

Toward a Foundational Theology of Nonviolence

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Introduction

The command to love our enemies is the magna carta of Christian nonviolence. It does not consist in succumbing to evil... but in responding to evil with good and thereby breaking the chain of injustice.

- Pope Benedict XVI

To be true followers of Jesus today...includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.

- Pope Francis

Amid the systemic violence facing our world and the tremendous suffering it inflicts, the Catholic Church is increasingly reaffirming the centrality of active nonviolence to the vision and message of Jesus, to the life and practice of the Church, and to its vocation to heal and reconcile both people and planet Earth. As part of this growing recommitment, Pope Francis has repeatedly focused attention on nonviolence as a core matter of the Gospel, and Christian thinkers have increasingly illuminated its theological principles.

There remains much work to be done, however, to develop a coherent theology of nonviolence, that is, a principled nonviolence rooted in the nature and action of God. If nonviolence is viable it can only be because it is true, and it is only true if it corresponds to the way things really are, that is, the way God really is, together with the way God revealed Godself to be and the way that God has chosen to create and sustain and redeem the world.

The following contributes to the development of a foundational theology of nonviolence by examining some of the central theological loci of the Christian tradition for what they can tell us about this subject. This analysis is undertaken from within the Christian tradition to spell out the implications of what Christians affirm to be true.

In this text, we begin with Genesis and generally move in chronological order through the Scriptures. But this task also includes engaging with God's call to humanity throughout history to live God's nonviolence. Knowing that the human family's calling is to live the way of nonviolence and the ever-growing actualization of being sisters and brothers to all – but also painfully aware that our experience in history is marked by the searing harm we do to each other personally and systemically – we approach the development of a theology of nonviolence as our generation's effort to retrieve and proclaim the shape that God's absolute peace, mercy, love, and justice take in the midst of a world fraught with violence: the incarnational nonviolence of Christ Jesus.

Reading the signs of the times, we commit to a project that, though rife with the limitations of our human condition and language, witnesses to the God of nonviolence who calls all of humanity to the nonviolence of God's universal call. The Church – the People of God – experiences this call through discipleship, community, prayer, sacrament, ministry and discernment under the guidance and creative power of the Holy Spirit.

In this document we explore a theology of nonviolence in light of classic theological categories: Creation and Anthropology, Biblical Foundations, Christology, Pneumatology, Eschatology and Ecclesiology.

A Note on Nonviolence

What do we mean by nonviolence?

Even though nonviolence has often been dismissed as passive, ineffective and otherworldly, we are presently in the midst of a revolution in our understanding of this powerful alternative to both violence and passivity.

Many understandings of nonviolence have been put forward. Nonviolence is the love that does justice (Martin Luther King, Jr.), peacemaking by peaceful means (Johan Galtung), transforming power (Alternatives to Violence), cooperative power (Jonathan Schell), and love in action (Dorothy Day). It is a stand against violence without violence (Stellan Vinthagen). It is an active form of resistance to systems of privilege and domination, a philosophy for liberation, an approach to movement building, a tactic of non-cooperation and a practice we can employ to transform the world (War Resisters League).

In its most basic sense, nonviolence is a process that actively opposes violence without using violence, works to resolve conflict and seeks just and peaceful alternatives.

Each of these three dimensions of a robust understanding of nonviolence is woven throughout the life and mission of Jesus. Unlike a strictly strategic nonviolence, however, Gospel nonviolence begins, not with strategies or methods, but with a fundamental call to a way of life rooted in God's vision for humanity. Gospel nonviolence is the historical and ethical affirmation of the intra-Trinitarian love on which all creation hinges and unfolds.

Jesus' nonviolence is rooted in his faithful response to the God who has created a world that is good and who calls humanity to live nonviolently and justly, grounded in a recognition of the sacramental presence of God among us. The nonviolence of Jesus springs from a foundational understanding of God and of the life God calls us to live. Nurtured and guided by the Holy Spirit, Christian nonviolence is a way of life and discipleship – including conversion, community, service and action – rooted in the Gospel that expressly stands against violence without violence; strives to engage, transform and resolve conflict to foster reconciliation and unity; and tirelessly seeks justice and peace for all.¹

These descriptions derive, on the one hand, from the proliferation of research on nonviolent strategies, techniques and case studies (undertaken under the purview of peace studies and the emergent discipline of nonviolence studies over the past half-century) and, on the other hand, from the accelerating work of theologians and scripture scholars on Jesus' nonviolence, including those who have contributed to the following document.

This description of Gospel nonviolence captures key facets of Jesus' mission. Faced with a world rife with structural violence, Jesus proclaimed a new, nonviolent order rooted in the unconditional love of God. Jesus called his disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44), which includes respecting the image of God in all persons; to offer no violent resistance to one who does evil (Matthew 5:39); to become peacemakers; to forgive and repent; and to be abundantly merciful (Matthew 5-7). Jesus embodied nonviolence by actively resisting systemic dehumanization, as when he defied the Sabbath laws to heal the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1-6); when he confronted the powerful at the Temple and purified it (John 2:13-22); when he challenged, with peaceful determination, the men accusing a woman of adultery (John 8:1-11); and when on the night before he died he asked Peter to put down his sword (Matthew 26:52).

¹ Here is another, recent description: "Christian nonviolence is a way of life modeled after Jesus, one that completely rejects violence, actively confronts evil, and unconditionally loves others by practicing gracious hospitality, radical forgiveness, and deep compassion. Put simply, nonviolence is love in action. As Christians we must do everything in our power to stop oppression and correct injustice—and we must do this without resorting to violence. This is because loving all people unconditionally means we care about both the oppressed and the oppressor, the one being harmed and the one doing harm. Christian nonviolence emphasizes the sacredness of all persons and the need to treat everyone with respect, even those who seem terrible and unlovable." Eric A. Seibert, *Disarming the Church: Why Christians Must Forsake Violence to Follow Jesus and to Change the World* (Cascade Books, 2018).

Part I

Nonviolence, Creation and Anthropology

In the beginning, Genesis tells us, one God created everything with words.

The first creation story in Genesis is often compared to the Babylonians' *Enuma Elish*, but the contrasts are more important. For the Babylonians, creation came about through a war among the gods; the earth was created from the dead body of the slain goddess Tiamat, and humans from the blood of her murdered servant Kingu. In Genesis there is no rivalry among gods, no primordial violence on which to impose order. Humans are fallen creatures, but that means that there is something good to fall away from, unlike in the *Enuma Elish*, in which rivalry and violence are present from the start. The Fall means that the way things are is not the way things are meant to be, or really are in God's eyes.

Peace, in other words, is ontologically primary; nonviolence is the nature of creation. Sin is a distortion of what really is. As Augustine would later argue, evil has no being; it is a privation of good, not a mere lack, but a privation, meaning good existed first and then was taken away.

This is not all. Embedded in the primacy of nonviolence is the ultimacy of nonviolence; the ontology of nonviolence is inseparable from the eschatology of nonviolence, because the Fall means that the way things are is not the way things are meant to be, and therefore there is hope that things might yet be transformed to reflect their true nature. Any theology of nonviolence looks simultaneously to the beginning of creation and to the final end of creation in the eschaton.

Creation is Good and Without Violence

Creation, as narrated in Genesis 1, is good. While it is not necessary to take the first chapter of the Bible as a historical narrative, it expresses a theological intention – it is a poetic affirmation that God created everything in good order and considered it “good” (Gen 1:4.10.12.18.21.25.31). This hymnic comment on the creation insists on the fact that anything evil, disordered and destructive in creation is put into order and displaced by a good and ordered creation full of blessing.

In the first chapter of Genesis, there is no violence. While in poetry like the Babylonians' *Enuma Elish* rivalry and violence are present from the start, in this first biblical creation narrative there is no violence. There is even peace and nonviolence between the different creatures on earth. While our translations tell us that men and women should “subdue” the earth and “have dominion over” animals (Gen 1:28 ESV), it seems that the fact that humans are made as an image of God (Gen 1:27) means that they shall represent God on Earth and act according to God's creating intention, that is, blessing and caring.

What may be even more striking is the fact that all creatures in the first chapters of Genesis are vegetarians – not even lions or eagles use violence to kill and eat. Nor do humans eat the meat of animals. It is only after the Flood that God enables humankind to hunt, kill and eat animal flesh: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.” (Gen 9:3 ESV).

It seems therefore that “in the beginning,” as long as creation was as good as intended by God, it was deeply characterized by a complete absence of violence. Nonviolence is what God intended – it is a memory and a representation of the goodness of the beginning.

The Human Being Made in God's Image

Human beings are not only part of God's good creation but are even made in God's image (Gen 1:27) and therefore have a special responsibility regarding the goodness and nonviolence of creation.

Humans are created “in the image of God.” This means not only that the Bible's first chapter attributes a very high value to humankind, in comparison with other creatures, but also the highest responsibility. Some argue that the “image” referred to in this text is comparable to the “image” an absent sovereign might place in representation of himself. So the text would suggest that humans are “representatives” of God on earth and have to act according to God's interest in creation.

Humans are called to be guardians of creation (cf. Gen 2:15), of its goodness, its interrelatedness and of its wholeness. Only if this initial and primordial goodness and wholeness of creation and the integrity of everything created can be maintained, humanity can live up to the ideal of being a representative, an “image” of God.

Moreover, the human being is made for fraternization: to be brothers and sisters to all. Humankind is created in plural, as humans of different sexes, but without any mention of estrangement, enmity or violence between them. As children of the one God we are all called to be like brothers and sisters to each other.

The Powers, Though Created for Good, Have Fallen

The ontology of peace is even true concerning sin, which is a distortion of what really is. As underscored above, Augustine would later argue that evil has no being; it is a privation of good, not a mere lack, but a privation, meaning good existed first and then was taken away.

The fall of human beings did not only result in individual sins but also in sinful social structures. The powers and principalities that originally were part of the good creation turned – through human sin – into destructive forces threatening not only the life of human beings but also the creation as a whole (Rom 8:38; Gal 4:3; Eph 2:2; Col 2:20). Among these fallen powers, we can discover patterns of human scapegoating persecuting single individuals as well as friend-enemy patterns channeling internal violence to the outside of a particular group. Anthropologists have called such patterns “closed societies” or ethnocentric worldviews. Today scientists recognize a “parochial altruism” as one of the oldest and most stable forms of social life. Human beings are more likely to live in solidarity with each other if they are committed to a group that understands itself over against other groups. Parochial patterns characterized early tribal wars as well as the rising nationalisms in our own day. They also provide the foundations for understanding these somewhat artificial divisions as the way things ought to be, and worthy to be violently upheld and defended.

The “sin of the world” challenges us personally and corporately. While creation is good and initially reflects its grounding on the God who desires nonviolence for all life therein, the impacts of the fall are experienced interpersonally and structurally. Social structures that govern interactions in the political, economic, cultural and even religious dimensions of social life, these too are impacted by the impulse to rule and impose order through violent coercion and domination. The Psalms and the Prophets witness to the terrible injustices and harm that rulers and their armies, merchants and their taskmasters, inflict on their subjects and employees. Structural violence is sustained by the people who go along with the practices of unjust structures without questioning their consequences on entire populations, especially the vulnerable. Through structural violence our parochial patterns of determining who belongs in our spheres of beneficence and solidarity turn into violence toward the other.

Amid the “fallen” situation of the present, we must not forget the suffering of creation as described exhaustively by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si’*. Violence and nonviolence are topics deeply related to the “integral ecology” (LS 137) proposed by him, because any violence against nature affects or will affect the most vulnerable of our sisters and brothers. At the same time, any use of violence against humans destroys this deep ecological relationship with our common home. Nonviolence denotes a paradigm of the fullness of life at the heart of reality. It is the power of love in action that celebrates the sacredness of life and actively works for the well-being of all. It challenges sin – including the structural sin of injustice – with faith and hope.

Together, we are called to grow in the way of our nonviolent God as revealed in the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

Part II

Nonviolence and the Old Testament

We begin our exploration of the primacy and ultimacy of nonviolence by first reflecting on the challenges posed by the violence we face in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament may seem bloody to us, but not because the God they reveal is violent. They show us, though, that violence is closely involved with matters of God. Scripture does not camouflage the violence we do to each other, but, rather, exposes it.

To achieve the goal of revealing in its pages a God of covenant and peace, the Bible does not hesitate to place this God in dangerous proximity to all types of violence. In so doing it demonstrates that covenant and peace have their price and cannot be regarded as something easily enjoyed or gently obtained. The Bible also reveals that the content of its pages is not simply a pious story, but an experience of salvation, which seeks to integrate all human reality, even in its most negative dimensions of violence, suffering and death.

The witness of Scripture presents human history as full of violent experiences: wars, deportations, forced exile, interpersonal violence, the rape of women, abandonment of the most vulnerable. Throughout, God chooses the side of the poor, oppressed and exploited. But the language expressing God's justice and partiality for those who suffer emphasizes God's power by using violent imagery that represents how the human family visualizes power historically.

The God of the Bible is near us throughout history, debating and defying the violence that we do to each other. These stories include the human urge to have divine legitimation for the violence we inflict on others. Alongside this is also the profound and vital experience of a God who liberates, who makes a covenant and has a plan of life and peace, but at the same time punishes, avenges, rages and does not hesitate to dialogue with the people about violence, even giving the impression that we have found the legitimation we so misguidedly seek.

This perception does not fail to mark deeply the experience and spirituality of the people of the Bible, forcing it to raise questions that very much resemble ours today:

- If God appears linked to violence and if, on the other hand, biblical faith tells us God can only want and do good, must we conclude that violence is good and positive?
- How do we reconcile, on the other hand, the revelation of a God of all mercy, witnessed to throughout the pages of the Bible, in the Old Testament and The New Testament, with the image of a God who uses violence to show his power? Which God do we believe in? Which God claims us as God's own, making us sisters and brothers to all, and inheritors to fellowship in the Spirit?
- At a time when violence threatens all of humanity, and where various sectors of society and the Church seek nonviolent solutions to the drama of conflict and violence, Christians stand before a dilemma: How to be nonviolent if our reading of God in history is that of a violent God. Must we make a necessarily impoverishing choice, that is, choose either the partial image of the biblical God or the ideal of nonviolence? Must we choose between the God of the Old Testament, who is sometimes depicted as wrathful and vengeful, and the God of Jesus, who reveals himself as redeeming love in the powerlessness of the cross?

God does not appear to humanity except through what humanity is. Through lenses marked by sin and hurt, the human being often can only see a violent God. The violence our eyes see in the God of the Bible is only the revelation of our own violence. Immersed in the sin of our own violence human beings can only see a God who also interacts with us through violence.

This way of seeing God bears a distorted understanding of who God is and who we are as created in God's image. God reveals Godself to us in truth, even when this revelation shows God acting violently. God creates the creature with love and freedom. Therefore, God respects the paths and options that this freedom takes. God does not interfere or force human beings to do what we simply cannot, or to understand what we do not yet have the capacity to assimilate. Yet God accompanies and reveals Godself to the extent that the human being can bear, at the same time preparing us to take other steps and move forward in truth, life and light.

The God of the Bible is not like God's creatures. God does not feel obliged or indebted to a logic in which evil is paid with evil and good with good. Even when this seems to be the case – as in the *lex talionis*, where it is commanded “only one eye for an eye” -- its purpose is to limit, not perpetuate, violence. Whenever a human being

expects or demands from God a predictable or symmetrical behavior, we will often be systematically disappointed. God does not play the human game of the dynamics of retributive justice.

Neither does God imitate or mimic human justice, making it clear that God is divine and not human. Hence, his revelation can often be felt as anger and wrath. But this is not the final word. In so doing, God breaks our temptation to isolate God in a reductive mimicry and takes advantage of this to teach us that God is God, the totally Other, the different, not similar to human beings.

Every time the biblical story witnesses to the eruption of human violence with its tragic consequences – war, conquest and looting of a city – God pushes back to limit this violence. God will no longer consent or even advise the extermination of the entire population of a city, or all the individuals who are in it. But God will order, for example, not to exterminate every person in a town, but only the males (Deut 20:13); or to subdue and destroy a city that is cursed, but without appropriating its treasures (Josh 6:18). God reduces the violent desire of the people, forcing them to limit their own unbridled and predatory drives, in order to be able to see life beyond instinct, acquisition and domination.

God's activity in history is always directed toward love and forgiveness without measure as the ultimate good for all creation (Isaiah 11). Even though we come to know God through the violence that marks human history, the God of the Bible actually actively leads us toward love and nonviolence. This is God's ultimate and final intention, and in the midst of the violence he "baffles" and "deconstructs" the concepts and images that Israel has about him.

God does not magically eliminate violence to move closer to love, but takes violence upon Godself in order to break this diabolical process. The hard questions that arise when we consider God's closeness to violence lead to the affirmation that "God is love" is the central message of Scripture. In the Christian story God consistently follows the path of meekness and peace in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Christians this is where God is fully revealed, not in revenge and violence, but instead in the place of the victim.

The nonviolent practice of God that makes a way, even amid violence, inspires and illuminates any human desire for nonviolence. Since violence imposes itself with the force of the sin of non-meekness, we recognize that meekness² bears the mark of conflict and violence in history. To claim that the practice of meekness can stand outside historical experiences of conflict and violence is illusory and falsely romantic and idyllic. To wish for a peacebuilding that eludes and diverts from the paths of conflict is to lie to oneself and to the human condition. It is in the midst of violence that love opens its way, never outside of it, for violence is the everyday shared experience of so many. This is the path that God has taken. And this will be the only possible way to teach the human being the difficult art of peace with patience and love.

To illuminate this trajectory in the Judeo-Christian tradition, we examine three key texts in the Old Testament: Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-24), the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-19) and the Suffering Servant of Second Isaiah (Is 52-53).

Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-24): Two Brothers before God

Cain is the first man born. He is received by Eve as the gift of God. It is to God's benevolence that the first woman owes maternity. It is the first experience of motherhood in the world, which changes the feminine condition making her more than a servant and companion of a husband, but someone capable of being the mother of human beings.

The biblical text then presents the two brothers, Cain and Abel, with different occupations. Cain is linked to agricultural practice and Abel to pastoral. This difference of activities will characterize a difference of attitudes, because in the development of individual vocations, human beings develop their own perspective from their experience with the environment. In the case of the biblical account, Cain and Abel, demonstrate different religious practices, which may indicate different perspectives in the religious-moral sphere, as a result of the activities

² As Glen Stassen points out that wherever the word, *praeis* ("meekness") appears in the Bible, "it always points to peacefulness or peacemaking," while Clarence Jordan preferred to render it as "completely surrendered to the will of God" (Stassen, 49, citing Jordan, 1974, 24-25). Reflecting on Paul's use of this term, Raniero Cantalamessa notes, "Meekness ("prautes") is placed by Paul among the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). See page 85-86 of this paper for a fuller discussion of "meekness." In each of these cases, "meekness" can be regarded as an attribute on display most vividly in the midst of engaging violence and injustice.

developed. The division into two distinct functions also leads to different sacrifices for different religious practices. Each cult belongs to a culture. There are, therefore, two altars and two cults.

Verses 4b and 5 tell us that Yahweh reacts differently to the offerings of the brothers. However, it is not clear why there is divine rejection of Cain's offer. This raises a lot of questions for us to consider. One interpretation is that the divine reaction could be a challenge to the sedentary-agricultural practice, demanding that it leave behind its attitude of domination and certainty about human ability in controlling our surroundings. Instead, God seems to privilege the attitude of Abel, a nomadic shepherd who, in his fragility and unstable activity, offers the true cult that pleases God in its understanding of humility before God's ultimate sovereignty.

The prophet Amos denounces the religion used to mask inequalities and placate the conscience of the rich (Am 5:21-23). In this case we find the Lord refusing the worship of Israel, demanding justice instead of the opulent offering. Yahweh, in the voice of the prophets, refuses not the offerings in themselves, but the spirit with which they are placed before God. Yahweh does not allow himself to be manipulated by the quality or quantity of the offerings, but it demands true worship, the practice of love, justice and fidelity to the Lord. The sin of Cain can be understood in these terms, rather than in the quality of his offer. As an eponym of the Cainites, Cain would be the one who gave rise to the worship that would later be severely condemned by the prophets of Israel, for their distancing from the practice of justice and fidelity to the Lord.

Another hypothesis lies in the theme of the enemy brothers that invites us to look at the expressions of this relationship. Cain, feeling inferior in relation to the younger brother, allows himself to be invaded by hatred against his brother. In Cain we see the mimetic desire (Rene Girard's phrase meaning a desire for what somebody else has or wants) in its most perverse form: converted into envy, resentment and, finally, hatred. Mimetic desire leads Cain to escape the otherness that seems to divide and tear him apart. Like Adam and Eve, Cain does not accept divine sovereignty, refuses to obey it, and makes of himself a god. Otherness is denied in Cain, both in the person of Abel and in obedience to the divine mandate.

The God of Israel is sovereign and has motives that escape God's subjects. The God of Israel reveals himself as the great Other, "an Other over which the human being has no power, is immutable, does not surrender to the impatient pursuits of man" and yet Yahweh does not fear the otherness arising from his relationship with man, on the contrary, he accepts to participate in the dialogical experience, in a "process that helps man [sic] to deepen in his problems and to solve them through an experience more and more correct and complex."

God dialogues with Cain to try to conquer sin and his "downcast countenance." This witnesses to the intimate drama between Cain, God and consciousness, the drama of every human being. Divine guidance urges Cain to acknowledge the way he has favored the spread of sin. He is asked to develop his conscience by trusting God and fraternity. Becoming aware that sin is at the door is the imperative that imposes total responsibility for the dynamics of its choice. God proposes to Cain "to do right," but Cain does not let himself be convinced. The divine proposal is the protection of the sinner's life. Abel's murder will be an extension of Cain's sin. In the dialogue given in verses 9 and 10 Cain responds casually and provocatively about his brother. His reply – "Am I my brother's keeper?" – is already revealing his distance from brotherly love. The indifference present in his response brings us a clue that Cain is not sorry for his criminal act.

In the account of the Fall, God asks, "Where are you?" In this text the question changes focus: "Where is your brother!" Before God the responsibility demanded at this moment is with regard to the brother. The question is novel. It is a social, relational question. The experience of God passes through the experience with the brother, the social.

God does not follow Cain's evasions and reacts to fratricide with punishment. The cry of vengeance comes from the earth on which Abel's blood was spilled. Here we enter another fundamental reflection in our text. Blood and life belong to God alone. When a person commits murder they attack their own divine power. The blood spilled on the ground cries out directly to the Lord of Life. The divine judgment concerning Cain is more terrible than that concerning the sin of Adam and Eve. Here we have a fact that cannot be reversed: fratricide. The earth, the motherly base of life, drank the blood of a brother. The earth itself denies Cain the power to bless it. The earth cannot be your home. The consequence is the life of the fugitive, deportation from that land.

Cain threshed the soil, offered his fruit, but also brought the blood of his brother to the ground. This blood cries against him from the very soil, which denies Cain its fruit. He is banished from the ground. The divine curse casts him away from the earth: *hā 'adāmā*. Cain will become a wanderer, wandering through the land uncultivated and deserted. The desert will be the absence of divine protection; it is a material and spiritual desert.

But Cain does not have the last word. Surprisingly, God places Cain under his protection. God places a sign on Cain. This sign is not a stigma, but on the contrary, by him Cain is reassumed into divine protection. It is a mark that not only protects him, but also removes him from the cycle of punitive human justice. Because of the murder he has committed Cain is separated from God but also, incomprehensibly, kept under God's protection.

The Sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-19)

The texts are found in Genesis, chapters 12 to 25, and show the beginning of the process of formation of the Hebrew people. Because they keep a great chronological distance from the "time of origins," these texts cannot be treated as forming a "biography" of Abraham, but rather as a record that the origin of the Hebrew people as beginning in God or, more precisely, the relation of a small family nucleus with the God it discovered.

The biblical account describes a migrant trajectory for Abraham. He would have left Ur, in the region designated as Chaldea, or the land of the Chaldeans (where Iraq is now, near the Persian Gulf), moved south to Assyria, reaching the city of Haran. Then, according to the account, Abraham would have descended to Palestine, passed through Egypt and returned to Palestine, a country in which he would have died (in the city of Hebron).

All this wandering of the patriarch was explained as design of God (cf. Gen 12:1). Abraham responds to a call. The tribe or clan of Abraham was one of the many groups that migrated along that route, looking for better lands. Having many gods, these groups immediately began to see God as Other, as otherness, as Unique, as One who knows the best destiny for the people, who intervenes, proposes and "dialogues" without being confused with the ideas that individuals can make about it.

This seems to be the meaning of the statement of Genesis 17:7, when the author of the text attributes to God the phrase "I will be God to you [Abraham]." To be God means to be alone, to be the sovereign, to be that absolute on which Abraham is called to place all his trust. To be the center of life, to take the place of the deities conceived and projected by human beings, this is what the God of Abraham wants.

Accepting the conditions of God implies faith in this same God. It is a wager on this promise and we place in it the hope of a better future. On the other hand, Abraham should not remain passive, waiting. He is called, even without understanding or knowing clearly where everything will go. God simply requires us to trust, and everything will follow. The land that Abraham sought so much, the son that biologically (in natural conditions) he could not have, and the respect and admiration of long and lasting offspring: all this is promised by God to Abraham (Gen 12:2-3).

Abraham went on his way, taking with him Sarah, his wife, and his nephew Lot (Gen 12:5). It was still the beginning. The certainty of faith would still have to be developed and confirmed in the challenges that life would impose. Abraham was already old when he departed (Gen 12:4) and his wife was also elderly and considered sterile (Gen 16:2). Since hearing the promise of God, Abraham lived in the confrontation between faith and reality. God's promise was rationally incomprehensible: from an elderly man and his barren wife a great people would be born!

Finally, chapter 21 of Genesis tells of the birth of Isaac, the rightful heir of the promise. The conflict with his nephew Lot was ended by Abraham's decision to divide the land, leaving Lot to choose his share (Gen 13:9). This and other episodes are indicative of how Abraham was assuming God's logic, changing his criteria and positioning himself in accordance with what was established by the divine will. Nevertheless, the most forceful demand made to Abraham is presented in the famous episode of the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-19), a trial set by God. God wants to prove the intensity of Abraham's faith and therefore submits him to a test that actually constitutes a requirement that God does not intend to lead to full compliance. Yet for Abraham the divine command is most earnest. It is about being or not being faithful to the God of the Promise, to his God, manifesting it in the cultic sacrifice. From these first two verses of the text we can draw some conclusions. First, the narrator's concern to warn that it was a trial, thus revealing the intention not to hurt the ears of his readers, and to show that Yahweh is not a bloodthirsty god. Second, in this way the narrator shows that Abraham and God see the same fact under different optics. For the former it is the question of the right sacrifice due to God, and for the second, it is about faith in God's promise. This fidelity of Abraham to what he believed to be the design of God made him the model of faith, the prototype of the man of God and the "father of believers."

Abraham not only becomes heir of the blessing through Isaac, but becomes himself the source of blessing for future generations. The narrator of Isaac's epic sacrifice does not have in mind a project of doctrinal formulation, but rather the demarcation of a boundary between worshipful and reverent action to the omnipotent and the murder of human beings. Henceforth it is clearly established that what Yahweh wants is distinct from what the gods / idols made by the neighboring tribes and clans of Israel ask for.

If the sheer number of explicit prohibitions on the shedding of blood and the sacrifice of human beings indicates that Israel has had to combat this violence for a long time, on the other hand, it unequivocally shows that the God of Abraham does not enjoy violence, nor does it fit into the frames of human interests. God alone is Lord and only God can decide sovereignly about the beginning and the end of life. God alone is the first and last word about everything that exists.

Second Isaiah: The Suffering Servant (Is 52-53)

The theme of human suffering is treated in a renewed way compared to the other texts of the Old Testament in the four Songs of the Servant of Yahweh. In the poems of Deutero-Isaiah the themes of suffering, pain and sacrifice – strong and constant interpellations in the walk of the people of Israel – are given a meaning that is unique throughout the history of the Hebrew people. It is a moment of maturity in the inter-testamentary literature, of depth of thought and faith before the mystery of human pain. In the poems of the Suffering Servant we find a new element in the dimension of pain and destruction: the prophet discovers the divine power to transform the element that generates death into a renewing factor of life. He discovers in pain a means of repairing injustice transformed into oppression and annihilation of the people, and turns it into a prophetic advertisement.

The first poem introduces the person of the Servant. He is Elect, chosen by Yahweh, who assigns him a task in the process of salvation of the people. For this mission the Lord prepares him by giving him his Spirit. The prophetic spirit surrounds him and assists him to manifest the right. The Servant is a man whom God sustains to act with discretion and steadfastness in the execution of deliverance. The vocation of the Servant has its source in God. The gift of the divine spirit (*rûah*) becomes the basis of the Servant's activity and also his motivation.

The text indicates that it is God who takes the initiative and chooses the Servant, supports him and guides him to the mission of establishing on earth the *mispot* – the right, the moral law founded on the relationship between the people and Yahweh.

Next, the chant presents seven denials describing how the Servant will perform the mission. The attitude of the Servant reveals a law that contradicts the harsh law of the world which decrees the death of the marginalized, the broken and the weak. The servant goes ahead on his mission and, although bruised, does not hurt; though overwhelmed, he does not oppress. The song emphasizes the character of nonviolence present in the servant's attitudes. His mission will be guaranteed without the use of violence.

Finally, we hear a promise from the Lord: the Servant will not be broken until he has built the *toro*. The purpose for which his mission is directed will be victorious over any and all obstacles and occasions of suffering, oppression or death. The mission will be filled with struggle and may cause him heavy pain and discouragement, but he will not be annihilated until it is fulfilled. The Servant takes the first step toward his mission through the attitude of resistance against oppression. In resistance the Servant breaks the chain of violence; oppression is not reproduced. It strikes him, is received by him and, at the same time, annihilated through the attitude of resistance and nonviolence.

In the second chant, it is the Servant himself who foresees his suffering. In view of his prophetic vocation, the Servant speaks of his calling and destiny, linked to the pronouncement of the Word (v. 2). His mission is linked to the national restoration of the chosen people – “to bring Israel back and to be the light of the nations!” His vocation is to be “the Servant” in order to carry out his mission of gathering the dispersed people and announcing to the peoples the existence of the one God and his will. His training comes from the Spirit of Yahweh. His equipment are not weapons of war, but the weapons of a prophet: his tongue is like the arrow and a sword to proclaim the word of God. Though the Servant makes an objection, he acknowledges the futility of suffering (v. 5) and reaffirms his trust in the Lord and his understanding that the mission entrusted to him is great (v. 6).

In the third song, the servant's voice sounds like a sage and faithful disciple. His specific message is that with his courage (v. 6) and his confidence in divine assistance (vv. 7-9) he will bear misfortunes (vv. 5-6) and will certainly count on the triumph of Yahweh (v. 9). The poem begins by presenting the mission of the Servant and the nature of his vocation, he continues by placing the obedience and pertinacity of the Servant, and concludes by presenting his absolute trust in Yahweh.

In verse 4 the Servant defines himself as a disciple of God, someone who every morning receives his lesson, which has a renewed connection with God every day. It is this relationship of intimacy and constancy that gives him the fiber to resist against the oppressors who persecute him. His discipleship is a vocation to serve the weak, so it is important that you keep an eye on the Word of the Lord.

The Servant hears the Word of the Lord and pronounces it to the community. He is in a difficult situation, because his word is the Word that requires awareness and transformation of reality according to the plan of God. Enmity, aggression, violence, insults and contempt arise, but despite this, the Servant maintains his attitude of fidelity to the Lord. Something totally new arises: instead of lamentation we get the acceptance of suffering. The Servant acknowledges himself victimized, beaten, reviled and annihilated, but in the name of the *mispat* himself, his mission to bring righteousness to the nations. The Servant consciously assumes suffering. He goes on because he has found new firmness.

The Servant believes that Yahweh will come to his rescue, so he accepts the suffering, giving his yes to the will of Yahweh. The certainty of the final victory and his election and vocation offers him firmness and strength in the face of suffering and enemies. His certainty does not come from the contradictions and reactions of reality but from his trust in Yahweh. The Servant does not believe that any of his enemies can truly defeat him. The condemnation itself does not mean defeat because its support comes from the Lord Yahweh, who will help him by doing true justice. Here we see the Servant of Yahweh taking up his mission and executing it. The union with God, the attitude of listening to what God has to say leads him to another vision of justice, the righteousness of God. This certainty leads him not to retreat from oppression, but to stand firm even if it is to denounce the iniquity of the system that governs the world. The Servant knows that his vocation and consequent mission require him to be prepared for the worst, for misunderstanding, injury and annihilation, for condemnation by historical judgments.

The fourth song presents the Servant as “a man of sorrows,” “acquainted with suffering” (v. 3ab); not only suffered physical pains (vv. 5a, 4cd) but also moral pains (v. 3ef), a victim of slander, being righteous (v. 11c), counted among the transgressors (v. 12d). He was unjustly condemned (vv. 4, 8) and violated (v. 7), to the point of losing the human figure (v. 14). His end is brutal, to be finally buried among the wicked (v. 8).

It seems that the prophet, in describing so much suffering and contempt, does not want, as Job did, to simply remember the suffering of the righteous, but the context leads him to believe that he intended to announce something else, totally new in antiquity, revealed for the first time to the world by Yahweh, through his prophet (v. 13). He is a righteous man who willingly gives his life to obtain forgiveness for his people.

At the same time that the Servant is a mediator of reparation, he makes the sufferer’s suffering the material of his restorative offering, thus transforming his pains into a remedy for his own wounds (v. 11ab), and by offering himself for many (v. 12), also becomes a remedy for his wounds (v. 5d). Deutero-Isaiah makes this figure, unique in Hebrew Scripture, the mediator who carries upon himself “the punishment that will bring peace to the people” (v. 5c).

The question that arises is how to explain the value and effectiveness of the Sacrifice for reparation before God? The prophet himself seems to have sought to answer this problem in his speech. It is the love of Yahweh that reaches everything and also supports the mission of the Servant as mediator. The mediating Sacrifice of the Servant brings salvation and healing in an unsurpassable way (vv. 5d, 12e), for all sinners, because this is the desired of Yahweh. God leads and surpasses all limits in the attainment of his designs (v. 10f).

The efficacy of the Servant’s sacrifice, guaranteed by Yahweh’s verdict of magnificence and reward, seems to reveal the mediating sense of salvation from suffering, while at the same time explaining the grace of return. The biblical word has a double nature. It is, at the same time, divine and human. Also it is communitarian. To the people of the Old Testament, both the sin of society and the sin of the individual are against God, against each component of the group and against the social group itself. Therefore, the responsibility of this sin and its consequences is both that of the individual and the community. The human being, created by God, is capable of violence. God cannot be accused as responsible for the evils that we generate by the misuse of our freedom. In this sense, we observe that injustices are rooted in the violation of God’s will. We know that the prophet calls upon every individual to leave the way of sin, to ward off misfortune and to encourage the nation to forsake injustice and practice the law in order to enjoy better days.

We identify the Servant of Yahweh as a corporate personality: as an individual who represents a community, which has an identity that turns to its own attitudes; and an individual character, or of the collective attitudes of all people. Thus, there is a journey from the individual to the community in these songs. The idea of the Servant, according to Carlos Mesters, is inspired by the prophet Jeremiah, the great Sufferer, who never bowed his head before his oppressors and who did everything to keep hope in the people. Mesters argues that the figure of the Servant of Yahweh helps in discovering in his mission the mission of God’s own people, who put himself at the service of the Lord, and, as a consequence, suffer insults, slander and all kinds of oppression. At that historic moment, the people of Israel also reposition themselves, stand before all these reflections and renew the Covenant

with Yahweh. The people of the captivity were God's servants; they did not allow Nebuchadnezzar to steal their ideals, but instead maintained their ideals and their hope for a society based on law and justice.

The search for the identity of the Servant leads us to resolve the question as to the mission assigned to him: Not so much who is the Servant but *what* is his mission. He accomplishes his mission not with bow and sword, but renewed with the spirit of gentleness, meekness, steadfastness in suffering.

As a prophecy, the servant's songs contain the new seed with the full force of propelling into the future: they have an eschatological dimension in the sense that at the moment it is issued it inaugurates a new birth. It gives birth to a new mode to be consolidated or embodied in the new kind of human being announced to the Israelites in the person of the Servant.

As we stand before the conception of the intrinsic relationship between individual and community of the people of Israel, we also begin to better understand the question of the identity of the Servant. This double character – personal and collective, individual and communal – is also present in the figure of the Suffering Servant. This conception helps us to understand that he is not one of the mediators of salvation raised in the History of Israel, but that he is in all of them in different nuances, concentrating on the personification of the Suffering Servant, which reflects a dialectical interaction between individual and community.

Another fundamental aspect in our analysis concerns the question of the Sacrifice of Reparation presented in the poems. The Sacrifice of Reparation – *the 'asam* – is a presupposition for the reparation of faults and consequent lifting of punishment presented in the Priestly Code (Lev 5:14-16). The immolation of the "lamb of reparation" for the forgiveness of sins is resumed here as the voluntary offering of the Servant. Its historical mission becomes the offering of its own life for the salvation of its people from slavery, for the restoration of the right and justice of its people.

The offering of life and its immolation make sacrifice the greatest religious act – life, the highest good of humanity, being voluntarily surrendered to the deity, makes it the religious act par excellence – recognition and submission to divinity. For Israel it is gift, fellowship and atonement. The suffering of the Servant was recognized as an effective vicarious Sacrifice to repair the sins of many. It points to a new meaning for suffering in the Economy of Salvation of Israel at the same time that it discovers a new economy. All guilt acquired means, at the same time, a responsibility to God. Every perverse action directed against the human being is directed against God.

The people "strayed from the path," turned away from Yahweh, led their lives far from God's commandments, set their own criteria for decision and allowed themselves to be guided by idols. If the sin of an individual is capable of bringing about the misery of the community in the Old Testament, the reciprocal can also be true: the community can have its sins forgiven, it can find salvation by repairing an individual who offers himself in reparation.

Such salvation is possible because of the understanding of individuality and solidarity of the human person that regulates the individual-community relationship in Israel. The Deutero-Isaiah prophesied about the Suffering Servant. More than a "scapegoat" burdened with the sins of the group, he saw in him the "lamb of reparation" sacrificed (Is 53:7) to obtain forgiveness of sins (Lev 5:16). Its novelty lies in having discovered in suffering an effective character for mediation. He is "the righteous" whom God meets at the edge of the rivers of Babylon, among the deportees, to deliver the people from the Exile.

It was not the altruism or the philanthropy of the Servant that dictated his sacrificial attitude of his own life as mediation, but it was Yahweh's desire to restore righteousness as part of the plan for salvation. This foundation prevents the death of the Servant from being judged as failure. His mission, the surrender of his life for sinners, mirrors the order of Yahweh and the revelation of divine power. The servant of Yahweh, as mediator, thus receives a new character for the understanding of the people of Israel. The community's renewal comes in a plan of salvation that does not require the elimination of the enemy, but by the depth of connection with God and the desire to accomplish God's salvific plan.

In the Servant of Yahweh, we see the highest expression of justice and fraternity. Through its apparent defeat the most complete and definitive victory is realized: the victory over the powers of death, oppression, violence and the denial of life that comes from the other. The Servant of Yahweh tells us of a faith in the human person that is effective in concrete attitudes, which recognizes that final victory is not given to the forces of death; thus there is always the possibility of recovery from sin. The restoration of law and justice passes through the person-community of the Servant of Yahweh – for the surrender of his own life to the cause of all, which is the cause of God, in the assurance of the definitive power of God.

What God? What Violence?

Having reached the end of this brief journey through some paradigmatic texts on the revelation of God in the Old Testament and its relationship with violence we must point out some conclusions that, although they do not close or end the task of reflection, they reposition its direction.

We can say categorically that the God of the Bible does not use violence. The experience of the God of the Bible is that God does not want death, but life. However, this God allows human beings to engage the divine from what is our existential reality, and this reality includes the practice of violence.

Indeed, the reality of bloody wars and human sacrifices, for example, is an integral part of the lives of the people of Israel, as with so many other societies and nations throughout history. What is striking, therefore, is not so much the content of the narrated text, for example, that of Isaac's sacrifice, asked of Abraham, but his insertion in the trajectory of experience and reflection of a people gradually realizing that their God is the God of life; and, perhaps most important, that in the maintenance and glorification of life God's partners intimately with human beings. To this end, this God, who seems to demand of the frightened and submissive human being a sacrifice that surpasses all normal ethical demands, ends up replacing the human victim with a lamb. That is, God seeks people where they are in terms of religious and ritual violence and makes them go one step further toward respect for life as a whole, and the realization that God does not want the sacrifice of humans. In the same way, sacrificial rituals with bloodshed of animals do not seek to stimulate violence, but to regulate and limit it, within a historical context that makes use of it to signify relationship of humanity with the divine. The slaughter of beasts in offering to Yahweh was not a demand of God, but a concession to the violent nature of humans. Cain's fratricide is the expression of what we are capable of in relation to our fellow humans, and God meets us at the point where we are in order to make us gain access to the communion that will give us the fullness of life.

All this, in essence, points to what is original in the experience of Israel, that is, the experience of the absolute otherness and transcendence of God. The great mark of the experience of the God of Israel is to find the way beyond henotheism and monolatry to the affirmation of faith that God is One and Holy, that is, different, separate. God does not number with the human being, nor are God's thoughts identical with those of the human being (cf. Is 55:8). God is God and not human, although God comes to meet us where we are to make us have access to the communion in God's life; to be able to open to us the experience of the central commandment of the Law of Holiness: Be holy as I am holy! This is how God, in acknowledging the murder of Abel, does not kill Cain and, despite punishing him with his justice, does not recognize for anyone the right to eliminate his life. Cain is marked with the sign of belonging to the Lord who is the One to be able to assert Godself as the owner of life and death. In the same way, Abraham, faced with the terrible demand of having to sacrifice his own son, does not end his experience before a God like Moloch or Chemosh, who would feed on sacrifices of human lives, the silent idols that are satisfied with the violence perpetrated in their name. But he receives the revelation that this God is another and different, not liking violence against human life. It does not mean that the Old Testament do not show us God punishing and correcting his creatures. However, what we receive from Hebrew Scripture is the self-limitation that God imposes on the punishment, making it pedagogical, establishing limits and ensuring a horizon for overcoming it. God punishes by not killing or eliminating but engendering again, that is, making mercy a trait more encompassing than punishment, and saving us from destructive escalation. God comes to bear on Godself the punishment that another would merit so that the excess of mercy puts an end to violence, even justified violence. Then, yes, the image of the God of the Old Testament, whose mercy no longer wants sacrifice, shines brightly. Then, yes, the vocation of the human being created by God for peace, not for violence, glows with new light. The human task is revealed as this: to be the bearer of the divine self-limitation of punishment and the pardon of grace; to bear a deficit in revenge, even when considered just; accepting loss with the patience and compassion that bear conflict without giving in to the temptation to eliminate it violently, and without demanding fully reimbursement for what was lost.

The Israelites were not simply more cheerful than the Babylonians who enslaved them; they saw the same world with the same violence, but they refused to resign themselves to it as "just the way it is." God, they thought, was a revolutionary who wanted to change the world. This is what salvation meant: not plucking a few survivors from the wreckage of the world and installing them in heaven, but creating a new heaven and a new earth. So God begins this grand revolutionary project by calling a goat-herder from Ur and gathering a small group of people around him.

The election of this ragged group does not seem a promising way to start a revolution. Scripture scholar Gerhard Lohfink explains it in terms of the nonviolence of God. Most revolutionaries use violence because they are

short on time; there must be one grand upheaval in which the powers are overthrown. God, on the other hand, has all the time in the world. God is nonviolent, so God begins the transformation of the world by calling a small group to live differently so that people can see a beautiful life and join the movement voluntarily, not by coercion. Salvation is through the Jews, a chosen people meant to model a peaceful and reconciled life for the whole world. Salvation is joining this movement, and it is meant to happen by attraction, not coercion.

In the Old Testament the figure of the Servant of Yahweh is paradigmatic in terms of this maturity of the experience of a God who is both just and merciful, whose love “exceeds” the violence and even the equity of “armed” justice. This mysterious figure, whose exact origin and significance leads exegetes to different interpretations, nevertheless opened the way for the desire and practice of the first Christian communities to identify him with Jesus of Nazareth, he whom they recognized and proclaimed as the Son of God. The path of Jesus Christ is the path of nonviolence, and yet one on which violence is inscribed and marked. The God of the Bible is manifested as merciful and nonviolent, but always encountered within the manifestations of violence in human history, never outside them.

It is to the nonviolence of Jesus that we now turn.

**Nonviolence and Christology:
The Incarnational Nonviolence of Christ Jesus**

The early Christians employed different interpretive strategies for reading the Old Testament. They often allegorized passages, such that war against the Amalekites was an allegory for war on sins. They tended not to read violent passages morally, either to reprove God and the Israelites or to justify their own acts of violence, but rather read them as affirmations that God acts in history to rescue his people. Above all, Christians have read such passages through the lens of what Jesus Christ definitively revealed about God: that God redeems the world by absorbing its violence.

The culmination of the revelation of the way things are, and the way God is, occurs in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ is not just one more witness to the power of nonviolence. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the very incarnation of God. The central drama of cosmic history is the incarnation in human history of the all-powerful Creator of the universe as a helpless baby born to a poor couple in a barn, and the redemption that follows from his life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus taught and lived nonviolence. His death on a cross indicates a willingness on the part of God to suffer violence rather than deal it out. His resurrection shows that violence does not have the final word, and that revenge is not on God's agenda. The entire drama of the incarnation and the redemption operates with a nonviolent logic of *kenosis*; rather than use power to overcome resistance coercively, God empties Godself and turns the logic of power on its head, absorbing the violence of the world rather than perpetuating the cycle of retribution.

The work of René Girard is helpful in unpacking the logic of redemption. Violence, Girard famously posits, is contained by human societies through scapegoating; rivalries would threaten to blow society apart if the rivals did not unite against a weaker victim. All societies maintain order by creating unanimity around the idea that the victims deserve what they get. God achieves a decisive breakthrough in human history by revealing through Jesus Christ that this scapegoating mechanism is a lie. Christ reveals the innocence of the victim, because the resurrection reveals that the victim is God.

The Incarnation

We encounter God in Jesus the Christ. God is incarnated in history amid the fallenness of individuals and societies. Christ is thus truly our peace.³ In meeting Jesus, we have the capacity to discover a precious gift of peace that is not to be hoarded or monopolized. It can and must be shared with the entire world and should remain in dialogue with the wisdom of the world. In and through Christ Jesus, God's pedagogy of peace takes on flesh, reveals a face directed towards those most in need, and points to a path that we can follow in our daily lives and within our communities conflicted not just on occasion, but endemically with violence and strife. We discover at once the message, example, and wisdom of God's peace in Jesus.

These reflections on the incarnational nonviolence of God in Christ unfold in four steps. First, we examine the good news of peace that Jesus walked and talked, focusing on key passages like "Blessed are the peacemakers." Second, we reflect upon Jesus as a wounded healer of peace. The "cross" to which he was nailed is a key to understanding the nature of violence in our world, for it is also our cross and a sign of our vulnerability in a violent world. Third, we discuss how Jesus's way of reconciliation can break cycles of violence through solidarity and humanization. Fourth, we consider in a Christological key the nonviolent discipleship of blessed Óscar Romero and the reverberations in El Salvador today of that witness. These final words are just examples of the self-manifestation of God's call for nonviolence that, like unpremeditated but brightly lit beacons of hope, are discoverable *within* the on-going historical struggles of the people of God.

The Gift of Peace in the New Testament

³ Eph 2:14.

In the Christian Gospel we encounter a gift of peace that is neither wholly otherworldly nor merely worldly; it is rather a real human offer of divinely incarnated peace. “Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts...” (Phil 4:6-7). This peace challenges us in our personal relations, in the widespread incidence of social violence, and even with respect to defamation and bullying spread over the internet.⁴

The Galilean Jesus Embodies the Path of Nonviolence

Virgilio Elizondo related the story of the Galilean Jesus in the light of three principles: the Galilean, the Jerusalem, and the Resurrection. Here we reflect on those principles in the light of God’s offer of peace in Christ Jesus.⁵

Jesus and many of his disciples were Galilean. It was a unique form of religious and cultural identity in Palestine of the first century. The Galileans were generally not wealthy and cosmopolitan but came from an ethnically diverse, downtrodden community that had for centuries struggled to maintain this unique identity in the face of fierce opposition from more than one side. Elizondo is not without a historical warrant in comparing them to the Mexican Americans in the United States today. The New Testament speaks specifically about a “Galilee of the Nations/Galilee of the Gentiles.”⁶ Elizondo shows that this usage is rooted in a vision of peace from the Prophet Isaiah that is then incorporated into the Gospel of Matthew:

The Prophet Isaiah (9:1–2) refers to “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Isaiah also speaks of universal salvation for all the nations, of a new era of peace and harmony, and even of a new heaven and a new earth. The influence of Isaiah’s perspective in the New Testament seemed to suggest a unique and unsuspected role for Galilee in God’s salvific plan for the restoration of unity among the human family, a unity and harmony that had been destroyed by sin since the very beginning of creation (Gen 3–11). The relative unimportance of Galilee seemed to fit with the idea that the gospel is absurd to many, that the ways of God appear as foolishness to the wise of this world, and that the redemptive grace of God is an unexpected gift.⁷

The Gospel of Matthew thus links discipleship to Jesus with a Galilean exemplarism. These *mestizos* from the first century are not heralded as being objectively better than Samaritans or others. But their highly particular struggle to maintain a Galilean identity speaks with equal eloquence to an existential problem of humanity that will be illuminated by God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.⁸

We arrive therefore at Jesus’s famous saying in the Sermon on the Mount, which in Matthew reads: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”⁹ In both accounts, Matthew and Luke, Jesus blesses the peacemakers and also embodies peacemaking. His very birth in Luke heralds “glory to God in the

⁴ In *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis compares calumny to terrorism. Cf. N. 73: “Detraction and calumny are acts of terrorism: a bomb is thrown, it explodes and the attacker walks away calm and contented. This is completely different from the nobility of those who speak to others face to face, serenely and frankly, out of genuine concern for their good.”

⁵ Virgil Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983, 2000, 2002). See also his essay “Jesus the Galilean in Mestizo Theology,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 262-280 as well as the other fine essays in that issue, especially that of Michael Lee.

⁶ Matt 4:15. See also Acts 13:13-52.

⁷ Virgil Elizondo, “Jesus the Galilean Jew in Mestizo Theology,” 271.

⁸ In his Easter Vigil homily of 2014, Pope Francis said in a similar vein: “In the life of every Christian, after baptism there is also a *more existential ‘Galilee’*: the experience of a *personal encounter with Jesus Christ* who called me to follow him and to share in his mission. In this sense, returning to Galilee means treasuring in my heart the living memory of that call, when Jesus passed my way, gazed at me with mercy and asked me to follow him. It means reviving the memory of that moment when his eyes met mine, the moment when he made me realize that he loved me. Today, tonight, each of us can ask: *What is my Galilee? Where is my Galilee?* Do I remember it? Have I forgotten it? Have I gone off on roads and paths which made me forget it? Lord, help me: tell me what my Galilee is; for you know that I want to return there to encounter you and to let myself be embraced by your mercy.”

⁹ Matthew 5:9. Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, I, 84-85.

highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”¹⁰ When his public ministry begins and he preaches a message of discipleship in expectation of the coming of God’s reign, those who follow him are called not only to an individual path to salvation. In belonging to Christ, one is also invited to belong to the new reign that also blesses and embodies peace (*shalom*) in the *ekklesia* and in the world.¹¹ This community must not only profess peace but offer testimony internally and externally to its palpable and transformative presence in their unity.

How do the disciples turn this peace into a reality? One cannot sit by idly and expect it to happen on its own. But it is also not a matter of blind activism. It is a spiritual path that requires expertise, prudence, and the discernment to avoid premature discouragement. On this very point, Pope Francis writes in *Rejoice and Be Glad*:

Peacemakers truly “make” peace; they build peace and friendship in society. To those who sow peace Jesus makes this magnificent promise: “They will be called children of God” (*Mt* 5:9). He told his disciples that, wherever they went, they were to say: “Peace to this house!” (*Lk* 10:5). The word of God exhorts every believer to work for peace, “along with all who call upon the Lord with a pure heart” (cf. *2 Tim* 2:22), for “the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (*Jas* 3:18). And if there are times in our community when we question what ought to be done, “let us pursue what makes for peace” (*Rom* 14:19), for unity is preferable to conflict.¹²

Peace is both a process that encompasses the very activity of discipleship and one of its most cherished and fragile fruits. If the community of disciples does not struggle for peace with one another they will not be able to “make” peace in and for the world. Peacemaking is not a vague wish. It is an arduous commitment to maintain a childlike devotion to God’s peace even when surrounded by wolves.¹³ Pope Francis emphasizes the need to be frank and speak up about the violence around us when it seems easier to ignore that reality and move on.¹⁴ Jesus and his Galilean disciples were aware from the outset of the perils involved in the sowing of peace: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force.”¹⁵

The peacemaker offers words and an example of religious reform. The man mocked as King of the Jews enters into this hub of cosmopolitan religion on an ass. The symbolism of the entry into Jerusalem expresses the subtle but revolutionary power of the Resurrection principle.

Less subtle, perhaps, is the incident about the moneychangers in the Temple of Jerusalem reported in *John* 2:13-22. There Jesus shouts: “Take these out of here and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.”¹⁶ Jesus is agitating for peace in the midst of corruption and violence. In this scene he is visibly angry. Where does prophetic and fraternal correction fit into the matrix of peacemaking? Jesus’s reform of the idolatrous cult is not at its core antinomian rebelliousness but rather a condition for the possibility of real peace. Otherwise, the sanctimonious will always have the upper hand in arguing for a status quo that is riddled with structural violence. Accordingly, Pope Francis makes a distinction between the “tranquil, artificial, and anaesthetized peace” in which anyone can put up his or her own “do not disturb” sign and Jesus’s witness to peace.¹⁷ He states: “The peace that

¹⁰ Luke 2:14.

¹¹ Cf. *I Chronicles* 22:9f.

¹² *Rejoice and Be Glad* 85.

¹³ *Rejoice and Be Glad* 89: “It is not easy to ‘make’ this evangelical peace, which excludes no one but embraces even those who are a bit odd, troublesome or difficult, demanding, different, beaten down by life or simply uninterested. It is hard work; it calls for great openness of mind and heart, since it is not about creating ‘a consensus on paper or a transient peace for a contented minority’, or a project ‘by a few for the few’... We need to be artisans of peace, for building peace is a craft that demands serenity, creativity, sensitivity and skill.”

¹⁴ *The Joy of the Gospel* 227: “When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened; they wash their hands of it and get on with their lives. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process.”

¹⁵ *Matt* 11:12.

¹⁶ *John* 2:16.

¹⁷ Morning meditation from Tuesday, May 16, 2017 in the chapel of Santa Marta, “Tranquillity is not Peace,” published in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 22, 2 June 2017.

Jesus offers is 'a real peace' because it is rooted in the Cross, and therefore enables one to overcome all of life's many daily tribulations, including suffering and illness, without falling into mere stoicism or playing the martyr."¹⁸

In the Gospel of John, the disciples are called to receive the peace that Jesus embodies: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."¹⁹ Jesus communicates that inner peace is both the presupposition and the result of outer peace. You cannot have one without the other.

We turn below to the wounded condition of Jesus as a peacemaker. Let us first recall how this dynamic also reflects the third principle in Elizondo's Galilean dialectic of peace. God's messenger of peace does not die peacefully in a cancer ward surrounded by admiring pupils. He is killed by jealous ruling authorities in Jerusalem. The incarnate God suffers physically unto death and, some would argue, even a spiritual condition of being abandoned. By any human measure, he would be a candidate for revenge after tasting the agony of innocent suffering and the inhumanity of torture. His words from the cross nonetheless do not evince any such bitterness: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."²⁰ What is most striking about this familiar Lucan message regarding the cruciform origins of divine mercy is that it extends even to an offer of forgiveness to a fellow sufferer who may not even be innocent: "Today you will be with me in paradise."²¹ The dynamic Gospel of mercy and forgiveness is proclaimed from the cross and links heaven and earth in its immediacy and radicality.

The post-Resurrection story of Emmaus is a key to incarnational nonviolence and serves as a lens to make sense of the attractive life, the violent death, and the foretold but still surprising resurrection of the Lord. In encountering the Risen One, the gift of peace is made manifest to the disciples:

The joy that is born in their hearts derives from "[having seen] the Lord" (Jn 20:20). He repeats to them: "Peace be with you" (v. 21). By then it was obvious that it was not only a greeting. It was a gift, the gift that the Risen One wants to offer his friends, but at the same time it is a consignment. This peace, which Christ purchased with his blood, is for them but also for all, the disciples must pass on to the whole world. Indeed, he adds: "as the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (ibid.). The Risen Jesus returned to his disciples to send them out. He had completed his work in the world, it was then up to them to sow faith in hearts so that the Father, known and loved, might gather all his children from the dispersion.²²

The work of building peace thus begins on the road to Emmaus and ends only with the return to God. The encounter and the breaking of bread on the way to Emmaus prepare Jesus's followers for the manifold challenges that await them.

Christ's Peace is Connected with His Wounds

Remember too that this same scene includes the disclosure of the resurrected Jesus's wounds.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again, Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."²³

Here Christ's offer of peace is literally connected to his wounds.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ John 14:27.

²⁰ Luke 23:34.

²¹ Luke 23:43.

²² http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20120411.html.

²³ John 20:19-22.

A fundamental aspect of the kerygma of the nascent church was the proclamation that Christ, the Risen One, was Jesus himself, who had been crucified²⁴:

Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." (Act 2,22-24)²⁵

This proclamation is central to affirming the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus which, in turn, allows us to affirm the transcendent and eschatological dimension of his Church; a presence that is not "visible and empirical, but [...] a transcendent presence lived in history."²⁶ It is the presence and not the absence of Jesus that gives birth to the Church. The conception of a church that takes the place of an absent Jesus in the expectation of the Parousia is a conception that denies the historicity of the resurrection. This historical continuity also legitimizes the nonviolence of the gospels and gives it a transcendent and eschatological dimension as a core value of the early Christian communities. It is the nonviolent Jesus murdered on the cross who rises from the dead.

A Nonviolent Reading of the Passion and Resurrection

The passion and death of Jesus were initially disconcerting for some disciples who in the book of the Acts of the Apostles still ask after the resurrection: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). A questioning that, in fact, inquires about the political project that equated the Kingdom of God with the Kingdom of Israel.²⁷ St. Paul speaks even of the madness of the cross, something that the first communities gradually came to understand as wisdom that leads to the resurrection: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18) and "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." (1 Co 1:25).

It is possible to read the passion from a nonviolent perspective taking the Suffering Servant Songs in Isaiah again as one's point of departure.²⁸ In the first song (Is 42:1-9) it is said that the Servant is sent to be light: "I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles" (Is 42:6; 49:6) and it is already mentioned that his nonviolent attitude will finally bring justice to the peoples of the earth: "In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth." (Is 42:3-4). However, the third and fourth songs (Is 50:4-9 and Is 52:13-53:12) present the Servant subjected to a punishment that seems cruel and unjust but is delivered by God. The fourth song, finally, speaks of the exaltation of the Servant who has experienced the torment (Is 52:13) and becomes the justification for many (Is 53:11).

The figure of the Servant of Yahweh is paradigmatic in terms of this maturity of the experience of a God who is both just and merciful, whose love "exceeds" the violence and even the equity of "armed" justice. This mysterious figure, whose exact origin and significance leads exegetes to different interpretations, nevertheless opened the way for the desire and practice of the first Christian communities to identify him with Jesus of Nazareth, he whom they recognized and proclaimed as the Son of God. The path of Jesus Christ is the path of nonviolence, and yet one on which violence is inscribed and marked. The God of the Bible is manifested as merciful and nonviolent, but always encountered within the manifestations of violence in human history, never outside them.

²⁴ Cf. J. Sobrino (1982), "El Resucitado es el Crucificado. Lectura de la resurrección de Jesús desde los crucificados del mundo" en J. Sobrino, ed. *Jesús en América Latina: su significado para la fe y la cristología*, UCA editores, San Salvador, pp. 235.

²⁵ Also Acts 3, 13-15; 1 Cor 15, 3ss and John 20, 25-28.

²⁶ P. Richard (1998), *El movimiento de Jesús antes de la Iglesia. Una interpretación liberadora de los Hechos de los Apóstoles*, Santander: Ed. Sal Terrae, p. 31.

²⁷ Cf. P. Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁸ Cf. J. Morera Perich (2018), *Desarmar los infiernos. Practicar la no violencia de Jesús hoy*, Cuadernos CJ, no. 207, Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia, pp. 6-13.

The nonviolent confrontation, in opening spaces for integration, delegitimizes the myth of redemptive violence, which believes in the destruction of those who are considered 'enemies' because it is not able to imagine the possibility of a change.²⁹ The experience of being "disarmed" by the testimony of nonviolent resistance is reflected in the confession of the gospel's centurion: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"³⁰ (Mark 15:39).

Resurrection in a Wounded World

When asked about the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus in our time, it is fundamental to talk about the suffering of the peoples as the historicization of the body of Christ in history and as an understanding of the historical continuity of the salvific action of the passion and resurrection. We can speak of the cross as a reality of individual people, but also as a reality of entire peoples: "what does it mean for the history of salvation and in the history of salvation the historical reality constituted by the majority of oppressed humanity? Can it be considered historically saved, when it continues to carry on itself the sins of the world?"³¹ Because of that, "it is right to speak about the 'crucified God' but just as necessary or even more so to speak about the 'crucified people.' This also gave the situation of Third-World peoples a theological status."³²

Passion and resurrection as historical facts reveal at once the tragedy of the victims and the hope in the justice of God. The violence exerted on the crucified peoples is a cry that rises to heaven and the resurrection is the confirmation that the cry has been heard and the suffering redeemed by the action of God.³³

But how are we to respond to the violence exerted on the crucified peoples in a world "engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal"?³⁴ The resurrection affirms that violence unjustly exercised is not the destiny of humanity and announces that God is capable of transforming the injustice that creates victims by inflicting violence and suffering.³⁵ And that announcement becomes a hope that is historically realized when Jesus's "path of nonviolence [...] [is] walked [...] to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace and put an end to hostility (cf. Eph 2: 14-16)."³⁶ That path is a path of liberation (Lk 4:18) fully illuminated in the resurrection. If God has resurrected Jesus, faith in the resurrection implies setting up conditions for the victims to come down from the cross and to have life in abundance, even if that process involves giving one's life.³⁷

Reconciliation toward the Kingdom of Fraternity

The resurrection is a call to reconciliation:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. [...] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to

²⁹ Cf. J. Morera, *op. cit.* p. 16.

³⁰ Mark 15:39.

³¹ I. Ellacuría (1994), "El pueblo crucificado" in I. Ellacuría and J. Sobrino, eds. (1994), *Mysterium liberationis. Conceptos fundamentales de la teología de la liberación*, Vol. 2, Madrid: Ed. Trotta, p. 189.

³² J. Sobrino citing I. Ellacuría in J. Sobrino (1993), *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, New York: Orbis Books, p. 254.

³³ Cf. Acts 7,34.

³⁴ Pope Francis (2017), *Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace*, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the celebration of the fiftieth World Day of Peace, no. 2, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-gio-rnata-mondiale-pace-2017.html.

³⁵ Cf. J. Sobrino (1999), *La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo sobre las víctimas*, Madrid: Ed. Trotta, p. 52.

³⁶ Pope Francis, *op. cit.*, no. 3.

³⁷ John 10:10-11.

himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.³⁸

Reconciliation in history is not, however, an easy process. In most societies struggling to rebuild after armed conflicts or prolonged periods of repressive regimes the word reconciliation itself can have multiple meanings and therefore find enormous resistance. Violence always involves wounds and deep divisions whose healing is usually slow and painful. The division between victimizers and victims can continue even after the formal end of a conflict. Nevertheless, despite everything, the historical and transcendent reality of the resurrection announces that it is possible to transform unjust violence. "Whoever accepts the Good News of Jesus is able to acknowledge the violence within and be healed by God's mercy, becoming an instrument of reconciliation."³⁹

Reconciliation: Breaking Cycles of Violence through Solidarity and Humanization

Reconciliation necessarily involves forgiveness, in the same way that the Suffering Servant, the Crucified One, is capable of forgiving his executioners.⁴⁰ (Lk 23:34). It is an act of love that goes beyond all logic and all interests and whose deeper meaning has been revealed in the resurrection. It is the hope that nonviolent love can transform unjust violence and open the way to full life.⁴¹

Forgiveness is freely given and, as such, opens both the possibility of acceptance and rejection by the other party, as shown in the contrasting attitudes of the centurion and those who derided Jesus. Indeed, given that conflict – in many ways – is part of every human community's life, the search for justice and reconciliation is always demanding creative nonviolent strategies. But from the logic of the resurrection, only forgiveness which is accepted after honest recognition of the commission of sin, injustice, or violence can lead to the transformation of structures. True reconciliation implies that transformation.⁴²

A fundamental aspect of this process is the recognition of the humanity of the other. When the other stops being an enemy and spaces is opened for the consideration of his or her humanity, the path of forgiveness and reconciliation can begin. And it is always a two-way process. The victimizer who recognizes the humanity of the victim and decides to stop the unjust violence and the victim who opens the heart to the recognition of the victimizer's humanity and to the possibility of a common future shared in justice. It is a process that begins in the sphere of interpersonal relationships but transcends them to engage in social structural change, including the state level and also the sphere of international relations. From this perspective, reconciliation has always a political dimension, understood from the historical realization of the Kingdom of God⁴³ and from Jesus's preferential option for the poor.⁴⁴

Witnessing to Nonviolence amid the Drums of War

Peace and reconciliation are thus not to be considered separately from Christ's wounds. The invitation to touch his wounds is an invitation from the wounded prophet of peace to *be an ecclesia crucis* in the world today.⁴⁵ Today among the poor of Latin America, for example, we find cycles of violence like the gang warfare that cripples the youth in El Salvador, the United States, and beyond, the decades of internal violence and the ensuing conflict between the FARC and the government in Colombia, and the Andean indigenous whose land and water rights are being sold by politicians and oligarchs to multinational corporations. Those who profess to belong to the wounded peacemaker are also invited to lead the people of God out of these cycles of violence into a lasting "peace on earth" willed by and in communion with God.

³⁸ 2 Co 5, 14-15.17-18.

³⁹ Pope Francis, *op. cit.*, no. 3.

⁴⁰ Luke 23:34.

⁴¹ Cf. J. Sobrino (1992), *El principio misericordia. Bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados*, Santander: Ed. Sal Terrae, p. 105.

⁴² Cf. J. Sobrino, *El principio*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

⁴³ Cf. J. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-104.

⁴⁴ Cf. G. Gutiérrez (1990), "Pobres y opción fundamental" in *Mysterium liberationis. Conceptos fundamentales de la teología de la liberación*, Vol. 1, Madrid: Ed. Trotta, 303-322.

⁴⁵ John 20:27. Cf. Roberto Goizueta, *Christ Our Companion*.

Let us recall just a few aspects of Blessed Óscar Romero's bountiful legacy in witnessing to Christ the peacemaker. As Jon Sobrino explained, Romero "did not insulate himself from the reality of his society. He did not succumb to the temptation of unreality and did not "confuse the world of spirituality with the world of the invisible." Rather he immersed himself in the Spirit of God amid "the special place from which he prayed and meditated": the reality of El Salvador and its poor women and men.⁴⁶ Romero's peace-making and nonviolence were immersed in these realities of the search for justice and dignity for those who had been excluded.

Romero is the Salvadoran Church's architect of peace, a peace that was needed so desperately during his lifetime and no less so in our day is needed. Moreover, he took to heart what the CELAM General Conference in Medellín had said about the necessary link between peace and development and applied that lesson directly to his ministry.⁴⁷ How did San Romero invoke the peacemaker? Interestingly, he dedicated his Third Pastoral Letter to the Feast of the Transfiguration, a date that also marks a patronal feast day for the nation of El Salvador. As Margaret Pfeil has convincingly demonstrated, San Romero invokes the event of the transfiguration before the unjust rulers of his land as a prefiguring of incarnational peace.⁴⁸ He reminds them that task of peace follows from the very name that has been given to their land.

We want to end our reflections by contemplating the splendid vision of peace offered by the transfigured Lord. It is striking that the five persons chosen to accompany the divine savior in that theophany on Mount Tabor were five men of aggressive temperaments and deeds. Moses, Elias, Peter, James, and John can be described in the terms used of Christians at Medellín, *they are not simply pacifists, because they are capable of fighting, but they prefer peace to war*. Jesus channeled the aggression of their temperaments toward a rich work of construction, of building up justice and peace in the world. Let us ask the divine Patron of El Salvador to transfigure in the same way the rich potential of this people with whom he has chosen to share his name. To be his instrument for bringing about this transformation in his people is the reason for the Church's existence. That is why we have tried to reaffirm its identity and mission in the light of Christ. Only by being what he wants it to be will the Church be able to give more intelligent and effective service and support to the just aspirations of the people. "This is my beloved Son: Listen to him [Mark 9:7 and parallels]." The voice of the Father on Mount Tabor is the best guarantee there is for the Church's mission among women and men, which is to point out Christ as the beloved Son of God and only Savior, and to remind them of the supreme duty of listening to him if they want to be truly free and happy.⁴⁹

Romero's message to foster peace in El Salvador thus applies equally to his advocacy of nonviolence and his witness literally unto death on behalf of an agrarian reform that would give life to the *campesinos* who were being murdered in more ways than one. But all those working towards peace, says Romero, need to let their efforts be channeled and chastised by Jesus's refracted light of peace. This applies to the rulers and those under their rule, to the military and to the pastoral workers, to the bishops and to the lay people. In his lifetime there was great conflict in all of these areas. He invoked the transfiguration not as a quick fix but only to get all the parties to think about the witness of Christ in their lives.

Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas of San Salvador is a successor to San Romero and wrote in 2016 a pastoral letter on his Feast Day entitled *I See Violence and Strife in the City*.⁵⁰ The letter does not analyze all the causes of violence in El Salvador today but acknowledges both Romero's on-going witness to the end of violence in El Salvador and the need to address the new challenge of gang violence in that light. Alas too invokes Christ the peacemaker. He cites for example the parable in which Jesus stops a group of men who wanted to stone a woman

⁴⁶ Jon Sobrino, S.J., "Monseñor Romero, A Salvadoran and a Christian," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality*, vol. 2:2 (Fall 2001), 143.

⁴⁷ Medellín Documents 20-27.

⁴⁸ Margaret Pfeil, "Oscar Romero's Theology of the Transfiguration," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 87-115.

⁴⁹ Archbishop Óscar Romero, "The Church and Popular Political Organizations," Third Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Romero, co-authored by Bishop Arturo Rivera y Damas, Bishop of Santiago de María, Feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 1978, 24.

⁵⁰ Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas, *I See Violence and Strife in the City*, Pastoral Letter of March 24, 2016.

caught in adultery.⁵¹ He notes how Jesus's example is also a call to take into account the leadership of women in Church and society.

Following Romero as a follower of Christ, one can transfigure the Salvadoran cycle of violence that persists today. Social analysis was and is still needed. But the light of the peacemaker is equally necessary. In the end, Alas states:

I would venture to guess that the causes of social exclusion are primarily--in the words of St. Ignatius of Loyola -- the three steps that the ruler of Babylon invites his followers to climb: wealth, honor, and pride. These are the three steps, which in the view of St. Ignatius, lead to all the vices. They are the steps that blessed Archbishop Romero described in several of his letters and homilies as the worship of Mammon.⁵²

A witness to nonviolence like Romero can show us the path illuminated by the peacemaker, Jesus the Christ. Following that path and allowing that light to continue to shine in our own lives, families, neighborhoods, cities, and countries are up to us.

As Romero shows us, through Jesus we realize that we are brothers and sisters to all and that it is our responsibility to engage in God's "universal fraternity" (*Laudato si'* 228). The ontological primacy of peace that is true for the whole of creation is also true for social structures. According to Saint Paul, the principalities and powers were originally good and part of their creation through Christ (Col 1:15-17).

While God has created every human being in God's image, and "the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man" (*Gaudium et spes* 22), the church has emphasized that a profound option for the poor is essential to the promotion of justice, and the overcoming of violence.

The preferential option for the poor, said Pope Benedict in his opening address to the Conference of Aparecida, "is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty". It is therefore necessary to take the perspective of the poor as a starting point to any theology of nonviolence, because the poor suffer most from the different forms of violence present in our world. It is also decisive, in different circumstances and contexts, to assume the perspective of women, communities of color, indigenous people., children and all vulnerable people everywhere.

⁵¹ Ibid. #94, citing John 8:3.

⁵² *I See Violence and Strife in the City* #143, citing *The Spiritual Exercises*.

Part IV
Nonviolence and Pneumatology

Our God of unconditional, self-giving love calls all humanity to the nonviolent life. We who are the Church – the People of God – experience this call through the life and presence of Jesus and the creative power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Church seeks, and collaborates in building, the nonviolent Reign of God through the gifts, direction and promptings of the Holy Spirit.

The generative power of the Holy Spirit activates faithful nonviolence in our lives, our Church and our world. We experience the Holy Spirit's call to nonviolence and the gift of nonviolence through scripture and through the presence of God and others.

The Spirit in the Old Testament

In Sacred Scripture, many symbolic images are used to convey the presence of the Holy Spirit, particularly those of wind, fire, water and Sophia Wisdom. The Holy Spirit is present in acts of creation and salvation, fundamentally shaping the eschatological meaning of word and sacrament in the Christian community.

"The Hebrew word for "spirit" (rûah) initially designated the wind, storm, or gentle breeze. (Farrelly, 493).⁵³ "Rûah also meant the breath in the human person, or life that was thought to be lodged in, or manifested by, breath (Gen 2:7)."⁵⁴

At the beginning of the Book of Genesis, the Spirit or wind of God "swept over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2; cf. Ps 33:6). This begins the creative act of God, establishing the context for a rich and enveloping sacramentality of all God's creation. The Spirit's wind issues forth in the breath of God animating the life of all members of God's creation, including humans. As scripture scholar Ellen Davis has noted, the poetic Genesis creation narratives highlight God's invitation to cooperation with God's ongoing creative dynamism.⁵⁵ This finds a later echo in 1 Cor 3:9, where human beings are invited to become *synergoi*, cooperators, with God in creative endeavors.

The thread running throughout scripture from Genesis forward is the building up of God's creation in love, which bears fruit in peace. Wherever life is fragile, God's Spirit strengthens and breathes dynamic, saving life into beings, relationships, and communities, drawing them to God (cf. Judges 13:25, 15:14-15). Ezekiel, for example, calls on the breath of God to bring dry bones in the valley to new life: "Then he said to me: 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude" (Ezekiel 37: 9-10).

Isaiah counts wisdom among the gifts of the spirit of the Lord that will be manifest in the awaited messianic kingdom, along with understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord (Is 11: 2-3). With the Spirit of the Lord upon him, "he will bring forth justice to the nations" (Is 42:1). Like water on parched land, the Lord promises Israel that "I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing upon your offspring." And, on the day of judgment, Joel prophesies, the Lord will pour forth the Spirit on all: "Then afterward I will pour out/my spirit upon all humankind./Your sons and daughters shall prophesy,/your old men shall dream dreams,/your young men shall see visions;/Even upon the servants and the/handmaids, in those days, I will pour/out my spirit" (Joel 2:28-29).

The Old Testament announce that the Spirit of Sophia Wisdom is at work in the world: "Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom" (Wis 7:27). Of this passage, Elizabeth Johnson observes, "From the beginning of the human race's emergence into consciousness and responsibility, the breath of the power of Spirit-Sophia has been

⁵³M. John Farrelly, OSB, "Holy Spirit," in Michael Downey, ed., *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, (The Liturgical Press, 1993), 493.

⁵⁴ Ibid. "Rûah brought rain to the fields from the Mediterranean or a sirocco from the desert and thus life or death to field and flock (Ezek 13:13; 1 Kgs 18:45; 19:12).

⁵⁵ See Ellen Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

pervading the human heart and conscience, awakening the fire of affection for divine mystery and the flame of compassion wherever injustice eviscerates what that love requires in the world.”⁵⁶

Not every spirit, though, is of God. Because some are destructive, discernment of spirits is an important formative element in nonviolence.⁵⁷ Discernment, as Pope Francis writes,

is not a matter of applying rules or repeating what was done in the past, since the same solutions are not valid in all circumstances and what was useful in one context may not prove so in another. The discernment of spirits liberates us from rigidity. ...Without the wisdom of discernment, we can easily become prey to every passing trend (173).

This is all the more important when some novelty presents itself in our lives. Then we have to decide whether it is new wine brought by God or an illusion created by the spirit of this world... At other times, the opposite can happen, when the forces of evil induce us not to change, to leave things as they are, to opt for a rigid resistance to change. Yet that would be to block the working of the Spirit” (168).⁵⁸

In the Old Testament the Spirit is the breath of life that calls humanity to the nonviolent journey for peace rooted in justice.

The Spirit in the New Testament

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-20)

From the beginning to the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus is inspired by the Spirit. “Luke particularly notes the outpouring of the Spirit in the conception and infancy of Jesus (Lk 1:35, 41, 67; 2:25-27), as he will later note the outpouring of the Spirit in the early Church” (Farrelly, 494). Mary’s assent to the power of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation and Joseph’s assent to accept this family of Mary with Jesus in the womb portend the effect of the Holy Spirit’s movement in and through those who walk with Jesus: It is dynamically relational and draws the lives of all who follow Jesus ever deeper into that “infinite charity which is the Holy Spirit” (Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 134, citing Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II 24.7).

Animated by this infinite love, Jesus models for his disciples what it means to be completely surrendered to God’s will: Ultimately it signifies openness to the movement and fruits of the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit accompanies the divine word given at Jesus’ baptism and reaffirmed later at the Transfiguration: “You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you” (Lk 3:22; cf. Lk 9:35)

Following his baptism, “full of the Holy Spirit,” Jesus was “led by the Spirit into the desert, where he was tempted by the Devil for forty days” (Lk 4:1-2). Rejecting a worldly, violent power, Jesus witnesses to a different kind of reign. He faces these temptations with a disposition of complete surrender to God. The lures of power, possession, and pride were no match for Jesus’ humility, a key virtue in the spirituality and practice of nonviolence. Returning to Galilee, Jesus took up his public ministry, “and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him” (Lk 4:14). He reads from Isaiah and proclaims their fulfillment in him: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Lk 4:18; Is 61:1).

At the point of his death, Jesus gives up his spirit, freely offering his life and love on the cross in the face of hate: “Into your hand, I commit my spirit” (Ps 31:5; cf. Lk 23:46). As René Girard notes, Jesus’ dying and rising into new life interrupts the deadly cycle of mimetic violence. The same Spirit animating divine creation also empowers the crucified Jesus’ resurrection. By the power of the Holy Spirit, death does not have the last word, and Jesus’ nonviolent way of being permeates his community of disciples through his risen presence. “As the narratives of the

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets* (Continuum, 1998), 40-41.

⁵⁷ See also Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, paragraphs 166-175. This whole section (para. 166-175) explicitly on discernment speaks to the prayerful disposition required for this, which is also an important aspect of the connection between pneumatology and nonviolence.

⁵⁸ Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate*, paragraphs 173, 168.

Easter appearances make clear, henceforth [Jesus] is present through the power of the Spirit in word and sacrament, dwelling wherever two or three gather in his name, encountered as a stranger explaining the Scriptures as he walks along the road, recognized in the breaking of the bread, present where human wounds are touched and healed and, in a special way, served where the hungry receive bread, the thirsty drink, and the naked clothing.” (Johnson, 209-210). Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus draws his followers into a discipleship of nonviolence, sending them the Paraclete, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to strengthen them along the journey.

In John’s Gospel in particular the eschatological nature of this gift of the Holy Spirit is clear, and it is explicitly linked to Christ’s gift of peace:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.... Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.... I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14:16-17, 23, 25-27).

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16:13). In fact, the Holy Spirit is the first gift of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples, given to empower them on their mission of furthering Christ’s peace and forgiveness, when he stands before them and says, “Peace be with you.” (John 20:19-23).

One week after Jesus’ first post-resurrection appearance to his disciples, he appears again to them, this time with Thomas present. Thomas makes a profession of faith, but only after touching Jesus’ wounds. In reflecting on this passage, Margaret Farley draws attention to the specific role of wounds in this moment of illumination:

...Jesus carries wounds that the disciples (including Thomas) had run away from at the time they were inflicted. The wounds have become the signature mark of the one who had loved them, been lost to them, and who returned with the good news of God’s forgiveness, acceptance, and salvation.

But why the wounds? Why not recognize Jesus by his face? His stature? His voice? These wounds are somehow at the heart of the Christian gospel. They tell Thomas not only that this is Jesus whom he has touched, but that this is the God who came to be with and for them even in suffering and death. ...Here is Jesus, with wounds eternally healed still among them. Here is Jesus, who had predicted he would take on the pain of all humankind, among them. Here is Jesus, whose wounds must represent, then, the wounds of all humankind, still among them. Here is Jesus, the face of God for them.

Here is Jesus, who has revealed that God’s peace is intimately bound up with the paschal mystery of the nonviolent Way of the Cross and the Resurrection that has vanquished the absolute hold of death, evil and violence on humankind.

With the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, they take up Jesus’ mission, which is characterized by nonviolence, as seen in the long lineage of Christian martyrs in the first centuries of the church. Filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter and John heal a person disabled from birth at the Beautiful Gate of the temple in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 3:1-10). When asked to name the source of their healing power, Peter proclaims healing and salvation through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:5-12).

Nonviolence and the Gifts of the Spirit

The language of charism, or the gifts of the Spirit, draws upon Paul’s message to Corinth and figures prominently in the account of the church’s ministry and mission found in *Lumen gentium*. As Paragraph 12 puts it:

It is not only through the sacraments that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills... he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit” (1 Cor 12:7).

Lumen gentium relies on Paul's description of the diverse gifts freely given by the Holy Spirit for service to the church. They may accent and coincide with natural abilities, but they are distinguished precisely as charisms by their essential direction toward the common good of the ecclesial community.⁵⁹ The Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (*Apostolicam actuositatem*) further specifies that believers have the right and duty to direct charisms toward the good not only in the church but in the world as well.⁶⁰

The humble, nonviolent surrender to God's love characterizes the eschatological promise of God's reign. In Mt 25:31-46, those who practice the works of mercy, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned, do so out of love for the person before them, not because they recognize Jesus. They manifest the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in lives surrendered to God. With Mary, they have said "yes" to the Spirit's movement: "'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and God's power will rest upon you....'" (Lk 1:35, 38)

The Spirit and the Trinitarian God

It is not possible to speak of the Holy Spirit without also speaking of the Holy Trinity. The Trinity is not an indecipherable dogma but a powerful articulation of the foundational relationality of God. The eternal communion of Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer is the ceaseless mutuality of ontological nonviolence in action. God is unconditional love that grounds, creates and maintains all life, rooted in the infinite goodness that the three Persons of the one God endlessly and inseparably share with one another and with all creation. St. Paul's frequent use of a tripartite greeting reflects this Trinitarian communion: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor 13:13).

As theologian Catherine LaCugna puts it:

"Living trinitarian faith means living God's life: living from and for God, from and for others. Living trinitarian faith means living as Jesus Christ lived, *in persona Christi*: preaching the gospel; relying totally on God; offering healing and reconciliation; rejecting laws, customs, conventions that place persons beneath rules; resisting temptation; praying constantly; eating with modern-day lepers and other outcasts; embracing the enemy and the sinner; dying for the sake of the gospel if it is God's will. Living trinitarian faith means living according to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit..."⁶¹ (400-01).

The nonviolent community of our Trinitarian God models how humanity is to be. The beloved community – God's own endless self-sharing – reveals how those of us made in the image and likeness of God are to live. We are called to be beloved community with one another, embraced and sustained by the beloved community of God.

The nonviolence of Jesus springs from this foundational understanding of God and the life God calls us to live. Jesus' nonviolence is rooted in his faithful response to the God of self-giving and infinitely relational love who has created a world that is good and who calls humanity to live in peace. "Jesus incarnates the liberating God, who takes sides with the poor and oppressed in a divine effort to bring life to all," writes John Dear.⁶² Nonviolence is the way to God even as it is the way to one another. As LaCugna notes, the persons of the Trinity model the loving relationality into which Jesus invites his disciples. The Holy Spirit stokes the fire of God's love among all members of God's creation.⁶³

⁵⁹ See Hans Küng, "The Charismatic Structure of the Church," in *The Church and Ecumenism*, Concilium Vol. 4 (New York: Paulist Press, 1965), 51. See also the following contributions in *Retrieving Charisms for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Doris Donnelly (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999): Margaret M. Mitchell, "'Be Zealous for the Greater Charismata': Pauline Advice for the Church of the Twenty-First Century," 22; John C. Haughey, "Charisms: An Ecclesiological Exploration," 2; and Avery Dulles, "The Charism of the New Evangelizer," 36. Finally, see René Laurentin, "Charisms: Terminological Precision," trans. Theo Weston, in *Charisms in the Church*, Concilium Vol. 109, ed. Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristan (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 7-8.

⁶⁰ Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (*Apostolicam actuositatem*), no. 3. See also John Haughey's account of the conciliar approach to the concept of charism in "Connecting Vatican II's Call to Holiness with Public Life," *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 55 (2000): 1-19.

⁶¹ Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (2000), 400-01.

⁶² John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence* (Orbis Books, 1994), 43.

⁶³ Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (2000).

Nurtured and guided by the Holy Spirit, nonviolence is a way of life that rejects the belief in violence, that transforms and resolves conflict, that fosters reconciliation and unity, and that tirelessly seeks justice and peace for all. The way of nonviolence is a pilgrimage of discipleship that calls us to conversion, community, service, and action. Nonviolence is a spiritual journey that invites transformation and healing at every level of our lives and our Church.

The Spirit and Encounter

Spirit-led nonviolence is revealed through scripture. It is also disclosed through authentic encounter: the unexpected and sometimes life-changing exchange with another that transforms and heals through which we can experience the “infinite charity which is the Holy Spirit” (*Amoris Laetitia* 134), as in this revealing contemporary example:

“One summer in Arizona, as temperatures reached 120 degrees, a group called the Samaritans sent volunteers to keep watch for any immigrants who might be in need or distress. When a group of 20 immigrants came walking along a dry river bed, a volunteer called out to them from a ledge on a hill and asked, “Is anybody injured?” “Do you need any food?” “Do you have any water?” Suddenly the group of immigrants stopped. Unsure of who was speaking to them, they huddled together and deliberated awhile. Then slowly the leader began walking toward the Samaritan volunteers and said, “We don’t have any more food. And we only have a little bit of water. But if you are in need of it, we will share what we have with you.”⁶⁴

Even in situations of precarity and risk, encounter can create unexpected options for transformation, mutual solidarity, and life itself.

In the Christian tradition, it is the encounters that Jesus has with others that serve as a paradigm for those who walk in his footsteps. Jesus calls his followers to repentance, to conversion, and to lifelong discipleship. This experience of unexpected transformation, change of heart, and a radical reorientation of one’s life is ignited by the encounter with Jesus who is the embodiment of love and mercy. Led by the Spirit more deeply into the life of Christ, we see the unveiled face of the living God. (LaCugna, 378).

Something happens to those who encounter Jesus. John, Jesus’s cousin leaps with joy in his mother Elizabeth’s womb encountering Jesus through his mother Mary. The elders at the Temple are astonished by the twelve-year-old Jesus’ wisdom (Luke 2:41-52). There is the non-judgmental and egalitarian conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan at the well (John 4); the raising of a dead girl and the healing of a sick woman (Mark 5:21-43) – all of these exchanges bring new life and hope to those who suffered. Each demonstrates intimacy, acceptance, courage, gratitude, and a shift to living life more fully in the service of the Beloved Community. These nonviolent encounters model for us a way of being with and for all others.

These stories also invite us to meet Jesus in a most personal manner. It is in our imagination, in the memories of sounds, scents, touch and emotions that Jesus stops for a moment with us on his journey. He takes us aside, spends time with us, and pulls us into his life so that we can experience that beautiful gaze of love. It is that encounter with the enfleshed bearer of ultimate grace that we are invited to transformation and to a deeper spiritual reality.

We become that woman at the well. It is hot, it is dusty, and we are filled with the scornful glances and whispered innuendos of our neighbors, who look down on us and gossip about us. Our self-image, our self-worth, makes us despise ourselves. And this man, who could be like so many others who have abused us, speaks to us instead as an equal. He looks into our eyes as if he is our very brother who loves us no matter what we may have done. We speak to him with contempt, expecting the worst. He responds with respect and directness, with humanness. He takes what no one else will take from us...and fills us with an overflowing abundance of what we thought we would never have again: loving hope in our very existence.

We must become the disdained woman at the well who has lost hope. We must be that scared pregnant teen who runs to her cousin in absolute fright about her condition that will bring such shame and reproach. And we must be the arrogant teacher who is surprised by the innocent wisdom of a child, the despairing parent of a dead child, or the sorrowing spouse who has lost her life partner. We are invited to feel our human pain and fragility

⁶⁴ Daniel G. Groody, C.S.C., “Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of A Crucified People,” *Theological Studies*, 70 (2009) pg. 298.

which we cannot escape alone. In the encounter with Jesus, we find the grace that transforms fear, despair, sorrow, and unbearable pain into a new existence. To encounter Jesus is to invite him into our lives and to be assured that he lives within us. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Cor 3:16).

In the context of this experience of acceptance, intimacy and healing Jesus' followers embrace his proclamation of the reign of God. This encounter transforms our deepest fears and insecurities into the possibility of hope in the knowledge that God is doing something new in the world, and that our role in this plan is essential. Fears and insecurities which are often turned against others in acts of dominance, violence, and exclusion, are overwhelmed by an encounter with absolute love and radical acceptance. In these encounters our personal fate and the fate of the communities we inhabit and shape are transformed. This is true in our lives. It is also true in the lives of the great cloud of witnesses who, for two thousand years, has encountered the God of nonviolence through Jesus Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit.

For twenty centuries, the Holy Spirit has called Christians in all parts of the world to a life of holiness. This has included responding to the challenges in their lives and their world with the humility and courage of nonviolence. Martyrs and saints – known and unknown – have dedicated their lives to actively following the Spirit's call to collaborate in building the already-but-not-yet nonviolent Reign of God. Despite its failings, the Church is called to be a community that "shares actively, freely, gratuitously, and unrestrictedly its goods and charismatic gifts... incompatible with physical, social, and political acts of violence; with revenge, murder, rape, extortion, exploitation, war. Its political stance is pacifist and nonviolent."⁶⁵ (Don Gelpi, 281). The Church, as bearer of the Paschal mystery in the present day,⁶⁶ lives and teaches the mystery of reconciliation in the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁵ Don Gelpi, S.J., *Experiencing God: A Theology of Human Emergence* (Paulist Press, New York, 1978), 281.

⁶⁶ Donal Harrington, "The Spirituality of Nonviolence," *The Furrow*, Vol. 42, N 11(Nov. 1991), 617.

Nonviolence and Ecclesiology

What is the Church for?

As followers of the Prince of Peace, the church is called to be nonviolent. But the church is not merely an aggregate collection of individual disciples; it is a community of people united as the Body of Christ. Is there something about the very logic of this union that witnesses to the nonviolence of God?

Scripture scholar Gerhard Lohfink explains the logic of gathering a People of God in terms of God's nonviolence. God sees the wreckage of the world post-Fall, the violence and chaos that has come about through human sin, and God wants to change the world. This is what salvation means: not plucking a few survivors from the wreckage of the world and installing them in heaven, but creating a new heaven and a new earth. God is a revolutionary. But God is not like human revolutionaries, as Gerhard Lohfink underscores

All violent revolutionaries have one basic problem: they are short of time. Individual lifetimes are limited, and the masses are often inert. If they want to see the new society of their dreams within their own lifetime revolutionaries have to change the old society in a relatively short period of time, and that they can only do by violent means. In fact, the usual concept of revolution includes at least three elements: (1) that the masses are involved, (2) that the social overthrow happens relatively quickly, and (3) that it is brought about by open and direct violence.⁶⁷

God's principle of transformation is different. God, like all revolutionaries, desires the overturning, the radical alteration of the whole society – for in this the revolutionaries are right: what is at stake is the whole world, and the change must be radical, for the misery of the world cries to heaven and it begins deep within the human heart. But how can anyone change the world and society at its roots without taking away freedom?

It can only be because God begins in a small way, at one single place in the world. There must be a place, visible, tangible, where the salvation of the world can begin: that is, where the world becomes what it was supposed to be according to God's plan. Beginning at that place, the new thing can spread abroad, but not through persuasion, not through indoctrination, not through violence. Everyone must have the opportunity to come and see. All must have the chance to behold and test this new thing. Then, if they want to, they can allow themselves to be drawn into the history of salvation that God is creating. Only in that way can their freedom be preserved. What drives them to the new thing cannot be force, not even moral pressure, but only the fascination of a world that is changed.⁶⁸

God is nonviolent, so God begins the transformation of the world by calling a small group to live differently so that people can see a beautiful life and join the movement voluntarily, not by coercion. Salvation begins in the Jews, a chosen people meant to model a peaceful and reconciled life for the whole world, and the church calls people into this unity. Salvation happens by attraction, not coercion, as William Cavanaugh explains:

This kind of attraction does not occur in a general and universal way, any more than one falls in love with men or women in general. Attraction to a saved life occurs when one can see a concrete community of people living out salvation, living reconciled and hopeful lives in the midst of a violent world. Rarely are people converted by well-argued theories. People are usually converted to a new way of living by getting to know people who live that way and thus being able to see themselves living that way too. This is the way God's revolution works. The church is meant to be that community of people who make salvation visible for the rest of the world. Salvation is not a property of isolated individuals, but is only made visible in mutual love.⁶⁹

Paul refers to the community of Christians as the "body of Christ." The church is the continuation of the bodily presence of Christ on earth. The boundaries of that body are rarely clear, for the Holy Spirit is not confined

⁶⁷ Lohfink, Gerhard. *Does God Need the Church?* Michael Glazier Publishing, 1999, p. 26.

⁶⁸ Id at 27.

⁶⁹ William T. Cavanaugh, "Pilgrim People" in *Gathered for the Journey*, ed. David McCarthy and Therese Lysaught (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 88-105.

to the visible church. But the center of that body is clear: the weakest members, Paul says, are the indispensable ones (1 Cor 12:22), and when one member suffers, all suffer together (1 Cor 12:26). Christ identifies himself with the victims of this world (Matt 25:31-46). In Girard's thought, the church is that community that undoes the logic of violence by breaking the unanimity that proclaims the guilt of the victims. The church identifies God with the victims of this world and thereby unmasks the scapegoating mechanism. Nonviolence is not for a few heroic individuals; it is lived in community by sensing the deep interconnection of all people, sharing the same nervous system in the cosmic Christ.

Siding with the victims of this world will provoke opposition. Nonviolence is not a tactic that always works in the short run. Christians must be prepared for martyrdom, which is not merely an ancient phenomenon but a daily reality for Christians around the world today. Martyrdom is the ultimate witness to the truth of nonviolence. The martyr, in imitation of Christ, prefers to absorb the violence of the world rather than deal it out, in the secure knowledge that she or he is on the right side of history. The coming Kingdom is nonviolent; the martyr decides to live that reality now. But the martyr is not alone; the witness of martyrs depends on a church community ready to keep the memory of the martyrs alive as a proclamation of what God – and God's creation – is really like.

Church as Sacrament of the Future

As a reality that makes God's uniting of the world visible to the world, the church is a sacrament. As *Lumen Gentium* says, "All those who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity."⁷⁰ The church is, furthermore, "in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race."⁷¹ It can be said that Christ is the sacrament of God, and the church is the sacrament of Christ. The church concretely manifests this claim when it is faithful to the nonviolent witness and teachings of Christ, who came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God.

The traditional "marks" of the church indicate that the church is characterized by its visible characteristics. The four marks are also signs of the nonviolence of God. The church is, firstly, one because God is one. Violence divides, while God unites. The church is, secondly, holy because God is holy. The church is called to renewal and reform, to making manifest the nonviolent nature of God in its very life. The church is, thirdly, catholic. It embraces all, and transcends the barriers that set people against each other. The church is, fourthly, apostolic. It is called to be faithful to the nonviolent teaching of Jesus and the apostles, as found in the Sermon on the Mount. The four marks are "signs of originative gifts" and "emergent properties" of the not yet fully realized vocation of the church.⁷²

The promise of God's revolution is that history is moving toward the reconciliation of all things. But that reconciliation is not fully here yet, obviously. There is still plenty of violence and evil. After Jesus was gone, it was easy to look around and conclude "The Messiah has not come. The world is the same as it was." The only proof the early Christians could offer that the Messiah had indeed come was to live as if the world was already changed. The early Christians in Acts of the Apostles lived reconciled, nonviolent lives, praising God and sharing all their goods in common (Acts 2:42-47). They lived as if the future Kingdom is already here, because it is. Christ has already changed the world, and after his ascension the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all humanity, making it possible that "your young people shall see visions, and your old people dream dreams" (Acts 2:17). The Holy Spirit has inaugurated the "last days," making it possible for people to live differently, to lead reconciled lives. True to his nonviolent nature, the event of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit does not force anyone to change. Rather, people are invited to live a beautiful life now, not waiting to live reconciled, peaceful lives until everyone else does. We are invited to bring heaven to earth now – to show the future in the present – by living nonviolently. It is still the only proof Christians can offer that the Messiah has really come in Jesus of Nazareth.

It is an odd thing to be reminded that the church – seemingly the most tradition-laden institution of the modern world, one rooted in the formative stories and experiences of its past – is fundamentally defined by the future. Rather than a barge being pushed from behind by a tugboat, the church is a vessel guided into the future by a lodestar, a magnetic attraction to what lies ahead.

⁷⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 9.

⁷¹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 1.

⁷² Stephen Pickard, *Seeking the Church: An Introduction to Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 2012).

What lies ahead is the Kingdom of God. It was the beginning of the consummation of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and inaugurated, and it is the reconciliation of the created order with God that Christians point to as the ultimate direction of history. It is the arrival of a 'new heaven and new earth' (Is 65:17; Rev 21:1), in which sin and its effects have been effaced, and in which peace and love flow from unity with a loving and benevolent God.

All too often overlooked or marginalized, however, is the role of the church in the unfolding of the Kingdom that began with Jesus and reaches completion when He comes again. While the church does not build the Kingdom of God, nor is it itself the Kingdom of God, it nonetheless has an irreplaceable role in the unfolding of the Kingdom. By minimizing the degree to which the mission and actions of the church should be constituted by what God intends all humanity to become, the church instead settles into dull conformity with the ends and means of the old age, that age whose end is proclaimed in the Resurrection and completed in God's future time. When the role of the church in the unfolding of the new era of God is properly reconfigured, many contemporary assumptions and habits stand ready for review and reconsideration.

Eschatology is not concerned primarily with the end of the world, or about a post-historical utopia with no purchase on life today. As John Panteleimon Manoussakis writes, such dispositions serve as:

the perfect alibi for getting all too comfortable with the world in its current state. We have found the ideal justification for forgetting that this is not our home, our goal, our destination; that the categories of this world are not and should not be the paradigms and concepts of our thought. By exiling eschatology to a time beyond time, we have precluded ourselves from the wonderfully subversive effects of the future, of the reversals that the new might bring. Without an eschatological awareness in our interaction with the everyday, we cannot but be immune to surprise, and, therefore, to the kingdom of God, which has surprise as its very mode of manifestation (Matt. 24:27; Mark 13:36; Luke 12:40; 17:24).⁷³

Whether the church is thought of as a "demonstration plot," a prototype, or a beachhead, the thrust of an ecclesiology mindful of its eschatological nature emphasizes that within the church people are supposed to start acting as if the Kingdom has already begun, and that the church is called to show the world that a different way to live is possible *here and now*, even as the old order seeks to preserve itself against the onslaught of the coming Kingdom of God. The resurrection of Christ marks an irrevocable change in the created order, here and now, if only people had the courage to believe it and act as if it were so. If Christ has been raised, the fear of death – the ultimate limit on human hope and aspirations – should no longer hold sway. If all who follow Jesus will be taken up into God at some point in the future, the grave need not serve as a check on our life and work and most noble predispositions. If life is held only when it is freely given away (Mk 8:35; Mt. 16:24; Lk 9:24), then we need not kill any longer to protect it; in fact, by seeking to protect life with violence, we may be foregoing the experience of eternal life first exemplified by the resurrection.

When the church is properly aware of its eschatological character, it sees that following Jesus – his practices and priorities, dispositions and affections – is itself a crucial aspect of the Kingdom's unfurling in history. The church does not cause the Kingdom to advance, but it is meant to show the world what human community starts to look like as the Kingdom becomes a lived reality. It does this in and through its sins, mistakes, wrong turns and reversals – it does this through showing what penance and reconciliation can make possible, by showing that the past need not have a death-grip on the present and future, and by imitating however it can the self-giving love of God toward one another and those outside its community.

The Church as Countersign

It seems absurd that God would intend the church – that historic repository for the mundane and the compromised, the source of great hypocrisy and venal pursuit of power – to be a central part of the plan to redeem the universe. Centuries of sin and failure have left most of us with minimal expectations regarding the role of the church in the world. Sometimes all we ask is that it not bring further scandal or embarrassment to the cause of Christ.

We must confess that the church has often been a countersign to the nonviolence of God.

⁷³ John Panteleimon Manoussakis, "The Anarchic Principle of Christian Eschatology in the Eucharistic Tradition of the Eastern Church," *Harvard Theological Review*, 100:1 (2007), p. 33.

The church has often spent more of its moral and intellectual resources trying to justify participation in war and violence than to renounce it. In the Crusades, Christians blasphemously claimed that “Deus Vult,” God wills the carnage. The church has sanctioned slavery, torture, and forced conversions. Violence against women and children has often been given cover in a patriarchal church. In modern times, the church has been riven by a narrow sectarianism that lauds killing on behalf of one’s nation-state over the universal embrace of the church catholic.

We cannot re-affirm the centrality of nonviolence to the life and mission of Jesus – and thus the life and mission of the Church – without confessing the ways the Church has betrayed its call to nonviolence throughout history. Indeed, our nonviolent journey requires ongoing metanoia – a profoundly transformative process as Church of turning away from the ways of violence – that includes acknowledging and making amends for this systemic betrayal.

Confessing the Church’s Violence

The Church seeks to be faithful to the biblical witness of the God of nonviolence. But this same witness, the stories that reveal the God of nonviolence, clearly witness to humanity’s sin of interpersonal and social violence. It is in the midst of these experiences of the harm we do to each other that God enters history in order to limit violence, hold back a vengeful spirit, promote freedom from oppression, and transform lives and communities. As an agent of this truth, the Church too must examine the ways its history is both touched by conflict and violence as a consequence of sin, while at the same time being gifted with the truth of a nonviolent God who wishes for us life abundant in love and hope.

Throughout human history our grandest plans for centralizing power, promoting human progress, and expanding the reach of our influence have met with the failure of our sinful propensity for violence, for the urge to impose our will on others through the subjugation and dehumanization of those who do not think like us or adapt to our plans.

Hebrew Scripture reminds us that in the times of the Kingdom of Israel the people demanded a King. Having an earthly ruler represented the fulfillment of the promises of Yahweh, of having arrived at a promised land, and finally governing themselves according to the dictates of the Law. But this was judged by God to be a rejection of divine rule and the law, that which set them apart from the other kingdoms around them. On the contrary, the people asked for Samuel to request from Yahweh a king: “We too must be like all the nations, with a king to rule us, lead us in warfare, and fight our battles.” (1 Samuel 8:20). Until then violence and conflict for the people of Israel had meant trusting God’s plan and sovereignty, which in its infinite wisdom and mercy established limits to humanity’s violent will. But now the people were demanding that they too enjoy the benefits of an earthly ruler, one that would lead in battle without the limits and conventions established by Yahweh. Samuel warns the people of the foolishness of their plan, for their benefit is not in becoming “like all the nations”, but, rather, in being a people set apart to follow and trust a liberating God of life.

The prophets call out the distortions of our own totalizing political projects. These projects tend to claim for themselves divine favor and blessing by establishing their justice and their contribution to the common good, while overlooking their failure or the harm they may do to others. Sin not only corrupts our historical projects, but also masks violence with the veil of necessity and progress. The prophets charged to call out this farce while reminding us of God’s mercy and purpose for peace and life suffer the fate of being ridiculed, persecuted, jailed, exiled, and sometimes even murdered.

The Church does not stand outside of history. It is born of the historical experience of the community of believers accompanied by the Spirit, cleaving to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the center of history. Its practices and the tradition it moves forward have grounded history in many ways, shaped it for the common good, always hoping to bring the human family closer together as sisters and brothers, and closer to life in Christ. But the Church’s story also betrays the sin of the world, and the ways in which the Church has sometimes legitimated different forms of violence for the sake of increasing the faithful, resolving doctrinal conflict, and protecting its material heritage.

Glimpsing the Church’s History of Violence

The just war tradition has long been adopted as part of the Church’s social ethics of war.⁷⁴ While the principles of just war sought to provide a framework for limiting wars, they have been used for justifying wars,

⁷⁴ Citations of CST that uses principles of JWT.

leading to many innocent deaths.⁷⁵ In 1095 at the Council of Clermont Pope Urban II declared that there were wars that could be declared not only as just wars but as holy wars.⁷⁶ In the medieval period the Church justified crusades against Muslims, and blessed many young men with a promise of heaven as they went to fight in crusades.

The 13th Century saw the creation of inquisitions-- included the Spanish, Portuguese, Mexican, and Roman Inquisitions – which led to holy violence against persons deemed to be heretics or against Church doctrine (1560-1700). Close to 150,000 people went through the Inquisition process and about 3,000 were executed.⁷⁷ The inquisitions targeted Christians who had converted from Judaism or Islam, and were seen to be reverting to their old religion or practicing a mixed religion. Others were convicted for going against official doctrines of the Church. The Inquisitors operated under the legal basis of Inquisitions established by Pope Urban IV in his bull *ad extirpanda* of 1252, which allowed for torture to extract confessions from heretic. By 1256 inquisitors were given absolution if they had used instruments of torture.⁷⁸ Inquisitions were banned in Europe in the early 19th century except in the Papal States.⁷⁹ The Church's department of Inquisition was converted into the "Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office," and was renamed after the Second Vatican Council the "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith."

The Church tolerated slavery to a great extent and justified it based on scripture. Trans-Atlantic slave traders sought ways of justifying slave trade following the expansion of colonies in the Americas and subsequent high demand for labor. This was said to have been initiated by Bishop Las Casas, under the authorization of Charles V in 1517.⁸⁰ Las Casas later condemned slavery, and many other popes issued bulls condemning unjust enslavement (although "just" enslavement was accepted), as well as mistreatment of Indians by Spanish and Portuguese missionaries. In their quest to capture more slaves in Africa, the slave traders held that enslaving Africans would bring them into contact with Christianity and save their souls.⁸¹ What followed was more than 400 years of slavery in Africa and Latin America. According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, the number of captured Africans shipped to USA were 12.5 million and 10.7 million made it across the seas into the USA.⁸² Many more millions of Africans were transported to Brazil and Caribbean countries.

The slave traders often used various scriptural justifications to perpetuate the lucrative slave trade industry. Reference was often made to Paul's Epistles which emphasized that Christian slaves have the obligation to serve their masters faithfully. For example, in his Letter to the Colossians (3:22), Paul states that: "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord." In Genesis 9:25-27 the story of the curse of Canaan has been used to justify slavery: "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers. He also said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem.'" In Genesis 9:22 we read that it was Ham, the Father of Canaan, who saw Noah naked, the latter having been drunk. Noah in turn curses Canaan. Extremist sectarian groups among Christian and Muslims, identified black Africans as Ham's descendants. Pagman notes that:

This reading of the Book of Genesis merged easily into a medieval iconographic tradition in which devils were always depicted as black. Later pseudo-scientific theories would be built around African skull shapes, dental structure, and body postures, in an attempt to find an unassailable argument – rooted in whatever

⁷⁵ Peter Partner 1998. *God of battles: holy wars of Christianity and Islam*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press

⁷⁶ Jonathan Philips. 2014. *The Crusades, 1095-1205*. London: Routledge.

⁷⁷ Edward Peters. 1998. *"Inquisitions". The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials (2 ed.)*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁷⁸ Larissa Tracy. 2012. *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature: Negotiations of National Identity*. Boydell and Brewer Ltd, p. 22

⁷⁹ Jonathan Kirsch. 2008. *The Grand Inquisitors Manual: A History of Terror in the Name of God*. San Francisco: HarperOne.

⁸⁰ "Negro Race", Joseph Butsch, Catholic Encyclopedia, 1911, CDROM Edition 2003

⁸¹ Ross, William Stewart. 1880. *Christianity and the slave trade*. London: W. Stewart

⁸² Henry L. Gates, *How Many Slaves Landed in US*. New York: PBS

the most persuasive contemporary idiom happened to be: law, theology, genealogy, or natural science – why one part of the human race should live in perpetual indebtedness to another.⁸³

In South Africa the Dutch Reformed Church provided a Biblical justification for apartheid. They relied on Biblical verses like Acts 2:5-11 and Revelation 5:9, 7:9, 14:6, among others, which according to them indicated that God divided people into different nations, languages and territories. The most frequently used text to justify separation of races is Acts 17:26: “From our one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the time of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live.” According to South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): “Some of the major Christian churches gave their blessing to the system of apartheid. And many of its early proponents prided themselves in being Christians. Indeed, the system of apartheid was regarded as stemming from the mission of the church...”⁸⁴

Colonialism became yet another tool of dominance against nations in the southern hemisphere. Many Africans, Latin Americans and Asians were subjected to the most dehumanizing and violent experiences leading to deaths and destructions of many people and their families.⁸⁵ Many colonialists came with Christian missionaries, in a sense giving blessing to the mission of colonialism. Religion was part and parcel of the state and evangelization, especially in Spain, Portugal and Great Britain.⁸⁶ In Africa, Latin America and Asia missionaries divided among themselves the conquered territories and spread their evangelization with a blind eye to human rights violations carried out by colonialists.⁸⁷ The missionaries condoned racism and played within the supremacist ideologies advanced by the colonialists.⁸⁸

In light of these structural sins, Nigerian theologian Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator asks whether we can still honestly claim that the church is a sacrament, and he argues that these various forms of violence at least obscure such an identity.⁸⁹ Perhaps it is better to claim this sacramental identity as more of an aspiration than an established fact.

This critical theological reflection is an important consideration when reflecting on the nonviolent witness of the ecclesial body in the world today. In our ecclesial doctrines and practices, what kind of message do we send to the world?

Is the church, in practice, a clear and vibrant sign of the unity of the human race? The church concretely manifests this claim only when it is faithful to the nonviolent witness and teachings of Christ.

Violence, on the other hand, is a countersign to the “unity of the whole human race” and obscures the identity of the church as a sacrament of Christ. The claim that the church is the Body of Christ should not license boasting of the church’s virtue, but rather serve to highlight the scandal of the church’s violence.

Writing about the Spanish Civil War, Dorothy Day invokes a reflection on the mystical body by Pope St. Clement of Rome: “Why do the Members of Christ tear one another; why do we rise up against our own body in such madness; have we forgotten that we are all members, one of another?”⁹⁰ Appealing to St. Augustine, Day affirms, “We are all members or potential members of the mystical body of Christ.”⁹¹ Therefore, it is not only

⁸³ Anthony Pagden. 1997. *The Slave Trade, Review of Hugh Thomas' Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. The New Republic.

⁸⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report, Volume 4 Chapter 3.” Pretoria: Government of South Africa.

⁸⁵ Robert Delavignette. 1964. *Christianity and colonialism*. Wheathampstead, Herts: Anthony Clarke Books.

⁸⁶ Hilary M. Carey 2013. *God's empire: religion and colonialism in the British world, c.1801-1908*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. ; Carole Blackburn. 2000. *Harvest of souls: the Jesuit missions and colonialism in North America, 1632-1650*. Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press.

⁸⁷ Edward Andrews. 2010. “Christian Missions and Colonial Empires Reconsidered: A Black Evangelist in West Africa, 1766-1816.” *Journal of Church & State*. **51** (4): 663–691.

⁸⁸ Katharine Gerbner. 2018. *Christian slavery: conversion and race in the protestant Atlantic world*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁸⁹ Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, “A Global Sign of Outward Grace: The Sacramentality of the World Church in the Era of Globalization.” *CSTA Proceedings* 67 (2012), p. 19, accessed 16 May 2016 at <https://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ctsa/article/download/2174/1939>.

⁹⁰ Dorothy Day, “The Mystical Body and Spain,” *The Catholic Worker*, August 1936.

⁹¹ Cavanaugh, 221. Emphasis added. Cf: Dorothy Day, “The Mystical Body of Christ,” *The Catholic Worker*, October 1939.

violence against other explicit members of the visible church that is a countersign to the Kingdom of God; all violence is an attack on Christ himself.

To assert the centrality of nonviolence to the mission of the church, though, does not imply that it is fully nonviolent. Indeed, as William Cavanaugh puts it:

Clearly the claim of Israel, and later the church, to have a special role in God's salvation of the world is not a claim of the moral superiority of God's people. The biblical writers emphasize the sinfulness of God's people in order to highlight the goodness and faithfulness of God. God loves the people unconditionally, contrary to anything the people deserve. The claim of a unique role for the people of God is not a claim based on human effort but on the forgiving love of God. The reason the biblical authors are able to name the people's sin so bluntly and so truthfully is that the truth has been revealed to them in the law and in the person of Jesus Christ. The only reason God's people can witness to the rest of the world – even by their own sinfulness and repentance – is that they have been enabled to name sin truthfully through the revelation of the living God. If it were not for their relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus, they would not be able fully to recognize their sin as sin.⁹²

Glimpsing the Church's History of Nonviolence

The Church has a history of enormous violence. At the same time, it also has a history of spiritually-grounded nonviolence. As we re-awaken in our time of catastrophic violence to the nonviolence of Jesus, we are also cognizant of the tradition of nonviolence within the Church and in the larger world inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The early church resolutely placed the nonviolence of Jesus at the center of the Church and of individual discipleship.⁹³ It fully understood that to be a disciple of Jesus meant to be comprehensively nonviolent. The Christian community in Jerusalem refused to participate in the violent insurrection against the Romans (66-70 C.E.) and for 300 years the church resisted service in the Roman military. The Church prepared its members to face the consequences for following the nonviolent Jesus: persecution and martyrdom. It nourished a culture of spiritually-grounded nonviolence through the corporal works of mercy, through the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation, and through resistance to the culture of violence.

This steadfast conviction and faithfulness, in many cases embodied to the point of death, was founded in a clear grasp of Jesus's nonviolence. Not only did it understand his nonviolence, it sought to emulate it in its many dimensions. The early Church, in its spiritual formation, evangelization, ecclesial self-understanding, sacramental life, and prophetic witness sought to faithfully live these facets of the life and ministry of the nonviolent Jesus. The witnesses of Christian martyrs were often recorded and recited at community Eucharist to encourage one another in their Gospel nonviolence.

After Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 C.E., pockets of Christian men and women retreated to the deserts to keep the nonviolence of Jesus alive. Rooted in this experience, monastic communities emerged for the practice of peace and hospitality, worship and study, and service to the local community. During the later Middle Ages the Church attempted to limit wars through "The Truce of God" and "The Peace of God," and in the thirteenth century Francis and Clare of Assisi reclaimed the nonviolence of Jesus and pointed Christians back to the Gospel. After the Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation, small "Peace Churches" blossomed which explicitly espoused the nonviolence of Jesus, including the Anabaptists, Brethren, Mennonites and the Society of Friends.

In the lives of specific witnesses of active nonviolence, this movement of the Holy Spirit is readily discernible. Faced with the violence of structural injustice, as well as destructive tendencies within themselves, they listen carefully to the Holy Spirit and surrender themselves fully to accept the Spirit's invitation to a loving, nonviolent, and compassionate way of being in the world. Our own time has seen the emergence of many Spirit-driven prophets and exemplars of God's nonviolence, including Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dom Hélder Câmara and many others.

Dorothy Day

⁹² Cavanaugh, "Pilgrim People."

⁹³ John Dear and Ken Butigan, "An Overview of Gospel Nonviolence in the Christian Tradition," conference background paper, Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference, April 11-13, 2016, Rome, 1ff.

Spirituality is the lived experience of the faith. To live our faith in the God of nonviolence is not to be carried off to an imaginary dream but to engage actively with the realities of this world, including its monumental violence and injustice, in light of the divine call for justice and peace. A modern example of this engaged spirituality is Dorothy Day (1897-1980). A co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, Day established “hospitality houses” from which voluntarily poor co-workers performed the corporal works of mercy with the poor and marginalized. She also espoused and practiced nonviolence in response to the wars of the 20th century.

Day’s spirituality was deeply incarnational; each person was worthy of dignity and honor as actual or potential members of the Mystical Body of Christ. As theologian David Tracy puts it, “The mystical character of her profoundly personalist Christian spirituality was rendered into prophetic action for justice.”⁹⁴ Day believed that Christians are called to inculcate respect and the deepest values of the human spirit in an increasingly spirit-bereft, industrialized, technologized and depersonalized culture. Grounded in the process of living in keen awareness of the unceasing presence of God, Day’s nonviolence was a way of compassion, voluntary poverty and safeguarding the dignity of all human beings.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) was a Baptist minister who played a key role in the American civil rights movement from the mid-1950s until his assassination in 1968.⁹⁵ Dr. King sought equality and human rights for African Americans, the economically disadvantaged and all victims of injustice through peaceful protest. He developed six principles of nonviolence rooted in the vision of Jesus, including: nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people; nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding; nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people; nonviolence holds that voluntary suffering can educate and transform; nonviolence chooses love instead of hate; and nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.⁹⁶ King offered a powerful witness of nonviolence, and his vision of the Beloved Community points toward the eschatological horizon: Animated by the Holy Spirit, Jesus’ disciples live into a communion characterized by nonviolence, compassionate love, dignity, justice, and full participation of each and every person.

Dom Hélder Câmara

In April 1964 Dom Hélder Câmara (1909-1999) was installed as the archbishop of Recife in northeast Brazil, just days after a military coup took over the Brazilian government.⁹⁷ With sixteen other bishops he issued a call for justice and the release of jailed leaders. The next day, government troops raided his offices. As the attack by the military government escalated – with many priests and lay workers tortured and killed – Dom Hélder continued to speak out, and faced persecution himself. For Dom Hélder, only justice would resolve the great challenges of his time, and creating justice required “the “liberating moral pressure” of nonviolence. “My personal vocation is to be a pilgrim of peace,” he said. “We need only turn to the Beatitudes – the quintessence of the gospel message – to see that the option for Christians is clear...Opting for nonviolence means to believe more strongly in the power of truth, justice and love than in the power of wars, weapons and hatred.” (Kemper and Engel, 215)

Many Other Witnesses for Nonviolence

Many other known and unknown lay persons over the past 2,000 years have lived the way of Jesus’ nonviolence. In the 20th century, these included Jean Goss (1912-1991) and Hildegard Goss-Mayr (1930-), nonviolence trainers with the International Fellowship of Reconciliation who for decades crisscrossed the globe spreading the methods and dynamics of nonviolence and nonviolent movements. The Goss-Mayrs also have helped build the capacity of numerous popular movements around the world. One of the most powerful examples was the trainings they

⁹⁴ David Tracy, “Recent Catholic Spirituality: Unity amid Diversity,” Louis Dupre and Don Saliers, eds., *Christian Spirituality III* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 162.

⁹⁵ “Martin Luther King, Jr. Biography,” *History*, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr>.

⁹⁶ See Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori’s pastoral letter that elucidates these principles: “The Enduring Power of Martin Luther King Jr’s Principles of Nonviolence,” February 2018, <https://www.archbalt.org/kingpastoral/>.

⁹⁷ Ken Butigan, “Blessing in the Desert: Dom Hélder Câmara and the Nonviolent Response to the Originating Violence of Nuclear Weapons at the Nevada Test Site,” in Mara Clara Bingemer and Pávo Fernando Carneiro de Andrade, eds., *A fonte o futuro da Teologia da Libertação: O Legado de Dom Helder Camara* (Editora Pontifical University Rio, Brazil, 2017).

organized in the Philippines at the invitation of Cardinal Jaime Sin that helped prepare the People Power movement that brought down the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship in 1986.

Formation in Nonviolence

As the church's complicity in violence makes manifest, being nonviolent disciples of Christ does not come easily. Being the sort of church that acts as if the nonviolent imperatives of Jesus and the Kingdom should find expression in the here and now requires robust processes of lay and ordained formation. While it is by the grace of God that people find their way to the Good News of Christ, the church itself (guided, one hopes, by the Holy Spirit) plays a role in shaping people into a community capable of choosing life and peace over death-dealing and violence.

Reflecting on the Church as the locus of formation in Jesus' nonviolence, Fr. Donal Harrington from Ireland speaks of the Church as an educational community:

a community that is learning nonviolence through a learning process that is endless. For, in learning nonviolence the Christian community is not learning some discreet item of knowledge. It is learning the Mystery of being Church, initiating itself into a very neglected dimension of what it means to imitate Christ and be his disciple... it is nothing less than the learning of a way of being Church in our land that incarnates God's way with his people.⁹⁸

In a basic sense, no one is "born" a Christian – no more than one is "born" a member of a political party, a national identity, or any other religious or cultural community. All of these are learned identities and perspectives: they are conveyed from persons already steeped in a given tradition or way of life, in the way that apprentices learn a craft from a master in a given field. Language works much the same way – nobody invents their own language, no one is born speaking a language, and all language acquisition in some sense is acquired from someone else – you can innovate in it, make up new words, but first you have to internalize what it is like to think, dream, love and inhabit the world that language creates.

In some ways, Christianity is like a language that one learns from other skilled speakers. Just as languages are different in respect to the realities they allow their speakers to express. So too different religious traditions equip their adherents to think, perceive, feel, and act in ways different from persons who have not been "formed" or socialized within those traditions. According to the late Yale theologian George Lindbeck, an observer at Vatican II, "There are numberless thoughts we cannot think, sentiments we cannot have, and realities we cannot perceive, unless we learn to use the appropriate symbol systems."⁹⁹ Before people can act in the world as "Christians" in any nontrivial sense, they must first be shaped by the narratives of Jesus and Israel, of the prophets and the saints, and by the other stories of the faith.

While the role of apprenticing people into the faith has been performed variously by the family, the state, and the culture, from the beginning of the Christian movement such formation has been the ineradicable obligation of the church. The church is the only "school of discipleship" where people learn – however incompletely or imperfectly – to make the priorities, dispositions, and practices of Jesus their own. At its best the church provides experiences (through liturgy, study, service and more) and time-intensive mentoring in which people come to inhabit practices and habits that help generate and deepen the ongoing conversion of mind, heart and action called for to be a pilgrim people in the world.

Such formation is always controversial, of course, and is always a matter of political struggle. For the church is not the only social force seeking to form the attitudes, desires and dispositions of people – the formation of Christians is always a contested matter, usually in competition with that sponsored by states, nations, corporations, ideological movements, and other powers that shape human cultures and futures. Forming nonviolent followers of Jesus comes into direct conflict with those institutions, ideologies and priorities for whom violence is a necessary feature of their identities and vocations. In this sense, among others, "becoming a Christian" remains an intrinsically countercultural matter even as Christianity lives and breathes inside the various cultures of the world.

There exists much literature about the so-called "crisis of Christian formation" in many parts of the world. The breakdown of older ways of incorporating the young and new members into the church, the incomplete or compromised versions of the faith that have come to dominate in certain places, and the strength of more

⁹⁸Donal Harrington, 622.

⁹⁹ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Westminster John Knox, 1984), p. 34.

powerful agents and processes of cultural formation – all of these and more have made questions of Christian formation and the forming of Christians a matter of urgency in many places worldwide. While no single solution, effective in all times and places, is likely to emerge, it remains true that without a revitalization of more intentional and intensive processes of Christian formation the nonviolent message of Christianity is fated to remain an abstract and generally ignored feature of the Christian life. Such renewed formation, whatever shape it takes, must not be limited to clergy or persons in religious life – it must prioritize the laity if discipleship (and nonviolence as an aspect of it) is to be anything more than an empty concept.

A Spirituality of Nonviolence

Christian spirituality is the way of nonviolence, a life of active peacemaking rooted in the Spirit of the risen Christ.¹⁰⁰ Called to collaborate in the emergence of the nonviolent Reign of God, we are invited to boldly practice Christian spirituality in its most fundamental sense, the lived experience of the dynamic and relational nonviolence rooted in the life of God incarnated in Jesus and activated through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The spirituality of nonviolence requires ongoing formation, conversion and transformation as individuals and as Church. It calls us to acknowledge our violence and to grapple with it; to break the cycles of retaliatory violence; to pursue nonviolent options and justice for all with humility, compassion, openness and determination; and to put our nonviolent power and potential into practice in our lives and our world.

This spirituality seeks to engage and transform all that inhibits our journey to God – including all that keeps us from fully experiencing, feeling, embracing, and grasping the depth of God’s love. For each of us, these inhibitors will be different: the hardened heart, spiritual paralysis, unhealthy attachments, vanquished hopes, an unwillingness to face our deepest pain, grief and fears, a reluctance to open ourselves to healing and transformation, and an unwillingness to take responsibility for our growth.

Jesus comes to transform our hearts of stone that prevent us from living fully into the grace of transformation and healing of God’s nonviolent transformation of our lives and our world.¹⁰¹ Through prayer, preaching, training, reflection, community-building, ministry and pastoral and prophetic engagement, we are called to plumb the spiritual depths of nonviolence. “Nonviolence is the Spirit of God that disarms our hearts,” writes John Dear, “so that we can become God’s instruments for the disarmament of the world. This nonviolent Spirit of God transforms us to transform the world. Spirituality...is the life of transformation from violence to nonviolence.”¹⁰²

Formation in the way of nonviolence might benefit from what Pope Francis has recommended as a kind of “evangelical discernment” on the part of Jesus’ missionary disciples, “an approach ‘nourished by the light and strength of the Holy Spirit’ (EG 50, citing John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992), 10: AAS 84 (1992), 673.) As he writes, “Let the grace of your baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness. Let everything be open to God; turn to him in every situation. Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life (cf. *Gal* 5:22-23).” (Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate* 15)

The Beatitudes figure prominently in this formation process. Glen Stassen notes the direct parallel between the Beatitudes, Is. 61, and Jesus’ first public preaching in Lk. 4:18.¹⁰³ The presence of the Holy Spirit marks each passage, pointing to the qualities of discipleship Jesus is seeking to cultivate in his followers by enfleshing them himself. Anointed by the Spirit, Jesus brings good news to the poor, proclaims release from bondage, comforts those who mourn, heals the brokenhearted, upholds righteousness, and perseveres joyfully in the face of persecution.

The beatitudes, Pope Francis noted in his 2017 World Day of Peace Message, are a kind of manual for formation in nonviolence as a way of life. They “provide a portrait of the person we could describe as blessed, good, and authentic” (para. 6). Stassen emphasizes that the beatitudes “speak to disciples who are already being

¹⁰⁰ Dear, 167.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Glen Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance* (Jossey-Bass, 2006), 50.

made participants in the presence of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ..." (41) Through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the Reign of God is already among us, and Jesus invites his disciples to live into the reality of that reign joyfully, guided by the Holy Spirit.

In the first and third Beatitudes, the Greek word, *praeis*, is used, and often it is translated as "meek." Stassen points out that wherever this word appears in the Bible, "it always points to peacefulness or peacemaking." (49) The third Beatitude follows closely Psalm 37:11, "But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace." (Stassen 50; cf. Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 80-84). The whole of Psalm 37 speaks to the qualities associated with the Reign of God that Jesus preaches, a reign characterized by Christ's gift of peace (Stassen, 50).

This connotation of peacemaking fits with another meaning that Clarence Jordan ascribed to the word *praeis*. He preferred to render it as "completely surrendered to the will of God" (Stassen, 49, citing Jordan, 1974, 24-25). Jesus is the Messiah who claims his reign as prophesied, riding humbly and peacefully into Jerusalem "on a foal, the young of a she-ass" (Zechariah 9:9; cf. Mt. 21:5). Jesus models what it means to be completely surrendered to God, which is the true meaning of spiritual poverty, as Gustavo Gutierrez notes (cf. "Preferential Option for the Poor").

In Galatians, Paul contrasts the fruits of fallen human nature with the fruits of the Holy Spirit: "What human nature does is quite plain... People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups.... I warn you now as I have before: those who do these things will not possess the Kingdom of God. But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control..." (Gal. 5:19-26).

Reflecting on this text, Raniero Cantalamessa notes, "Meekness ("prautes") is placed by Paul among the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23), that is, among the qualities that the believer manifests in [her] life when [s]he receives the Spirit of Christ and makes an effort to correspond to the Spirit."¹⁰⁴

A spirituality that seeks openness to God's will and peacefulness witnesses to the marks of nonviolence by preferring to bear suffering than to inflict it, placing trust in the persuasive power of the truth that we are all sisters and brothers, and realizes that there is no "winning" in nonviolence, only the victory of reconciliation.¹⁰⁵ In all situations of conflict, personal, familial, corporate, political, a spirituality of nonviolence will seek to acknowledge the dignity of all persons involved, privileging a stance of care over a stance of control. It will naturally seek to engage practices that build relationships across lines of difference, rather than participate in structures that tear down community, or that require protecting our interests through harmful means.¹⁰⁶

The Sacraments

Building a reconciled, nonviolent community requires not heroic individuals but timeful disciplines of formation that inscribe peace into the hearts and bones of sinful human beings. God has given us the sacraments as grace-filled conduits of such habits. Sacraments in general pay tribute to the goodness of creation and the reality of the incarnation, both of which, as we have already seen, are central to a theology of nonviolence. Sacraments

¹⁰⁴ Raniero Cantalamessa, 2nd Lenten sermon (3/18/07). See also Pope Francis, *Gaudete et exsultate* 15: "73. Paul speaks of meekness as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Gal* 5:23). He suggests that, if a wrongful action of one of our brothers or sisters troubles us, we should try to correct them, but "with a spirit of meekness," since "you too could be tempted" (*Gal* 6:1). Even when we defend our faith and convictions, we are to do so "with meekness" (cf. *1 Pet* 3:16). Our enemies too are to be treated "with meekness" (*2 Tim* 2:25). In the Church we have often erred by not embracing this demand of God's word. 74. Meekness is yet another expression of the interior poverty of those who put their trust in God alone. Indeed, in the Bible the same word – *anawim* – usually refers both to the poor and to the meek. Someone might object: "If I am that meek, they will think that I am an idiot, a fool or a weakling". At times they may, but so be it. It is always better to be meek, for then our deepest desires will be fulfilled. The meek "shall inherit the earth", for they will see God's promises accomplished in their lives. In every situation, the meek put their hope in the Lord, and those who hope for him shall possess the land... and enjoy the fullness of peace (cf. *Pss* 37:9,11). For his part, the Lord trusts in them: "This is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word" (*Is* 66:2). Reacting with meekness and humility: that is holiness."

¹⁰⁵ Donal Harrington, "A Spirituality of Nonviolence," 619.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Crosby, OFMCap, "The Spirituality of Nonviolence," *CMSM Shalom Strategy* (Washington, DC, 1991), 29-38.

proclaim that the Kingdom of God is not merely a future reality but is already among us in material form. In baptism, God overcomes divisions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female (Gal. 3:27-28). All the violence-causing divisions of ethnicity, creed, class, gender, race, nation, and so on are transcended by membership in the body of Christ conferred by baptism.

In the Eucharist, we remember the victim on the cross, we anticipate the future by calling down the heavenly banquet to the altar, and we are formed into the body of Christ by eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood. Christ's act of nonviolent self-sacrifice is made available to us in the Lord's Supper, incorporating us into Christ's reconciled and reconciling body.

In the sacrament of reconciliation or penance, we examine our own consciences and acknowledge the ways that we have failed to live into the future Kingdom. We ask for reconciliation with God and with our fellow human beings. If we are honest, we acknowledge that we are not good enough to use violence well; we share in the sinfulness that we would righteously try to correct in others through coercive means.

The reality of sacrament brings us back to a conviction that must underlie any attempt to live nonviolently: unless the LORD builds the house, the laborers labor in vain (Ps. 127:1). Nonviolence is not only a technique by which human beings can fix the world. Nonviolence is ultimately a recognition of the sacramental presence of God among us. God saves the world, not us. We merely try to conform ourselves to the God who is revealed to us.

The Sign of Peace

The sign of peace shared at the Eucharistic liturgy is one resource the Lord has given us to conform our lives to his. More than a mere symbol, the sign of peace is a reality-creating ritual that is ever ancient and ever new. It is ancient in that it originated in the gift of peace offered by Jesus to His disciples on the night before he died.¹⁰⁷ "Peace I bequeath to you," Jesus says, "my own peace I give you, a peace which the world cannot give, this is my gift to you" (John 14:27). In using the first-person possessive – "my own peace," "my gift to you" – Jesus makes it clear that the peace He offers is not from "the world" which cannot give it. Rather it comes from Jesus in union with the Father through "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name," who "will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (John 14:26). The centrality of this gift of peace is made clear later in John's Gospel when Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room and twice says to them, "peace be with you," then commissions them with the words, "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you," after which He breathes on them, saying "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven . . ." (John 20: 21-23). Jesus' breathing on the apostles recalls God's breathing into and giving life to Adam at the creation (Gen 2:7). In this Pentecostal scene, therefore, the gift of peace is part of the new creation that becomes a reality as the disciples share in divine life with the Father and the Son through the Spirit.

This sharing in the divine life was enacted by Christians in antiquity through the practice of the holy kiss. The Apostle Paul urged his readers in Rome to "greet each with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16). A similar instruction can be found in several of Paul's other letters as well (1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). This kiss was not only an expression of affection. It was seen as the deepest form of communication availability to humanity, an exchange of the breath of the Holy Spirit. The profound meaning of the sign of peace was extended in many Christian liturgical contexts. It was part of the early initiation rites, when the presider offered a kiss to the newly baptized. In some places, it served as a ritual conclusion to the Liturgy of the Word. It was widely used to welcome back those who had broken away from the church due to serious sin. Later, it was incorporated into liturgies conferring holy orders and it was a regular part of the entry rites into monastic communities. Eventually, it served as a pre-communion rite of reconciliation, in keeping with Jesus' exhortation be reconciled with our brothers and sisters before bringing our offering to the altar (Matt 5:23). All these ritual forms of the sign of peace indicate its ancient and central importance in the life of the church.

The sign of peace is an ancient ritual that is, at the same time, ever new. Today, when members of the church gather for the liturgy of the Eucharist, the presider recalls the gift of peace bestowed on the apostles and prays that this same gift of peace be given again, here and now, to the local assembly and the entire church. After this, the presider, or deacon if present, issues the invitation, "Let us offer to one another the sign of peace:" and then, as the rubrics in the sacramentary indicate, "all make an appropriate sign of peace according to local custom." Local customs vary greatly. Some ways of sharing the sign of peace are fast and formal, others are more expressive,

¹⁰⁷ The following is taken from Michael J. Baxter, "The Sign of Peace: The Mission of the Church to the Nations," *CTSA Proceedings* 59 (2004): 21-2.

as people shake hands, embrace, or kiss. In all cases, those present at the liturgy share, with visible gestures, the invisible grace that transforms those present into an assembly of unity and peace, a transformation completed in the Rite of Holy Communion as the members of the Body of Christ become what they receive.

The gift of peace given in the liturgy here and now underscores the church's genuine catholicity, her presence throughout all the world, a unity that reaches every tribe, people, and nation. Herein lies the full meaning of this ordinary, seemingly simple rite, for it signifies how at the Fall humanity became divided by rivalry and sin and now in Christ, the New Adam, we recover the original unity of all humanity, a unity to be fulfilled in the coming of Christ at the end of time. In this day and age, when humanity suffers from such deep divisions of rich and poor, along racial and ethnic lines, and by national interests and imperial designs, nothing is more urgent than for the church to embody in and through her members the peace and unity enacted in the Sign of Peace. Let Christians everywhere throughout the world receive the gift given by Christ to the apostles in the upper room in Jerusalem, and given again as they gather at Eucharist. And may they bring this gift to every race and people, to all the nations, repeating the words of Christ to the apostles and to all humanity: "Peace be with You."

Conclusion

God's great vision for humanity is the nonviolent transformation of the world, a new creation where all are reconciled. Jesus incarnated this divine vision by proclaiming the Reign of God, a nonviolent order of justice and dignity for all. In Christ we see the love that sustains all things, that rescues all things from nothingness, *ex nihilo*. The cross and resurrection are not just events in history but reveal the nonviolent love that stands at the core of all being.

The Reign of God is both "here" and "not yet." But even in the "not yet" we are called to act *now*: to love our enemies, to put down our sword, to be compassionate as God is compassionate, to spread the good news of God's nonviolent reign.

Called to be a people of nonviolence, the church exists for the sake of God's nonviolent reign. Beginning with the power of the Holy Spirit poured out on Pentecost, the Church emerged as a liberating and peaceable community of disciples.¹⁰⁸

To speak of the Church's call to nonviolence, though, is not to imply that it has always responded faithfully to it. Indeed, "we confess that the people of God has betrayed this central message of the Gospel many times, participating in wars, persecution, oppression, exploitation, and discrimination."¹⁰⁹ To affirm Gospel nonviolence is to confess our own violence and to perennially open ourselves, as people and as the Church, to conversion to the way of Jesus' nonviolence under the living guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Despite its violence and failings, the Church is called by the Holy Spirit in every age to respond prophetically to the challenges of its time. In an age that is undergoing what Pope Francis has named a "world war in installments," we are called today to respond to global violence and injustice with decisive action in the spirit of nonviolent love throughout the Church and world.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁹ "An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence," Final Document, Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference, April 11-13, 2016, Rome, 2.