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"Official Catholic Social Thought on Gospel Nonviolence"

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What are the roots, meaning, significance, role, and practices of ***Gospel Nonviolence****?*
What are its ***history and context****, as well as its recent* ***direction or trajectory****?*

Historical Overview

Gospel nonviolence has been an essential characteristic of Christianity since the first century. To be a disciple of Jesus is live out of the reign of God, as embodied in his command to "love your enemies and do good to those who persecute you….so that you may be children of your father in heaven" (Mt 5: 44, 45). The example and teaching of Jesus embody love, inclusion, forgiveness, willingness, and sacrifice. The early church excluded the shedding of blood for all his followers. Until the fourth century, nonviolence, including refusal of military service, was the Christian norm, although from the second century on, there is evidence that some Christians in fact served in the Roman army.

Just war tradition or theory began to develop in the age of Constantine, and became dominant as Christians gained access to and responsibility for government and political power, eventually even generating a crusade ideology, in which violence was claimed to serve the gospel itself. The two main shapers of Christian just war theory were Augustine (and his teacher Ambrose) and Thomas Aquinas (fourth and thirteenth centuries, respectively). Though both recognized gospel nonviolence, Augustine limited it to an inward intention of love, when establishing peace necessitates war. Aquinas thought war to defend the common good could be justified within carefully defined limits. For Aquinas, strict gospel nonviolence was to be embodied by the clergy, who imitate Christ on the altar. Nevertheless, pacifist ideals and peace movements, such as the Peace of God and Truce of God, continued throughout the middle ages and into the modern era. In the thirteenth century, Francis of Assisi crossed crusader lines to preach the gospel to the caliph of Egypt. In the sixteenth century, Desiderius Erasmus depicted war as inhumane and unholy,

especially deplored violence by those claiming to act in God's name, and saw peace as so necessary to the blessings of life that war should be avoided at virtually any cost.

Although just war theory has historically been the most influential framework for Catholic teaching on the political use of force, it has always been secondary to the Catholic Christian commitment to peace. In fact, just war theory was and is intended primarily to restrain not validate war. Just war theory was not endorsed officially by the Roman Catholic Church until the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992, no. 2309). Justification of force has been overshadowed in the tradition overall, in Catholic social thought, and in papal teachings, by exhortations to nonviolence and peace. Modern popes have lent personal support to efforts to mediate international conflicts nonviolently, including Pius IX, Leo XIII, and Pius X. Most notable in this regard is Benedict XV, an Italian elected in 1914, just as World War I was beginning. Although the Italian episcopacy supported the war, and Catholics around the world were divided on it, Benedict used his first encyclical to deplore the horror of modern weapons. Benedict saw just war theory as merely excusing war and as unable to deal with the present-day reality of war. He called for a 1914 Christmas truce, opened a Vatican office to reunite prisoners and families, and dedicated scarce Vatican funds to relief efforts. Like his predecessors, Pius XII, pope during World War II, constantly held up the ideal of peace as growing from spirituality, justice and charity.

In his 1944, 1948, and 1956 Christmas messages, however, Pius XII alluded to just war criteria when he asserted the right of nations to defend themselves against unjust attack. *Gaudium et spes* likewise asserts the right of governments to "legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted" (no. 79). Perhaps paradoxically, the twentieth century also saw the diminution of the just war emphasis in Catholic social teaching, especially after the Second Vatican Council (1965). Since the 1960's, official Catholic teaching has uniformly deplored the destruction and disaster of war, pressing the point that it always represents a moral failure. Although the idea and theory of a just war has not officially been repudiated, no pope since the Council has approved a war, or even mounted a

defense of the justice of war in principle. In fact, the criteria of just war, if applied stringently, may themselves eliminate the possibility of a just modern war. The use of force for humanitarian purposes--in cases of horrific threats to human life, human security, and social order—is still acknowledged by Catholic teaching. Yet the focus of recent official statements certainly has been on nonviolence, and on the incompatibility of violence with transformational justice. Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have repeatedly denounced the savagery of war. John Paul, Benedict and Francis have all echoed Paul VI's cry, "No more war, war never again!"

Popes, other Catholic leaders, and official Catholic organizations have made the nonviolent resolution of conflict a moral and practical priority through their teachings, symbolic actions, and work to end conflicts and build peace. The Catholic Church urges the resolution of conflicts by peaceful, nonviolent and democratic means, insisting that the way to genuine peace lies in the creation of just and participatory social, economic, and political relations and institutions. In fact, it might be said that the distinctively Catholic contribution to the Christian tradition of gospel nonviolence is to put the emphasis on constructive and practical efforts to build the conditions of peace nonviolently, in cooperation with other social entities--rather than simply to repudiate violence and refuse political participation as a countercultural act of witness. In the words of Paul VI, "If you want peace, work for justice" (1972 World Day of Peace Message).

Focus: The Priority of Gospel Nonviolence From Vatican II Onward

Both the Council document *Gaudium et spes* (1965) and John XXIII's *Pacem in terris* (1963) were written at the height of the Cold War, and in light of the advent of nuclear weapons, so terrifyingly balanced by the superpowers' policy of "mutual assured destruction" at the edge of planetary disaster. Both documents pose the question whether just war criteria need to be thoroughly reconsidered, and contemplate a possibility that John XXIII explicitly puts forth: "it is contrary to reason to hold that war is now a suitable way to restore rights which have been violated" (*Pacem in terris*, no. 127; cf. *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 79-80). *Gaudium et spes* still legitimates defensive wars, and John XXIII does not definitively exclude them.

Yet they agree that modern war threatens unimaginable destruction, and see the arms race as a clear and present cause of global injustice. War and preparation for war are placed under ever more stringent moral scrutiny and targeted by mounting moral disapprobation (*Pacem in terris*, nos. 112-13; *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 80-81.).

The foundation and heart of these two documents, however, is not the consideration of war. It is the proclamation of a gospel-inspired and nonviolent peace, capable of engendering lasting trust among nations. Pope John appeals both to the Christian faithful and to "all men of good will," praying that Christ will banish "whatever might endanger peace" and "transform all men into witnesses of truth, justice and brotherly love." "Besides caring for the proper material welfare of their peoples," rulers should "also guarantee them the fairest gift of peace" (no. 171). *Gaudium et spes* captures the practical and social meaning of gospel nonviolence in very similar terms. Praising all who "renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their right," it calls Christians "to 'practice the truth in love' (Eph. 4:15) and to join with all true peacemakers in pleading for peace and bringing it about" (no. 78). In accord with nonviolence as an authentically Christian and human mandate and practice, the Council for the first time recognizes a right of individual conscientious objection to bearing arms (no. 79).

Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict, and Francis all solidify and advance this trajectory, accentuating the tensions latent in a tradition that has historically justified war, while holding up peace as it guiding social ideal. New developments include: language that more strongly contrasts war and nonviolent peace, even to the point of excluding violence entirely; the marginalization and even abandonment of explicit validation of defensive war as just; the introduction by John Paul of a duty of humanitarian intervention (not excluding armed force); a strengthening and elaboration of the connection between practical work for justice ("development"), nonviolence, and peace; incorporation of environmental reasons to avoid war; the need for broad social conversion; and, with Francis, an explicit turn to interreligious as well as intercultural and international partners.

Paul VI emphasizes that "reconciliation is the way to Peace" (1975 World Day of Peace Message), declaring "No more war, war never again! Peace, it is peace

which must guide the destinies of people and of all mankind" (1965 Address to the United Nations General Assembly). Not only does he hope (with *Gaudium et spes*) that war will eventually be prohibited by international law (1975 World Day of Peace Message). He states in no uncertain terms that "the Church cannot accept violence, especially the force of arms" (*Evangelii nuntiani*, no. 37, 1975), and holds up Gandhi's example to urge that nonviolence can become a national and international principle of action (1976 World Day of Peace Message). Nevertheless, he does seem to accept the legitimacy of armed revolution to resist grave offenses to human dignity and the common good (*Populorum progressio*, no. 31). This pope's greatest contribution is his insistence that the only true way to peace is to engage social partners constructively to end injustice, and actualize human rights, economic justice, and stable, participatory social and political institutions. The more privileged nations and peoples have a special responsibility. "If you want peace work for justice" (1972 World Day of Peace Message; citing the 1971 Synod of Bishops' *Justitio in mundi*, no. 6). And most famously, "the new name for peace is development"-- though not on a neoliberal or unrestrained market model (*Populorum progressio*, no. 87).

John Paul II announces just as clearly that "Violence is evil," "a lie," and "the enemy of justice" (Homily at Drogheda, Ireland, 18-20, 1979; quoted in the 2006 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 496). Like previous popes, John Paul sees violence as leading to more injustice, and deplores the scale of modern warfare. Combining Paul VI's distinctive contribution with his own call for solidarity as an active commitment to the common good of all, he titles his 1987 World Day of Peace Message "Development and Solidarity: Two Keys to Peace." Yet the 1990's saw humanitarian disasters in the face of international apathy or ineffectiveness in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Somalia. Hence this pope validates the new concept of "humanitarian intervention" (2002 World Day of Peace Message, no. 11). As he asserted regarding Bosnia, when "populations are succumbing to the attacks of an unjust aggressor, States no longer have a "right to indifference". It seems clear that their duty is to disarm this aggressor, if all other means have proved ineffective" (Address to the Diplomatic Corps, January 16, 1993).

Along the same lines, and responding again to recent events, John Paul allows for a nation's right of defense against terrorism (2002 World Day of Peace Message, no. 5), even while holding up forgiveness and interreligious cooperation as by far the better path. Yet when confronted in advance with specific military interventions such as the Gulf War and a US invasion of Iraq, John Paul rejects the possibility of war as "a decline for humanity," (Address to the Diplomatic Corps, no. 7, 1991), and "a defeat for humanity" (Address to the Diplomatic Corps, no. 4, 2003). Rejecting the inevitability of war in both cases, he urges dialogue and diplomacy in accord with international law.

Benedict XVI returns to the basic question whether a just war can even exist today, agrees that the war against Iraq was unjust, and notes that modern weapons inevitably violate noncombatants ("Cardinal Ratzinger on the Abridged Version of Catechism," Zenit, 2003). "Violence never comes from God" (Angelus Address, 2007). Specifically refusing violence and embracing gospel nonviolence, Benedict calls "love your enemies" its "magna carta." Nonviolence is for Christians not merely a behavioral strategy, much less a form of obedience to a heteronomous norm. It is "a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God's love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone" (Angelus Address, 2007; see also Good Friday message, 2011). "Violence is contrary to the Kingdom of God" (Angelus Address, 2012). On a visit to Cameroon, Benedict asserted that all genuine religion rejects violence in any form ("The Saving Message of the Gospel Needs to be Proclaimed," 2009).

Nevertheless, like his predecessor, Benedict endorses humanitarian intervention under the rubric "responsibility to protect." "Recognition of the unity of the human family, and attention to the innate dignity of every man and woman, today find renewed emphasis in the principle of the responsibility to protect" (Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations, New York, 2008). Like John Paul II, Benedict mentions humanitarian intervention or the responsibility to protect in international contexts such as UN intervention, or intervention by an international coalition, in which the presumable and implied means is armed force. Neither explicitly rejects this possibility. Yet, perhaps reflecting skepticism about

whether violence can actually end violence, Benedict adds in *Caritas in veritate* that the responsibility to protect must be implemented "in innovative ways" (no. 7, 2009).

Benedict follows both Paul VI and John Paul II in urging economic and political "development" as a necessary part of the solution to social problems, and the best way to prevent and remedy injustices. He repeatedly confirms this aspect of Catholic social teaching in his World Day of Peace Messages (2009, 2010, 2010), and makes it the centerpiece of *Caritas in veritate*, an encyclical written to commemorate *Populorum progressio.*

It will come as no surprise that Pope Francis reaffirms these same themes, often in the very same phrases. He summons international parties in conflict to seek peace by dialogue, reconciliation, negotiation and compromise. He appeals repeatedly for nonproliferation and disarmament, especially of nuclear arms. Praying for peace in Egypt, Francis reiterates that "the true force of the Christian is the force of truth and love, which means rejecting all violence. Faith and violence are incompatible!" The way of Jesus is the way of peace, reconciliation, "living for God and for others." The strength of the Christian is "the force of meekness, the force of love" (Angelus Address, August 19, 2013). When, like John Paul and Benedict, Francis is confronted by the prospect of a military intervention in Syria by US and French "superpower," he is insistent that "War brings on war! Violence brings on violence" (Angelus Address, August 31, 2013).

Expanding on these themes, he adds,

> My Christian faith urges me to look to the Cross…. *violence is not answered with violence*, death is not answered with the language of death. In the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue, and peace is spoken. This evening, I ask the Lord that we Christians, and our brothers and sisters of other religions, and every man and woman of good will, cry out forcefully: *violence and war are never the way to peace!* …. War always marks the failure of peace, it is always a defeat for humanity. Let the words of Pope Paul VI resound again: 'No more

> one against the other, no more, never! ... war never again, never again war!'. 'Peace expresses itself only in peace, a peace which is not separate from the demands of justice but which is fostered by personal sacrifice, clemency, mercy and love'. Forgiveness, dialogue, reconciliation – these are the words of peace, in beloved Syria, in the Middle East, in all the world! ("Vigil of Prayer for Peace" [in Syria], 2013).

After the publication of *Laudato Si'*, in which he connected war and ecological destruction (no. 56), Pope Francis urged the United Nations in New York to support sustainable development while protecting the environment. He decried the hypocrisy of talking about peace while manufacturing arms; and rebuked international leaders for failing to find peaceful solutions to global conflicts, especially in the Middle East (Address to the General Assembly of the UN, 2015).

Some ambiguity in Pope Francis's position on violent force has been introduced regarding the dilemma of how to defeat the international terrorist organization, the so-called Islamic State (IS or ISIS). In August 2014, the pope remarked informally to reporters that dialogue even with Isis should not be considered a "lost cause" (http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/11/27/pope-francis-door-is-always-open-to-dialogue-with-isis/). Yet, "I can only say that it is licit to stop the unjust aggressor. I underscore the verb 'stop'; I don't say bomb, make war — stop him. The means by which he may be stopped should be evaluated" (http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/385672/pope-francis-iraq-kathryn-jean-lopez).

Ordinarily, one would assume that stopping unjust armed aggression calls for humanitarian intervention and/or self-defense, in the form of taking up arms against a very violent and very dangerous opponent. Yet, perhaps going beyond John Paul and Benedict, Francis explicitly adds that he is not endorsing bombs and war. Left unclear is whether he envisions more limited and carefully targeted uses of violence as a last resort; or whether he has in mind such measures as nonviolent peacekeeping, civil society acts of nonviolent resistance and protest, or initiatives

by Islamic religious leaders and faith communities to deter membership in ISIS. In March 2015, Silvano Tomasi, then the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, did endorse military action against ISIS (but not in Syria), applying just war criteria. He urged that a political solution be sought first, yet reminded heads of state and their representatives that inaction would lead to moral culpability similar to that following, for example, the genocide in Rwanda. Tomasi cautioned that any intervention should be guided by UN authority, and include the Muslim states of the Middle East. (http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-vatican-idUSKBN0MA0WX20150314). The tension continues.

A new or at least more visible dimension of the endorsement of gospel nonviolence by recent popes is their awareness that ethical analyses, Church teachings and publicly accepted ideals and norms are one thing; commitment, solidarity, and the political will to live up to ideals and abide by norms are another. Therefore condemning violence is not enough; a huge task remains to convert hearts and minds, and to show that another way is truly possible. A similar awareness is manifest in *Laudato Si's* use of prayer and poetry, its invocation of saints and heroes, its multiple references to local bishops conferences, its appeal to interreligious spirituality and commitment, and its accompaniment by a Vatican video illustrating the beauty and endangerment of "our common home." It is crucial to mobilize nations, peoples, communities, and members of faith traditions, by awakening imaginations, inspiring new identities, and creating wider worldviews.

In this vein, it is important to note that public symbolic actions by recent popes go beyond "teaching" in the sense of pronouncements and documents. Symbolic actions and events creatively reach out to those of many faiths, and span divisions that spawn violence. One example is the well-publicized prayer vigil for peace in Syria that Francis held in St. Peter's Square in September 2013. He was joined by 100,000 peace advocates, even as international leaders debated the possibility of military action. Another example is the prayer of three successive popes—John Paul, Benedict and Francis—at the Western Wall or "Wailing Wall" in Jerusalem, the remnants of a platform on which the Second Temple was built. Their widely circulated and iconic images represent Christian repentance of suffering

caused to the Jews, as well as hope for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The latter message was brought home powerfully (and controversially) by Francis's additional visit to the "wall of separation" in Bethlehem.

Though the focus of this discussion has been on post-Vatican II popes, it is important to realize that the most effective "official" teachers of gospel nonviolence in local contexts are the local episcopacy, accompanied by clergy, religious, pastoral ministers, catechists, and community workers, and members of base communities. Their existential perspective is frequently very different from that of high-level Vatican teachers, heads of state, and international leaders who have the power and the prerogative to deliberate about unleashing their considerable military arsenals (or even a UN peacekeeping force) against less powerful aggressors. A few illustrative examples will have to suffice.

In Medellín, Colombia (1968), the Conference of Latin American Bishops named the support by political authorities of an oppressive elite as a major source of violence, and recognized structural injustice as a form of "institutionalized violence." They called for a Church that is not only nonviolent, but in solidarity with the poor. In 1983, the bishops of the United States reflected their own cultural situation within a superpower nation, when they embraced gospel nonviolence in the first half of their pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace;" yet went on in the second half to endorse a policy of "strictly conditioned" nuclear deterrence which placed the lives of millions and the health of the entire planet in jeopardy. Yet the 1993 anniversary letter, "The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace" was more critical of just war theory, called for "peaceable virtues," and underlined the potential of nonviolence to be a principle of political debate and government decisions.

In 2009, the Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) delegates to the Synod for Africa linked violent conflicts to religious divisions, the global economic recession, poor leadership and corruption, environmental crises, HIV/AIDS, and the lack of evangelization and spirituality with strong cultural as well as Christian roots. Simple promulgation of Catholic social teaching is hardly an adequate remedy. True evangelization must include small Christian communities, families, education, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, and the participation of

women and youth. In 2014, the Bishops of Eastern Africa spoke to the crisis in South Sudan. Like recent popes they cited the bible in support of God's mandate of peace, and Christ's call to reconciliation. They called for a cessation of hostilities. But they also appealed for international humanitarian support, "intervention" on behalf of the Sudanese people whose human rights are violated, security for refugees, and participation of all stakeholders in negotiations.

In 2014, the Conference of Latin Bishops of the Arab Regions (CELRA) reported on the "horrible" conditions and levels of suffering in Syria and Iraq. Reflecting some of the tension in the papal voice on this situation, they asserted that "without true reconciliation based on justice and mutual forgiveness there will be no peace;" yet uphold "the right of the oppressed to self-defense." Moreover, they urged "the international community" to use "proportionate force to stop aggression and injustice against ethnic and religious minorities." Finally, the international Synod of Bishops gathered in Rome in 2015 to discuss the family issued an appeal for resolution of the situations of conflict in the Middle East, Africa and Ukraine. They referenced "unspeakable atrocities" and "bloody conflicts" that have continued for years. But they also expressed their conviction that peace without force is possible. "Reconciliation is the fruit of fraternity, justice, respect and forgiveness."

Much could be written about international Catholic peacebuilding organizations such as Caritas Internationalis, Catholic Relief Services, the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the Community of Sant' Egidio, Maryknoll, Franciscans International, Jesuit Relief Services, Pax Christi International, RENEW International and Peacebuilders Initiative, all united around gospel nonviolence (http://cpn.nd.edu/resources-for-scholars-clergy-and-practitioners/international-catholic-peacebuilding-organizations/). These too work to create the conditions of peace through justice; are committed to resourceful and practical ways of nonviolence; often work in the midst of ongoing violence; are willing to take great risks in the name of the gospel; and bridge ethnic, racial, and religious divisions. These too are embodiments of Catholic social tradition and action, and are helping to define the current trajectory and future of gospel nonviolence, as well as its potential for success.

Conclusion

While recent official Catholic social teaching has certainly amplified and made central the voice of gospel nonviolence, it is clear that official teaching to date has not spoken with one voice only. This reality is open to **a variety of interpretations**. For example: 1. A simple lack of coherence in the Catholic position, deriving perhaps from different historical contexts and interests; 2. An interpretation of papal statements as rhetorically creative, pastoral interventions regarding ad hoc problems, not efforts to formulate a full theoretical analysis of ethical-political obligations and norms; 3. A deep and real "Augustinian" ambiguity within Christian social responsibility in a fallen world, reflected in the Church's teaching and in its practical responses; 4. A qualified but sure endorsement of just war theory in Catholic teaching, with pleas for nonviolence a necessary reminder that the just war criteria must be stringently applied; 5. A gradual yet sure shift from the precedence of just war theory to gospel nonviolence, though recalcitrant vestiges of the former still appear.

Without settling whether any or none of these interpretations are adequate, let me offer five **hypotheses about the trajectory and future direction** of Catholic teaching on nonviolence. These hypotheses are inferred from the present actual state of Catholic social teaching on nonviolence, not from an evaluation of desirable changes. 1. The heart of Christian identity, and hence of the Catholic message on nonviolence, is to commit wholeheartedly to *living* the gospel and the reign of God. This means to prioritize love, compassion, reconciliation and "mercy" at the existential level; and to engage in nonviolent *practices* of justice and reconciliation. 2. Situations of conflict or injustice must be approached with the mentality of "there has to be a better way." As Francis said to Sant' Egidio in 2014, "War is never a necessity, nor is it inevitable. Another way can always be found." 3. Leave the possible use of violence *in extremis* on the table, but don't expend Christian or Catholic moral capital to debate or justify particular uses of violence (others are more than ready to do so). 4. More broadly, eliminate the elaboration or refinement of "Christian just war theory" as a Catholic social teaching project. Replace it with a theology and ethics of peace and peacebuilding (such as "just peace"). 5. Recognize

that the political success of gospel nonviolence depends on broad social conversion and mobilization. Seek ways in which grassroots activism, networking, and public symbolic actions can bring that about.