

Nonviolence and Just Peace: A new moral framework for Catholic theology in the context of a violent world.

Sixteen theologians and peace practitioners from seven countries met regularly via Skype from September 2017 through June 2018 to explore essential characteristics of a new moral framework for responding to the violence and injustice of our time that will help the institutional Catholic Church to devote its considerable moral, ecclesial and financial resources to fostering nonviolent approaches to transforming conflict and promoting just peace.

Additionally, a two-day consultation with 12 theologians and peace practitioners from five African countries and in-person interviews with over 15 theologians and peace practitioners from El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala and Nicaragua brought deep experience in different contexts of war and ongoing violence to the roundtable discernment process.

Seeking to articulate an ethic and a set of practices for preventing violence, protecting vulnerable people, promoting reconciliation and building a just peace, participants discussed questions such as the following:

- What new moral framework would authentically be grounded in the Sermon on the Mount as Pope Francis' 2017 World Day of Peace message calls for? What moral framework would better help us deepen our understanding of and commitment to Gospel nonviolence? What are the implications of a proposed new moral framework for Catholics, pastoral practice, and engaging governments?
- Stability, security, and the rule of law are among those social conditions that make for peace. Can active nonviolence meet the need for just governance that is a bedrock affirmation in Catholic understandings of the social order?
- How to talk about and confront the moral ambiguities and compromises involved, no matter which framework is used: just war, pacifism, peacebuilding or nonviolence and just peace. If there is still some small, extraordinary place for the use of armed force in the nonviolence and just peace paradigm, what mode of moral reasoning and what principles should guide and govern it?

Participants agreed that the focus and goal of the renewed moral framework should be on the potential for a given strategy to be conducive to building just and sustainable peace. Thus, in adopting a just peace moral framework inspired by the virtues and transformative practices in the Gospels, the Church would promote moral guidelines for public action that extend Catholic social teaching and its vision of human thriving through reconciling relationship, while drawing on the growing body of knowledge about what actually makes for just and integral peace; on the rich diversity of nonviolence and just peace experiences found in different cultures and societies; and on norms that Catholic thinkers and diplomats have helped to embed into international human rights and humanitarian law.

This renewed moral framework in many ways recapitulates Catholic social teaching as a whole, while emphasizing active, strategic, nonviolent approaches, which include, but are not limited to, both nonviolent civil resistance and peacebuilding. As such it will inevitably be more expansive than either pacifism or the just war tradition, the two major traditions of Christian discernment that have sought to resist and restrict war and violence through many centuries.

Participants noted that negative moral norms are easier to delineate with precision than positive moral norms because they mark the outer boundaries of what a community may permit. Both pacifism and the just war tradition, each in its own way, mostly name negative norms and thus can summarize their criteria succinctly. In contrast, positive norms are virtually infinite and thus require generalization, for they guide and point to all the activities by which all members of the human community build healthy lives and relationships according to their concept of the good. While including negative norms in order to rule out acts that always undermine human thriving, a just peace framework will place far more emphasis on positive norms, which require countless positive actions to create the conditions for peace.

Participants propose just peace norms for (1) preparing for and working through the inevitable conflicts in human societies (*jus in conflictione*), (2) exiting vicious cycles of violence (*jus ex bello*), and (3) building sustainable peace (*jus ad pacem*). Uniting these are several important assumptions:

- Just, integral peace expects human beings to thrive when ends and means are closely integrated, such that the means chosen in the pursuit of ends are consonant with or reflect those ends. While the category of *jus ex bello* names explicit strategies for escaping vicious cycles, all just peace practices benefit from diagnosing these cycles, and can be understood as transforming initiatives, which are transformative precisely because they resist the temptation to counter the root causes of injustice through incongruent means, and instead seek to "overcome evil through good" (Rom. 12:21).
- Achieving a just, integral, sustaining peace requires constant attention to the root causes of violent discord and to the social conditions that make for peace, rejecting simplistic solutions that make violence deceptively tempting.
- A powerful contribution of these norms is that they apply at all stages of conflict. The categories can also overlap in time and space.

This proposal for a renewed moral framework, rooted in the experience of those who have lived in contexts of war, destructive conflict, and violence, and reinforced by evidence of effective nonviolent alternatives, highlights the moral responsibility of the institutional church and its members to end war and other forms of violence, transform conflicts, and promote nonviolent strategies for ending oppression and addressing direct and structural violence.

Roundtable participants

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Margaret Angucia, Uganda Martyrs University

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Michael Baxter, Regis University
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Michael Budde, DePaul University
Gill Burrows, Pace e Bene Australia
Ken Butigan, DePaul University/Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service
Lisa Sowle Cahill, Boston College
Nora Carmi, Kairos Palestine (retired)
Kevin Carroll, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Peter Casarella, University of Notre Dame
Loreta Castro, Miriam College Center for Peace Education/Pax Christi Pilipinas
Bill Cavanaugh, DePaul University
Natalia Chan, Christian Aid
Erica Chenoweth, Harvard Kennedy School
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Meghan Clark, St. John's University
David Cochran, Loras College
John Dominic Crossan, DePaul University, professor emeritus
Rev. Pat Cunningham, Missionary Society of St. Columban
MT Dávila, Andover Newton Theological School
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+Kevin Dowling, Bishop of Rustenberg, South Africa
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Sara Ianovitz, Operation Dove/John XXIII Community
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Kanini Kimau, Reconcile Peace Institute
Sr. Sheila Kinsey, JPIC Commission USG/UISG
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+Antonio Ledesma, Archbishop of Cagayan de Oro, Philippines
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Myla Leguro, Catholic Relief Service
Cory Lockhart, Christian Peacemaker Teams
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