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## DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

*'We can argue constantly, but do we ever prove anything? There's arguments on both sides.'*

**Bishop John Glynn**  
Chancellor of the Archdiocese  
for the Military Services, U.S.A.



### Modern wars test permissible limits of church's teaching

Story by Lee Strong, Senior staff writer

More than 1,500 years ago, St. Augustine of Hippo attempted to place limits on war by enunciating the "just-war theory."

His theory stated that wars should be fought only at the command of legitimate authorities, for only just causes, and with the right intention of correcting or preventing a wrong — not simply to punish an enemy or to gain land or wealth.

It remains debatable whether the theory has succeeded in preventing or limiting warfare. But the theory has become so well known — at least in name — that almost every side in every conflict since St. Augustine's time has cited it in support of their respective causes.

Thus, when the Persian Gulf War began in 1991, then-President George Bush said the coalition powers attacking Iraq were waging a "just war." A number of U.S. Catholic bishops and theologians joined Bush in making that claim.

But some Iraqi bishops said the war was just from Iraq's point of view.

And some U.S. Catholic leaders — including Bishop Matthew H. Clark — raised doubts that the war was just from the allied perspective.

Indeed, the Vatican itself joined the chorus of voices questioning the justness of the war. As recently as Jan. 19, 1993, Vatican officials reiterated their opposition to the 1991 conflict and called for a halt to coalition forces' continuing bombing of Iraq, describing the bombing as "overreaction" to Iraqi actions.

On the other hand, the Vatican also recently suggested that limited military intervention in the region formerly known as Yugoslavia might be just. The Vatican made the suggestion in light of ongoing violence there and the failure thus far of peaceful means to quell fighting among the nations that emerged when Yugoslavia splintered.

Since the just-war theory consistently has been used by both sides of conflicts, an observer might begin to wonder whether the theory is an ideal for controlling war or simply a tool for justifying military action.

Indeed, one might ask if the theory retains any relevance at all in light of the contemporary world situation — with conflicts in such places as Somalia, Iraq and the for-

mer Yugoslavia.

"The just-war theory seemed to influence the U.S. government's thinking going into the (Persian Gulf) conflict," noted Bishop John Glynn, chancellor of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, U.S.A., in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

"The president (Bush and) newspaper writers pretty frequently invoked the theory because it was front and center in the gulf war."

Conversely, the head of the Catholic peace organization Pax Christi USA noted that the theory has been consistently misused.

"One of the things that Pax Christi has been saying is that the just-war theory has just been used to justify war," Sister Anne McCarthy, OSB, said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*. "I have never known of any time in history where church leadership has understood a war to be unjust. Every war has been declared a just war — at least by some segment of the church."

Part of the problem is that the world has changed since St. Augustine first developed the theory, noted Monsignor William H. Shannon, professor emeritus of theology at Rochester's Nazareth College.

"I don't think that today the condition of just war can be met," Mon-

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Illustration by Denise C. Lowery