

## **Introduction: The Future of Nonviolence in Catholic Social Teaching**

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I give you a new commandment, that you love one another *as I have* loved you.

–Jesus<sup>1</sup>

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

–Pope Francis<sup>2</sup>

Surveying the signs of the times we can see the urgent need for engaging the theme of nonviolence more deeply. Nearly 66 million people are displaced by war and violence, which comes out to one in every 113 people, with children making up half of all refugees.<sup>3</sup> The Yemen war has killed over 100,000 civilians plus one person every hour dying from cholera,<sup>4</sup> not to mention wars in South Sudan, Libya, DRC, Somalia, etc. The U.S. has spent over \$6.4 trillion on war since September 11, 2001.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there are massive costs from war, such as indirect deaths, trauma, suicide, domestic violence, sexual assaults and rapes, environmental damage, blowback violence, and the drafting of child soldiers. Other related issues are the environmental crisis, rising economic inequality, poverty, military spending, sexual violence (including in the Church), gun ownership, racism, etc.

So, we are compelled to ask, What is the future of nonviolence in Catholic Social Teaching, which also has implications for practice and advocacy? Over the last two years, the passion and dialogue around this issue has expanded across the globe and in the U.S. The 2016 Nonviolence and Just Peace conference in Rome was a key stimulus. That 85-person, multi-dimensional group of Catholics from around the world produced an appeal to the Catholic Church to re-commit to the centrality of gospel nonviolence.<sup>6</sup>

Since then, thousands of others have been cultivating the ground for the harvest of nonviolence in the Catholic Church. Over 250 organizations and thousands of individuals have endorsed the

appeal, including the Catholic Conferences of Bishops in Japan and Belgium, the Justice and Peace Commission of the USG/USIG (international religious superiors), Pax Christi International, the U.S. Catholic Mission Association, the U.S. Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and the U.S. Conference of Major Superiors of Men. Cardinal Peter Turkson, who is the head of the Dicastery of Integral Human Development, has been a key leader at the Vatican supporting this effort and creatively moving it forward. Pope Francis expressed his solidarity in the 2017 World Day of Peace message “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.”

Over the last two years, the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI) has generated numerous dialogues in the Catholic community and beyond on these topics. There have been U.N. events, regional events around the world, and many events in the United States. For example, at the University of San Diego, Cardinal Turkson and Bishop Robert W. McElroy (among others) conducted a high-level dialogue with military representatives in 2019. There were other university and college events at Seton Hall with Cardinal Tobin, as well as at Georgetown, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Creighton, DePaul, St. Michael’s, and Marquette. There were presentations at academic conferences, such as the Society of Christian Ethics and Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church, and at national advocacy conferences such as the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Ignatian Family Teach-In, and Alliance for Peacebuilding. There have been numerous publications, journal articles, blogs, and books, such as *Choosing Peace* (Orbis, 2018) and *A Just Peace Ethic Primer* (Georgetown, 2020), which developed from this initiative. In 2017–2018, we completed five global roundtable dialogues on key topics, such as the Bible and Nonviolence, Theology of Nonviolence, New Moral Framework, Power of Nonviolence, and Integrating Nonviolence into the Life of the Church. They have collectively produced a large, synthesizing document which was presented to the Vatican in a spring 2019 conference, with the hope of forming a basis for an encyclical on nonviolence.

Many educational resources and action guides have been developed and a global education committee has been formed to deepen the collection of these resources and stimulate more peace studies programs at Catholic educational institutions.<sup>7</sup> Initiatives focused on nonviolence have been strengthened at seminaries as well as the Archdioceses of Chicago and Baltimore under the leadership of Cardinal Blase J. Cupich and Archbishop William E. Lori.<sup>8</sup> Nonviolent direct action, including civil disobedience, has increased with more official support, such as Bishop John Stowe's presence and support for the 2018 Catholic Day of Action with Dreamers at the U.S. Senate, as

well as Cardinal Tobin's presence and support for the 2019 action in New Jersey with local activists and the Catholic Nonviolence Campaign for Immigrant Children.<sup>9</sup> CNI participants have helped to increase the energy for scaling-up key nonviolent practices such as unarmed civilian protection at the U.S. State Department.

Through this extensive dialogue and these initiatives, we have deepened our understanding and commitment to nonviolence: *as the positive reverence for dignity and life; as the power of love in action; as the path to fuller truth; as a spirituality, way of life, and distinct virtue; and as an effective method and constructive force for social change, transforming conflict, challenging all forms of violence, protecting all people and the earth, and building sustainable peace.*

Our initiative on nonviolence and the question about the future of nonviolence in the Catholic Church is robust and broad. It is not merely or even primarily a question about war and just war theories. It is not merely about direct violence, but also structural and cultural violence. When we take this broader and deeper view, we believe we can see better not only these specific types of violence, but also we can better assess specific traditional responses such as just war approaches. A “re-centering” or a shift to nonviolence is a shift in imagination, practice, and commitment. A shift to nonviolence and just peace goes beyond re-stating the preference or priority of our way of being, and rather invites Catholics to an alternative path, field of play, type of harmony, or set of fresh wineskins (Matthew 9:16–17).

This iteration of *Expositions: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* will focus on this broader and deeper view of the future of nonviolence in Catholic Social Teaching. In this context, the authors will address some of the arguments raised about supporting just war, which has been an area of recent focus for some scholars in *Expositions* and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Others, such as Cardinal Turkson, have argued that the development of understanding and practices of nonviolence may be distracted or obscured by the ongoing commitment to just war in the Catholic community, even when that is not the stated intention.<sup>11</sup> There are also significant questions about the consistency of just war with Jesus’s way, how just war has primarily functioned to justify or enable war, how it has been an inadequate or ineffective constraint on war, how it still gets us stuck in vicious cycles of violence even when war appears just, and how it has failed to form us, particularly as peacemakers.<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2017, Bishop McElroy said that the just war principles have “become only a little bit less than a green light” for war, and that the Church must “recognize the

increasing incapacity of the just war tradition to be an effective constraint on warfare in the modern age.”<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, other scholars who support the elaboration and refinement of a just war ethic have made various arguments. Some claim that the Church simply needs to do a better job of formation in just war thinking, in part because it already in theory prioritizes nonviolence. Others claim that we need some ethic to guide questions about war and to offer to policymakers, and thus, just war theories are necessary for the Church. Some focus their support for just war in extreme situations which fall under the somewhat wavering international norm of a responsibility to protect. A smaller minority still make the claim that the scriptures either support a just war ethic or at least do not rule it out.

Collectively, the authors in this forum will undertake to address many of these arguments. However, it will not only be an analytical exercise of doing so with a more robust and deeper understanding of nonviolence, but also with a vision to elaborate and expand on the future of nonviolence in Catholic Social Teaching. Thus, they elaborate on the following possibilities: a way of describing nonviolence and its multi-dimensional character for the Church; on the distinct role of the Church in relation to nonviolence and witnessing to a church of mercy; on nonviolence as a tradition of moral praxis; on nonviolence as truly living the works of mercy; on the consistency of nonviolence with scripture and for building gospel-based communities; on nonviolence and Pope Francis’s peacebuilding pedagogy; on developing Catholic Teaching and nonviolence; on the potential and effectiveness of nonviolence for activists and policymakers; on how nonviolence and a just peace ethic could transform the military institution, such as nonviolent civilian-based defense and in dire situations of a “responsibility to protect”; and on other issues.

## Notes

1. John 13:34.
2. Pope Francis, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” The Holy See, January 1, 2017, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161208\\_messaggio-1-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-1-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html).
3. “War, Violence, Persecution Push Displacement to New Unprecedented High,” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), June 19, 2017,

- <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2017/6/5943ec594/war-violence-persecution-push-displacement-new-unprecedented-high.html>.
4. Hollie McKay, “Nearly 100,000 Have Been Killed in Ongoing Yemen War, Report Finds,” Fox News June 19, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/100000-civilians-killed-yemen-war>; Bethan McKernan, “Yemen: Almost One Death per Hour as Cholera Epidemic Spreads like Wildfire,” *Independent* June 9, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/yemen-war-deaths-cholera-epidemic-dying-every-hour-a7782341.html>.
  5. Neta Crawford, “United States Budgetary Costs and Obligations of Post 9/11 Wars through FY2020: \$6.4 Trillion,” Costs of War, Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, November 13, 2019, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/US%20Budgetary%20Costs%20of%20Wars%20November%202019.pdf>.
  6. “An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence,” Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, 2016, <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/final-statement-an-appeal-to-the-catholic-church-to-re-commit-to-the-centrality-of-gospel-nonviolence/>.
  7. “Resources on Nonviolence and Just Peace,” Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, 2019, <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/resources/>.
  8. Cardinal Cupich launched an Anti-Violence Initiative and created a diocesan Office for Violence Prevention. Archbishop Lori wrote a pastoral letter, “The Enduring Power of Dr. Martin Luther King’s Principles of Nonviolence,” Archdiocese of Baltimore, February 14, 2018, <https://www.archbalt.org/kingpastoral/>.
  9. Eli McCarthy, “Cardinal Tobin Emboldens Catholic Nonviolent Risk-Taking,” Ignatian Solidarity Network, September 16, 2019, <https://ignatiansolidarity.net/blog/2019/09/17/cardinal-tobin-catholic-nonviolent-risk-taking/>.
  10. “Ethics in Focus: Special Issue on the Future of Just War in Catholic Social Teaching on War and Peace,” *Expositions: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 12.1 (2018), <https://expositions.journals.villanova.edu/issue/view/159>.

11. Cardinal Turkson said “It [just war theory] can undermine efforts to develop alternative capacities and tools for conflict to be overcome and transformed,” quoted in Christopher Lamb, “Pope Urged to Abolish Creed of a ‘Just war,’” *The Sunday Times* April 24, 2016, [https:// www.thetimes.co.uk/article/pope-urged-to-abolish-creed-of-a-just-war-spm5jzjg8](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/pope-urged-to-abolish-creed-of-a-just-war-spm5jzjg8).
12. Eli S. McCarthy, “The Gospels Draw Us Further: A Just Peace Ethic,” in *Expositions* 12.1 (2018): 80–102, <https://expositions.journals.villanova.edu/article/view/2322>.
13. Joshua J. McElwee, “Pope Condemns Possession of Nuclear Weapons in Shift from Church’s Acceptance of Deterrence,” *National Catholic Reporter* November 10, 2017, <https://ncronline.org/news/vatican/pope-condemns-possession-nuclear-weapons-shift-churchs-acceptance-deterrence>.