

**COMPENDIUM
OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE
OF THE CHURCH**

CHAPTER ELEVEN

III. THE FAILURE OF PEACE: WAR

497. *The Magisterium condemns “the savagery of war”*[1032] *and asks that war be considered in a new way.*[1033] In fact, “it is hardly possible to imagine that in an atomic era, war could be used as an instrument of justice”.[1034] War is a “scourge” [1035] and is never an appropriate way to resolve problems that arise between nations, “*it has never been and it will never be*”,[1036] because it creates new and still more complicated conflicts.[1037] When it erupts, war becomes an “unnecessary massacre”,[1038] an “adventure without return”[1039] that compromises humanity's present and threatens its future. “*Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war*”.[1040] The damage caused by an armed conflict is not only material but also moral.[1041] In the end, war is “the failure of all true humanism”,[1042] “it is always a defeat for humanity”: [1043] “never again some peoples against others, never again! ... no more war, no more war!” [1044]

498. *Seeking alternative solutions to war for resolving international conflicts has taken on tremendous urgency today,* since “the terrifying power of the means of destruction — to which even medium and small-sized countries have access — and the ever closer links between the peoples of the whole world make it very difficult or practically impossible to limit the consequences of a conflict”.[1045] It is therefore essential to seek out the causes underlying bellicose conflicts, especially those connected with structural situations of injustice, poverty and exploitation, which require intervention so that they may be removed. “For this reason, another name for peace is *development*. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development”.[1046]

499. *States do not always possess adequate means to provide effectively for their own defence, from this derives the need and importance of international and regional organizations, which should be in a position to work together to resolve conflicts and promote peace, re-establishing relationships of mutual trust that make recourse to war unthinkable.*[1047] “There is reason to hope ... that by meeting and negotiating, men may come to discover better the bonds that unite them together, deriving from the human nature which they have in common; and that they may also come to discover that one of the most profound requirements of their common nature is this: that between them and their respective peoples it is not fear which should reign but love, a love which tends to express itself in a collaboration that is loyal, manifold in form and productive of many benefits”.[1048]

a. Legitimate defence

500. A war of aggression is intrinsically immoral. In the tragic case where such a war breaks out, leaders of the State that has been attacked have the right and the duty to organize a defence even using the force of arms.[1049] To be licit, the use of force must correspond to certain strict conditions: “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”.[1050]

If this responsibility justifies the possession of sufficient means to exercise this right to defence, States still have the obligation to do everything possible “to

ensure that the conditions of peace exist, not only within their own territory but throughout the world”.[1051] It is important to remember that “it is one thing to wage a war of self-defence; it is quite another to seek to impose domination on another nation. The possession of war potential does not justify the use of force for political or military objectives. Nor does the mere fact that war has unfortunately broken out mean that all is fair between the warring parties”.[1052]

501. *The Charter of the United Nations, born from the tragedy of the Second World War with the intention of preserving future generations from the scourge of war, is based on a generalized prohibition of a recourse to force to resolve disputes between States, with the exception of two cases: legitimate defence and measures taken by the Security Council within the area of its responsibilities for maintaining peace.* In every case, exercising the right to self-defence must respect “the traditional limits of *necessity* and *proportionality*”. [1053]

Therefore, engaging in a preventive war without clear proof that an attack is imminent cannot fail to raise serious moral and juridical questions. International legitimacy for the use of armed force, on the basis of rigorous assessment and with well-founded motivations, can only be given by the decision of a competent body that identifies specific situations as threats to peace and authorizes an intrusion into the sphere of autonomy usually reserved to a State.

b. Defending peace

502. *The requirements of legitimate defence justify the existence in States of armed forces, the activity of which should be at the service of peace. Those who defend the security and freedom of a country, in such a spirit, make an authentic contribution to peace.*[1054] Everyone who serves in the armed forces is concretely called to defend good, truth and justice in the world. Many are those who, in such circumstances, have sacrificed their lives for these values and in defence of innocent lives. Very significant in this regard is the increasing number

of military personnel serving in multinational forces on humanitarian or peace-keeping missions promoted by the United Nations.[1055]

503. Every member of the armed forces is morally obliged to resist orders that call for perpetrating crimes against the law of nations and the universal principles of this law.[1056] Military personnel remain fully responsible for the acts they commit in violation of the rights of individuals and peoples, or of the norms of international humanitarian law. Such acts cannot be justified by claiming obedience to the orders of superiors.

Conscientious objectors who, out of principle, refuse military service in those cases where it is obligatory because their conscience rejects any kind of recourse to the use of force or because they are opposed to the participation in a particular conflict, must be open to accepting alternative forms of service. “It seems just that laws should make humane provision for the case of conscientious objectors who refuse to carry arms, provided they accept some other form of community service”.[1057]

c. The duty to protect the innocent

504. The right to use force for purposes of legitimate defence is associated with the duty to protect and help innocent victims who are not able to defend themselves from acts of aggression. In modern conflicts, which are often within a State, *the precepts of international humanitarian law must be fully respected.* Far too often, the civilian population is hit and at times even becomes a target of war. In some cases, they are brutally massacred or taken from their homes and land by forced transfers, under the guise of “ethnic cleansing”,[1058] which is always unacceptable. In such tragic circumstances, humanitarian aid must reach the civilian population and must never be used to influence those receiving it; the good of the human person must take precedence over the interests of the parties to the conflict.

505. *The principle of humanity inscribed in the conscience of every person and all peoples includes the obligation to protect civil populations from the effects of war.* “That minimum protection of the dignity of every person, guaranteed by international humanitarian law, is all too often violated in the name of military or political demands which should never prevail over the value of the human person. Today we are aware of the need to find a new consensus on humanitarian principles and to reinforce their foundation to prevent the recurrence of atrocities and abuse”. [1059]

A particular category of war victim is formed by *refugees*, forced by combat to flee the places where they habitually live and to seek refuge in foreign countries. The Church is close to them not only with her pastoral presence and material support, but also with her commitment to defend their human dignity: “Concern for refugees must lead us to reaffirm and highlight universally recognized human rights, and to ask that the effective recognition of these rights be guaranteed to refugees”. [1060]

506. *Attempts to eliminate entire national, ethnic, religious or linguistic groups are crimes against God and humanity itself, and those responsible for such crimes must answer for them before justice.* [1061] The twentieth century bears the tragic mark of different genocides: from that of the Armenians to that of the Ukrainians, from that of the Cambodians to those perpetrated in Africa and in the Balkans. Among these, the Holocaust of the Jewish people, the Shoah, stands out: “the days of the *Shoah* marked a true night of history, with unimaginable crimes against God and humanity”. [1062]

The international community as a whole has the moral obligation to intervene on behalf of those groups whose very survival is threatened or whose basic human rights are seriously violated. As members of an international community, States cannot remain indifferent; on the contrary, if all other available means should prove ineffective, it is “legitimate and even obligatory to take concrete measures

to disarm the aggressor”.[1063] The principle of national sovereignty cannot be claimed as a motive for preventing an intervention in defence of innocent victims.[1064] The measures adopted must be carried out in full respect of international law and the fundamental principle of equality among States.

There is also present within the international community an *International Criminal Court* to punish those responsible for particularly serious acts such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression. The Magisterium has not failed to encourage this initiative time and again.[1065]

d. Measures against those who threaten peace

507. *Sanctions, in the forms prescribed by the contemporary international order, seek to correct the behaviour of the government of a country that violates the rules of peaceful and ordered international coexistence or that practises serious forms of oppression with regard to its population.* The purpose of these sanctions must be clearly defined and the measures adopted must from time to time be objectively evaluated by the competent bodies of the international community as to their effectiveness and their real impact on the civilian population. *The true objective of such measures is open to the way to negotiation and dialogue. Sanctions must never be used as a means for the direct punishment of an entire population:* it is not licit that entire populations, and above all their most vulnerable members, be made to suffer because of such sanctions. *Economic sanctions in particular are an instrument to be used with great discernment and must be subjected to strict legal and ethical criteria.*[1066] An *economic embargo* must be of limited duration and cannot be justified when the resulting effects are indiscriminate.

e. Disarmament

508. *The Church's social teaching proposes the goal of “general, balanced and controlled disarmament”.*[1067] *The enormous increase in arms represents a*

grave threat to stability and peace. The principle of sufficiency, by virtue of which each State may possess only the means necessary for its legitimate defence, must be applied both by States that buy arms and by those that produce and furnish them.[1068] Any excessive stockpiling or indiscriminate trading in arms cannot be morally justified. Such phenomena must also be evaluated in light of international norms regarding the non-proliferation, production, trade and use of different types of arms. Arms can never be treated like other goods exchanged on international or domestic markets.[1069]

Moreover, the Magisterium has made a moral evaluation of the phenomenon of *deterrence*. “The *accumulation of arms* strikes many as a paradoxically suitable way of deterring potential adversaries from war. They see it as the most effective means of ensuring peace among nations. This method of deterrence gives rise to strong moral reservations. The *arms race* does not ensure peace. Far from eliminating the causes of war, it risks aggravating them”. [1070] Policies of nuclear deterrence, typical of the Cold War period, must be replaced with concrete measures of disarmament based on dialogue and multilateral negotiations.

509. *Arms of mass destruction — whether biological, chemical or nuclear — represent a particularly serious threat. Those who possess them have an enormous responsibility before God and all of humanity.*[1071] The principle of the non-proliferation of nuclear arms, together with measures of nuclear disarmament and the prohibition of nuclear tests, are intimately interconnected objectives that must be met as soon as possible by means of effective controls at the international level.[1072] The ban on the development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical and biological weapons as well as the provisions that require their destruction, complete the international regulatory norms aimed at banning such baleful weapons,[1073] the use of which is explicitly condemned by the Magisterium: “Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of

entire cities or extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation”.[1074]

510. *Disarmament must include the banning of weapons that inflict excessively traumatic injury or that strike indiscriminately. This includes anti-personnel landmines, a type of small arm that is inhumanly insidious because it continues to cause harm even long after the cessation of hostilities.* States that produce them, sell them and continue to use them are responsible for seriously delaying the total elimination of these death-dealing weapons.[1075] *The international community must continue its committed efforts aimed at mine-clearance, fostering effective cooperation — including education and technical training — with those countries that do not have adequate means to clear their territory of mines with all due urgency and that are not able to offer the necessary assistance to victims of mines.*

511. *Appropriate measures are needed to control the production, sale, importation and exportation of small arms and light weapons, armaments that facilitate many outbreaks of violence to occur.* The sale and trafficking of such weapons constitute a serious threat to peace: these arms kill and are used for the most part in internal and regional conflicts; their ready availability increases both the risk of new conflicts and the intensity of those already underway. The position of States that apply severe controls on the international transfer of heavy arms while they never, or only very rarely, restrict the sale and trafficking of small arms and light weapons is an unacceptable contradiction. It is indispensable and urgent that Governments adopt appropriate measures to control the production, stockpiling, sale and trafficking of such arms [1076] in order to stop their growing proliferation, in large part among groups of combatants that are not part of the military forces of a State.

512. *The use of children and adolescents as soldiers in armed conflicts — despite the fact that their young age should bar them from being recruited — must*

be condemned. Obligated by force to take part in combat or choosing to do so on their own initiative without being fully aware of the consequences, these children are not only deprived of an education and a normal childhood, they are also trained to kill. This constitutes an intolerable crime. The use of child soldiers in combat forces of any kind must be stopped and, at the same time, every possible assistance must be given to the care, education and rehabilitation of those children who have been involved in combat[1077].

f. The condemnation of terrorism

513. *Terrorism is one of the most brutal forms of violence traumatizing the international community today; it sows hatred, death, and an urge for revenge and reprisal.*[1078] From being a subversive strategy typical of certain extremist organizations, aimed at the destruction of material goods or the killing of people, terrorism has now become a shadowy network of political collusion. It can also make use of sophisticated technology, often has immense financial resources at its disposal and is involved in large- scale planning, striking completely innocent people who become chance victims of terrorist actions.[1079] The targets of terrorist attacks are generally places of daily life and not military objectives in the context of a declared war. Terrorism acts and strikes under the veil of darkness, with no regard for any of the rules by which men have always sought to set limits to conflicts, for example through international humanitarian law; “in many cases, terrorist methods are regarded as new strategies of war”[1080]. Nor must we overlook the causes that can lead to such unacceptable forms of making demands. The fight against terrorism presupposes the moral duty to help create those conditions that will prevent it from arising or developing.

514. *Terrorism is to be condemned in the most absolute terms. It shows complete contempt for human life and can never be justified, since the human person is always an end and never a means.* Acts of terrorism strike at the heart of human dignity and are an offence against all humanity; “*there exists, therefore,*

a right to defend oneself from terrorism".[1081] However, this right cannot be exercised in the absence of moral and legal norms, because the struggle against terrorists must be carried out with respect for human rights and for the principles of a State ruled by law.[1082] The identification of the guilty party must be duly proven, because criminal responsibility is always personal, and therefore cannot be extended to the religions, nations or ethnic groups to which the terrorists belong. International cooperation in the fight against terrorist activity "cannot be limited solely to repressive and punitive operations. It is essential that the use of force, even when necessary, be accompanied by a *courageous and lucid analysis of the reasons behind terrorist attacks*".[1083] Also needed is a particular commitment on the "*political and educational levels*" [1084] in order to resolve, with courage and determination, the problems that in certain dramatic circumstances can foster terrorism: "the recruitment of terrorists in fact is easier in situations where rights are trampled and injustices are tolerated over a long period of time"[1085].

515. *It is a profanation and a blasphemy to declare oneself a terrorist in God's name.*[1086] In such cases, God, and not only man, is exploited by a person who claims to possess the totality of God's truth rather than one who seeks to be possessed by the truth. To define as "martyrs" those who die while carrying out terrorist attacks distorts the concept of martyrdom, which is the witness of a person who gives himself up to death rather than deny God and his love. Martyrdom cannot be the act of a person who kills in the name of God.

No religion may tolerate terrorism and much less preach it.[1087] Rather, religions must work together to remove the causes of terrorism and promote friendship among peoples[1088].