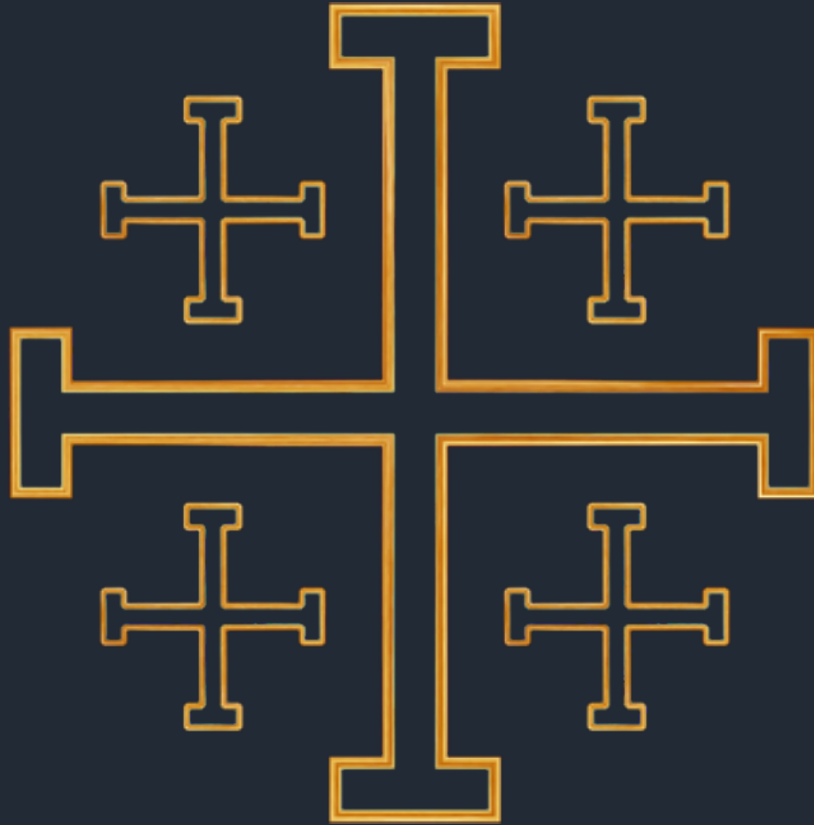


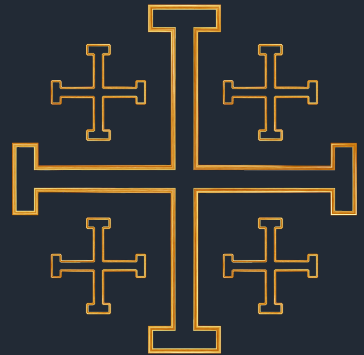
Self-Defence:



a Catholic Perspective

Contents:

- An Introduction to Self-Defence Within Christianity
- Weaponry and Self-Defence: Biblical References
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church
- Saint Thomas Aquinas
- Other Notable Contributions
- In Conclusion: a Catholic Perspective on Self-Defence



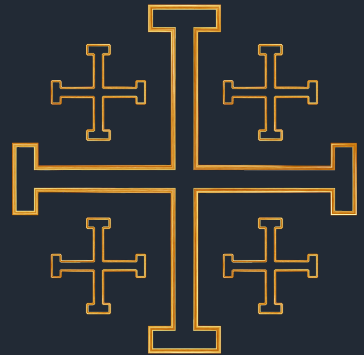
An Introduction to Self-Defence Within Christianity

‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ [1]

Love toward oneself remains a fundamental principle of morality. Therefore it is legitimate to insist on respect for one's own right to life. Someone who defends his life is not guilty of murder even if he is forced to deal his aggressor a lethal blow:

If a man in self-defense uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repels force with moderation, his defense will be lawful. . . . Nor is it necessary for salvation that a man omit the act of moderate self-defense to avoid killing the other man, since one is bound to take more care of one's own life than of another's. [2]

“You must not murder.” [3]



Weaponry and Self-Defence: Biblical References

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own mansion, his property is safe.” [4]

“But now,” he said, “take your money and a traveler’s bag. And if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one!” [5]

“Look, Lord,” they replied, “we have two swords among us.”

“That’s enough,” he said. [6]

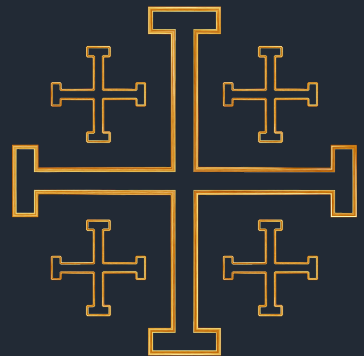
He trains my hands for battle; He strengthens my arm to draw a bronze bow. [7]

Praise the LORD, who is my rock. He trains my hands for war and gives my fingers skill for battle. [8]

He trains my hands for war; He strengthens my arm to draw a bronze bow. [9]



Fig. 1 – Depiction of St. Paul, 1426.

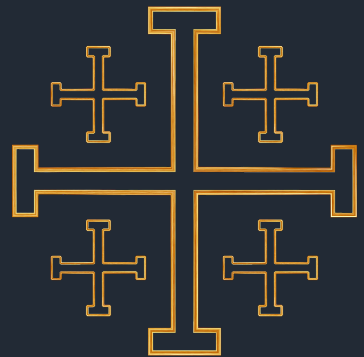


The Catechism of the Catholic Church

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If a man in self-defense uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repels force with moderation, his defense will be lawful. . . . Nor is it necessary for salvation that a man omit the act of moderate self-defense to avoid killing the other man, since one is bound to take more care of one's own life than of another's. [10]

Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm. For this reason, those who legitimately hold authority also have the right to use arms to repel aggressors against the civil community entrusted to their responsibility. [11]



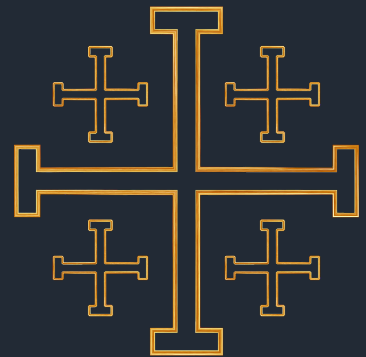
Saint Thomas Aquinas

It is written (Ex. 22:2): "If a thief be found breaking into a house or undermining it, and be wounded so as to die; he that slew him shall not be guilty of blood." Now it is much more lawful to defend one's life than one's house. Therefore neither is a man guilty of murder if he kill another in defense of his own life. [12]

Accordingly the act of self-defense may have two effects, one is the saving of one's life, the other is the slaying of the aggressor. Therefore this act, since one's intention is to save one's own life, is not unlawful, seeing that it is natural to everything to keep itself in "being," as far as possible. And yet, though proceeding from a good intention, an act may be rendered unlawful, if it be out of proportion to the end. Wherefore if a man, in self-defense, uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repel force with moderation his defense will be lawful. [13]



Fig. 2 – Depiction of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1478.

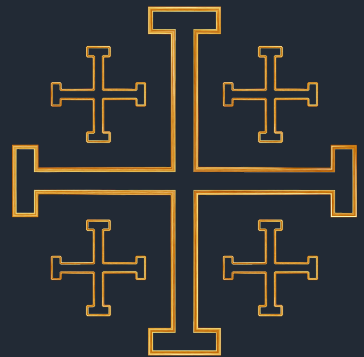


Other Notable Contributions

Human life is sacred because – from its beginning – it involves the creative action of God. [14]

Certainly, the intrinsic value of life and the duty to love oneself no less than others are the basis of a true right to self-defence. The demanding commandment of love of neighbour, set forth in the Old Testament and confirmed by Jesus, itself presupposes love of oneself as the basis of comparison. Consequently, no one can renounce the right to self-defence out of lack of love for life or for self. Unfortunately it happens that the need to render the aggressor incapable of causing harm sometimes involves taking his life. In this case, the fatal outcome is attributable to the aggressor whose action brought it about, even though he may not be morally responsible because of a lack of the use of reason. [15]

It is lawful to kill when fighting in a just war; when carrying out by order of the Supreme Authority a sentence of death in punishment of a crime; and, finally, in cases of necessary and lawful defence of one's own life against an unjust aggressor. [16]



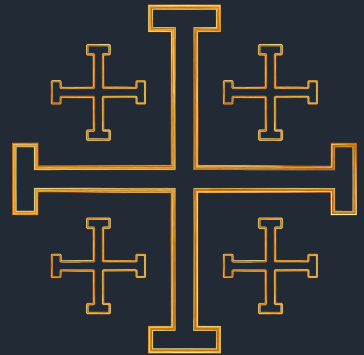
In Conclusion: A Catholic Perspective on Self-Defence

*A man finds three things which he is to love:
God, himself, and his neighbour; for a man
who loves God does not err in loving
himself. [17]*



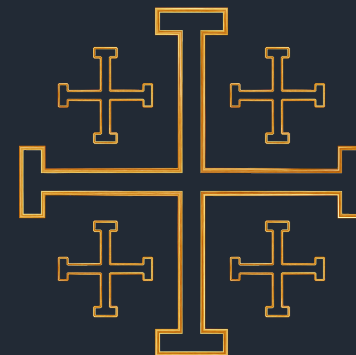
Fig. 3 – Rittenhouse collapses into tears upon verdict.

*“The jury reached the correct verdict – self-defence is not illegal – and . . .
I’m glad that everything went well. It’s been a rough journey, but we made it
through.” [18]*



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- [1] New Living Translation, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Tyndale House Publishers, 1996) Matthew 22:39.
- [2] Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), para. 2264.
- [3] Holy Bible, Exodus 20:13.
- [4] Ibid., Luke 11:21.
- [5] Ibid., Luke 22:36.
- [6] Ibid., Luke 22:38.
- [7] Ibid., Psalm 18:34.
- [8] Ibid., Psalm 144:1.
- [9] Ibid., II Samuel 22:35.
- [10] Catholic Church, *Catechism*, para. 2264.
- [11] Ibid., para. 2265.
- [12] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, II-II, Q. 64, Art. 7, ad. 5, s. c.
- [13] Ibid., II-II, Q. 64, Art. 7, ad. 5, co.
- [14] John XXIII, Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, III: AAS 53 (1961) 447; cf. John Paul II, *Discourse to priests participating in a seminar on "Responsible Procreation"*, 17 September 1983, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VI, 2 (1983) 562.
- [15] John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitæ: the Encyclical of Pope St. John Paul II* (Rome: Vatican City, 1995), ch. III, para. 55.
- [16] St. Pius X, *The Catechism of Pope St. Pius X* (Rome: Vatican City, 1905), The Fifth Commandment, Q. 3.
- [17] Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 941.
- [18] Patrick Reilly, The New York Post, *A Smiling Kyle Rittenhouse Says Jury Came to 'Correct Verdict' in Tucker Carlson Interview* (2021) <https://nypost.com/2021/11/19/kyle-rittenhouse-interview-with-tucker-carlson-to-air-on-monday/> [accessed 27th November 2021].

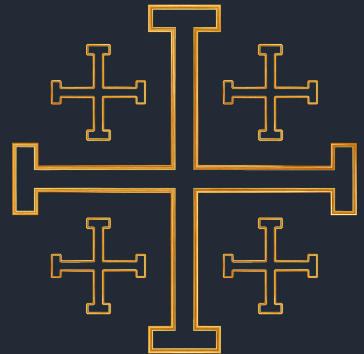


Visuals:

Fig. 1 – “Saint Paul”, Masaccio, 1426, Tempera on wood, 51 x 30 cm, Museo Nazionale, Pisa.

Fig. 2 – “Saint Thomas Aquinas, Crivelli, 1476, Tempera on poplar, 60.5 x 39.5 cm, The National Gallery, London.

Fig. 3 – AP Photo, The Associated Press, *‘Kyle Rittenhouse is comforted by his lawyer as he was acquitted of all charges at the Kenosha County Courthouse in Kenosha, Wis., on Friday, Nov. 19, 2021. The jury came back with its verdict after close to 3 1/2 days of deliberation.’* (19th November 2021) <https://apnews.com/article/kyle-rittenhouse-wisconsin-shootings-kenosha-acquittals-cd9769563ad47f9f389f225c6ecd45c5/gallery/7f526b8a1b414dddb94251cbfcff035f> [accessed 27th November 2021].



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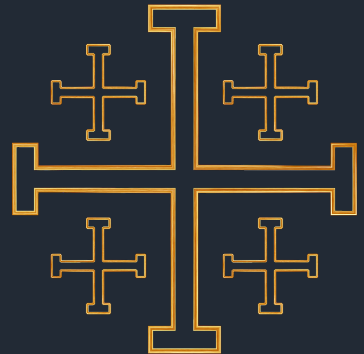
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Script (Part 1 of 2):

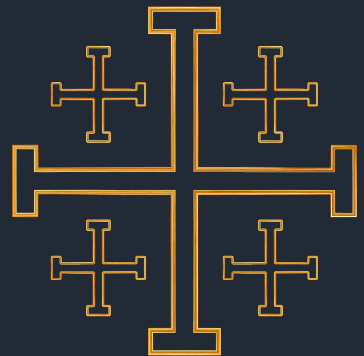
Today, we're going to be identifying and assessing the concept of self-defence from a *Catholic* perspective – with reference to scripture, within its historical context, alongside other key documents of traditional Christian teaching.

To give a brief overview of today's presentation, the subject of self-defence will be explored within six parts. We will begin with an introduction to the concept within Christianity. Next, we will refer to the religion's most authoritative text, pointing out specific references to weaponry and self-defence within scripture. From there, we will establish the *Catholic* position, with reference to the *second most* authoritative text for this denomination – the Catechism. Contributions will be sought from Saint Thomas Aquinas and other pious and papal people of note, before tying our discoveries together in conclusion with a current case of cultural significance.

In order to uphold the commandment asserted by Jesus in the Book of Matthew – to 'love your neighbour as yourself' – one must first acknowledge and insist upon a respect for one's own right to life. Love towards *oneself* is described in the Catechism as a 'fundamental principle of morality'. This Catholic concern for the sanctity of life dovetails perfectly with the specific use of the word 'murder' – as opposed to 'kill' – in the Ten Commandments. One might reasonably factor intent and circumstance into the distinction between these verbs. Murder is antithetical to the intrinsic value of life espoused by Catholic teaching.

In the first century, swords were commonly carried as weapons of self-defence. After years of travelling with Jesus, the disciples still carried swords. The scripture from Luke on-screen certainly suggests that weaponry was not prohibited. In the garden of Gethsemane, for example, Peter goes so far as to *use* his sword – referenced in Luke 22:38. Dating back even further, the idea of weaponry and self-defence is also referenced in the books of II Samuel and Psalms.

Citing the great theological reasoning of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Catechism deems proportional acts of self-defence as lawful; it is not considered murder to defend oneself, even if that defence results in a lethal blow. However – and here's the distinction that harks back to Exodus – the repelling of force must be *proportional* to the threat, as opposed to excessive. As social beings, the right to self-defence is not limited to the individual; in fact, the right to defend *others* from an 'unjust aggressor' is described by the Catechism as a 'grave duty' – a legitimate act for the common good of one's family, one's community, or one's country.



Script (Part 2 of 2):

Aquinas refers to another quote from Exodus, concerned – in particular – with the protection of property. Scripture describes a scenario in which a trespassing thief is struck and killed. Proportional force within a last-resort mentality is promoted by this passage, which does – however – assert that ‘if it happens in *daylight*, the one who killed the thief is guilty of murder’. The assumption here is that one is afforded more options during daylight than during the night. Lethal force must *only* be used when all other options have been exhausted. Aquinas builds on this idea of protecting the home, claiming that the defence of one’s life is surely ‘much more lawful’ than the defence of one’s property. It is natural, Aquinas argues, for a human to want to remain in a state of being. He divides self-defence into two effects: the saving of one’s life and the slaying of an aggressor. The lawfulness of an act of self-defence is dependent upon intent and moderation of force.

As created beings, Catholics acknowledge the sanctity of life with reference to its Creator. In order to love one’s neighbour, one must first possess a love of *oneself* as a basis of comparison. The God-given right to self-defence is predicated on the intrinsic value of life. Despite this, there *are* circumstances where the need to render an aggressor incapable to cause harm *sometimes* requires lethal force. Although a subject not taken lightly, the value of self-defence is promoted throughout many key Catholic documents – extending beyond the personal and familial, to matters of just war and capital punishment.

Self-defence is a concept deeply rooted in a Catholic understanding of the sanctity of life. Scripture makes reference to the possession of weaponry, under the instruction of Jesus Himself; great theological minds have both directly and indirectly expanded upon this, from Augustine to Aquinas; and the right to defend oneself with *proportional* force has been supported by Catholic doctrine ever since. The taking of a human life in self-defence is a grave decision for one to make; it is an act that is often dictated by split-second choices in high-pressure circumstances. A most recent example would be the case of Kyle Rittenhouse – a case of cultural significance with regards to American citizens and their right to defend themselves, against an aggressor, under life-threatening circumstances. Kyle Rittenhouse was acquitted of all charges by a jury of his peers. Dating back to the Founding Fathers, it is well understood that scripture – Exodus 22:2 in particular – underpins the rationale and justification for “Castle Doctrine” and “Stand Your Ground” laws, which form the basis for self-defence in the American judicial system. In his first interview since he was found not guilty on all charges, Rittenhouse insisted “The jury reached the correct verdict – self-defence is not illegal – and . . . I’m glad that everything went well. It’s been a rough journey, but we made it through.” In conclusion, one might reasonably assert that a Catholic perspective on the right to self-defence is – to this day – enshrined within U.S. law.

