

# Pope urged to abolish creed of a ‘just war’

**Christopher Lamb**, Rome

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Francis with UN troops: there are calls for the church to embrace pacifism GIUSEPPE CICCIA

Pope Francis is being urged by one of his most senior aides to overturn the centuries-old doctrine of “just war” that has granted Catholics the right to engage in armed conflict.

The drive, by Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, threatens to put the church at odds with Catholics serving in uniform across the world.

“Too often the ‘just war theory’ has been used to endorse rather than prevent or limit war,” said Turkson, 67. “It can undermine efforts to develop alternative capacities and tools for conflict to be overcome and transformed.”

Turkson, considered a potential successor to Francis, was speaking after a landmark conference in Rome that called for the church to embrace pacifism.

He said the discussions now under way in the Vatican could lead to a papal encyclical setting out new teaching on violence.

The concept of jus ad bellum is held up by theologians and the international courts as the test for the use of military force.

First formulated by the 4th-century bishop St Augustine of Hippo and developed in the 13th century by St Thomas Aquinas, it enabled rulers to wage battles without incurring sanctions from the church.

The teaching sets out conditions for war, including the need for a justified cause and proper authorisation. It also includes the constraint that the force used should not inflict more damage than “the evil to be eliminated”.

Turkson’s initiative has been criticised by Lord Guthrie, the Catholic former chief of the defence staff, who cited the doctrine when he oversaw British interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo under Tony Blair.

Guthrie said he would be “alarmed” by abandonment of the theory, which provided a valuable checklist before engaging in conflict.

“Of course we don’t want war, but we don’t live an ideal world. In the real world you have people you cannot negotiate with,” he said.

“Is Pope Francis saying we should stand aside and allow genocide to go on against Christians?”

There are also believed to have been expressions of concern to the Vatican by some senior serving members of western armed forces.

Turkson runs the Holy See’s justice and peace department and is known to be close to Francis.

The conference, organised by his department in conjunction with Pax Christi International, a Catholic peace movement, elicited a message of support from the pontiff.

“The ultimate and most deeply worthy goal of human beings and of the human community is the abolition of war,” Francis wrote in the letter.

While Francis and Turkson both concede that countries have the right to defend themselves, the Pope has said conflict should be tackled with a “new process which ‘peacemakers’ initiate”.

Any move to repeal just war teaching could still be blocked by opponents within the Vatican.

Robert Dodaro, a Rome-based theologian, adviser to the Vatican’s theological watchdog and an expert on St Augustine, said any change in teaching would be a “mistake” that could lead to a backlash among many bishops, theologians and ordinary Catholics.

Such was the depth of opposition that he did not believe the Pope would ultimately give his assent to the proposed change.

The Catholic Church’s backing of armed conflict is increasingly rare; John Paul II opposed the Gulf and Iraq wars.

Vatican diplomats nevertheless backed a United Nations resolution last year calling for military intervention to stop Isis.

But Francis has shown that he is not afraid to overhaul church teaching. He has already called for the worldwide abolition of the death penalty — which is permitted in some circumstances under Catholic teaching — and wrote an impassioned appeal to protect the environment in an encyclical letter last year.

By writing a document that repudiated war, he would also be staying true to his namesake, St Francis of Assisi, whose name the Pope adopted because he is “the man of peace”.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/pope-urged-to-abolish-creed-of-a-just-war-spm5jzg8>