

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Second Part of the Second Part, Question 40: War.

Article 1. Whether it is always sinful to wage war?

Objection 1. It would seem that it is always [sinful](#) to wage [war](#). Because punishment is not inflicted except for [sin](#). Now those who wage [war](#) are threatened by [Our Lord](#) with punishment, according to Matthew: "All that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Therefore all [wars](#) are unlawful.

Objection 2. Further, whatever is contrary to a Divine precept is a [sin](#). But [war](#) is contrary to a Divine precept, for it is written ([Matthew 5:39](#)): "But I say to you not to resist [evil](#)"; and ([Romans 12:19](#)): "Not revenging yourselves, my dearly beloved, but give place unto wrath." Therefore [war](#) is always [sinful](#).

Objection 3. Further, nothing, except [sin](#), is contrary to an act of [virtue](#).

But [war](#) is contrary to peace. Therefore [war](#) is always a [sin](#).

Objection 4. Further, the exercise of a lawful thing is itself lawful, as is evident in scientific exercises. But warlike exercises which take place in tournaments are forbidden by the [Church](#), since those who are slain in these trials are deprived of ecclesiastical burial. Therefore it seems that [war](#) is a [sin](#) in itself.

On the contrary, [Augustine](#) says in a sermon on the son of the centurion [Ep. ad Marcel. cxxxviii]: "If the Christian Religion forbade [war](#) altogether, those who sought salutary advice in the Gospel would rather have been counselled to cast aside their arms, and to give up soldiering altogether. On the contrary, they were told: 'Do [violence](#) to no [man](#) . . . and be content with your pay' [[Luke 3:14](#). If he commanded them to be content with their pay, he did not forbid soldiering."

I answer that, In order for a [war](#) to be [just](#), three things are [necessary](#). First, the authority of the sovereign by whose command the [war](#) is to be waged. For it is not the business of a private [individual](#) to declare [war](#), because he can seek for redress of his rights from the tribunal of his superior. Moreover it is not the business of a private [individual](#) to summon together the people, which has to be done in wartime. And as the care of the common weal is committed to those who are in authority, it is their business to watch over the common weal of the city, kingdom or province subject to them. And just as it is lawful for them to have recourse to the sword in

defending that common weal against internal disturbances, when they punish [evil](#)-doers, according to the words of the [Apostle \(Romans 13:4\)](#): "He beareth not the sword in vain: for he is [God's](#) minister, an avenger to execute wrath upon him that doth [evil](#)"; so too, it is their business to have recourse to the sword of [war](#) in defending the common weal against external enemies. Hence it is said to those who are in authority ([Psalm 81:4](#)): "Rescue the poor: and deliver the needy out of the hand of the sinner"; and for this reason [Augustine](#) says (Contra Faust. xxii, 75): "The [natural](#) order conducive to peace among mortals demands that the power to declare and counsel [war](#) should be in the hands of those who hold the supreme authority."

Secondly, a just [cause](#) is required, namely that those who are attacked, should be attacked because they deserve it on account of some fault. Wherefore [Augustine](#) says (QQ. in Hept., qu. x, super Jos.): "A just war is wont to be described as one that avenges wrongs, when a nation or state has to be punished, for refusing to make amends for the wrongs inflicted by its subjects, or to restore what it has seized [unjustly](#)."

Thirdly, it is [necessary](#) that the belligerents should have a rightful [intention](#), so that they intend the advancement of [good](#), or the avoidance of [evil](#). Hence [Augustine](#) says (De Verb. Dom. [The words quoted are to be found not in [St. Augustine's](#) works, but Can. Apud. Caus. xxiii, qu. 1]): "True religion looks upon as peaceful those [wars](#) that are waged not for motives of aggrandizement, or cruelty, but with the object of securing peace, of punishing [evil](#)-doers, and of uplifting the [good](#)." For it may happen that the [war](#) is declared by the legitimate authority, and for a just [cause](#), and yet be rendered unlawful through a wicked intention. Hence [Augustine](#) says (Contra Faust. xxii, 74): "The passion for inflicting harm, the cruel thirst for vengeance, an unpacific and relentless spirit, the fever of revolt, the [lust](#) of power, and such like things, all these are rightly condemned in [war](#)."

Reply to Objection 1. As [Augustine](#) says (Contra Faust. xxii, 70): "To take the sword is to arm oneself in order to take the life of anyone, without the command or permission of superior or lawful authority." On the other hand, to have recourse to the sword (as a private [person](#)) by the authority of the sovereign or judge, or (as a public [person](#)) through zeal for [justice](#), and by the authority, so to speak, of [God](#), is not to "take the sword," but to use it as commissioned by another, wherefore it does not deserve punishment. And yet even those who make [sinful](#) use of the sword are not always slain with the sword, yet they always perish with their own sword, because, unless they repent, they are punished [eternally](#) for their [sinful](#) use of the sword.

Reply to Objection 2. Such like precepts, as [Augustine](#) observes (De Serm. Dom. in Monte i, 19), should always be borne in readiness of mind, so that we be ready to obey them, and, if [necessary](#), to refrain from resistance or self-defense. Nevertheless it is [necessary](#) sometimes for a man to act otherwise for the common [good](#), or for the [good](#) of those with whom he is fighting. Hence [Augustine](#) says (Ep. ad Marcellin. cxxxviii): "Those whom we have to punish with a kindly severity, it is [necessary](#) to handle in many ways against their will. For when we are stripping a man of the lawlessness of [sin](#), it is [good](#) for him to be vanquished, since nothing is more hopeless than the [happiness](#) of sinners, whence arises a guilty impunity, and an [evil](#) will, like an internal enemy."

Reply to Objection 3. Those who wage [war justly](#) aim at peace, and so they are not opposed to peace, except to the [evil](#) peace, which [Our Lord](#) "came not to send upon earth" ([Matthew 10:34](#)). Hence [Augustine](#) says (Ep. ad Bonif. clxxxix): "We do not seek peace in order to be at [war](#), but we go to [war](#) that we may have peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those whom you war against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace."

Reply to Objection 4. Manly exercises in warlike feats of arms are not all forbidden, but those which are inordinate and perilous, and end in slaying or plundering. On olden times warlike exercises presented no such danger, and hence they were called "exercises of arms" or "bloodless [wars](#)," as [Jerome](#) states in an epistle [Reference incorrect: cf. Veget., De Re Milit. i].

Article 2. Whether it is lawful for clerics and bishops to fight?

Objection 1. It would seem lawful for [clerics](#) and [bishops](#) to fight. For, as stated above ([Article 1](#)), wars are lawful and just in so far as they protect the poor and the entire common weal from suffering at the hands of the foe. Now this seems to be above all the [duty](#) of [prelates](#), for [Gregory](#) says (Hom. in Ev. xiv): "The wolf comes upon the sheep, when any [unjust](#) and rapacious [man](#) oppresses those who are faithful and [humble](#). But he who was thought to be the shepherd, and was not, leaveth the sheep, and flieth, for he [fears](#) lest the wolf hurt him, and dares not stand up against his [injustice](#)." Therefore it is lawful for prelates and [clerics](#) to fight.

Objection 2. Further, Pope Leo IV writes (xxiii, qu. 8, can. Igitur): "As untoward tidings had frequently come from the Saracen side, some said that

the Saracens would come to the port of Rome secretly and covertly; for which reason we commanded our people to gather together, and ordered them to go down to the seashore." Therefore it is lawful for [bishops](#) to fight.

Objection 3. Further, apparently, it comes to the same whether a man does a thing himself, or consents to its being done by another, according to [Romans 1:32](#): "They who do such things, are worthy of death, and not only they that do them, but they also that consent to them that do them." Now those, above all, seem to consent to a thing, who induce others to do it.

But it is lawful for [bishops](#) and [clerics](#) to induce others to fight: for it is written (xxiii, qu. 8, can. Hortatu) that Charles went to [war](#) with the Lombards at the instance and entreaty of Adrian, [bishop](#) of Rome. Therefore they also are allowed to fight.

Objection 4. Further, whatever is right and [meritorious](#) in itself, is lawful for [prelates](#) and [clerics](#). Now it is sometimes right and [meritorious](#) to make [war](#), for it is written (xxiii, qu. 8, can. Omni timore) that if "a man die for the [true faith](#), or to save his country, or in defense of [Christians](#), [God](#) will give him a heavenly reward." Therefore it is lawful for [bishops](#) and [clerics](#) to fight.

On the contrary, It was said to [Peter](#) as representing [bishops](#) and [clerics](#) ([Matthew 16:52](#)): "Put up again thy sword into the scabbard [[Vulgate](#): 'its place'] ["Scabbard" is the reading in [John 18:11](#)]." Therefore it is not lawful for them to fight.

I answer that, Several things are requisite for the [good](#) of a [human](#) society: and a number of things are done better and quicker by a number of [persons](#) than by one, as the [Philosopher](#) observes (Polit. i, 1), while certain occupations are so inconsistent with one another, that they cannot be fittingly exercised at the same time; wherefore those who are deputed to important duties are forbidden to occupy themselves with things of small importance. Thus according to [human](#) laws, soldiers who are deputed to warlike pursuits are forbidden to engage in commerce [Cod. xii, 35, De Re Milit.].

Now warlike pursuits are altogether incompatible with the duties of a [bishop](#) and a [cleric](#), for two reasons. The first reason is a general one, because, to wit, warlike pursuits are full of unrest, so that they hinder the [mind](#) very much from the [contemplation](#) of Divine things, the praise of [God](#), and [prayers](#) for the people, which belong to the duties of a [cleric](#). Wherefore just as commercial enterprises are forbidden to clerics, because they unsettle the [mind](#) too much, so too are warlike pursuits, according to [2](#)

[Timothy 2:4](#): "No [man](#) being a soldier to [God](#), entangleth himself with secular business." The second reason is a special one, because, to wit, all the clerical Orders are directed to the ministry of the altar, on which the [Passion of Christ](#) is represented sacramentally, according to [1 Corinthians 11:26](#): "As often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the [chalice](#), you shall show the death of the Lord, until He come." Wherefore it is unbecoming for them to slay or shed blood, and it is more fitting that they should be ready to shed their own blood for [Christ](#), so as to imitate in [deed](#) what they portray in their ministry. For this reason it has been decreed that those who shed blood, even without [sin](#), become [irregular](#). Now no [man](#) who has a certain [duty](#) to perform, can lawfully do that which renders him unfit for that [duty](#). Wherefore it is altogether unlawful for [clerics](#) to fight, because [war](#) is directed to the shedding of blood.

Reply to Objection 1. Prelates ought to withstand not only the wolf who brings [spiritual](#) death upon the flock, but also the pillager and the oppressor who work bodily harm; not, however, by having recourse themselves to material arms, but by means of [spiritual](#) weapons, according to the saying of the [Apostle \(2 Corinthians 10:4\)](#): "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through [God](#)." Such are salutary warnings, devout [prayers](#), and, for those who are obstinate, the sentence of [excommunication](#).

Reply to Objection 2. Prelates and [clerics](#) may, by the authority of their superiors, take part in [wars](#), not indeed by taking up arms themselves, but by affording [spiritual](#) help to those who fight [justly](#), by exhorting and absolving them, and by other like [spiritual](#) helps. Thus in the [Old Testament \(Joshua 6:4\)](#) the [priests](#) were commanded to sound the sacred trumpets in the battle. It was for this purpose that bishops or [clerics](#) were first allowed to go to the front: and it is an abuse of this permission, if any of them take up arms themselves.

Reply to Objection 3. As stated above (23, 4, ad 2) every power, art or [virtue](#) that regards the end, has to dispose that which is directed to the end. Now, among the [faithful](#), carnal [wars](#) should be considered as having for their end the Divine [spiritual good](#) to which [clerics](#) are deputed. Wherefore it is the [duty](#) of clerics to dispose and counsel other men to engage in just [wars](#). For they are forbidden to take up arms, not as though it were a [sin](#), but because such an occupation is unbecoming their personality.

Reply to Objection 4. Although it is [meritorious](#) to wage a just [war](#), nevertheless it is rendered unlawful for [clerics](#), by reason of their being deputed to works more [meritorious](#) still. Thus the marriage act may be

meritorious; and yet it becomes reprehensible in those who have vowed [virginity](#), because they are bound to a yet greater [good](#).

Article 3. Whether it is lawful to lay ambushes in war?

Objection 1. It would seem that it is unlawful to lay ambushes in [war](#). For it is written ([Deuteronomy 16:20](#)): "Thou shalt follow [justly](#) after that which is just." But ambushes, since they are a kind of deception, seem to pertain to [injustice](#). Therefore it is unlawful to lay ambushes even in a just [war](#).

Objection 2. Further, ambushes and deception seem to be opposed to faithfulness even as lies are. But since we are bound to keep [faith](#) with all [men](#), it is wrong to lie to anyone, as [Augustine](#) states (Contra Mend. xv). Therefore, as one is bound to keep [faith](#) with one's enemy, as [Augustine](#) states (Ep. ad Bonif. clxxxix), it seems that it is unlawful to lay ambushes for one's enemies.

Objection 3. Further, it is written ([Matthew 7:12](#)): "Whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them": and we ought to observe this in all our dealings with our neighbor. Now our enemy is our neighbor. Therefore, since no [man](#) wishes ambushes or deceptions to be prepared for himself, it seems that no one ought to carry on [war](#) by laying ambushes.

On the contrary, [Augustine](#) says (QQ. in Hept. qu. x super Jos): "Provided the [war](#) be [just](#), it is no concern of [justice](#) whether it be carried on openly or by ambushes": and he proves this by the authority of the Lord, Who commanded Joshua to lay ambushes for the city of Hai ([Joshua 8:2](#)).

I answer that, The object of laying ambushes is in order to deceive the enemy. Now a man may be deceived by another's word or [deed](#) in two ways. First, through being told something [false](#), or through the breaking of a promise, and this is always unlawful. No one ought to deceive the enemy in this way, for there are certain "rights of [war](#) and covenants, which ought to be observed even among enemies," as Ambrose states (De Officiis i).

Secondly, a man may be deceived by what we say or do, because we do not declare our purpose or meaning to him. Now we are not always bound to do this, since even in the Sacred Doctrine many things have to be concealed, especially from unbelievers, lest they deride it, according to [Matthew 7:6](#): "Give not that which is [holy](#), to dogs." Wherefore much more ought the plan of campaign to be hidden from the enemy. For this reason among other things that a soldier has to learn is the art of concealing his purpose lest it

come to the enemy's [knowledge](#), as stated in the Book on Strategy [Stratagematum i, 1 by Frontinus. Such like concealment is what is meant by an ambush which may be lawfully employed in a just war.

Nor can these ambushes be properly called deceptions, nor are they contrary to [justice](#) or to a well-ordered will. For a man would have an inordinate will if he were unwilling that others should hide anything from him

This suffices for the Replies to the Objections.

Article 4. Whether it is lawful to fight on holy days?

Objection 1. It would seem unlawful to fight on [holy](#) days. For [holy](#) days are instituted that we may give our time to the things of [God](#). Hence they are included in the keeping of the Sabbath prescribed [Exodus 20:8](#): for "[sabbath](#)" is interpreted "rest." But [wars](#) are full of unrest. Therefore by no means is it lawful to fight on [holy](#) days.

Objection 2. Further, certain [persons](#) are reproached ([Isaiah 58:3](#)) because on fast-days they exacted what was owing to them, were guilty of strife, and of smiting with the fist. Much more, therefore, is it unlawful to fight on [holy](#) days.

Objection 3. Further, no ill [deed](#) should be done to avoid temporal harm. But fighting on a [holy](#) day seems in itself to be an ill [deed](#). Therefore no one should fight on a [holy](#) day even through the need of avoiding temporal harm.

On the contrary, It is written ([1 Maccabees 2:41](#)): The [Jews](#) rightly determined . . . saying: "Whosoever shall come up against us to fight on the [Sabbath-day](#), we will fight against him."

I answer that, The observance of [holy](#) days is no hindrance to those things which are ordained to man's safety, even that of his body. Hence [Our Lord](#) argued with the [Jews](#), saying ([John 7:23](#)): "Are you [angry](#) at Me because I have healed the whole [man](#) on the [Sabbath-day](#)?" Hence physicians may lawfully attend to their patients on [holy](#) days. Now there is much more reason for safeguarding the common weal (whereby many are saved from being slain, and innumerable [evils](#) both temporal and [spiritual](#) prevented), than the bodily safety of an [individual](#). Therefore, for the purpose of safeguarding the common weal of the [faithful](#), it is lawful to carry on a [war](#) on [holy](#) days, provided there be need for doing so:

because it would be to tempt [God](#), if notwithstanding such a need, one were to choose to refrain from fighting.

However, as soon as the need ceases, it is no longer lawful to fight on a [holy](#) day, for the reasons given: wherefore this suffices for the Replies to the Objections.