

James Turner Johnson's Reading of Augustine's Just War Reflection and its Relevance to Just Peace Debate

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Abstract: This article examines Augustine's just war reflections and highlights its significance to contemporary discussions on war, violence, peace, and justice. To demonstrate this, the article first analyzes some of Augustine's insights on war, justice, and peace, and how some classical influences significantly contributed to his reflection on these subjects. Second, by examining James Turner Johnson's reception, interpretation, and expansion of the just war theory (JWT), especially in light of contemporary discussions, the article shows how this ancient thought remains ever new. While indicating the attendant ambiguity that surrounds the JWT, the article argues that the JWT still holds much relevance, especially when it is critically re-engaged in the light of the present day debate on nonviolence and just peace.

Keywords: Augustine • James Turner Johnson • Just War Theory • Justice • Peace

Introduction

One of the issues that has received and continues to receive attention today is the debate on the moral justification for war. Some of these discussions on the JWT seem to point to Augustine either implicitly or explicitly. As a result of some of his thoughts on war, there is sometimes the temptation of seeing him as an advocate of war. But critical attention to some of his texts and context would reveal otherwise – he was more a champion of peace¹ and an associative thinker who sought to make sense of the events of his time. That notwithstanding, scholars continue to interpret his

¹ Frederick Russell, "War," in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Michigan and Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 875-876, esp. 875.

thoughts on just war with different scholarly lenses – while some look at the historical context within which such an idea emanated, others deal with the moral or ethical perspectives within which the Augustinian concept of just war could be understood. That scholars often analyze his thoughts on war from different perspectives further shows the depth of his theological and philosophical insights.² This essay does not seek to rehearse all of these positions. However, one of the scholars who has paid attention to both the historical and ethical aspects of Augustine’s thoughts on war is James Turner Johnson, and this partly explains why this essay puts him in a dialogue with Augustine. As it will be subsequently demonstrated, Augustine’s ‘just war’ thought, reflected and broadened in Johnson’s analysis, offers profound insights for contemporary ‘just peace’ debate.

Augustine never wrote a treatise on war in which he treated the topic of just war.³ Since his thoughts on war were in response to certain events and contexts, some scholars continue to wonder why he is seen as the progenitor of the Christian JWT in the West. All we know about his thoughts on JWT is gleaned from different sections of his corpus, especially *The City of God*, his *Contra Faustum*, the *Heptateuch* and some of his letters and sermons. Christoph Baumgartner contends that Augustine’s thoughts on the topic of war, found in “a variety of texts of different genres,” have contributed significantly to the development and systematization of

² Alan J. Watt, “Which Approach? Late Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Augustine’s Views on War,” *The Journal of Church and State* 46, no. 1 (2004): 99-113, esp. 107.

³ Christoph Baumgartner, “War,” in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, eds. Karla Pollmann and Willemien Otten (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1889-1894, esp. 1889.

the JWT.⁴ It is apt to state that *De Civitate Dei* is one of the writings of Augustine which deals with the topic of war and peace to a certain extent. Regarded “as a *Summa* of his theological and philosophical ideas,”⁵ the treatment of just war is not as systematic as one conceives it to be, because Augustine’s preoccupation is not the formulation of a theory of just war – *bellum iustum*, but a theological elucidation of the two cities: *Civitas Dei* (*The City of God*) and *Civitas terrena* (*The Earthly City*). Meanwhile, one of the earliest treatments of warfare and killing is found in Augustine’s early *De Libero Arbitrio*.⁶ Though, war or killing is not justified here, the emphasis is on whether it is possible to kill without ever committing sin.

This article answers the following question: How does Augustine’s just war thinking contribute to contemporary debate on just war and just peace? To answer this question, the essay first analyzes some of Augustine’s insights on war, justice, and peace. Second, by examining James Turner Johnson’s reception, interpretation, and expansion of the JWT, especially in light of contemporary discussions, the article shows how this ancient thought remains ever new. It demonstrates how the traditional concepts of *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello* (and the recent *ius post bellum*) continue to be of great interest to contemporary just war debates. While indicating the ambiguity that surrounds the JWT, the article argues that the JWT still holds much relevance, especially when it is critically re-engaged in the light of the present-day debate on nonviolence and just peace.

⁴ Baumgartner, “War,” in *The Oxford Guide*, 1889.

⁵ Andrej Zwitter and Michael Hoelzl, “Augustine on War and Peace,” *Peace Review* 26, no. 3 (2014): 317-324, esp. 319.

⁶ Nico Vorster, “Just War and Virtue: Revisiting Augustine and Thomas Aquinas,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 34, no. 1 (2015): 55-68.

Peace and Justice in Augustine's Just War Reflection

Peace and justice are key elements that undergird Augustine's reflections on war. He sees peace as the deepest desire of all human beings in their earthly affairs.⁷ Paraphrasing Augustine, Donald X. Burt captures this when he states: "the driving force of all human action is the desire for happiness, and no one can be happy without peace."⁸ Augustine considers peace as something which comes as a gift from God, and not as a result of human wisdom or ingenuity.⁹ Underlining the indispensable role of peace in human affairs, especially in war-making, Augustine observes:

Anyone who, with me, makes even a cursory examination of human affairs and our common human nature will realize how sweet peace is. For, just as there is no one who does not wish to have joy, neither is there anyone who does not wish to have peace. In fact, even those who want war want nothing other than victory; what they desire, then, in waging war is to achieve peace with glory... It is with the aim of peace, therefore, that wars are waged, even when they are waged by men who are eager to exercise the martial virtues in command and in battle. It is plain, then, that peace is the desired end of war. For everyone seeks peace, even in making war, but no one seeks war by making peace.¹⁰

⁷ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XIX, 11; William Babcock, trans. *The City of God: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (New York: New City Press, 2012), 364.

⁸ Donald X. Burt, "Peace," in *Augustine through the Ages*, 629-632, esp. 629.

⁹ Burt, "Peace," 629.

¹⁰ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XIX, 12; Babcock, trans. *The City of God*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, 365.

Enjoying true or perfect peace in this world is for Augustine, not possible. True peace for him, can only be found at the end of time, and in the heavenly city where both humans and angels will rejoice eternally in and with God.¹¹ Hence, those who wage war only do that for the sake of temporal peace, which Augustine calls a transient good in contradistinction to the heavenly peace, found only in God. This concept of peace which Augustine delineates at length, has an integral connection with his reflection on just war, because he always acknowledges that even wars that are justly waged can hardly ever bring about an enduring peace. The cause of this, he repeats again, is the dent of original sin.

In his reflections on JWT, Augustine, like Ambrose, relied largely on Cicero's concepts. However, Augustine, unlike Cicero, gave his JWT a spiritual undertone, even while still adapting some elements from Cicero.¹² In what follows, the JWT of Augustine is examined under three main subheadings (just cause, right intention, and legitimate authority). However, Augustine never codified these criteria himself.¹³

Just Cause

One of the features that runs through Augustine's JWT is just cause. In making just cause a criterion for going to war, Augustine understands justice alongside the concept of order or the "order of love" (*ordo amoris*). This understanding of justice evokes a sense of both

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Watt, "Which Approach? Late Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Augustine's Views on War," 107. See also Alex Bellamy, *Just Wars: From Cicero to Iraq* (Malden: Polity, 2006), 44. Bellamy here points to the continuous influence of Cicero in the codification of the criteria and reasons for going to war.

¹³ Russell, "War," 876.

individual and collective obligation which enhances the promotion of the wellbeing of the state and of citizens. Augustine, like Cicero, held the strong conviction that a state has the duty to protect itself and its citizens from both internal and external aggressors. This led him to believe that a state has a just cause to declare war in the interest of peace, and for the sake of its own people.¹⁴ A just and reasonable cause must be established sequel to the use of violence against a state, and this has to be adhered to for as long as the war lasts.¹⁵ It is the desire for justice that impels the state to use its machinery to quell the aggression of both internal and external enemies. Speaking about just cause as a criterion for going to war, Augustine declares:

But the wise man, they say, will wage just wars. Surely, however, if he remembers that he is a human being, it is far more true that he will grieve at being faced with the necessity of waging just wars. If they were not just, he would not have to wage them, and so there would be no wars for the wise man. For it is the iniquity of the opposing side that imposes on the wise man the obligation of waging just wars; and this iniquity should certainly be lamented by human beings, even if no necessity of waging wars arises from it, for the very reason that it is the iniquity of human beings. Let everyone, therefore, who reflects with sorrow on such vast, horrendous, such savage evils as these, acknowledge our misery.¹⁶

It is obvious that wisdom and right judgment serve as prerequisites in the waging of wars. Augustine points out that the Romans themselves had a just cause for waging

¹⁴ John Mark Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 62.

¹⁵ Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*, 45.

¹⁶ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XIX, 7; Babcock, trans. *The City of God*, 362.

so many wars, and “they were compelled to resist the savage incursions of their enemies, and this due not to any avid desire for human glory but rather to the necessity of defending life and liberty.”¹⁷ Since the injustice from the opposing side, imposes on a state the obligation to wage war, as Augustine holds, the state against which the war is waged equally deserves some kind of justice because the revenging party might further commit another kind of injustice in its vengeance. This will create a circle of injustices whereby both the offender and the offended will be asking for justice. Little wonder, Augustine underlined the difficulty of upholding justice and the impossibility of practicing absolute justice in the *civitas terrena* (earthy city).

Meanwhile, Augustine justifies the use of violence to seek redress if and only if no other means suffices,¹⁸ and admits of “compensation beyond that which would result merely from a return to the *status quo ante bellum*.”¹⁹ This compensation has both a material and a moral dimension which must not be abused by the revenging party, otherwise it would contravene the laid down norms for making just wars. This means that, Augustine’s first preoccupation whenever an injustice is done to another is not the contemplation of revenge, but peaceful engagement through dialogue, restitution, and restoration. This attitude of peaceful engagement through dialogue also dominated Augustine’s thoughts in his controversy with the Donatists before he later approved of the use of coercion to suppress religious dissidents. It is pertinent to note that in his just war reflections, Augustine never distinguished between defensive and offensive wars as it

¹⁷ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* III, 10; Babcock, trans. *The City of God*, 78.

¹⁸ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XIX,7; Babcock, trans. *The City of God*, 362.

¹⁹ Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*, 45.

is often done in contemporary just war debates. He sees wars as defensive and punitive actions of a commonwealth, *necessarily* undertaken for the preservation of the moral order and justice.²⁰

Legitimate Authority

The criterion of just cause is linked to legitimate authority. According to Augustine, a just war is to be carried out by a competent authority.²¹ This right is exercised by the political sovereign who is empowered by God, and wages ‘just’ wars for the benefit of his or her people. Soldiers have the obligation to heed to the command and instruction of a legitimate authority under whom they serve. Killing by a soldier in obedience to a legitimate authority is not to be seen as a case of murder because he is carrying out the instruction of the sovereign for the good of the society. If, however, a soldier refuses to carry out such an instruction in the service of his state and in obedience to a legitimate authority, he is to be charged for mutiny and dereliction of his duties.²² However, Augustine believes that a soldier may not be obliged to obey the instruction of a sovereign if such an instruction or command does not aim at the common good. Commenting on the place of authority in any act of “just” war-making, Augustine in one of his famous replies to Faustus notes:

For it makes a difference for which causes and under what authority people undertake the waging of war. But the natural order which aims at the peace of

²⁰ Ibid., 47.

²¹ Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* XXII, 75; Roland Teske, trans. *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (New York: New City Press, 2007), 352.

²² Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* I, 26; William Babcock, trans. *The City of God*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, 28.

mortals, demands that the authority and the decision to undertake war rest with the ruler, while soldiers have the duty of carrying out the commands of war for the common peace and safety."²³

However, for a war to be justified, according to Augustine, it must also have the right intention – not to harm as such (even though this is inevitable in war), but to right wrongs and restore peace.

As stated *ab initio*, Augustine's just war reflections were influenced by his interpretation of the Old Testament in order to refute the claims of his Manichean opponents who saw war as going against the pacific injunctions of the New Testament.²⁴ The Manicheans completely rejected the God of the Old Testament whom they saw as warlike and hostile. Meanwhile, Augustine maintains that the intention is always of fundamental importance.

Right Intention

This criterion is seen as the main driving wheel of the other two criteria enunciated above.²⁵ The sole intention for which a nation should go to war, Augustine argues, is ultimately for peace. If war is carried out without any lustful desires, such a war can be an act of love.²⁶ However, if it is carried out for the purpose of territorial

²³ Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* XXII, 75; Roland Teske, trans. *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, 352.

²⁴ Russell, "War," in *Augustine through the Ages*, 875.

²⁵ These tripartite criteria of the *ius ad bellum* of Augustine could be likened to a triangle which consists of three different lines, in which the absence of one line makes it not a triangle but a different thing entirely. In like manner, therefore, the absence of one of the three criteria of the just war theory offered by Augustine, renders a war problematic.

²⁶ Baumgartner, "War," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, 1889.

expansion, fame or other worldly gains, such a war cannot be regarded as an act of love because it lacks the right intention.²⁷ Writing about right intention, Augustine notes:

If, however, they think that God could not have commanded the waging of war because the Lord Jesus Christ later said, *I tell you not to resist evil, but if anyone strikes you on your right cheek, offer him your left as well* (Mt 5:39), let them understand that this disposition lies not in the body but in the heart. For in the heart is found the holy chamber of the virtue that also dwelled in those righteous men of old, our fathers.²⁸

In the above statement, Augustine gives a central role to the human heart which embodies every kind of virtue and vice. He gives a special place to virtue which is found in the chamber of the human heart, and which impels people to practice true love even in the face of provocation or war. Hence, even if a sovereign leader considers waging a war, the right intention which springs from the recesses of the heart should guide one's action. This intention should be nothing but love for the other, and for peace.

In his letter to Boniface,²⁹ a Christian army general, Augustine states in his counsel what constitutes right intention. He suggests that every just war should always aim at peace. This is shown in the connection Augustine makes between *bellum* and *pax*, and the expression *sed bellum geritur, ut pax adquiratur* (but war is waged so

²⁷ Baumgartner, "War," in *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, 1889.

²⁸ Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* XXII, 76; Roland Teske, trans. Answer to Faustus, a Manichean, 351.

²⁹ See *epistula* 185, also known as *De Correctione Donatistarum* (On the Correction of the Donatists) in Augustine's *Retractationes*.

that peace may be obtained).³⁰ This implies that any war fought for selfish reasons or intent is a perversion of right intention. Thus, having the right to go to war (*ius ad bellum*) does not translate into following the right conduct in war (*ius in bello*), because one may have the right to wage war, and may as well not follow the 'code of conduct' in war. He, in his letter to Boniface, maintains that "agreements should be kept, even with one's enemies, and that mercy should be shown."³¹ In his close textual analysis of Augustine's just war thoughts, Mattox considers Augustine to be the pioneer figure in the just war tradition to explore what has come to be known today as 'the doctrine of military necessity,' which allows soldiers to *proportionately* use some violent means to restore peace.³²

Although, war is a sad reality and an evil practice, Augustine maintains that the real evil is "the desire to do harm, cruelty in taking vengeance, a mind that is without peace and incapable of peace, fierceness in rebellion, the lust for domination, and anything else of the sort..."³³ He considers Moses' wars in the Old Testament as a righteous retribution, noting that Moses was moved not by cruelty but by charity.³⁴ Furthermore, Augustine notes that even if the injustice suffered by Rome from its neighbors constituted a just cause for taking a military action, "the justice of the cause did not, in and of itself,"³⁵ imply that Rome had the right intention. He detests the brutality with which gladiators fought and the ovation

³⁰ Berit Van Neste, "Cicero and St. Augustine's Just War Theory: Classical Influences on a Christian Idea," (2006). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.

³¹ Augustine, *epistula* 185,14.

³² Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*, 61.

³³ Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, XXII, 74; Roland Teske, trans. *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, 351.

³⁴ Russell, "War," in *Augustine through the Ages*, 875.

³⁵ Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*, 55.

which they received from the people and its senate; and so, he says, “it is better to pay the penalty for any inaction than to seek glory in arms of this sort.”³⁶ He laments the wars of the Romans against the Albans which made both Rome and Alba suffer mutual losses as allies. Here, it is necessary as both Cicero and Augustine have argued, that the *status quo ante bellum* (situation of things before war) be strictly maintained by giving a deep thought to the criterion of right intention.

Thus, the *ius ad bellum* and the *ius in bello* criteria are intertwined in Augustine’s reflections on just war, because the latter always reveals something of the former. Hence, it goes without saying that, every just war that is fought must first have the right intention, just cause, the wisdom of a competent leader and must be carried out in love, without lustful intents and desires.

Having analyzed Augustine’s just war ideas in the preceding sections, the next section examines the significance of Johnson’s just war reflection in contemporary just war thinking.

Johnson’s Insights and Considerations

James Turner Johnson is one of the influential contemporary scholars on the JWT. The just war idea for him, is a “historical, moral tradition,”³⁷ which evolved through the blending of critical reflections on human historical experiences and moral systems.³⁸ In his discussion of what constitutes a just war, and how a just war is to be waged, he explores the concepts of *ius ad*

³⁶ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, III, 14; William Babcock, trans. *The City of God*, 84.

³⁷ James Turner Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 19.

³⁸ Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War*, 19.

bellum (right to engage in war) and *ius in bello* (good conduct in war) – concepts that are said to be typically Augustinian, though they are not found *expressis verbis* in Augustine's oeuvre.

Johnson believes that there are some missing links in the JWT which have been deemphasized in different epochs of scholarship. Although he does not arrogate to himself the task of reclaiming these missing links, he nevertheless, looks to historians and theologians for the reconstruction of a modest JWT through dialogical engagement at all levels.³⁹

Johnson's thesis is quite compelling. If society continues to see the JWT as a kind of an unbreakable moral code which has been canonized right from antiquity, the proclivity towards war may linger. In tracing the historical background of the JWT, Johnson mentions that the tradition, as it is known today underwent a series of developments and emanated from multiple sources.⁴⁰ First, it came from a "specifically Christian religious tradition," grounded in Augustine's reflections, and eventually codified in theology and canon law.⁴¹ The second source was the "chivalric tradition, with roots in older ideals of warriorhood."⁴² Third, it emanated from the Roman law, especially the concepts of *ius naturale* (natural right) and *ius gentium* (right of nations).⁴³ These sources further developed and interacted with the political experience of societies in the art of governance. It is therefore, inappropriate to think

³⁹ James Turner Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War: Religious and Secular Concepts 1200-1740* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 6.

⁴⁰ James Turner Johnson, "Maintaining the Protection of Non-Combatants," *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 4 (2000): 421-448, esp. 424.

⁴¹ Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War*, 6.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

of the JWT as emanating solely from the Christian religious tradition. It is more reasonable to see it as a result of an interaction of sources and traditions. This explains the reason why Johnson prefers to speak of the just war as *a tradition* rather than a doctrine.⁴⁴

According to Johnson, the strength of the classic JWT lies in the fact that it was a “product of secular and religious forces,” blended together.⁴⁵ We shall, in what follows, examine Johnson’s insights on just war under two main subheadings: *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello*.

***Ius ad bellum* Criteria**

According to Johnson, the essential parts of the classic JWT are classified into two main groups, namely, the *ius ad bellum* and the *ius in bello*, respectively.⁴⁶ The *ius ad bellum* requirements in the just war debate refer to those criteria which must be fulfilled before any military engagement is permitted. In grounding his exploration on an existing historical trajectory, Johnson asserts that Francisco de Vitoria (1483- 1546) and Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) who are regarded as chief proponents of the JWT in the early modern period “inherited a conception of just war with a fully developed *ius ad bellum* centered around the requirements of sovereign authority, just cause, right intention, and the aim of peace.”⁴⁷ The *ius in bello* which takes into account noncombatant immunity and proportionality was likewise seen as complementary to the *ius ad bellum*

⁴⁴ James Turner Johnson, *Can Modern War Be Just?* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 12.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Ideology, and the Limitation of War*, 26.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Can Modern War be Just?*, 18.

⁴⁷ James Turner Johnson, “Paul Ramsey and the Recovery of the Just War Idea,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 1, no. 2 (2002): 136-144, esp. 141.

requirements.⁴⁸ A unified doctrine which delineates the concepts of *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello* came towards the end of the Middle Ages.⁴⁹ Johnson sees the three main conditions of the *ius ad bellum* as traceable to Augustine, Aquinas, and canon law, and the two parts of the *ius in bello* as emanating from the chivalric code of fighting wars. While this may be the case, however, fragmentary elements of *ius in bello* are also found in Augustine. Hence, it could be argued that both the *ius ad bellum* and *ius in bello* are apparently intermixed in Augustine, albeit not in a systematic way.

In the thoughts of Johnson, the *ius ad bellum* criteria are indispensable prerequisites that always dominate discussions on just war both within national and international circles. He avows that “the whole structure of the *ius ad bellum* of just war tradition has to do with specifying the terms under which those in political power are authorized to resort to force for good...”⁵⁰ Johnson enumerates just cause, right authority, right intent, proportionality, the end of peace and last resort,⁵¹ as coming under the *ius ad bellum* criteria. He believes that some criteria in the classic JWT are more important than others, and should be given more priority in any just war debate.⁵² To stress the hierarchy of some of the *ius ad bellum* criteria, Johnson divides the criteria into ‘deontological’ and ‘prudential.’ He maintains that the deontological criteria rank higher than the prudential criteria.⁵³ This is because for him, the deontological

⁴⁸ Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War*, 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁰ James Turner Johnson, *Morality and Contemporary Warfare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 35.

⁵¹ Johnson, *Can Modern War Be Just?* 18.

⁵² Nahed Artoul Zehr, “James Turner Johnson and the ‘Classic’ Just War Tradition,” *Journal of Military Ethics* 8, no. 3 (2009):190-201, esp. 198.

⁵³ Johnson, *Morality and Contemporary Warfare*, 41.

criteria are the “requirements that are found in classic just war thought,”⁵⁴ while the prudential criteria are meant to be principles that govern societies in the art of statecraft.⁵⁵ Although, Johnson recognizes the role of the prudential criteria, he nevertheless insists that their importance proceeds from, and depends on, the deontological criteria.⁵⁶ This implies that it is impossible to think about the prudential criteria without having first considered the deontological criteria. The deontological criteria lay the foundation on which classic or contemporary just war debate is carried out.

In one of his most recent books titled, *The War to Oust Saddam Hussein: Just War and the New Face of Conflict*, published in 2005, Johnson lists four deontological *ius ad bellum* criteria: sovereign authority, just cause, right intention and the end of peace. Similarly, he mentions proportionality, reasonable hope of success, and last resort as recently added prudential *ius ad bellum* criteria. Thus, Johnson argues, “the aim of a just war is not simply to end the fighting, for peace without justice is no peace at all. Rather just war tradition requires a peace with justice...”⁵⁷ Similarly, the conduct of war must be carried out according to the *ius in bello* criteria.

***Ius In Bello* Criteria**

It is difficult to think of fulfilling the conditions resulting in war without also taking into account the

⁵⁴ James Turner Johnson, *The War to Oust Saddam Hussein: Just War and the New Face of Conflict* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 36.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *The War to Oust Saddam Hussein*, 36.

⁵⁶ Zehr, “James Turner Johnson and the ‘Classic’ Just War Tradition,” 194.

⁵⁷ John Turner Johnson, “The Just War Idea: The State of the Question,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 23, no. 1 (2006):167-195, esp. 172.

conditions to be followed in the execution of such a war. One is the flipside of the other. In looking for an established authority on the idea of *ius in bello* within which noncombatant immunity is considered in the late Middle Ages, Johnson argues that one should rather look to the treatise *De Treuga et Pace* (Of Truces and Peace), added to the code of canon law during the pontificate of Pope Gregory IX in the thirteenth century.⁵⁸ In this assertion, Johnson does not, however, undermine the significance of the systematization of the JWT in the writings of both Gratian and Aquinas. Although there exist traces of the *ius in bello* in both Gratian and Aquinas, nevertheless the treatise *De Treuga et Pace*⁵⁹ expanded this notion more. Mention is made here of the classes of persons, goods, and animals that are to be protected in any event of war.⁶⁰ These ideas underwent further development and codification into the contemporary idea of proportionality and noncombatant immunity.

Similarly, Johnson traces the evolution of the *ius in bello* condition(s) to Augustine's proscription of evil intentions in war. Here, proportionality and discrimination are considered as twin principles which must be strictly adhered to in any war that is adjudged to be just.⁶¹ Again, both Vitoria and Suarez distinguished between guilt and innocence among those who live under the situation of war in their *ius in bello* enunciations.⁶²

⁵⁸ Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War*, 43.

⁵⁹ The above Latin title means, "Of Truces and Peace." It was a peaceful and a nonviolent movement led by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages after the collapse of the Carolingian rule. The Latin phrase is also written as *Pax et Treuga Dei* (The Peace and Truce of God). For a detailed and an in-depth explication of this phrase, see Clifford R. Backman, *The Worlds of Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War*, 44

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 197.

Johnson believes that making this distinction is important because of the little space that has been given to these concepts in the history of international law. According to him, the *ius in bello* otherwise known as law of war, is an integral component of the JWT which mainly deals with “the restraint or limiting of war once begun.”⁶³

Historically, the *ius in bello* consisted in the two forms of customary restraints, namely the extent of harm done and the weapons used.⁶⁴ However, further development among contemporary moralists has codified the *ius in bello* criteria into two: discrimination or noncombatant immunity and proportionality of means.⁶⁵

From the above analysis of Johnson’s position, it is obvious that the JWT still remains a relevant topic for debate in our contemporary world that is threatened by war – with the present being the Russian-Ukrainian and the Israeli-Palestinian wars. While the foregoing discussion has demonstrated that both Augustine’s and Johnson’s ideas on JWT have contributed considerably to contemporary just war debate, the next section highlights some points of convergence or divergence between Augustine and Johnson.

Augustine and Johnson: Some Points of Reference

In the preceding analyses, we discussed both Augustine’s and Johnson’s reflections on the JWT. Looking at Augustine has enabled us to saunter into the world of some contemporary scholars who have in one way or another, maintained some traces of Augustine’s insights. In this section, we would look at some points of

⁶³ Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War*, xxiii.

⁶⁴ For more on this, see Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War*, 19-40.

⁶⁵ See Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War*, 327-366.

reference, convergence, and divergence between Johnson's position on the one hand and Augustine's position on the other.

Augustine, as hitherto stated, drew upon several sources not only in his reflection on just war but in the whole of his theological and philosophical thinking. Understanding his thought-pattern becomes more fruitful when these sources which influenced him are seen as interacting with the circumstances in which he found himself. From his controversy with the Donatists, for example, his ideas on the use of coercion underwent constant metamorphosis in response to the situation at his time.

The question then arises: Why is Augustine always regarded as one of the founders of the JWT, if he really never wrote a single tract on war? This question may be answered at two levels: first, the level of textual evidence and, second, Augustine's reception history (which depends on the availability of textual evidence). First, we need to rely on available textual evidence. We may, on the level of textual evidence, say that since some sections of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, *Contra Faustum*, *Heptateuchum*, letters, sermons, and other writings bear some of his thoughts on just war, one may posit that Augustine could indeed be referred to as one of the exponents of the JWT. Mattox holds this view and asserts that Augustine is one of the founders of the western JWT, which has considerable impact on contemporary just war thinking.⁶⁶ He does this by examining some of Augustine's texts. Second, we need to go back to the beginning of Augustine's reception history, especially within the Christian circle. Though it sounds somewhat simplistic, the impact of most of Augustine's writings in almost every sphere of Christian life may have

⁶⁶ Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*, 81.

contributed to labelling him as one of the founders of the Christian JWT. What this implies is that, scholars who came after him studied and combed some portions of his writings, sermons and letters where traces of just war are found and then began to name him as one of the theorists of just war.

Meanwhile, Johnson reminds his readers that his elucidation on war is never at variance with classical understanding. He maintains that he is committed to the classical JWT, and to the limitation of war in societies and communities. This commitment has made him to lean heavily on the position of Augustine and the insights of Aquinas, Vitoria, Suarez, Grotius, and the like. Be that as it may, Johnson has in our contemporary milieu given the JWT a facelift, with little or no distortion of the principles and criteria. His delineation of the *ius ad bellum* deontological and prudential criteria as well as the *ius in bello* deserves attention and commendation. We see in this excursus that when Johnson is placed side by side with Augustine, a lot of points of interest emerge: the restraint of war, the instrumentality of justice in peaceful coexistence, and the objective of peace in war. The question then remains: How do these just war ideas impact on the present quest for just peace and nonviolence? The next section attempts to answer this question by pointing to some contemporary voices.

Nonviolence and Just Peace: The Present Quest

As we recognize the tension that exists between pacifists and just war theorists today, we as well realize the quest for nonviolence and peace. This section looks at how nonviolence works in preventing the outbreak of war or violent conflicts, and maintains a plea for (just) peace (an ethics of peace) in a world that has known so much violence.

In looking at some of the pitfalls of the JWT and its attendant abuses, Johan Verstraeten maintains a plea for an ethics of peace which has long-term benefits and provides a fertile ground for justice and nonviolent actions. Acknowledging the great efforts made in recent peace studies on the necessity for peace building, he contends that classic JWT seems to pay little or no attention to the restoration of peace.⁶⁷ He argues that, “a neglect of the logic of peace building can lead to precipitous decisions to wage wars that are more an obstacle than a contribution to peace.”⁶⁸ Peace is therefore of the essence. Little wonder then, peace efforts and initiatives at national, regional and international levels are gaining more grounds and momentum. People of diverse faith convictions, states, private and public individuals, and people from all walks of life are all keying into this peace initiative. This has led Adrian Pabst to maintain that there is a need for a theological-interactive imperative “to shift the focus away from the justice of war towards the justice of peace.”⁶⁹

Oliver O'Donovan sees the pursuit of peace within the Christian eschatological framework as an unfolding reality that is linked to the desire for justice. He avers that “any quest for peace that is not linked to a quest for justice will be illusory.”⁷⁰ For there to be just and sustainable peace in society, Peter C. Phan calls for an “interreligious spirituality of peacemaking and recon-

⁶⁷ Johan Verstraeten, “From Just War to Ethics of Conflict Resolution: A Critique of Just-War Thinking in the Light of the War in Iraq,” *Ethical Perspectives* 11, no. 2 (2004): 99-110, esp. 104.

⁶⁸ Verstraeten, “From Just War to Ethics of Conflict Resolution,” 107.

⁶⁹ Adrian Pabst, “Can There Be a Just War Without a Just Peace?” *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1018 (2007): 722-738, esp. 727.

⁷⁰ Oliver O'Donovan, *Peace and Certainty: A Theological Essay on Deterrence* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

ciliation.”⁷¹ With this interest and commitment towards building peace, Jennifer J. Llewellyn and Daniel Philpott lay an emphasis on reconciliation and restorative justice. For them, reconciliation and restorative justice are practical approaches in the building of a sustainable peace.⁷² A peacebuilding initiative is not only a corrective means of combating the savagery of violence in the world but an initiative of deploying concrete ways of dealing with the multiple layers of evil in the world.⁷³ According to John Howard Yoder, “one of the most original cultural products of our century is our awareness of the power of organized nonviolent resistance as an instrument in the struggle for justice.”⁷⁴ Being a pacifist, he strongly believes that the struggle for justice can only be won through nonviolent action and engagement. But this is not without its own challenges.

In berating America’s invasion of Iraq, Matthew Hassan Kukah argues that the world has lost so much to war as a result of the abuses which warmongers have

⁷¹ Peter C. Phan, “Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, Peacebuilding: An Interreligious Spirituality for Just Peace,” in Peter C. Chan and Douglas Irvin-Erickson, eds., *Violence, Religion, Peacemaking: Contributions of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21-60, esp. 48.

⁷² Jennifer J. Llewellyn and Daniel Philpott, “Restorative Justice and Reconciliation: Twin Frameworks for Peacebuilding,” in *Restorative Justice, Reconciliation, and Peacebuilding*, eds., Jennifer J. Llewellyn and Daniel Philpott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14-36, esp.18.

⁷³ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “A Theology of Peace-building,” in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, eds., Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers (Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 289-314, esp. 304.

⁷⁴ John Howard Yoder, *Nonviolence: A Brief History*, eds., Paul Martens, Matthew Porter and Myles Werntz (Baylor: Baylor University Press, 2010), 17. For a theology of nonviolence and peace, see James Douglass, *The Nonviolent Cross: A Theology of Revolution and Peace* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2006).

always attached to the JWT.⁷⁵ He calls for “more humane ways of resolving conflicts than resort to war.”⁷⁶ What Kukah is hinting at is the deployment of practical peacemaking and reconciliatory efforts that serve the interest of peace and justice. Rather than finding reasons to justify the indiscriminate use of firearms, we should instead find reasons to promote and build peace. We shall return to this much later in our conclusion. Also, in spite of the dangers that go with active nonviolent resistance, the gains that result from it surpass the resort to violence by both sides.⁷⁷

With the inundation in violence and wars across the world, especially the Russian-Ukrainian war and the Israeli-Palestinian war, series of calls and initiatives for just peace and nonviolence have been made by several international bodies and groups. The International Peace Research Association (IPRA) is one of these associations of like-minded persons who are concerned about the ravages of war, and the need for peace in all climes of the world. The United Nations (UN) is not left out in this struggle. Pax Christi International (PCI) and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP) have also called for a “return to gospel nonviolence.” Rather than lay so much emphasis on just war criteria, Pax Christi International invites the Catholic Church to make a

⁷⁵ Matthew Hassan Kukah, “The Just War Theory and the Morality of the Iraq War,” *Unpublished Paper* (London: House of Lords, 2004), 26.

⁷⁶ Kukah, “The Just War Theory and the Morality of the Iraq War,” 26.

⁷⁷ Gene Sharp, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works* (Boston: The Albert Einstein Institution, 2013), 51; see also Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 2005), 78-89.

radical shift towards “a Just Peace approach based on Gospel nonviolence.”⁷⁸ This remains a work in progress.

The church, represented by the Holy See has always been at the forefront of promoting and espousing justice, reconciliation, and world peace. This is seen in its Catholic Social Teachings (CST), World Day for Peace Messages, and in a number of encyclicals.⁷⁹ In an address to the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Pope Francis criticizes the monstrosity of war and calls it “the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment.”⁸⁰ Again, he cautions, “If we want true integral human development for all, we must work tirelessly to avoid war between nations and peoples.”⁸¹ Francis questions the traditional language of the JWT and its predisposition to put forward arguments for engaging in war.⁸² Francis’ position “implies increased attention to the *ius post bellum*” criterion, which emphasizes committed peacebuilding initiatives.⁸³

A Critique of the Just War Theory

Despite the centuries of relevance which the JWT has had and continues to have, several criticisms have been leveled against it. Even though it is not our intention to

⁷⁸ Marie Dennis, ed., *Choosing Peace: The Catholic Church Returns to Gospel Nonviolence* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 25.

⁷⁹ Among others, see the following: *Populorum progressio*, *Pacem in terris*, and *Fratelli tutti*.

⁸⁰ Pope Francis, *Address to the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations*, New York (25 September 2015): AAS 107 (2015), 1041.

⁸¹ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* (Vatican: Associazione Amici del Papa, 2020), no. 257.

⁸² Drew Christiansen, “*Fratelli tutti* and the Responsibility to Protect,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 18, no. 1 (2021): 5-14, esp. 13.

⁸³ Christiansen, “*Fratelli tutti* and the Responsibility to Protect,” 1.

underline and elucidate all of these criticisms here, we shall look at few of what others have called the blind spots of the JWT. One of the first critiques leveled against the JWT is that it is too complex to explore. Two, it is often wrongly alluded to in initiating war. In his assessment and critique of the JWT in the light of the war in Iraq, Verstraeten maintains that apart from the many abuses and complexities that surround the JWT, a lacuna for 'post-war ethics' still exists.⁸⁴ This is because, the classical JWT does not explicitly define what *ius post bellum* entails and how this fits into contemporary just war debate. The challenge today is how to promote peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of war, and this is the gap that contemporary post-war ethics needs to fill. Similarly, Gerard F. Powers argues that the JWT is "radically incomplete apart from an ethic of peacebuilding," and sees it as "the missing dimension of a Catholic ethic of war and peace."⁸⁵

The notion of peace being proposed by the JWT still needs further and deeper clarification.⁸⁶ A number of other related goods such as human rights and international peace needs to be highlighted to make clearer the notion of peace.⁸⁷ This is because the JWT is not simply concerned with "national self-defense."⁸⁸ It

⁸⁴ Verstraeten, "From Just War to Ethics of Conflict Resolution," 108.

⁸⁵ Gerard F. Powers, "From an Ethics of War to an Ethics of Peacebuilding," in *From Just War to Modern Peace Ethics*, eds., Heinz-Gerhard Justenhoven and William A. Barbieri (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2012), 275-312, esp. 289.

⁸⁶ James G. Murphy, *War's Ends: Human Rights, International Order, and the Ethics of Peace* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 22; see also Mark Evans, ed., *Just War: A Reappraisal* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 88; Simon Chesterman, *Just War or Just Peace? Humanitarian Intervention and International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 41.

⁸⁷ Murphy, *War's Ends*, 22.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

has everything to do with international good. Kukah, who considers himself to be on the borderline between pacifism and JWT, has maintained that the justifications that are often adduced for engaging in war “are literally impossible for us to meet.”⁸⁹ He believes that “presumption against war is the most sensible option to take in discussing the issue of the just war theory...”⁹⁰ More so, apart from contending that the use of the just war language hampers the development of nonviolent strategies and initiatives,⁹¹ many peace activists and nonviolent campaign experts believe that the constant allusion to the JWT has continued to give impetus to those who subscribe to it to support war instead of opposing it. They believe that “the dominance of the just war framework,” remains a major obstacle to the ethics of nonviolent practices and strategies.⁹² The critics maintain that with the massive destruction and bloodbath that characterize modern wars, it would be unfair to make a demarcation between either just or unjust wars, for all wars are evil. Some of the criteria such as proportionality and noncombatant immunity are replete with lots of abuses, which lead to more tension and violence. Others believe that the JWT is at odds with the gospel way of life and deflects from Jesus’ injunction on nonviolence which does not condone recourse to the use of military force.⁹³ In the same vein, Gerald

⁸⁹ Kukah, “The Just War Theory and the Morality of the Iraq War,” 1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹¹ Dennis, *Choosing Peace*, 18.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 203.

⁹³ Peter Steinfels, “The War against Just War: Enough Already,” *Commonweal* 144, no. 4 (2017):15-20, esp. 17. Steinfels believes that apart from condemning war in its entirety, Christians need to return to the gospel path of peace and nonviolence – the path that leads to human development and flourishing. This commitment, he further

Schlabach avows that one of the major criticisms against the JWT lies in its overlooking of other promising and alternative approaches to attaining peace.⁹⁴ By paying much attention to the just war teaching, he argues, “the Church has paid a huge opportunity cost, to the detriment of its own nonviolent practice.”⁹⁵

Notwithstanding many of these criticisms that have been put forward against the JWT, some positive values can be cultivated from it through a reinterpretation of its principles to pave a way for just peace and active peacemaking. It is against this backdrop that the next section outlines the significance of Augustine's just war reflection to contemporary just peace debate.

The Significance of Augustine's Just War Theory to Contemporary Just Peace Debate

Augustine's ideas are rooted in the historical context of his time. His “openness to transcendence”⁹⁶ continues to reveal to us that there is a rapport between the past, present and future. In drawing inspiration from his wellspring of ideas, we continue to recover his significance for our times.

Many centuries have passed since Augustine and other leading thinkers formulated what is traditionally called the JWT. As Johnson affirms, the tradition evolved from both ecclesial quarters and state practices. Little wonder, then, the JWT has found its way into catholic

argues, should be shared by all people of goodwill across religions, cultures, nations, races and languages.

⁹⁴ Gerald W. Schlabach, “Just War? Enough Already,” *Commonweal* 144, no. 4 (2017): 11-14, esp. 12.

⁹⁵ Schlabach, “Just War? Enough Already,” 12.

⁹⁶ Anthony Dupont, “Augustine's Relevance for Contemporary Religious Education: A Deconstructive and Constructive Reading of Augustine,” *Universidad Catolica de Valencia “San Vicente Martir” Edetania* 48, no. 3 (2015): 61-79, esp. 74.

teaching, politics and international law practice across the world. Even though we do accept and realize the many abuses, challenges and complexities which go with the JWT, its validity and relevance nonetheless continue to remain. Meanwhile, as a result of the abuses which accompany the JWT, some people are calling for a war against the JWT, an abolition sort of. It can therefore not be gainsaid that in spite of all these abuses, the JWT has always and will always stand in defense of the restraint of war, given the reality of war in human existence. For instance, with the massive infrastructural damage and civilian casualties recorded in the Russian-Ukrainian war and the Israeli-Palestinian war, the just war criteria of discrimination (noncombatant immunity) and proportionality become all the more *relevant*. In spite of the divergent approaches of pacifism and the JWT, both teachings could be deployed into the development of a more pragmatic ethic of just peace. This is because both of them have as their main objective in the bringing forth of a peaceful society. There is need for a dialogue of complementarity. If for example, we take the criterion of last resort under the JWT, we would discover, upon careful examination that the criterion implies the use of nonviolence, a position which is held by the pacifists who reject the just war criteria.

Furthermore, the JWT has helped in the formulation of what has come to be known as “military ethics” or “rules of engagement” which guide the way military personnel or soldiers conduct themselves in war.⁹⁷ The *ius in bello* criteria have also proved helpful in restraining some actors in war, and in prohibiting the weapons systems or stockpiling of weapons. The JWT still has and will continue to have significance in human society for a number of reasons. The eventual development of the JWT

⁹⁷ Dennis, *Choosing Peace*, 212.

with its constant reinterpretation is primarily targeted at the curtailing, and not the total eradication, of war. This is what we have argued within Augustine's trajectory of the JWT. In his anthropological-theological interpretation of human existence, Augustine believes that human nature has been tainted by original sin and so, many vices, including war will continue to exert themselves on humanity. In highlighting the significance of Augustine's JWT, the words of Mattox are worthy of mention here:

...the merits of Augustine's theory, with its emphasis on the rightly intended maintenance of justice and order through the sole instrumentality of duly recognized agents of legitimate states, its absolute prohibition against the infliction of unnecessary harm to combatants and non-combatants alike, and its aim of a speedy restoration of a just peace, are of such enduring value to humankind as to warrant their continued contemplation.⁹⁸

A compelling example of how the JWT has proved relevant just as in other war scenarios in the past is the question of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the *right* of the Ukrainian people to defend themselves against such an external aggression. This is also the case in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that, in spite of the complexity that undergirds the JWT, its relevance in the contemporary quest for just peace, peacemaking, restoration, reconciliation and active nonviolent initiatives continues to remain strong.

⁹⁸ Mattox, *Saint Augustine and the Theory of Just War*, 177.

Perhaps, rather than use the ‘just war language,’ which always sees the possibility of using some military action, a better practical-ethical language, predicated on nonviolence and peacemaking could be developed in the years ahead. Thus, it is not the question of abandoning or completely rejecting the JWT in favor of nonviolence but of drawing inspiration from many sources with a view to finding the best practical approach for creating peace, love, and harmony across the world. Ethicists, moral theologians, governments, lawyers, and indeed people from all walks of life have to brace up to this challenge. How then are we to see Augustine? We must read and understand Augustine as a thinker of his own time, who was confronted with the challenges of his context. Though similar challenges of wars and violent conflicts continue to besiege us today, we must reread him with a view to finding inspiration on dealing with these maladies. However, we should be circumspect in trying to canonize all his thoughts. He was not infallible and his teachings are not unalterable.

Looking at the relevance of the JWT tradition, we have similarly seen how some contemporary voices, especially Johnson and the like, have continued to expand and reinterpret it. This article has shown that the JWT carries within itself a lot of values and wisdom predicated on peace which need to be re-invented. With the global clarion call for just peace and peacemaking, a lot more energy and wisdom need to be deployed into creating a humane and sustainably peaceful society. In addition to the plethora of abuses it has been subjected to, the JWT has sometimes been used to uncritically legitimize war, a situation that is at odds with the reflections of Augustine who saw war as a stern necessity occasioned by original sin. Thus, Augustine was more a personage of peace than of war. His reflection thereof

offers us insights for greater commitment to peacebuilding in our contemporary world.

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