ACSJC does not believe that a legitimate authority has authorized the current military action in Afghanistan. The United Nations Security Council is the appropriate authority in this case, not a self-appointed grouping of nations.

We reiterate our statement that Australia should not be supporting any use of force that is not authorized by the United Nations Security Council.

## **Last Resort**

The ACSJC does not believe that the current military action in Afghanistan has been undertaken as a last resort after all non-violent means had been exhausted.

Negotiations, the careful use of sanctions, and financial measures against the supporters of terrorism all require time to produce results.

It will take concerted action over a long period of time to really address the root causes of terrorism. The use of force is incapable of addressing such causes.

## **Chance of Success**

For the use of force in a just cause to be legitimate, it also needs to have a reasonable chance of success. Several weeks of bombing and other military actions in the 'war against terrorism' do not appear to have produced the desired outcomes. Despite the expulsion of the Taliban from Kabul, the suspects have not been apprehended and peace and security have not been established.

As the winter closes in, the prospect of a long and difficult ground campaign looms large.

The ACSJC has serious doubts about the chances of the military campaign succeeding in bringing the suspects to face justice, and achieving peace.

## **Proportionality**

As the campaign continues it seems more and more likely that any good achieved will be outweighed by the suffering and death caused and the anger and mistrust generated among Muslim people around the world. The danger of escalation is very real, as is the likelihood of perpetuating the conflict in this and future generations.

The number and type of bombs being dropped on Afghanistan seems to be out of proportion to the aim of the exercise.

Many ordinary Afghans have been displaced and are facing starvation. Without the international humanitarian aid that has been barely keeping the civilian population alive in the face of famine, many are sure to perish this winter.

Attempts by military forces to provide civilians with relief by dropping food parcels have been fraught with practical difficulties. Many international aid workers have been critical of the efficacy and adequacy of this method of delivering food in the current situation.

It appears to the ACSJC that a spiral of injustice, violence and religious intolerance is being fed by this military action, which is out of proportion to its end.

## **Discrimination**

When armed conflict breaks out, even in a just cause, morality is not suspended. Non-combatants, wounded soldiers, and prisoners must be respected and treated humanely - any use of force must discriminate between them and combatants (*Gaudium et Spes* n 79, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n 2312 - 2313).

The civilian death toll is mounting. The current bombing in Afghanistan is not discriminating adequately between the innocent and the guilty, between non-combatants and combatants. The use of cluster bombs is intrinsically indiscriminate and therefore morally unacceptable.

The ACSJC believes that the failure of this action to guarantee adequate protection for the civilian population is a major moral problem, sufficient in itself to require the cessation of bombing.

**In sum, the ACSJC does not believe that the current military action in Afghanistan meets the conditions for a legitimate use of force.**

## **Prayer for Peace**

All loving and ever-present God,  
You encircle us with Your wisdom and inspire us with Your Word.  
Be present amongst us  
as we work for peace and justice in our world.

We pray for those who at this time  
face danger in the defence of justice.  
We pray for the members of the Australian  
Defence Force, and for our leaders.  
We pray too for the people of Afghanistan,  
and for those who are refugees from that country.  
Remove from the hearts of all people  
the path of terrorism.  
Remove too from the hearts of all people  
the passions that give life to war.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, Your Son,  
who lives with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
now and forever,  
Amen.

**Adapted from a prayer for peace by  
Reverend Professor James Haire  
President, Uniting Church in Australia**

# Appropriate Action

If the current military response to the events of 11 September is not appropriate, what then should be done?

## **The ACSJC calls on the Australian Government to:**

- Review its support for the current military action, which has a dubious legal basis, and fails to meet some of the basic conditions for a morally legitimate use of force;
- Encourage world leaders to cooperate to bring those suspected of being responsible for these acts of terrorism before an international criminal tribunal;
- Cooperate with other nations to pursue means such as negotiation, the careful use of sanctions, and financial measures against the sponsors of terrorism;
- Undertake, together with the international community, an honest exploration of the causes of terrorism;
- Welcome asylum seekers fleeing human rights abuses and physical danger in Afghanistan and process their claims for asylum on refugee grounds or humanitarian grounds swiftly and fairly;
- Support and protect the rights of members of the Australian community being victimized at this time because of their ethnicity or religion.

## **The ACSJC calls on the Catholic community to:**

- Pray: for the victims of terrorism around the world, and for their families; for the civilian population of Afghanistan and for Australian service personnel deployed in the region; for world leaders that they will respond to terrorism with wise and principled action for the common good; for true justice, peace and security for the whole human family;
- Welcome asylum seekers who have fled the conflict in Afghanistan;
- Support and protect the rights of members of the Australian community being victimized at this time because of their ethnicity or religion;
- Encourage world leaders to cooperate to bring those suspected of being responsible for these acts of terrorism before an international criminal tribunal;
- Urge the Australian Government to review its support for this use of force that does not meet some of the conditions for a legitimate use of force.

# The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) was set up by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference (ACBC) in 1987 as the national justice and peace agency of the Catholic Church in Australia. The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference mandates the ACSJC to promote research, education, advocacy and action on social justice, peace and human rights, integrating them deeply into the life of the whole Catholic community in Australia, and providing a credible Catholic voice on these matters in Australian society. In this way the ACSJC seeks to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed. The ACSJC is accountable to the ACBC through the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace.

The major responsibilities of the ACSJC are:

- Researching issues and monitoring trends in public policy and current affairs in Australia and overseas;
- Presenting Catholic Social Teaching and the social justice tradition of the Catholic Church;
- Applying Catholic Social Teaching to current social justice, human rights, development and peace issues in Australia and overseas;
- Speaking out against injustice, the abuse of human rights, poverty and violence and in favor of change for a more just society and thereby ensuring a credible national Catholic voice on these issues;
- Promoting a spirituality of justice and the integration of concern for social justice into the liturgy, worship and general life of the whole Church;
- Building social justice networks within the Catholic Church, encouraging local action, coordinating action at the national level, and maintaining contact with relevant international Catholic agencies;
- Collaborating with national and international agencies with objectives similar or complementary to those of the ACSJC;
- Witnessing to and promoting unity among Christians through ecumenical action in favour of justice and peace;
- Educating the Catholic and wider community on social justice, human rights, development and peace issues in Australia and overseas by providing guided experience and educational materials;
- Advising the Bishops on statements and actions for justice and peace.

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