

■ The just war theory

In the fourth century St Augustine was one of the first Christians to write about the morality of war, and his thoughts were developed into a distinct set of criteria by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Further adaptations have been made to the **just war** theory up until the present day. It seeks to lay out the conditions under which fighting a war is justifiable, and also provides rules on how the war must be fought to ensure it is ethical. All the following conditions must apply for the war to be a 'just war':

- The war must have a *just cause*. This may include self-defence or defending someone else. It must not be to gain territory or resources, or in retaliation.
- The war must be declared by the *correct authority*. This should be the government or lawful rulers of the country.
- The *intention* of the war has to be to defeat wrongdoing and promote good. The good achieved by the war must outweigh the evil that led to it.
- Fighting must be a *last resort*. All other ways of resolving the issue, such as diplomacy, must have been attempted before war can be declared.
- There must be a reasonable *chance of success*. It is unjust to ask people to fight a war if it is probable that the war will be lost and they will be killed.
- The methods used to fight the war must be *proportional* to achieve success. Excessive force should not be used.



▲ Refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war in 2015. Is it possible to fight a war without harming any civilians?

Objectives

- Understand the just war theory.
- Apply the just war theory to a specific war.

Key term

- **just war:** a war which meets internationally accepted criteria for fairness; follows traditional Christian rules for a just war, and is now accepted by all other religions

Discussion activity

Without looking at the information on this page, with a partner draw up a list of conditions that you think makes fighting a war the right thing to do.

Links

To remind yourself of the differences between self-defence and retaliation, see pages 128–29.

Activity

Look carefully at the conditions for a just war. Are there any other conditions that you would like to add and any that you think should be removed? Explain the reasons for your answer.

The way the war is fought must obey the following conditions:

- The war must be fought by *just means*. Innocent people and civilians must not be targeted or harmed.
- Only *appropriate force* may be used. This includes the type of force and how much is used.
- *Internationally agreed conventions* on the conduct of war must be obeyed. The Geneva Convention, accepted by the UK government in 1957, lays down the rules that must be obeyed in war.

Extension activity



Find out more about the Geneva Convention. Do you think such rules about the conduct of war should be kept? Explain your answer.

Falklands War

The Falkland Islands and South Georgia are British territories off the coast of Argentina in South America. For many years, the Argentinians have believed that they should govern the islands, which they call the Malvinas. In April 1982, Argentinian forces invaded the Falkland Islands and South Georgia, claiming the islands for themselves. After organising diplomatic pressure against Argentina, the British government sent a task force to reclaim the islands, which they did in June 1982.

During the conflict, the Argentinian navy vessel ARA *General Belgrano* was sunk, killing 323 people onboard. The British vessel HMS *Sheffield* was sunk in retaliation at the cost of 20 lives. Overall, 649 Argentinian and 258 British military personnel died in the conflict. Three civilians on the islands were also killed. However the citizens of the Falklands supported the UK task force. The majority of the current population still identify themselves as British and overwhelmingly support remaining as an Overseas Territory of the UK.

Many Christians believe that although fighting a just war is acceptable, it is much better if there is no war, just or not. Working together to avoid situations where war is a possible outcome is preferable to fighting. The United Nations, founded in 1945, encourages countries to resolve disputes peacefully. Some Christians disagree with the theory of a just war because it defends the concept of war in certain circumstances. This could lead to a general acceptance of war.

★ Study tip

Learning the words in italics on these pages may help you to remember the just war conditions.



▲ This sculpture is outside the United Nations building in New York City. What do you think its message is?

Activities

- 1 From what you have read, do you think the Falklands War was a just war?
- 2 'It is acceptable to do anything to win a war if it ultimately leads to a better outcome.' Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons for your opinion.

Summary

You should now know the criteria for a just war and have used the criteria to judge whether a specific war was just.