

## Where does the Catholic Church stand regarding a war with Iraq?

### Pope John Paul II

*NO TO WAR!* War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity. International law, honest dialogue, solidarity between States, the noble exercise of diplomacy: these are methods worthy of individuals and nations in resolving their differences. I say this as I think of those who still place their trust in nuclear weapons and of the all-too-numerous conflicts which continue to hold hostage our brothers and sisters in humanity..... And what are we to say of the threat of a war which could strike the people of Iraq, the land of the Prophets, a people already sorely tried by more than twelve years of embargo? War is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations. As the Charter of the United Nations Organization and international law itself remind us, 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."

(Address to the Diplomatic Corps, Monday, 13 January 2003.) See:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20030113\\_diplomatic-corps\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20030113_diplomatic-corps_en.html)

### Cardinal Francis George, OMI Archbishop of Chicago

With all the talk about impending war today and all the concern for the fallout or unintended consequences of an invasion of Iraq, few are recalling a line spoken by Mother Teresa of Calcutta in 1994, "The greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion." .... Few make the connection between the deliberate destruction of an unborn human being and the deliberate destruction of those already born; but only the means are different. .... Even the means, now that both medical procedures and war are so transformed by technological advances, tend to look more and more similar. .... Certainly, the way we talk about both abortion and war and the reasons given for engaging in either practice tend to sound eerily alike: protecting freedom, using no more violence than necessary, reluctantly concluding that we have no choice, needing to maintain our way of life. .... If we had not grown so accustomed to abortion as integral to our way of life for the past 30 years, would we be more hesitant now about attacking Iraq? Does our failure to recognize an unborn baby as a human person prompt us to de-personalize our enemies? It's arguable, I suppose. It's at least profitable to think about it on January 22 as we mark again the anniversary of a decision by the Supreme Court that cheapened human life and changed our way of life and do so this year in the midst of preparations for war.

(See, [http://www.catholicnewworld.com/archive/card\\_arch/card2003/011903\\_geo.html](http://www.catholicnewworld.com/archive/card_arch/card2003/011903_geo.html))

**Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, President  
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops  
September 13, 2002 Letter to President Bush on Iraq**

... I thought it was important that I express [the American Catholic Bishops] serious questions about the moral legitimacy of any preemptive, unilateral use of military force to overthrow the government of Iraq.... Given the precedents and risks involved, we find it difficult to justify extending the war on terrorism to Iraq, absent clear and adequate evidence of Iraqi involvement in the attacks of September 11th or of an imminent attack of a grave nature.... Our assessment of these questions leads us to urge you to pursue actively alternatives to war. ... We respectfully urge you to step back from the brink of war and help lead the world to act together to fashion an effective global response to Iraq's threats that conforms with traditional moral limits on the use of military force. (<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/bush902.htm>)

**Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect,  
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith**

All I can do is invite you to read the Catechism, and the conclusion seems obvious to me..." [Military intervention] "has no moral justification" (September 20, interview on the Italian national news program. (See, <http://www.comunione-liberazione.org/articoli/eng/1/nowar.html>.)

The United Nations is the [institution] that should make the final decision. It is necessary that the community of nations makes the decision, not a particular power. The fact that the United Nations is seeking the way to avoid war, seems to me to demonstrate with enough evidence that the damage would be greater than the values one hopes to save. The U.N. can be criticized from several points of view, but it is the instrument created after the war for the coordination - including moral - of politics.

The concept of a 'preventive war' does not appear in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. One cannot simply say that the catechism does not legitimize the war, but it is true that the catechism has developed a doctrine that, on one hand, does not exclude the fact that there are values and peoples that must be defended in some circumstances; on the other hand, it offers a very precise doctrine on the limits of these possibilities. (Statements to the press by the Cardinal Ratzinger after receiving the 2002 Trieste Liberal Award. His statements were published in the Italian newspaper *Avvenire*. (See, <http://www.coc.org/resources/articles/print.html?ID=278>)

**Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran,  
Vatican "Secretary of State"**

The use of arms is not an inevitable fatality; what is more, no provision is made in the United Nations Charter for a preventive war. Nothing should be decided without the consent of nations and international institutions, from whence derives the irreplaceable role of the U.N. [Two months ago he expressed to the US Government] the need for

dialogue and the appropriateness that it be the international community that assumes the responsibility.

A member of the international community cannot say: 'I will do this and you will help me, otherwise you stay home. If it were so, the whole system of international rules would crumble. The risk would spell a jungle. It could happen that tomorrow in a dispute with another state, a country could start saying: 'I am going to put things in order. War is not the solution to the problem. It is necessary to think of the repercussions that [war] would have.'

If the international community were to judge the recourse to force to be opportune and proportionate, this should take place on the basis of a decision made within the framework of the United Nations, after weighing the consequences for the Iraqi civilian population as well as the repercussions that it could have on the countries of the region and on world stability; otherwise it would simply be a case of the imposition of the law of the strongest. But it can legitimately be asked if the type of operation that is being considered is an adequate means for bringing about peace. (Comments made on December 23, 2002, interview with the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, see, <http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=29372> and <http://www.comunione-liberazione.org/articoli/eng/1/nowar.html>)

#### Catechism of the Catholic Church

The fifth commandment forbids the intentional destruction of human life. Because of the evils and injustices that accompany all war, the Church insistently urges everyone to prayer and to action so that the divine Goodness may free us from the ancient bondage of war.

All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war.

However, "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-defense, once all peace efforts have failed."

The strict conditions for legitimate defense by military force require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time:

- 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. These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the "just war" doctrine. The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.
- (CCC, Paragraphs 2307-2309)