

Article

The Concepts of War and Peace in Christian Philosophy

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Abstract

This article examines the concepts of war and peace through the lens of Christian philosophy, integrating anthropological, ethical, and socio-political perspectives. It argues that while conflict is rooted in human biology and social organization, war is not a biological necessity but a culturally constructed phenomenon shaped by ideology, power structures, and moral judgment. Drawing on insights from ethology, political theory, and Christian moral theology, the study analyzes the causes of war in modern mass societies, including nationalism, global capitalism, media influence, and environmental degradation. Central attention is given to the Christian tradition's balanced approach to war and peace, particularly its articulation of just war theory as a middle path between pacifism and militarism. The article contends that war is inherently irrational, though occasionally morally permissible as a penultimate resort aimed at restoring just peace. Ultimately, it presents Christian ethical messianism as a coherent normative framework for evaluating armed conflict, assigning responsibility, and fostering a durable peace grounded in human dignity, justice, and the moral order.

Keywords: war and peace; Christian philosophy; just war theory; moral theology; anthropology of war; conflict ethics; nationalism; global capitalism; media and war; human dignity

1. Introduction

“Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And after this, Ahab said to Naboth, ‘Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.’ But Naboth said to Ahab, ‘The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.’ . . . And Jezebel his wife said to him, ‘Do you now govern Israel? . . . I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.’ (. . . Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.” (1 Kings 21:1–16)¹

Throughout history, humanity has been both accompanied and haunted by war. It appears almost as an immutable law that “peace breeds prosperity, prosperity breeds pride, pride breeds war, war breeds misery, misery breeds humility, and humility breeds peace—and then, da capo.” The problem of war raises primarily moral questions in philosophy, as every state feels compelled to justify its participation in war. Consequently, each party shifts responsibility onto the other, portraying the war as something forced upon it, and seeking moral justification through claims such as the violation of neutrality, the defense of culture against barbarism, the punishment of regicide, or fidelity to an alliance (Jehlicska 1916; Kornis 1916, p. 102; Bergman 2018, p. 10; Reyna and Downs 1999, pp. 1–3; Bieler and Morton 2018, p. 32; Walzer 2002, pp. 925–26; Hammond 2007, pp. 2–4). The moral



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assessment of war is a question of value *a quaestio iuri* which history can never transform into a *quaestio facti* (Kornis 1916, p. 105; Prusak 2018, pp. 1–2; McKenna 1960; Walzer 2002, p. 925; Stahn 2007, p. 921; Allhoff et al. 2013, p. 2; Braun 2018, pp. 1–3). The evaluation of values, therefore, signifies not only the study of the philosophy of war but also, in a certain sense, a war of philosophies—that is, of worldviews and religions—and, in its wake, a clash of civilizations and cultures as well (Huntington 1996, p. 21; Münkler 2003, pp. 5–7; Hammond 2007, pp. 2–4; McDonald 2009, p. 22; Reyna and Downs 1999, pp. 1–3; Antony and Mathew 2025, pp. 36–38). Against this background, the present study adopts a normative-philosophical approach to demonstrate that a sustainable peace requires more than political pragmatism. Drawing on the tradition of Christian realism and the necessity of “moral clarity” in the face of aggression (Novak 1983), this article argues that the restoration of the moral order is the only viable path to peace. To this end, the study proposes the framework of *Christian Ethical Messianism* as a *tertium datur* (third way) between the extremes of secular political messianism and utopian pacifism (Klein 2018).

2. Methodological and Theoretical Framework

Given the complexity of war, this research adopts a transdisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from philosophical anthropology, political science, and Christian moral theology. While drawing on insights from ethology and sociology regarding human aggression and social conflict, the study primarily presents a normative-philosophical analysis rather than an empirical investigation. It falls under the category of basic research, as its primary objective is the theoretical re-evaluation of fundamental concepts—specifically, the criteria of “just war”—rather than the analysis of specific operational security measures.

The methodology employs a synthetic approach to interpreting primary and secondary sources. It contrasts classical Christian Natural Law traditions (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas) with modern anthropological findings (e.g., biological determinism vs. cultural learning) and contemporary political theories. Through this hermeneutical process, the study seeks to construct a coherent Christian ethical messianism that serves as a middle path between absolute pacifism and political militarism. Instead of collecting quantitative data, the research applies a qualitative conceptual analysis to determine the ontological status of war (as irrational) and its moral permissibility (as a penultimate resort).

A specific methodological criterion for this inquiry is the avoidance of two reductionist extremes. First, it avoids purely spiritualizing the concept of peace, which would detach Christian philosophy from the harsh realities of political existence (pacifism). Second, it rejects the secular realpolitik approach that views war merely through the lens of effectiveness and power dynamics, stripping it of its transcendent moral limitations (political messianism). The goal is to demonstrate that Christian ethical principles can act as an objective, normative guide for shaping real-world political decisions.

Finally, regarding the limitations of the study, it is acknowledged that warfare is continually evolving (e.g., hybrid warfare, cyber conflicts, economic sanctions). While the study references these modern phenomena to illustrate the “structural pathologies” of mass societies, it does not aim to provide an exhaustive catalogue of all contemporary security threats. Instead, it focuses on the immutable moral principles that remain valid regardless of the changing technological character of warfare. The aim is to provide a stable normative framework that future empirical research can apply to these fluctuating circumstances.

To achieve this, the article addresses the following central research problem: How can the classical Christian just war tradition be reinterpreted to provide a viable normative alternative to both secular realpolitik and absolute pacifism in the context of modern mass societies? In answering this, the specific scientific contribution of the study is the synthesis

of anthropological analysis with moral theology to formulate the framework of “Christian Ethical Messianism” as a *tertium datur*.

3. Anthropological Considerations

War may be conceptualized as aggressively motivated behavior that is systematically planned and executed (Clausewitz [1832] 1976, p. 75; Reyna and Downs 1999, pp. 3–4; Csányi 1993, p. 751; Walzer 2002, p. 925; Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education 2025, § 54–55). While man enters the world as a biologically helpless and unarmed being—dependent for a prolonged period on the protection of his community—he nevertheless arms himself by virtue of his rational capacity. He does so to defend both himself and his community, thereby securing the conditions necessary for a life of dignity. One instrument of this is the fabrication of tools (including the manufacture of weapons) (Ramsey 2016); the second is aggression, and the third is loyalty to one’s community (Sölle 1984, pp. 494–502; Sekulic 2013). It appears that the primordial phenomenon of man encompasses the dynamic illuminated by the question: “Who is stronger?” In its wake follow the measurement of forces and the displacement of the Other, extending even to its destruction (Weber 1999; Bargheer 2017; Ferguson 1990, p. 28; Reyna and Downs 1999, pp. 3–5; Mesnard y Méndez 2002, p. 65). Yet, is aggression intrinsically evil in itself? Ethologists contend that within the animal kingdom, aggression serves a crucial function in the survival of the group or population, specifically by facilitating the optimal distribution of resources within the group (Haller et al. 1996, p. 441; Csányi 1996; Reyna and Downs 1999, pp. 3–4). In humans, intra-group aggression is remarkably low, particularly when contrasted with the intensity of intergroup aggression (Ferguson 1990, pp. 26–27; Snyder 2002, pp. 7–9; Fry 2013, pp. 1–4). However, in the case of humans, a far more complex form of aggression has emerged at the group level, manifested through diverse tools and modalities: cultural aggression (Tinbergen 1968, pp. 1411–13). This phenomenon is only tangentially related to biological aggression, as culture possesses the capacity to fundamentally reshape even our innate biological impulses (Boehm 2013, pp. 315–17; Hammond 2007, pp. 2–4). Consequently, human aggression exhibits a remarkable versatility. Under the influence of specific cultural imperatives and through social learning, biological aggression can be either suppressed to a minimal level or, conversely, elevated to an extreme intensity (Csányi 1993, pp. 750–51; Boehm 2013, pp. 315–17; Tinbergen 1968, pp. 1411–13; Dombrowski 1996, pp. 1–5).

Therefore, nature does not justify war; in other words, there is no direct “killer instinct” inherent in human beings (Csányi 1993, pp. 750–51; Snyder 2002, pp. 12–15; Gronemeyer 1984; Malinowski 1941, pp. 522–24). Aggression, however, is not only subject to reduction; it can also be significantly intensified through learning and social conditioning (Csányi 1993, p. 751; Malinowski 1941, p. 524; Gellner 1992; Verbeek 2008, p. 1511). In this context, socialization implies that the individual learns to manage his or her inherent impulses of aggression appropriately and to regulate them through social mechanisms (Malinowski 1941, pp. 522–23; Zuo and Xi 2007, pp. 281–83; Verbeek 2008, p. 1511; Hoagland 1967, p. 55). It must not be overlooked that pain and injury, if not addressed promptly, likewise can transform into aggression (Ferguson 1990, pp. 27–28; Malinowski 1941, p. 522; Reiner 2018, p. 25; Hoagland 1967, pp. 47–48). Human biology, therefore, encompasses the potential for conflict, directed toward both escalation and peaceful, consensual resolution. Yet, humans are not inherently predatory; there is no so-called ‘killer instinct’ within us (Dombrowski 1996, pp. 1–2). Killing is the absolute last resort of self-defense, whereas the conditioning and readiness for homicide are products of “cultural aggression.” This is, therefore, an acquired trait for which destructive ideologies and methods—as well as the individuals who devise and enforce them—bear primary responsibility. Furthermore, it is

equally inherent in human biology to be prepared to make the greatest sacrifices, including self-sacrifice, for one's group; this very readiness is a significant driver of war. For it is a profound thing for an individual to have something or someone worth living for, but it is even more significant to have a purpose for which one deems it worthy—should the hour come—to die (Bakhtadze and Gegenava 2025, p. 12).

4. Causes of Wartime Tensions

Three specific power factors bear primary responsibility for the escalation of social and international conflicts: excessive nationalism, industrial and commercial capitalism, and the media, which serves as the vanguard of the financial world. Nationalism is responsible because it prioritizes the demands of the nation and nationality over the rights of humanity, and the interests of the state (Barash 2013, p. 175) over the laws of God. Capitalism is a cause because the drive for acquisition, greed, and competition—the impulse of the strong to exploit and oppress the weak—has historically been the factor that turns humans against their fellow beings (McMahan 2005, pp. 1–3; Ferguson 1990, p. 28; Wells 1969, pp. 823–25). While authors like Michael Novak argue that democratic capitalism is morally justified because it liberates human creativity—the “primary resource” of nations—and serves the common good through a “spirit of enterprise” (Novak 1982, 1993), Christian philosophy warns that without strict moral regulation, the logic of profit maximization tends to commodify human relationships. As Novak himself points out, the “creative subjectivity” of the human person must be at the center of the economy; otherwise, the system becomes oppressive. Consequently, industrial and commercial capitalism can become a cause of war, because the drive for acquisition, greed, and competition—the impulse of the strong to exploit and oppress the weak—has historically been the factor that turns humans against their fellow beings (McMahan 2005, pp. 1–3; Ferguson 1990, p. 28; Wells 1969, pp. 823–25). Furthermore, in its modern structure, large-scale capital is reliant on the integration of foreign markets, and the capital has always maintained an eminent interest in the military rearmament of states. Finally, the press, unable to sustain itself through its own resources, serves those who finance it: governments, political parties, and industrial interests. In its service, it can reshape public opinion in entire countries within the shortest possible time. In the wake of these factors, we may speak of colonial, imperialist, and nationalist wars (Häring 1979–1981, pp. 595–99; Ferguson 1990, pp. 28–30; McMahan 2005, pp. 10–12).

It is worth noting that these primary traits essentially govern nationalism, capitalism, and the media alike. Indeed, the structural links between global capitalism and conflict are well documented (Bieler and Morton 2018, p. 2). These culpable inclinations are what ignite wars: the military is primarily prone to ferocity, the wealthy to avarice (Mesnard y Méndez 2002, p. 66), and politicians, above all, to vaulting ambition (Tirimanna 1992, pp. 239–41; Wells 1969, p. 823; Hoskins and O'Loughlin 2010). Pope Pius XI shed light on further causes of war remarkably aptly, asserting that the ultimate cause of wartime carnage lies in the contempt for the authority of the Supreme Authority—that is, the severance from God (manifested in the state, the family, and the school having turned away from the Divine) (Pius XI 1922). Humanity often fails to learn from its own history; its actions frequently reflect the instinctive aggression of fallen nature rather than the image of God, revealing a deep-seated inclination toward conflict (Wells 1969, p. 819; Tirimanna 1992, p. 236; O'Donovan 2003, pp. 11–13). In contrast, Christian peace efforts operate dually: on one hand, they attune people to a love for peace (Ujházi 2025, pp. 927–29); on the other, they strive to harmonize the peace initiatives of individuals and nations through political means, thereby breaking the dominance of the press, excessive nationalism, and capital (Hehir 1990). We are reminded that civilization and culture are themselves forms of competition and conquest—a triumph over nature or other civilizations and cultures. Consequently, diverse

national civilizations and cultures harbor differing, and often antagonistic, worldviews and religious positions, which can easily become fuel for war by fostering an ‘us versus them’ mentality (Barash 2013, p. 175). Religious conviction itself is also highly susceptible to manipulation, as early social imprinting can lead to fanatical loyalties and uncritical obedience to authority (O’Donovan 2003, pp. 6–11; Malinowski 1941, p. 522; Gronemeyer 1984, pp. 519–20; Hoagland 1967, p. 55).

The Complex Nature of Contemporary Security and the Catholic Response

The contemporary strategic landscape is defined by a complex interplay of domestic and international factors, where threats are dynamic and often stem from non-military sources (Yarger 2006, pp. 17–18; Doyle 2007, p. 624). As Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde demonstrate, the concept of security has expanded considerably, moving beyond traditional state-centric military concerns to encompass multiple interconnected sectors: military, political, economic, societal, and environmental (Buzan et al. 1998, pp. 7–8; Yarger 2006, pp. 17–18). Furthermore, unlike classical warfare, where the aggressor is usually a visible, defined state actor, modern security challenges often lack a clear, singular perpetrator. This contrasts sharply with the historical paradigm of armed conflict. As comprehensive analyses of classical warfare demonstrate, traditional conflict was characterized by organized engagements between defined political entities—such as the Greek poleis—where the adversary was visible, and war was a distinct, public act of the state (Campbell and Tritle 2013, pp. 1–5). In that context, the aggressor was a recognizable strategic actor. However, in the modern strategic environment, this clarity has dissipated. The shift from state-centric warfare to diffuse security threats fundamentally alters the decision-making landscape (Geva and Mintz 1997, pp. 1–4; Bieler and Morton 2018, p. 255). Moreover, the analysis must not overlook the personal dimension of security. Anthropological analyses suggest that in this pressured context, the human personality has increasingly exhibited even pathological characteristics at a mass scale (Barnett 1977, p. 261). Consequently, world political leaders, economic actors, and military personnel are not immune to these anthropological distortions. As Geva and Mintz argue, high-stakes decision-making under conditions of ambiguity imposes a cognitive burden that can override rational calculation (Mintz 1997, p. 3). As a result, factors such as systemic negligence, avarice, cynicism, or outright malevolence threaten to escalate the aforementioned risks to unmanageable levels. Indeed, future conflicts may rest on these psychological vulnerabilities (Reger et al. 2008, pp. 22–26).

In light of these deep anthropological and security crises, the Catholic response articulates a framework on two simultaneous levels: the pastoral-ecclesial and the institutional-magisterial. The primary defense against the manipulation is the restoration of an authentic ecclesial community. Consequently, pastoral theology must be understood as the scientific reflection on the Church’s redemptive activity within a specific socio-cultural context. This requires an inductive methodology that reads the signs of the times (Przygoda 2013, p. 48). Specifically, in the face of modern atomization, the task of pastoral care is to counter the massification of society. The moral life is not merely about adherence to laws but about the cultivation of virtues that enable the proper functioning of human faculties (Mattison 2008, pp. 57–60). In the context of modern war, the virtue of prudence becomes critical. This is prudence that enables the decision-maker to know the truth of the complex security environment, cutting through the obscurity of responsibility and media manipulation. Without this virtue, the Just War criteria—such as proportionality and last resort—cannot be applied effectively, as the leader lacks the cognitive and moral clarity to discern reality. Moreover, Teofil Tia emphasizes, the Church must focus on strengthening local communities. It is within these networks of solidarity that the individual recovers the moral and communal identity necessary to dehumanizing pressures of the global security environment (Tia 2010, p. 63).

Complementing this communal restoration, the Magisterium provides a systemic response to security, which must be developed in two distinct areas. First is the General Moral Theology. On the fundamental level, the fragmentation of the modern subject calls for a return to a unified vision of morality (Porter 1993, pp. 27–28). The second is the specific security engagement. The general foundation must then be applied to specific contemporary challenges. As James F. Keenan highlights, this requires a dynamic engagement with culture, and the Church must exercise a prophetic voice to critique the structural causes of war (Keenan 2006, p. 148). The Magisterium has consistently emphasized that peace is not merely the absence of war but requires a holistic approach to human development (Chu 2012). Papal teaching has consistently connected security to broader issues such as migration and environmental stewardship, framing them as moral imperatives for all believers (Christiansen 2006; Francis 2015, 2018; Benedict XVI 2009). Building on this tradition, Pope Leo XIV provides a significant framework for the technological age with his concept of human digitalization. Recognizing that technological progress is intrinsically linked to the spiritual, social, and environmental dimensions of existence, he argues for the harmonization of five distinct intelligences: technical, emotional, social, spiritual, and ecological (Leo XIV 2025, n. 3). The restoration of the integral human good cannot remain an abstract ideal; it must be operationalized according to the particular dynamics of each security challenge such as fields of migration, food security; threat of nuclear proliferation; the ethical paradoxes of remote warfare (drones); and the structural violence of environmental degradation. The theological and pastoral framework serves as the necessary foundation for addressing the most pressing contemporary issues. It demonstrates that the Church's moral principles are not abstract ideals, but the essential bedrock of authentic security in a constantly evolving strategic landscape.

5. The Concept of War and Peace: The Balance of Christian Philosophy

The task of philosophy consists, on the one hand, in studying a phenomenon to formulate its essence, ultimate causes, value, and purpose, and to provide the means and modes leading to that purpose. In the context of war, this requires distinguishing its permanent “nature”—violence and political instrumentality—from its ever-changing “character” or modes of conduct (Gray 2007, p. 38). On the other hand, it examines previous philosophical reflections on the given phenomenon, critically reviewing them to assess their validity and identify their shortcomings, thereby refining and nuancing our understanding of the problem. Through this, it offers a more accurate representation of individual and social consciousness, potentially enabling a truer human relationship to the matter at hand. Philosophy, therefore, brings to consciousness the human stance regarding the given phenomenon, including worldview and religious conviction; pointing out that man is a being inevitably predestined to take a worldview stance, and that his entire personality (hunches, conclusions, fears, prejudices, desires, sympathies, and antipathies) is involved in such a stance (Hoagland 1967, p. 47). Every philosophy possesses its own idea and ideal of truth, which partly excludes and partly encompasses other perspectives. This is why the philosophy of war can become the war of philosophies. However, this fact and its recognition do not fuel the mill of extreme and fatal relativism; rather, it should lead the contemplating man to suspect that our vision is perspectival, that we have not yet finished revealing the full truth, but that we can only move toward it if we assume that truth has only one order in both nature and ethics. More specifically, regarding the question of war and peace, the task of philosophy is to justify the rationality or irrationality of a war or peace; that is, to form a moral judgment—whether regarding the past, the present, or the future—concerning a concluded, ongoing, or planned war. By doing so, it effectively overrides the final word of the victors; through this judgment, it encourages or disapproves of certain

war efforts and contributes to the maturation of human experience and tradition regarding wars by countering historical amnesia (Gray 2007, p. 36). Consequently, it functions as a form of political wisdom: inquiring how military conflicts might be avoided, whether waging war is justified, or whether concluding peace would be the preferable course. In this exploratory and evaluative activity, the philosopher—and indeed every politician or citizen—is guided by a certain *optio fundamentalis philosophica*, that is, by their deepest, often unconscious and subliminal intuition or stance regarding the matters of war and peace. This *optio fundamentalis* also guides the non-philosophical student of war, the historian chronicling wars (Jordan et al. 2016, p. 2), the strategic planner of technical operations, as well as researchers investigating the psychology, anthropology, sociology, ideological, and economic preconditions of war, or the causes of militarization (Kissel and Kim 2019, p. 141).

Man is inherently a martial being, yet not necessarily a belligerent one (Fry 2013, p. 2). First, he must secure the conditions of his existence (the archaic figure of the peasant); second, he must defend the civilization and culture he has created (the archaic figure of the soldier); and third, he must place his life—which remains endangered despite these efforts—and the community that fosters his flourishing under the protection of the divine (the archaic figure of the priest). Consequently, man is obliged to cultivate and humanize his inner forces, rendering the evil that awakens within him harmless. This constitutes his necessary martial duty—the true *jihad*—wherein he battles his own demons, prejudices, and delusions. The essence of war and peace differs fundamentally depending on whether war can be objectively justified. If morally justifiable (rational), it represents legitimate self-defense and the restoration of genuine peace through the just punishment of the enemy. If morally unjustifiable (irrational), the essence of war becomes predation, that is, the violent and unjust redistribution of power and resources. This signifies eternal discord within the given society, where it is merely a matter of time before weapons clash again. The decision of the individual initiating such a war can be modeled as the “calculating self” subjugating the “social and axial self.” Thus, war constitutes a grave and enduringly unjust violation of natural law—as understood and expounded in Christian philosophy—against a people capable of self-legislation, viewed as a moral persona. Therefore, war is inherently irrational, even if occasionally permissible. Consequently, its possibility is not the *ultima ratio* (last resort), but the *paenultima ratio*. Fundamentally, conflicts must be resolved through peaceful means, via constructive dialogue (Bieler and Morton 2018, pp. 1–3; Aloyo 2015).

Given its inherent irrationality, war cannot be regarded as “creative destruction,” even if it admittedly eradicates substantial evils and facilitates the emergence of more just social structures and power groups (Bieler and Morton 2018, pp. 32–35, 82–85; Mesnard y Méndez 2002, p. 65). The etiology of war may be traced to any object of covetousness (the desire for possession, envy) that embodies the spirit of competition—that is, the potential for conflict (psychologically, the adversary, the enemy, already exists). More precisely, this is a competition waged with an unrestrained or excessive, indeed falsified, measure. Any good covetable from the Other (whether an individual, a group, a people, or a state)—be it material or spiritual goods, or attributes signifying the worth of the person—becomes a source of hatred toward that Other, toward that group or people, precisely because it is not mine, yet I desire to acquire it at any cost. Behind this hatred, as the ultimate cause, lies fear: the fear of the encounter with the self and with the Other. It is a fear that awakens me to my own malevolence; reveals that I shall become unjust if I acquire the coveted object through guile or force; and warns that I must be the first to change, to preserve—or indeed to achieve—my own humanity. Paradoxically, this underlies the ruthlessness of the soldier, the rapacity of the financial world, and the arrogance of political power alike (t’Hart 2000, pp. 209–12; Mesnard y Méndez 2002, pp. 65–68; Bieler and Morton 2018, p. 160; Leveringhaus 2013, p. 22).

Today, wars are no longer fought merely by states, but rather by the economic, political, and military forces lurking latently behind them (Bieler and Morton 2018, pp. 1–3; Reyna and Downs 1999, pp. 1–5; t’Hart 2000, p. 209; Herța 2013, pp. 5–8). This obscures clarity and complicates the formation of a correct judgment regarding the just nature of the war. Consequently, a war is no longer rendered just solely because it was initiated and waged by a competent state authority; rather, the just cause becomes the decisive factor. This implies that, in certain instances, the state can no longer be regarded as an absolute point of reference. That is, if constituent parts perceive that the state power fails to adequately validate their legitimate interests (violating them gravely and persistently), and if they receive no remedy for their grievances through negotiation, they may form an autonomous state entity. Therefore, as a last resort, they may justifiably wage war (initially via media and economic means, and ultimately, actual combat) (McDonald 2009, pp. 1–5).

The outcome of war—depending on whether it was morally permissible or prohibited—is either a state of grave injustice, which deforms the personality and mocks human dignity in both the victor and the vanquished, or peace, which establishes just relations. It must be noted here that reparation—that is, the punishment of the guilty as a *conditio sine qua non* of peace—is a highly complex issue with no pristine solution. Responsibility is evidently shared. The soldier fighting under orders is not primarily responsible; rather, the burden lies with the ruler, the power elite, or the commanders who have become blinded. Therefore, this demands unprecedented wisdom in both the relevant legislation and its execution (Stahn 2007, pp. 921–23; Orend 2007, p. 571; Bellamy 2008, p. 601). Justice and mercy must be applied in unison (*Nulla est caritas sine iustitia; Iustitia sine misericordia et aequitate, iniustitia est; Caritas in iustitia et iustitia in caritate*), which we must regard as the work of correctly understood and practiced neighborly love (Bellamy 2008, pp. 601–3; Orend 2007, pp. 571–75). Whether in the initiation of war or in the management of the post-conflict situation, we must also recognize that even the noblest ideas and religious truths, once they become so-called “historical ideas” (i.e., when they fall into the hands of the political sphere), undergo sorrowful transformations; they become unrecognizable, and great evils may adhere to them.

The objective of war: (A) If morally justifiable, it is the restoration of peace (*tranquillitas ordinis principaliter moralis*), since peaceful (just social) conditions enable freedom and flourishing for the citizens. In this respect, peace and the striving for peace signify an alignment with the order of creation, obedience to the Creator, and the occupation and fulfillment of the place designated for man by the Creator (as the crown and gardener of creation). Its ideal figure is the Saint, that is, the human being who has truly taken possession of his dignity. (B) If the war is not morally justifiable, its objective is the establishment and maintenance of an unjust social order, which necessarily distorts and overturns the order of creation. The aggressor is therefore a rebel, seeking to become the demiurge, the lord, or indeed the god of creation (Williams and Caldwell 2006, pp. 309–11; Walzer 2002, p. 925; Bieler and Morton 2018, pp. 1–3; Mesnard y Méndez 2002, p. 65).

Means and Modes of War and Peace. Factors leading to peace or war include: (1) The just or unjust regulation of competition. (2) Enlightenment (the condemnation of unjust war, the exposure of prejudices) versus the manipulation of the consciousness industry (the whipping up of cultural aggression). (3) Healthy socialization and education, which foster the development of personal maturity, versus the legalization of deviant behavior and the facilitation of “structures of sin.” (4) The consolidation of natural human communities (family, people, state) versus the dissolution of natural communities through the preferential treatment of artificial groups. (5) Disarmament versus the escalation of the arms race. (6) The application of moral or economic pressure versus the deployment of weapons. Contemporary warfare is conducted primarily through financial instruments, high-tech

intelligence acquisition, information manipulation, political parties, so-called NGOs, the establishment of dubious international organizations, and the capture of markets. The Value of War: Individual human beings and peoples (and their religions) are fundamentally pacific—that is, not inherently prone to gratuitous violence. If they become so, the political elite (acting under economic and/or military pressure) bears the primary responsibility (Mesnard y Méndez 2002, p. 65; Bieler and Morton 2018, pp. 32–35; Hammond 2007, pp. 2–4; McDonald 2009, p. 22; Reyna and Downs 1999, pp. 1–3).

An unjust war is always a serious moral failure against charity and justice; a significant ethical violation of human dignity, freedom, healthy social relations, peace, and the order of creation; and a profound moral transgression against God, the author of the moral order. It is a significant crisis in the life of humanity, or, in an analogous sense, a spiritual consequence (for nature itself essentially avenges the rebellion). In the final analysis, humanity's generations fundamentally divide into two camps regarding war and peace, identified by Christian philosophy as pagan and Christian worldviews (or religions). Both conceptions are messianic. As Massimo Faggioli argues, this tendency manifests today in a “technocratic paradigm,” in which the state or political power demands absolute loyalty, effectively displacing the Church's transcendent authority (Faggioli 2017). If this cannot be achieved peacefully, it must be enforced through violence. This view glorifies the imperial idea and the war that led to its realization. The man of this conception is not merely arbitrary but is driven by the drive for domination—ruthlessly subjugating the Other—sensual, rebellious, and hateful; his intelligence is essentially cunning, and his decisions—however rational they may appear—are aimed solely at power consolidation.” In contrast, the Christian conception embodies the idea of ethical messianism. Therefore, it is pro-peace (though not pacifist), seeking to explore and resolve conflicts through rational dialogue, value-driven guidance, and persuasion; yet, in cases of dire necessity, it applies armed force with determination and perseverance. It regards every human being as a brother; that is, it is guided by charity (Francis 2020; Ujházi 2020 pp. 784–85). Thus, in the realization of the human life-task, it is moved not by coercion but by striving for voluntary cooperation. It is consistently flexible in its approach to its ideals. Human action is regulated primarily by the moral order and the legal order that protects it. Therefore, its fundamental attitude is one of submission to Truth, but by no means subservience to Power. When necessary, it can be forceful, and it even employs prudence (astuteness) in the execution of its plans. It is guided not by the imperial idea of a privileged people or power elite (characterized by unhealthy uniformity), but by the idea of a great family of sovereign and mutually complementary nations (where healthy plurality prevails) (Allhoff et al. 2013, pp. 1–3; O'Donovan 2003, pp. 11–13; Bieler and Morton 2018, pp. 1–3; Walzer 2002, p. 925).

6. Normative Implications for Political Decision-Making

Christian philosophy serves not merely as a theoretical framework but also as a concrete imperative for political decision-makers. The legislator regards it as both a right and a duty for the lay faithful to “permeate... with the spirit of the Gospel” the affairs of the earthly city (CIC c. 225 § 2). Although the promotion of peace is the task of every baptized person, the Church's Magisterium distinguishes between the general apostolate and the specific responsibility of those exercising public authority (Navarro 2012; Ujházi 2024). Indeed, the ecclesiastical legislator reserves active participation in public authority and politics as the terrain of the lay faithful, rather than a task for clerics (CIC c. 287 § 2; c. 289 § 2).

While the lay faithful generally bear witness to the faith in their daily lives, the decisions of political leaders possess a systemic impact on peace and justice. This distinction is reinforced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's 2002 Doctrinal Note regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, which defines political engagement not as a

matter of power mechanics but as a moral obligation (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2002). This obligation carries particular weight in the face of totalitarian or oppressive regimes, where Christian political action serves as a witness to the Truth (Benda 1985) and a concrete program for social justice and the protection of the poor (Alonso 2011).

Recognizing the importance of the ethos of politics, Pope John Paul II proclaimed Saint Thomas More the Patron of Statesmen and Politicians, emphasizing that the Christian politician cannot compromise their conscience in exchange for power, as the silencing of conscience is the antechamber to totalitarianism (John Paul II 2000; Sarais 2012). Michael Novak reinforces this view, warning that contemporary democracy becomes “unsafe” and prone to a “totalitarian impulse” when it detaches itself from the biblical realization of truth that grounded its original founding (Novak 2000). The key to preventing modern conflicts lies in social justice and the practice of “strategic peacebuilding” (O’Brien 2023). Pope Leo XIV’s Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* notes that peace is unsustainable when the most vulnerable segments of society are subjected to systemic oppression (Leo XIV 2025). Therefore, the political decision-maker must place the interests of the poor and those affected by migration crises at the center of decision-making—not merely for charitable reasons, but to build the “structures of peace.” This approach is crucial in avoiding the logic of “Cain-like” fratricide in international politics (Micallef 2015).

However, political rationality alone is insufficient to preserve peace. Carl Schmitt warned early in the 20th century that modernity tends to degrade politics into mere economic and technical administration. In contrast, Catholic thought preserves a specific “political form” capable of representing transcendent authority against purely material interests (Schmitt 1996). Similarly, Massimo Faggioli argues that the Church must confront the “technocratic paradigm” of modern governance with a renewed concept of “Catholic citizenship,” which refuses to relegate faith to the private sphere (Faggioli 2017).

In his encyclical *Spes salvi*, Benedict XVI warned that purely technocratic or ideologically based politics—detached from transcendent truth—often become inhumane (Benedict XVI 2007; Mangan 2012). Marxist and Jacobin examples demonstrate that “reason without faith” easily leads to terror. The task of the Christian politician is to integrate the “reason of the heart” into governance: this signifies the courage to resolve conflicts not through superior force but through dialogue and mercy (Cahill 2010; Curran 2014).

In *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis 2013), Pope Francis made it clear that lay faithful—including Christian politicians—cannot be “isolated heralds” (Bosch 2012) nor can they be content with a mere theoretical knowledge of principles. The promotion of peace requires active engagement against armed aggression, particularly in crisis zones (Christiansen 2017). Post-synodal apostolic exhortations regarding Africa and the Middle East eminently highlight that politicians must actively promote reconciliation, and that passivity amounts to complicity in maintaining “structures of sin” (Ilo 2014).

In summary, the normative basis of Christian political decision-making is not pragmatism, but the unconditional respect for human dignity. This perspective enables politics to be not a preparation for war (*si vis pacem, para bellum*), but the building of a just peace (*opus iustitiae pax*).

7. Conclusions

Conflict is inherent in human biology, possessing the potential for both escalation and peaceful resolution. Throughout human history to date, the true realization of peace has not been achieved; yet Christian philosophy is melioristic, holding that if a thing is theoretically possible, it can eventually be realized. As this study has demonstrated through the framework of Christian Ethical Messianism, this realization requires not a utopian withdrawal but active engagement. This requires individuals of mature personality,

particularly those at the helm of activities and institutions that address major conflicts, as well as within the majority of societies. The human being transformed in Christ is capable of realizing this maturity. However, this maturity can only be attained with supernatural assistance. At the same time, the Christian person is ready—fighting for a just cause in a just manner—to sacrifice even their life, provided that their sacrifice results in a truer peace.

It is our moral duty to explore conflicts within our societies and among peoples, and to manage them in a humane manner, as well as to declare the just nature (ethically permissible) or unjust nature (ethically unjustifiable) of waged war, and thus to assign responsibility. In this sense, Christian realism offers a necessary third way between the extremes of secular political messianism, which absolutizes power, and absolute pacifism. Naturally, such a moral judgment may evolve over time as new evidence accumulates and the worldview that grounds it becomes more comprehensive. Ultimately, preventing war is one of humanity's central tasks today.

Lasting peace is founded on respect for human dignity, whether it pertains to the natural person or the moral personhood of nations. A fundamental condition of peace is that the earth's goods and resources remain, in essence, justly distributed, preventing the structural pathologies that lead to conflict.

The problem of war and peace can be solved, and human conflicts will not devolve into slaughter, only if we regard peace as the fundamental condition for individual and social development. Therefore, the preservation of peace is primarily a duty (thus, we must labor chiefly on its construction through the restoration of *tranquillitas ordinis*), whereas the waging of war is permissible, that is, lawful, only under certain conditions.

In final summation, it must be asserted that Christian thought is indeed capable of providing politics with fundamental principles and guiding ideas. Therefore, alongside its religious and moral character, it inevitably assumes a political stance and orientation. It highlights that the Christian politician is called to exercise a “reason of the heart,” implying that security cannot be achieved solely through technical means but requires the reintegration of transcendent moral principles into governance structures. Indeed, the Christian tradition encompasses political and social principles that have been developed and tested over two millennia, providing a normative framework that is adaptable in its details to varying circumstances. To this day, these principles remain the secure foundations for the lasting prosperity and, indeed, the survival of the state and society.

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Note

- ¹ The “vineyard” in the motto may, of course, represent anything that a human being might covet or desire to possess (wealth, power, culture, glory, pleasure, human attributes, etc.).

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