

QUESTION 40

War

We next have to consider war (*bellum*). And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Is any sort of war permitted (*licitum*)? (2) Are clerics permitted to engage in war? (3) Are those engaging in war permitted to use insidious tactics (*uti insidiis*)? (4) Is it permissible to engage in war on feast days?

Article 1

Is engaging in war always a sin?

It seems that engaging in war is always a sin (*bellare semper sit peccatum*):

Objection 1: A punishment is inflicted only for a sin. But a punishment for those who wage war is made known by our Lord—this according to Matthew 26:52 (“Everyone who takes up the sword will perish by the sword”). Therefore, every war is impermissible.

Objection 2: Whatever is contrary to a divine precept is a sin. But to engage in war is contrary to a divine precept; for Matthew 5:39 says, “I say to you, do not resist evil,” and Romans 12:19 says, “Do not defend yourselves, dearly beloved, but leave room for the wrath [of God].” Therefore, engaging in war is always a sin.

Objection 3: Nothing except a sin is contrary to an act of virtue. But war is contrary to peace. Therefore, war is always a sin.

Objection 4: As is clear in the case of training in the sciences, a training exercise for what is permitted is itself permitted (*exercitium ad rem licitam est licitum*). But the training exercises for wars that take place in tournaments are prohibited by the Church, since those who die in training of this sort are denied a Church burial. Therefore, war seems to be a sin absolutely speaking.

But contrary to this: In his sermon *De Puero Centurionis* Augustine says, “If the Christian way of life faulted war altogether, then in the Gospel those seeking advice about salvation would have been told to abandon their weapons and remove themselves altogether from the military. Instead, they are told, ‘Do violence to no one, and be satisfied with your pay’ (Luke 3:14). He was not forbidding military service to those whom he told that their pay should suffice.”

I respond: In order for a war to be just, three things are required.

First, *the authority of the ruler* by whose command the war is to be waged. For it does not belong to a private person to start a war, because he can pursue his own claim (*ius suum*) in the tribunal of a superior; again, and similarly, it does not belong to a private person to convene a multitude, which has to be done in the case of a war. Since the care of the republic is committed to the rulers, it belongs to them to safeguard the republic that is subject to them, whether it be a city or a kingdom or a province. So just as the rulers are permitted to defend the republic by the material sword against internal disturbances when they punish malefactors—this according to Romans 13:4 (“Not without cause does he carry the sword; for he is God’s minister, an avenger of God’s anger against those who do evil”)—so, too, it belongs to them to protect the republic from external enemies with the sword of war. Hence, in Psalm 81:4 the rulers are told, “Rescue the poor man, and liberate the needy man from the hand of the sinner.” This is why Augustine says in *Contra Faustum*, “The natural order, as accommodated to peace among mortal men, demands that the authority to undertake war and the planning for war should lie with the rulers.”

Second, *a just cause* is required, so that, namely, those who are brought under attack deserve the attack because of some fault. Hence, in *Quaestiones in Heptateuch* Augustine says, “Just wars are normally defined as wars that avenge injuries, where the nation or city to be punished is one that has either neglected to make amends for what was done unjustly by its subjects or refused to restore what was lost through injury.”

Third, it is required that *those who engage in the war have an upright intention (ut sit intentio bellantium recta)*—more specifically, one by which they intend to promote the good and to avoid evil. Hence, in *De Verbis Domini* Augustine says, “In the eyes of the true worshipers of God, those wars are peaceful which are waged not out of disordered desire or out of cruelty, but with a zeal for peace, so that evil men might be restrained and good men might be lifted up.” Now it can happen that even if the authority of the one declaring the war is legitimate and the cause is just, the war is nonetheless rendered impermissible because of a depraved intention. For in *Contra Faustum* Augustine says, “A disordered desire to do harm, a cruel thirst for vengeance, a restless and implacable mind, a savage spirit of rebellion, a lust for domination, and other such things: these are the sorts of things that are rightly condemned in war.”

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine says in *Contra Manicheos 2*, “He who ‘takes up the sword’ is the one who arms himself to spill someone’s blood without any higher or legitimate authority either ordering him to do it or permitting him to do it.” By contrast, when someone who uses the sword (a) on the authority of a ruler or judge (in the case of a private person) or (b) out of a zeal for justice and, as it were, by God’s authority (in the case of a public person), he is not ‘taking up’ the sword himself but is using the sword that has been commissioned to him by someone else. Hence, he ought not to be punished.

Still, it is not the case that even those who use the sword with sin are always *killed by the sword*. However, they do always *perish by their very sword*, since, unless they repent, they are punished eternally for the sin of the sword.

Reply to objection 2: As Augustine says in *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, the precepts are always to be preserved in preparing one’s mind, so that, namely, a man is always prepared not to resist or not to defend himself, if this is required. But he must sometimes act otherwise for the sake of the common good and even for the sake of the good of those with whom he is fighting. Hence, in *Epistola ad Marcellinum* Augustine says, “Many things have to be done against the will of those whom we have to punish with a certain benign harshness. For one from whom the license of wickedness is snatched away is being conquered to his own advantage, since nothing is more unhappy than the ‘happiness’ of sinners, which nourishes a punishable impunity and strengthens a bad will like an internal enemy.”

Reply to objection 3: Those who wage just wars intend peace. And so those wars are opposed only to the sort of bad peace that, as Matthew 10:34 points out, our Lord did not come to bring into the world. Hence, in *Ad Bonifacium* Augustine says, “It is not the case that peace is sought in order that war might be waged; rather, war is waged in order that peace might be acquired. Therefore, be peaceful when engaging in war, in order that, by subduing those whom you are fighting against, you might lead them to the benefits of peace.”

Reply to objection 4: Not all training exercises for war that men engage in are prohibited, but just those exercises that are disordered and dangerous and result in killing and plundering. Now as is clear from Jerome in one of his letters, among the ancients there were training exercises for war without dangers of the sort in question, and so they were called ‘preparations for arms’ or ‘wars without blood’.

Article 2

Are clerics and bishops permitted to fight in a war?

It seems that clerics and bishops are permitted to fight in a war (*clericis et episcopis liceat pugnare*):

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), wars are just and permitted to the extent that they safeguard the poor and the whole republic from being injured by enemies. But this seems to pertain to

prelates most of all; for in one of his homilies Gregory says, “The wolf comes upon the sheep when any unjust and rapacious man oppresses any of the faithful and the humble. But he who was thought to be a shepherd, and was not, leaves the sheep and flees, because when he fears danger for himself from the wolf, he does not undertake to resist its injustice.” Therefore, it is permissible for prelates and clerics to fight.

Objection 2: In *Decreta* 23, q. 8 Pope Leo writes, “When adverse news was coming more and more frequently from the side of the Saracens, some said that the Saracens would come to the port of Rome secretly and covertly. For this reason, we ordered our people to congregate and told them to go down to the seashore.” Therefore, it is permissible for bishops to go into war.

Objection 3: It seems that a man’s doing something is the same in nature as his consenting to someone else’s doing it—this according to Romans 1:32 (“Not only are those who do these things worthy of death, but also those who consent to their doing them”). And someone who induces others to do something consents most of all. But it is permissible for bishops and clerics to induce others to engage in war; for *Decreta* 23, q. 8 says, “At the urging and supplication of Adrian, the bishop of Rome, Charles went to war against the Lombards.” Therefore, it is likewise permissible for them to fight.

Objection 4: What is upright and meritorious in its own right is permissible for prelates and clerics. But to engage in war is sometimes both upright and meritorious; for *Decreta* 23, q. 8 says, “If a man has died for the truth of the Faith, or to save his country, or in the defense of Christians, He will receive from God a heavenly reward.” Therefore, it is permissible for bishops and clerics to engage in war.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 26:52 Peter, who is standing in for bishops and clerics, is told, “Put your sword back into its sheath.” Therefore, they are not permitted to fight.

I respond: Many things are necessary for the good of a human society. Now as is clear from the Philosopher in his *Politics*, diverse roles are better and more expeditiously played by diverse individuals rather than by one individual. And certain roles are in such tension (*sunt adeo sibi repugnantia*) with one another that they cannot be appropriately played simultaneously. And so lesser things are forbidden to those who are entrusted with greater things; for instance, according to human laws, soldiers, who are entrusted with the exercise of war, are forbidden to engage in commerce.

Now the exercise of war is especially in tension with the roles that are assigned to bishops and clerics, and this for two reasons.

The first, and more *general*, reason is that the exercise of war is accompanied by a very high degree of disquiet, and so it greatly impedes the mind from contemplating divine things and praising God and praying for the people, all of which belong to the role of a cleric. And so just as commerce is forbidden to clerics because it ties one’s mind up too much, so too is the exercise of war—this according to 2 Timothy 2:4 (“No man who is fighting for God ties himself up in secular matters”).

Second, this is so for a *special* reason. For all the orders of clerics are ordered toward the ministry of the altar, in which Christ’s passion is represented under the sacrament—this according to 1 Corinthians 11:26 (“As often as you eat this Bread and drink this Cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until He comes”). And so it does not befit clerics to kill or to spill blood; instead, it befits them to be prepared for the pouring out of their own blood for the sake of Christ, in order that they might imitate in deed what they do by their ministry. And for this reason it has been decreed that those who spill blood, even without sin, are irregular. But no one who is assigned an office is permitted to do what renders him unfit for his office. Hence, clerics are not at all permitted to engage in war, which is ordered toward the spilling of blood.

Reply to objection 1: Prelates must resist not only the wolves who kill their flock spiritually, but also pillagers and tyrants who harm them corporeally. However, they do this by using spiritual weapons and not by using material weapons in their own person—this according to the Apostle in 2 Corinthians 10:4 (“The weapons of our warfare are not bodily, but spiritual”). The spiritual weapons in question are,

for instance, beneficial admonitions, devout prayers, and the sentence of excommunication against those who are obstinate.

Reply to objection 2: Prelates, along with clerics by the authority of their superior, are able to be involved in wars—not that they might fight with their own hands, but in order that they might, by their exhortations, absolutions, and other types of spiritual help, give spiritual assistance to those fighting a just war (*iuste pugnantis*)—just as in the Old Law it was mandated that the priests should sound the sacred trumpets in battle (Numbers 10:9). It was for this reason that bishops or clerics were first permitted to proceed into battle. However, it is an abuse of this permission for any of them to fight with his own hands.

Reply to objection 3: As was established above (q. 23, a. 4), every power or skill or virtue to which the end pertains has to dispose the means to that end. But within a faithful people, carnal wars must be referred to the divine spiritual good as an end, and clerics are assigned to the divine spiritual good. And so it belongs to the clerics to dispose and induce others to fight just wars. For they are prohibited from engaging in war not because it is a sin to engage in war, but because such an exercise on their part does not befit their public persona (*personae non congruit*).

Reply to objection 4: Even though it is meritorious to take part in a just war, it is nonetheless rendered impermissible for clerics because they are assigned to more meritorious works. In the same way, the marriage act is able to be meritorious, and yet it is rendered damnable for those who have vowed virginity, and this because of their obligation to a greater good.

Article 3

Is it permissible to use insidious tactics in war?

It seems that it is not permissible to use insidious tactics (*uti insidiis*) in war:

Objection 1: Deuteronomy 16:20 says, “You shall pursue justly that which is just.” But since insidious tactics are a kind of fraud, it seems that they are unjust. Therefore, insidious tactics should not be used even in a just war.

Objection 2: Insidious tactics and fraud seem to be opposed to trustworthiness (*fidelitas*), in the same way that lying (*mendacia*) is. But as is clear from Augustine in *Contra Mendacium*, since we ought to keep faith with everyone, we should not lie to any man. Therefore, since, as Augustine says in *Ad Bonifacium*, “faith is to be kept with one’s enemy,” it seems that one should not use insidious tactics against one’s enemies.

Objection 3: Matthew 7:12 says, “Do unto men what you want them to do unto you,” and this is to be observed with respect to all our neighbors. But our enemies are our neighbors. Therefore, since no one wants insidious tactics or frauds to be prepared against themselves, it seems that no one ought to engage in war with insidious tactics.

But contrary to this: In *Quaestiones in Heptateuch* Augustine says, “When a just war is undertaken, it does not matter at all to justice whether one fights openly or with insidious tactics.” And he proves this by the authority of the Lord, who commanded Joshua to set up an ambush against the inhabitants of the city Ai (Joshua 8:2).

I respond: Insidious tactics are ordered toward deceiving one’s enemies. Now there are two ways in which one can be deceived by another’s word or deed.

In one way, because he is told something false or because a promise is not kept. This is always impermissible, and no one should deceive his enemies in this way. For as Ambrose explains in *De Officio*, there are certain “rights of war,” and pacts are to be honored even among enemies themselves.

In the second way, someone can be deceived by our word or deed because we do not reveal to him

our purpose or meaning. We are not always obligated to do this, since even in sacred doctrine many things are to be hidden, especially from non-believers, lest they ridicule them—this according to Matthew 7:6 (“Do not give what is holy to the dogs”). Hence, *a fortiori*, what we prepare in order to engage our enemies should be hidden from them. Hence, among other military documents, this is said especially with respect to plans that must be kept secret, so that they do not fall into the hands of our enemies—as is clear from Frontinus’ *Book of Strategies*. And this sort of secretiveness belongs to the nature of the insidious tactics which it is permissible to use in just wars.

Insidious tactics of this sort are not properly called fraudulent; nor are they incompatible with justice or with a well-ordered will. For one’s will would be disordered if he wanted nothing to be hidden from him by others.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: From this the replies to the objections are clear.

Article 4

Is it permissible to engage in war on feast days?

It seems that it is impermissible to engage in war on feast days:

Objection 1: Feast days are ordered toward making leisure for divine things, and hence they are implicit (*intelliguntur*) in the observance of the Sabbath that is commanded in Exodus 20:8; for ‘Sabbath’ means ‘rest’. But war involves very great disquietude. Therefore, one should not in any way fight on feast days.

Objection 2: In Isaiah 58:3-4 certain individuals are criticized because on the days of fast “they exact what is owed to them and start quarrels, striking with their fist.” Therefore, *a fortiori*, it is impermissible to engage in war on feast days.

Objection 3: Nothing is to be done in a disordered way in order to avoid temporal disadvantage. But to engage in war on a feast day seems to be disordered in its own right. Therefore, one ought not to engage in war on a feast day out of a need to avoid temporal disadvantage.

But contrary to this: 1 Maccabees 2:41 says, “The Jews thought things through in a praiseworthy way, saying, ‘Let us fight against any man whatsoever who comes against us on the day of the Sabbath.’”

I respond: The observance of feast days does not interfere with what is ordered toward man’s well-being, even his corporeal well-being. This is what our Lord argued about with the Jews, saying in John 7:23, “Are you indignant at me because I have made a man whole on the Sabbath?” And this is why physicians can licitly heal men on a feast day. But more than the health of a single individual, one must preserve the well-being of the republic, which prevents the killing of many along with innumerable evils, both temporal and spiritual.

And so for the safety of the faithful of the republic it is permissible to wage just wars on feast days, as long as necessity demands this; for it would be tempting God if someone, with such necessity present, willed to abstain from war. However, once the necessity passes, then it is not permitted to engage in war on feast days, and this for the reasons adduced in the objections.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: From this the replies to the objections are clear.