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Nonviolence: The Witness of a Church of Mercy

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Theologians, activists, clergy, laypersons, and anyone concerned about the complex forms of violence that permeate daily existence continuously wrestle with one of the fundamental ethical questions of humanity, perhaps most pithily stated in modern times by Kant—*What ought I to do?* If we shift this individual question to a communal framework, such as that of the Church, we may ask, *What ought we the Church to do?* Any attempt to answer this question must inevitably engage the equally complex question of identity—*Who am I? Who are we?* Doing and being, two categories that conceptually and practically implicate each other, are ever present in how we respond to violence. In an ecclesiological key, these two categories can be understood as the mission and nature of the Church—what the Church is called to do and what the Church is. In a world that has made violence a seemingly defining feature of existence, what the Church does or does not do bears witness to what the Church claims to be or not be.

With violence as a category and challenge for understanding what the Church is and ought to do, some scholars have reasonably argued that the Church's call is to build peace.[1] Gerard Powers, for example, has argued for understanding our Catholic vocation (identity and practice) as one of peacebuilding.[2] The primary intention of his reflection is to encourage a new Vatican synod and apostolic exhortation on the question of peace. The hope for such a synod and papal document is widely shared and would be a fitting echo from Pope Francis to St. Francis of Assisi, the Twelfth Century icon whom Pope Francis has referred to as "a man of peace, a man of poverty, a man who loved and protected creation."[3] One can argue that while Pope Francis has given substantial attention to both the question of poverty and creation (for example, his texts *Evangelii gaudium* and *Laudato si'*), a more substantial text on the question of peace is yet to emerge. If such a document were to emerge from the Vatican in the years to come, there is an open question as to how Pope Francis would deal with the long tradition of the justification of war, even as a last resort, and additionally, how he would deal with the even longer tradition of nonviolence, and how both relate to the desire for peace.

In Powers's reflection and recommendation for a synod, he argues for the vocation of peacebuilding as constituted by an inherent complementary relationship between nonviolence and the just war tradition. Nonviolence is not, he says, the "sole Christian option," and a possible synod on peace would not have to reject the just war tradition that has undergirded Roman Catholic thinking. For Powers, a synod and a papal document would elaborate on the need of nonviolence, restrictive just war, and peacebuilding as necessary elements of Catholic identity and practice. While I will not rehearse what Powers calls the "well-trod debate over just war and nonviolence,"[4] this essay will not affirm an inherent complementary relationship between just war (restrictive or not) and nonviolence, for violence, even when intellectually or theologically justified, does not cease to be incompatible with Christian faith.[5] Perhaps this generation, like every generation of Roman Catholics, is called to consider the possibility that nonviolence may in fact be the sole Christian means for peace.

If a major Vatican synod takes place or a document on peace is produced, part of the challenge will be the task of continuing to incorporate nonviolence into capacious theological frameworks, or, phrased differently, it will be necessary to continue developing the theological frameworks of nonviolence. In this essay I suggest that mercy can serve as a key theological concept for ongoing reflection on nonviolence and the Catholic Church. My thesis is that nonviolence becomes a genuine constitutive element of the Church's nature and mission, of what the Church is and is called to do, if and when we also come to understand and accept that mercy is, as Pope Francis says, "the very foundation of the Church's life."[6] From that theological and ecclesiological vantage point, nonviolence becomes a defining mark or sign of the Church's authentic existence and not only an ethical demand.

First, I show that Pope Francis's recent efforts to re-center nonviolence in the Church are more fully understood when read in light of his attempts to make real and present a Church of mercy. Thus, I provide an analysis of his recent key texts on mercy, which organically bridge with his text(s) on nonviolence. I then enter more deeply into the logic of mercy and the implications for the Church using the theological insights of Jon Sobrino, whose writings have arisen out of the context of ongoing violence in El Salvador and Latin America. Lastly, I shift to a more direct examination of Mahatma Gandhi's key principles to demonstrate the resonance between the conceptual horizon of nonviolence and a Church of mercy.

Pope Francis's Vision for a Church of Mercy

Pope Francis has made mercy the central theological category of his papacy. In his first Sunday Angelus message in March 2013, when reflecting on the story of the woman accused of adultery and condemned to death (John 8:1–11), Pope Francis spoke of God as the merciful one and of Christ as the mercy of God made flesh.[7] In that Angelus message Pope Francis reveals that Cardinal Walter Kasper's recently published book on mercy had done him much good.[8] Since those first days of his papacy, mercy has continued to mark Francis's understanding of the Church. Perhaps the most public manifestation of Francis's focus on mercy is the Jubilee Year of Mercy he inaugurated to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. It is in the midst of his reflections on mercy that Francis has also begun to write about nonviolence, with the most important text marking the fiftieth anniversary of the first World Day of Peace that took place in 1967. I begin by providing an analysis of Francis's texts on mercy and on nonviolence to show how they invite a rethinking of Catholic identity and practice.

Francis's insights on mercy introduced during his first Sunday Angelus appearance find their fuller expression in *Misericordiae vultus* ("*The Face of Mercy*"), the 2015 document written to mark the beginning of the Holy Year of Mercy.[9] The name of the document is a reference to Jesus Christ whom the Pope affirms is the face of the mercy of God. Unequivocally, the document states in its opening section that mercy *is* the divine nature, in other words, that God is mercy itself.[10] This reality has been manifest throughout salvation history through the presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit who as he previously stated in the Angelus message, gives "inner wisdom focused on God's mercy."[11] For this pope, mercy is the fundamental category of all other categories that can express the divine trinitarian presence in history, thus he speaks of it as "the ultimate and supreme act," "the fundamental law," and the "bridge" between the divine and the human.[12] Mercy then, is the very means and ends of the Christian life, and the Holy Year of Mercy was meant to help the Church become "a more effective sign"[13] of the mercy of God.

That Pope Francis instituted an "extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy" points to the significance of mercy for commemorating the event that was Vatican II, which marked "a new phase" in the Church's history and "a new way" of proclaiming the gospel.[14] Like other Jubilee Years in the Church's history, they are meant to be a time of pardon, of remission of penalties, of interrupting cycles of injustice and violence, so that persons and communities can heal relationships with one another and with God. The spirit of reconciliation undergirds Jubilee Years, and the ritual of

opening a church's door so that all may enter points to what Francis has called a "culture of encounter"[15] where we come face to face with the other and with the Holy Other. This Jubilee ritual of opening doors may even be tied to the ancient practice of persons seeking sanctuary in churches to flee violence,[16] a practice that in the early Church was referred to as "fleeing to the mercy of the Church."[17] A Jubilee Year of Mercy is a symbolic and literal opening of the doors of the Church, and for Francis it was also an opening for the spirituality of the Council to be made present for a new generation. Pope Paul VI proclaimed at the Council's closing address on December 7, 1965 that "the old story of the Good Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the Council,"[18] and fifty years later Pope Francis renewed the efforts for the followers of Christ to become a Samaritan Church, a Church whose identity and mission is defined by an active mercy that goes out to encounter those who suffer the effects of violence.[19]

In *Misericordiae vultus*, Pope Francis moves from an affirmation of God's nature as mercy, to Jesus's mission as that of revealing mercy, and ultimately to the implications of this reality for the Church. He writes that "the signs [Jesus] works, especially in favor of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy."[20] Even the calling of the disciples is interpreted as a sign of mercy—Jesus reaching out into the lives of ordinary persons and calling them to follow the way of mercy. According to Pope Francis, what Jesus's life and his teachings reveal is that mercy is a "force that overcomes everything," including all limits one can conceive or erect to reject mercy.[21] Thus, followers of Jesus, then and now, exist as followers to the degree that their life is overcome by mercy, for as Pope Francis writes, "it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are" and is "an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves."[22] All of this is a process of concretizing mercy in history, making it "visible and tangible," expressing it in "intentions, attitudes, and behaviors" of daily life.[23]

The Church, the people of God who bear witness to Jesus's life and teaching, becomes historically credible when mercy is its foundation and its end. But this requires a radical reframing of mercy as the Church's identity and mission, and to use Pope Francis's words, "perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy."[24] Behind these words is Francis's concern that a focus exclusively on justice leaves no room for grace, God's very self, to enter. Conceptually, Francis locates justice both as an initial moment, and as a dimension of mercy, without conceiving of them as contradictory realities but rather as "two dimensions of a single

reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love."[25] While there is much philosophical and theological nuance to be explored in these affirmations of the relationship between mercy and justice, Francis's emphasis is on remembering the primacy of mercy, a mercy that does *not* do away with justice but which goes beyond it into the mystery of God. One of his most profound statements is that "God's justice is his mercy,"[26] a stunningly beautiful and pithy way of communicating a forgotten truth drawn from the history of salvation as expressed in scripture. A credible Church, a Church that is believed because it lives according to the witness of Jesus Christ, is one whose justice is its boundless mercy made historically concrete. Lacking mercy, the veracity of the Church, whose "first truth is the love of Christ," is at stake.[27] The Church's vocation then, is to enflesh mercy, to reflect the divine nature that is our human end.[28]

Misericordiae vultus, despite being a relatively short text, provides a capacious theological lens for ongoing discernment on what it means to be a Church reconfigured by mercy. Keeping this text in mind, I now shift to a brief message that Pope Francis wrote in April 2016 during the Jubilee Year and on the occasion of the conference on nonviolence and just peace that took place in the Vatican. In that message the Pope echoes *Misericordiae vultus* by locating mercy as the source or foundation for peace.[29] Additionally, the document states that "humanity needs to refurbish all the best available tools to help the men and women of today to fulfill their aspirations for justice and peace," and says to the conference participants that "your thoughts on revitalizing the tools of nonviolence, and of active nonviolence in particular, will be a needed and positive contribution," for the historical moment in which we are living is a "world war in installments."[30] A literal translation of the Spanish version of the document, which would be in the Pope's native tongue, says that it is "necessary to renew all of the instruments that are most adequate to make concrete the aspirations for justice and peace," and that "reflection to relaunch the way of nonviolence, and especially of active nonviolence, constitutes a necessary and positive contribution."[31] While not a major difference from the English translation, the shift from "refurbish" to "renew," from "tools" to "instruments," and from "revitalizing the tools of nonviolence" to "relaunching the way of nonviolence," lends a qualitatively different tone to that which is being brought forth. In particular, Pope Francis emphasizes "active nonviolence." The qualification of "active" is not unlike Francis's various qualifications of mercy as a concrete reality and not an abstract idea.[32] At the heart is an attempt to retrieve the living and creative *force* that must give life to these words if they are to be enfleshed. Francis further speaks of "the active witness of nonviolence as a 'weapon' to

achieve peace."[33] Here one finds another distinction between the English and Spanish translations of the text, for the literal translation of the Spanish says, "the active witness of nonviolence as 'weapon' for achieving peace."[34] A key difference is that the Spanish construction does not need an article ("a" or "the"), while the English translation uses an article that some readers may want to emphasize. In other words, whereas in the English translation one can more easily argue that nonviolence is simply "a" weapon among other legitimate weapons, this point is more difficult to make in light of the Spanish translation where nonviolence is simply "weapon." Whether one wants to emphasize that nonviolence is "a" weapon or "the" weapon for achieving peace is perhaps fundamentally not as relevant as it initially appears because one can argue that in fact, from a Christian perspective, there is no other way for achieving what can genuinely be called peace. Leaving aside these details that may have been lost in translation, Pope Francis's document directly locates nonviolence as intimately bound to peace, and in light of his understanding of mercy as the foundation for peace, a question about the relationship between mercy and nonviolence begins to arise. His comments on nonviolence and peace echo the well-known phrase, "if you want peace, work for justice,"[35] but perhaps with an invitation for the hearer to consider another formulation—"if you want peace, live nonviolence," or, "if you want peace, work for justice nonviolently." In all cases, for Francis, mercy remains the fountain that nourishes the historical possibilities.

In the same document Pope Francis indirectly elaborates on active nonviolence by addressing conflict, indifference, and the inherently political aspect of mercy. In addition to saying that conflict must be faced and not ignored or concealed, a point previously addressed in *Evangelii gaudium* (§226), he emphasizes the figurative and tangible "wall of indifference" as the greatest obstacle for resolving or transforming conflict. To respond with the force of mercy to indifference is to imitate God, and such mercy he adds, "is so to speak 'political' because it is expressed in solidarity, which is the moral and social attitude that responds best to the awareness of the scourges of our time and of the interdependence of life at its different levels."[36] These are points Pope Francis had already made in the 2016 World Day of Peace message,[37] but now he contextualizes them in relation to the active witness of nonviolence as work for peace. Increasingly, one finds a convergence between the active and creative force that is mercy and the way of nonviolence that like mercy, is considered a force capable of ultimately overcoming everything.

Before publishing the 2017 Day of Peace message, Francis wrote an apostolic letter to close the Jubilee Year of Mercy that further sets the context for his historic 2017 message on nonviolence.

In that letter he expresses in new ways much of the spirit of *Misericordiae vultus* by emphasizing that mercy constitutes the Church's very existence and that it is through mercy that "the profound truths of the gospel are made manifest and tangible."[38] Throughout his writings Pope Francis continues to connect mercy to truth and speaks of it as that which brings about the veracity—the truthfulness—of the Church inasmuch as it expresses the true spirit of the gospel. There is a performative dynamism at play in the Pope's understanding of mercy. In speaking of sacramental life and prayer, he says that in the Church's prayer, "references to mercy, far from being merely exhortative, are highly *performative*,[39] which is to say that as we invoke mercy with faith, it is granted to us, and as we confess it to be vital and real, it truly transforms us."[40] One can also speak of this dynamism as an incarnational logic that historically enfleshes that which in faith one believes to be true. In other words, the invocation of mercy is not merely or primarily about words spoken, but about performing the truth that is mercy.

To perform mercy is to imitate God and locate ourselves where God is already present—in the midst of violence and suffering. Francis writes that "the desire for closeness to Christ requires us to draw near to our brothers and sisters […] by its very nature, mercy becomes visible and tangible in specific and powerful acts."[41] If it is mercy, by its very nature it is active even when it seems to be passive. For example, in this letter Francis speaks of silence by saying that "it is not true that silence is an act of surrender; on the contrary, it is a moment of strength and love."[42] Silence can be an authentic reply to violence and suffering if it is a silence not out of fear or indifference, but out of a participation in a more powerful force that manifests the reign of God already present in our midst. In the logic of mercy, what appears as weakness may in fact be strength, and what appears passive may in fact be the most creative force in creation. Thus it is no surprise that Francis says that "now is the time to unleash the creativity of mercy, to bring about new undertakings, the fruit of grace."[43] As new forms of violence arise to undermine humanity, a culture of mercy requires resisting what Francis calls "a temptation to theorize 'about' mercy" without also performing, enfleshing, and actively participating in the creative movements of mercy. Nonviolence *is* the creative movement of mercy, and its strength is being unleashed.

The Emergence of Nonviolence within the Horizon of Mercy

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the first World Day of Peace, and after the formal conclusion of the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis issued the text, *Nonviolence: A*

Style of Politics for Peace. Given the message's proximity to the other texts published for the Year of Mercy, which were a continuation of the spirituality of Vatican II, Pope Francis's message on nonviolence is perhaps best read in relation to his reconfiguration of a Church of mercy.

The title of the document already begins to reveal that Pope Francis is proposing a new spirituality—a way of life.[44] The use of the word "style" has to be understood in terms of its etymological roots pointing to a way of living, to conduct or behavior. Similarly, the use of the word "politics" in the title cannot be limited to the electoral dimension of most contemporary "politics," but rather, to a way of life in the "polis" (the city) in relation to various publics and governmental structures. With these qualifications in mind, another manner of expressing the title could be "Nonviolence: a way of life for peace." While the phrase "style of politics" may appear peculiar, Francis's texts have arisen in the midst of profound social movements on a global scale and among an ongoing contestation of what constitutes genuine political power. Also, let us remember that the Pope has a vested interest in an ongoing encounter between grassroots socio-political movements and Church leadership, as is evident by his establishment of the World Meeting of Popular Movements begun during his first year as Pope. Thus, his papacy is marked by an effort to contribute to the reclaiming of politics by "the people." In his 2016 message to the meeting of popular movements he writes:

> The breach between the peoples and our current forms of democracy is growing ever greater, due to the enormous power of the financial and media sectors that would seem to dominate them. Popular movements, I know, are not political parties, and I would say that, in great measure, this is what makes them so valuable, since they express a distinct, dynamic, and vital form of social participation in public life. But do not be afraid to get involved in the great discussions, in politics with a capital P[.][45]

In light of this background, to speak of nonviolence as a style of politics is to bring into focus the varied and creative ways that communities in precarious situations are performing their right to exist now and into the future, even when the violence of political structures relegate them to the peripheries of society or beyond.[46]

In the opening statement of his 2017 World day of Peace message, Pope Francis invites all people, from heads of state and government, to religious and civic leaders, to "make active nonviolence our way of life."[47] As already noted, to speak of a way is to point to a style of life, to a conduct or behavior, or what in theology is referred to by the term "spirituality," a manner of living according to the Spirit.[48] Akin to the earlier analysis of mercy, nonviolence is not a vacuous feeling or passive ahistorical concept, but rather a reality that is incarnated in relation to others and which has its root in the God of mercy who heals our "violence within."[49] Citing Pope Benedict XVI, Francis stresses that "For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behavior but a person's way of being, the attitude of one who is so convinced of God's love and power that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone."[50] In the same way that Pope Francis's texts seek to reclaim mercy as more than the works of mercy (e.g., corporal works of mercy, spiritual works of mercy), but as a fundamental principle or as divine nature itself, so too this most recent text on nonviolence seeks a more capacious embrace of nonviolence as more than tactics, but as a whole horizon—spiritual and theological—that marks the life of the Church and all persons.

In previous documents Pope Francis connected mercy to truth, and in this document it is nonviolence that is placed in relation to truth. Not only is the "force of arms" referred to as "deceptive," but Francis also cites the late Pope John Paul II in saying that in the late 1980s Europe's "momentous change in the lives of people, nations, and states had come about 'by means of peaceful protest, using only the weapons of truth and justice.'"[51] To further illustrate the veracity of active nonviolence Pope Francis alludes to the "decisive and consistent practice of nonviolence" achieved by persons such as Mahatma Gandhi, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Leymah Gbowee—a Hindu, a Muslim, a Baptist, and a Lutheran—all of whom worked tirelessly within and beyond their particular faith traditions to encounter and accompany the victims and survivors of multiple forms of violence. If violence is the way of death and nonviolence the way of life,[52] if "violence profanes the name of God," if "the name of God cannot be used to justify violence,"[53] then nonviolence as *a way of and to life* must constitute a universal path of holiness that witnesses to the truth of God's mercy that overcomes all violence.[54]

Active nonviolence is the logic of mercy that transforms the logic of violence. In his message on nonviolence Pope Francis writes that "an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence between individuals and among peoples cannot be based on a logic of fear, violence, and closed-

mindedness, but on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue."[55] He adds that conflict must be faced "constructively and nonviolently, so that 'tensions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity,' preserving 'what is valid and useful on both sides.'"[56] Earlier I highlighted the performative logic of mercy, a transformative force whose truth of being is manifest as it is invoked and practiced. And not unlike the performative logic of mercy, the truth of nonviolence is enfleshed through its practice, as it comes face to face with violence without surrendering to fear. The performance of nonviolence as an expression of mercy is a form of dialogue in the flesh, an embodied diplomacy that, like silence, can be a powerful and constructive reply to the destructive nature of violence. The Church of mercy that Pope Francis seeks may in fact only come about if we continue to reconstitute the relationship between mercy and nonviolence, for nonviolence is the means of mercy, the way through which mercy walks in this world. Pope Francis asks that we become "nonviolent people" and build "nonviolent communities,"[57] and to the degree that we as Church do so, we will also become a Church of mercy.

Mercy as the Means for What is Truly Human

So far, I have analyzed some of the key texts of Francis's pontificate in relation to mercy and nonviolence. Although early on Pope Francis emphasized the influence of Cardinal Walter Kasper's book on mercy on his own thinking, I want to suggest that the insights of theologian Jon Sobrino, especially on what he calls "the principle of mercy" and on being a Samaritan Church, further elucidate the inner logic of mercy. Sobrino's 1992 book, *El Principio Misericordia* (*The Principle of Mercy*) is a collection of his essays on the reality of the Church in Latin America in light of suffering, modern-day crucifixion, colonialism, solidarity, and martyrdom, among other topics. But it is the opening section, after which the book is titled, that provides the ground and lens for reconfiguring theology and the Church in relation to mercy. By going deeper into the inner-logic of mercy we can also begin to more explicitly see its fundamental relationship to nonviolence.

Sobrino is unambiguously clear that when speaking of mercy, he is not speaking simply of a sentiment, of works of mercy, or of addressing individual needs; rather, he is speaking of a principle, of a structuring reality of love that goes to the very root of all reality. He writes that "mercy is a basic attitude toward the suffering of another, whereby one reacts to eradicate that suffering for the sole reason that it exists, and in the conviction that, in this reaction to the ought-

not-be of another's suffering, one's own being, without any possibility of subterfuge, hangs in the balance."[58] As a re-action to another's suffering that has been interiorized within oneself, this praxic love generates the condition for authentic being, for the very possibility of humanity. The suffering of the other implicates not only an ethical question—What ought I/we to do?—but also an ontological one—Who/Am I? Who/Are we? To be fully human, Sobrino argues, is to let our lives resemble Jesus's own life by reproducing the very structure of his life, a life whose most radical structuring element was the principle of mercy that revealed the divine. The story of the Good Samaritan, then, is the story of the total or complete human person. Without the reaction of mercy, "the human is vitiated in its root, as occurred with the priest and the Levite who 'saw him and went on.'"[59] Mercy stands at the origin and at the end of a truly human, and thus divine life—it is the minimum and the maximum principle, the first and the last.

If mercy is the most structuring element in Jesus's life, a Church of Jesus must also have this as its basic structure. In a world of mercilessness, or what Sobrino calls anti-mercy, a Church that merely practices works of mercy and/or proclaims words about mercy will be tolerated, but a Church that is reconfigured by the principle of mercy will face the violence of all that opposes mercy. To be reconfigured by mercy is for the Church to be "de-centered" by the wounded one, for the Church to "think itself" from outside itself, from the road where the victim of multiple forms of violence lies.[60] While recognizing the great variety of wounds of which one can speak and attempt to universalize, Sobrino is clear that, quantitatively, the most serious wound on a global scale is poverty, thus echoing those famous words attributed to Mahatma Gandhi that "poverty is the worst form of violence."[61] A Church that reacts to this violence and all its related forms in order to eradicate it will be "threatened, assaulted, and persecuted […] contrariwise, the absence of such threats, assaults, and persecutions demonstrates that, while the Church may have managed to perform works of mercy, it has not allowed itself to be governed by the principle of mercy."[62] The following of Jesus and the proclamation of the reign of God inevitably entail a willingness to self-suffer for the truth of one's witness to the God of mercy who overcomes violence at its root. To put it simply, the Church too, if it is Church, must risk bearing the marks of a wounded and crucified flesh. At the very least, this "mark of mercy" will make the Church credible. In Sobrino's words:

> A Church of consistent mercy is at least credible. If it is not consistently merciful,

> it will seek credibility in vain through other means. Among those who are weary of the faith, agnostics, or unbelievers, such a Church will at least render the name of God respectable. That name will not be blasphemed by the Church's own actions. Among the poor of this world, the Church will awaken acceptance and gratitude […] consistent mercy, then, is a "mark" of the true Church of Jesus.[63]

I previously claimed that active nonviolence is the logic of mercy that transforms and overcomes the logic of violence, and in light of Sobrino's insights on the principle of mercy, it can be said that active nonviolence is a mark of the true Church of Jesus that does not replicate violence and the suffering it causes, but eradicates it through its own willingness to suffer in the struggle against violence.

Nonviolence as the Means of Mercy

Throughout this essay I have attempted to weave together mercy and active nonviolence using texts primarily drawn from Pope Francis and the life of the Church. I have mostly refrained from directly incorporating the philosophy of nonviolence, especially as expressed by Gandhi, although his spirit has haunted certain formulations and emphases used throughout. His practical idealism of *active* and *principled* nonviolence certainly continues to live in communities across the globe who struggle and suffer in their non-cooperation with violent structures that dehumanize, humiliate, and crush all who dare bear "the mark of mercy." But I would be remiss if this essay did not let what has been in the background come to the fore, even if toward the end. Thus, I turn to Gandhi's philosophy more directly in order more firmly construct the shared positive horizon of mercy and nonviolence.

Nonviolence was Gandhi's style of politics and the means through which he faced the violence of colonialism and the hope for liberation of both the oppressor and the oppressed. While a traditional *realpolitik* framework tends to dismiss his approach as idealistic and thus unrealistic for addressing violence and war,[64] his theoretical formulations are one of the most practical intellectual archives[65] we have for "becoming a nonviolent people" and "building nonviolent communities"[66] capable of transforming "politics with a capital P,"[67] which too often justifies fighting violence with more violence. At the heart of Gandhi's vision for transforming a world enmeshed in cycles of violence was a scientific rigor and method for living out "experiments in

the practice of truth and nonviolence."[68] This practical method is traditionally termed "satyagraha." Joan Bondurant describes satyagraha as "an instrument of struggle for positive objectives and for fundamental change—a technique more widely used than understood and one which yet called for testing in the field of social and political action."[69] With these words Bondurant points to the sense of ambivalence that surrounds this term, for even in Gandhi's time persons would use the term to name their actions or popular movements regardless of the means they employed or the objectives for which they struggled. Gandhi was killed before he could systematize his method for resolving conflicts, but in her classic study of Gandhi's philosophy, Bondurant examines truth, nonviolence, and self-suffering as key interrelated principles of the method.

The very word "satyagraha" is comprised of both truth and nonviolence. Gandhi writes, "Truth (*satya*) implies love, and firmness (*agraha*) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement 'satyagraha,' that is to say, the Force which is born of Truth and Love or nonviolence."[70] In these few words about the origin of his method and movement one finds a close conceptual relationship between notions of truth and love and the nonviolent force they generate to address violence. *Satya* (truth) derives from *sat* ("being"), and *agraha* literally translates into "firm grasping," thus satyagraha is often referred to as "holding on to Truth or 'Truth force.'"[71] For Gandhi, Truth has an ontological density and one is not able to grasp absolute truth in this life. As he states, "To find Truth completely is to realize oneself and one's destiny, that is, to become perfect. I am painfully conscious of my imperfections, and therein lies all the strength I possess."[72] It is the realization that we are not fully realized persons, that we are not absolute truth, which necessitates a recognition of our partial truths and of our unfinished becoming, and thus, of a reflexive means of engagement with others that mutually allows for a growth in the grasp of truth. In social relations love is the means that can allow for growth in truth, growth into a true or authentic self, and for Gandhi this social manifestation of love is nonviolence.[73] Essentially, love or nonviolence is the means in the struggle for truth—the only means whose veracity does not contradict or undermine that for which it struggles.[74]

At its core, nonviolence is a positive love. The word that is generally translated in English as nonviolence is *ahimsa*, which for Gandhi was not merely a renunciation of the will to kill or to damage, but a positive state of love.[75] However, Gandhi is clear that such a positive state of love does not mean passivity. He writes, "I accept the interpretation of *ahimsa* namely that it is not

merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence."[76] Quite the contrary, Gandhi advocates for a forceful response to evil that resists and transforms the conflict. However, the means of such resistance must be the force of love and nonviolence that does not undermine the very truth (e.g., justice, goodness, dignity, etc.) out of which and for which one struggles. Bondurant explains that "truth, judged in terms of human needs, would be destroyed, on whichever side it lay, by the use of violence. Nonviolence, or *ahimsa*, becomes the supreme value, the one cognizable standard by which true action can be determined."[77] Or, in Gandhi's words, "Truth is the end, Love a means thereto. We know what is Love or nonviolence, although we find it difficult to follow the law of Love."[78] In Gandhi's philosophical and/or theological horizon, truth and love are inseparable, for nonviolence is the way to truth, to being, to the verification of one's humanity. Here we hear echoes of Sobrino's argument when speaking of mercy, that "in this reaction to the ought-not-be of another's suffering, one's own being, without any possibility of subterfuge, hangs in the balance."[79] Nonviolence, like mercy, is not simply an ethical response ("What ought I to do?"), but implicates a whole ontology ("Who/what am I?"). If for Sobrino to be fully human is to resemble the structure of Jesus's life, a life structured by mercy, for Gandhi to be realized as a person is to walk the way of nonviolence that leads to Truth. In both cases the way is difficult, but both mercy and nonviolence hold promise as insurmountable forces capable of ultimately overcoming all forms of violence. It must be added, though, that for Gandhi as well as for Sobrino and Pope Francis, love or nonviolence entails a willingness to suffer.

Self-suffering is the alternative to inflicting violence upon others. A willingness to suffer is not the same as cowardice and an inability to inflict violence, and it is certainly not suffering for its own sake. Rather, one is willing to suffer in one's re-action to another's suffering because it is a re-action that holds firmly to one's truth without undermining oneself or others through violence. For Gandhi, "Satyagraha postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one's own person."[80] From a Christian perspective, Jesus's own willingness to suffer persecution and ultimately death for proclaiming the reign of God—good news to the poor, release for captives, liberation to the oppressed (Luke 4:18–19)—stands as the paradigmatic example. To live in the shadow of the cross in the struggle against all forms of violence is also to live into the truth that the violence of the cross has been and continues to be conquered through the force of love that is

nonviolence. In one of his most striking statements about the relationship between self-suffering and nonviolence, Gandhi writes that "just as one must learn the art of killing in the training for violence, so one must learn the art of dying in the training for nonviolence."[81] To learn the art of dying is to overcome the fear of dying, a process that liberates a person and community to live unto its true vocation. In a world profoundly marked by violence it is a process of being liberated unto the creativity of nonviolence as the means for transforming history. Essentially, learning the art of dying is a process of overcoming fear through love, violence through nonviolence, indifference through mercy. In an ecclesiological key, this is the willingness of the Church to suffer as it forcefully resists violence and points toward a different way of being and becoming a Samaritan Church on the path of nonviolence.

In Gandhian philosophy the means are ends in the making, and thus, there is a primacy to means that are inseparable from ends. Bondurant writes that "perhaps the most characteristic quality of satyagraha is the flexibility in ends which an emphasis on means implies."[82] While ends may be unpredictable and beyond our control, the means must be accessible and firm. Thus, Gandhi writes, "means to be means must always be within our reach, and so *ahimsa* is our supreme duty. If we take care of the means, we are bound to reach the end sooner or later. When once we have grasped this point, final victory is beyond question."[83] For Gandhi, the means of nonviolence was the creative ground that carried the surest possibility of a fundamental transformation of conflicts and the cultivation of social conditions capable of generating a more human, and thus divine, society. For the Church, it is a matter of shifting its gaze from particular ends that seem to be reached only through the justification of violence, and towards an endlessly creative nonviolent means that paradoxically may be the only way of reaching the desired ends. In other words, to affirm with Pope Francis that nonviolence is a style of politics for peace is to affirm that nonviolence is a means for reaching that peace, the only Christian means, but that such peace, like the reign of God, is never fully reached by our human efforts. A Christian Church that seeks to overcome violence in all its forms can only do so by the means of nonviolence, for it is in this way that it verifies that it is in fact following Jesus, the mercy of God made flesh, whose grace overcomes all violence.

Nonviolence as Source for Theology

If Pope Francis writes an encyclical on peace, not only will he complete the echo to his twelfth century namesake, but his papacy will also provide the Church with a text that will likely, and

perhaps ironically, be fought over. Relaunching the tradition of nonviolence as the Christian means for peace will require nothing short of a radical revolution—a turning back to the very roots of our Christian faith. The Pope's writings on mercy have provided a fertile context upon which to continue to tradition the Church unto nonviolence, but the work of theologians committed to incarnating the Spirit of nonviolence and not justifying violence with theology is required. In June 2019 when speaking to theologians in Southern Italy, Pope Francis spoke of nonviolence as "a horizon and wisdom […] to which theology must look upon as its own constitutive element."[84] Nonviolence is constitutive for theology because it is constitutive for a Christian life. In both theology and in the life of the Church, in reflection and in praxis, nonviolence is the horizon that reveals the Church of Christ, and that makes a Church of mercy credible.

Notes

1. Robert J. Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers, *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010).
2. Gerard F. Powers, "Our Vocation is Peacebuilding (*Construo pacem est nostra vocatione*), *Expositions* 12.1 (2018), 126–141, https://expositions.journals.villanova.edu/article/view/2324.
3. Pope Francis, "Audience to Representatives of the Communications Media: Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis," The Holy See, March 16, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130316_rappresentanti-media.html.
4. Powers, "Our Vocation is Peacebuilding" 135.
5. In his August 18, 2013 Angelus message, Pope Francis said: "The Christian's real force is the force of truth and of love, which involves renouncing all forms of violence. Faith and violence are incompatible! Instead, faith and strength go together. Christians are not violent; they are strong. And with what kind of strength? That of meekness, the strength of meekness, the strength of love" (The Holy See, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130818.html).
6. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of*

Mercy, The Holy See, April 11, 2015, §10, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html.

7. Pope Francis, "Angelus," The Holy See, March 17, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20130317.html.
8. Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 2014).
9. The document was released on April 11, 2015 and the Holy Year of Mercy officially began on December 8, 2015.
10. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus* §1, §6.
11. Pope Francis, "Angelus," March 17, 2013.
12. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus* §2.
13. Ibid. §3.
14. Ibid. §4.
15. See Pope Francis, "Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements: Address of the Holy Father Francis," The Holy See, May 18, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco_20130518_veglia-pentecoste.html.
16. See Pedro Tafur, *Travels and Adventures: 1435–1439* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 38–39.
17. Council of Serdica, canon 8 from the Latin version; Hamilton Hess, *The Early Development of Canon Law and the Council of Serdica* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 217.
18. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus* §4.
19. The notion of a Samaritan Church was emphasized in the 2007 Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) document of Aparecida, of which Cardinal Bergoglio, future Pope Francis, was a key author. See Aparecida sections 26, 135, 176, 491, 537.
20. Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus* §8.
21. Ibid. §9.
22. Ibid. §9.

23. Ibid. §9.
24. Ibid. §10.
25. Ibid. §10, 20.
26. Ibid. §20.
27. Ibid. §12.
28. Ibid. §25.
29. See *Misericordiae vultus* §2.
30. Pope Francis, “Message of his Holiness Pope Francis to the Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson on the Occasion of the Conference on ‘Nonviolence and Just Peace: Contributing to the Catholic understanding of and commitment to nonviolence,’” The Holy See, April 6, 2016, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160406_messaggio-non-violenza-pace-giusta.html.
31. The Spanish text reads: “Es necesario renovar todos los instrumentos más adecuados para hacer concreta la aspiración a la justicia y a la paz de los hombres y de las mujeres de hoy. Así, también la reflexión para relanzar el camino de la no violencia, y en especial de la no violencia activa, constituye una aportación necesaria y positive,” https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/messages/pont-messages/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160406_messaggio-non-violenza-pace-giusta.html.
32. See *Misericordiae vultus* §6.
33. Translation from Spanish my own. Pope Francis, “Nonviolence and Just Peace.”
34. The Spanish reads: “contribuir a la renovación del testimonio activo de la no violencia como ‘arma’ para conseguir la paz.”
35. Pope Paul VI, “Message of his Holiness Pope Paul VI for the Celebration of the Day of Peace: If You Want Peace, Work for Justice,” The Holy See, January 1, 1972, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19711208_v-world-day-for-peace.html.
36. Pope Francis, “Message of his Holiness Pope Francis to the Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson.”
37. Pope Francis, “Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the celebration of the XLIX World Day of Peace: Overcome Indifference and Win Peace,” The Holy See, January 1,

2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20151208_messaggio-xlix-giornata-mondiale-pace-2016.html.

38. Pope Francis, "Apostolic Letter Misericordia et misera of the Holy Father Francis at the Conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy," The Holy See, November 20, 2016, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20161120_misericordia-et-misera.html.
39. Emphasis in the original.
40. Pope Francis, *Misericordia et Misera* §5.
41. Ibid. §16.
42. Ibid. §13.
43. Ibid. §18.
44. The document mostly uses the term "nonviolence" instead of "non-violence," the latter of which had been used in the previous Vatican message on nonviolence from April 6, 2016. In literature on nonviolence both spellings are used.
45. Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Third World Meeting of Popular Movements," The Holy See, November 5, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161105_movimenti-popolari.html.
46. For more on how various experiences of precarity are giving rise to embodied nonviolent movements that claim communities' rights to exist, see Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
47. Pope Francis, "Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Celebration of the Fiftieth World Day of Peace, 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-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html.
48. See Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 80–89.
49. Pope Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace" §3.
50. Ibid. §3.

51. Ibid. §4.
52. Ibid. §4.
53. Ibid. §4.
54. Since Vatican II the universal call to holiness specified in *Lumen gentium* chapter 5 has served as a means of reflection on living holiness in the modern world. Though there are varied paths, there is one holiness: "The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity" (Pope Paul VI, *Lumen gentium*, The Holy See, §41, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html). Similarly, one may argue that nonviolence is a path to holiness that must mark all paths. As Pope Francis said on the feast of All Saints in 2013, "The Kingdom of Heaven, indeed, is for those […] who are not violent, but instead merciful and who seek to be architects of reconciliation and peace" (Pope Francis, "Angelus," The Holy See, November 1, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2013/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20131101.html). See also "Saintliness Is a Vocation for All," Vatican News Service, November 4, 2013, http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2013/11/saintliness-is-vocation-for-all.html.
55. Pope Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace" §5.
56. Ibid. §6.
57. Ibid. §7.
58. Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 18.
59. Ibid. 18.
60. Ibid. 21.
61. While widely accepted as words of Gandhi, it has been difficult to locate a specific citation for what was the reality for most of India under British colonial rule.
62. Sobrino 23.

63. Ibid. 26.
64. For an analysis of Gandhian politics in relation to political realism, see Karuna Mantena, "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence," *The American Political Science Review* 106.2 (2012): 455–470.
65. Boaventura de Sousa Santos considers Gandhi an "archivist of the future" because of his amazing ability to engage in intercultural and interpolitical translation in his time, practices that are necessary for the ongoing global struggles against new forms of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. See *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 209–246.
66. Pope Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace" §7.
67. Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Third World Meeting of Popular Movements, November 5, 2016.
68. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951), 240.
69. Joan Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 4.
70. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* (India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1950), 172.
71. Bondurant 16.
72. Gandhi, cited in Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence* 17.
73. Bondurant 18–19.
74. Here one finds a parallel with Pope John Paul II's words at Drogheda, Ireland in 1979: "I proclaim, with the conviction of my faith in Christ and with an awareness of my mission, that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy of man. Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings. Violence is a crime against humanity, for it destroys the very fabric of society" (Pope John Paul II, "Homily at Drogheda, Ireland," The Holy See, September 29, 1979; http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790929_irlanda-dublino-drogheda_en.html).
75. Bondurant 24.

76. Gandhi, cited in Bondurant 24.
77. Bondurant 25.
78. Gandhi, cited in Bondurant 25.
79. Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 18.
80. Gandhi, cited in Bondurant 28.
81. Gandhi, cited in Bondurant 29.
82. Bondurant 34.
83. Gandhi, cited in Bondurant 25.
84. Translation my own. The Spanish text, like the Italian, reads similarly: “En este punto pienso, como horizonte y sabiduría, en la no violencia, a la que la teología debe mirar como elemento propio constitutivo.” The English translation of the text says the following: “And here I think of nonviolence as a perspective and way of understanding the world, to which theology must look as one of its constitutive elements.” The English translation does away with equating nonviolence as a horizon and as wisdom, and specifies that it is “one” of theology’s constitutive elements. See Pope Francis, “Meeting on the Theme of ‘Theology after Veritatis Gaudium in the Context of the Mediterranean,” The Holy See, June 21, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/june/documents/papa-francesco_20190621_teologia-napoli.html.