

Context and Opportunities

As a child of God and a Catholic, Jesus' way of nonviolent love of friends and enemies orients my life. My determination to seek nonviolent responses has been more specifically prompted by family conflict, 9/11 in the U.S., the wars in Afgh., Iraq, and Syria, serving as an international monitor for Palestinian elections 2006, and as a member of the DC Peace Team. Active nonviolence offers many strengths and opportunities today. One example is the growing evidence of the effectiveness of nonviolent civilian resistance movements. Not only have they been proven to be twice as effective as violent resistance, but more importantly at least 10x's more likely to lead to a more durable democracy.¹ A second example is the emerging practice of unarmed civilian protection (see chart at end) by groups such as the Nonviolent Peaceforce, Cure Violence, Christian Peacemaker Teams, and Operation Dove (Catholic). They are directly protecting people in hot conflict zones and reducing shootings/homicides.² A third example is the practice of restorative justice or processes. These focus on identifying the harm done to relationships and how to heal that harm. They include restorative circles, family conferences, survivor-offender conferencing, truth and reconciliation commissions, and trauma-healing programs.

A fourth example is the practice of civilian-based defense. This practice entails using nonviolent resistance or force to defend against military invasion, occupation or *coups d'état*. The resisters may not physically prevent invading troops from entering their territory. Yet, everyone as much as possible participates in the resistance. Civilian-Based Defense primarily entails non-cooperation with the opponent's orders and perhaps creation of a parallel government, to the point of making it inconvenient to nearly impossible for the occupying force to benefit or even stay. Past examples include the 1923 resistance to Wolfgang Kapp's attempted *coup d'état* in Germany,³ the Norwegian and Danish resistance against German occupation during WWII,⁴ the Czechoslovakian resistance against Soviet occupation in 1968,⁵ the Philippines "people power" prevention of a 1986 coup, and the Baltic countries in 1990-91.⁶

A fifth opportunity of active nonviolence is the recognition that it entails both what Gandhi called the "constructive program" and the "obstructive program." The former refers to social uplift with particular attention to the needs of the marginalized and poor, such building schools, creating jobs, movement unity, etc. The latter refers to non-cooperation with injustice such as boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience, etc. Both are needed in a nonviolent movement. The former program is primary and if violence breaks out by the resisters, Gandhi would often call off the obstructive program and return to constructive program until better unity and discipline was cultivated.

¹ Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, 2011.

² Nonviolent Peaceforce saves 14 people in South Sudan, <http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/what-we-do/stories-from-the-field/29-south-sudan-news/60-andres-gutierrez-and-derek-oakley-on-their-experience-of-the-violence-in-south-sudan>. Cure Violence reduces shootings and homicides, <http://cureviolence.org/results/scientific-evaluations/>.

³ Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, 2005, p. 91-100.

⁴ Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, 135-142.

⁵ Michael Nagler, *Is There No Other Way*, 133-136; Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, 189-204.

⁶ Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, 277-286.

Catholic Church Investment

I strongly suggest as the Catholic Church we invest our energy in the following initiatives. First, I think it's important to educate Catholics at schools, parishes, etc. about the *broad range* of nonviolent practices. Second, I think it's important to articulate a more robust understanding of Christ's way of nonviolence. This should include recognizing that Jesus teaches nonviolent peacemaking as a virtue, or a healthy habit for us to cultivate through core practices and as integral to human flourishing.⁷ It's not a utilitarian approach, or simply a rule against violence.

Third, I think the Catholic Church should shift to a Just Peace approach based on this Gospel nonviolence. A just peace approach offers a vision and ethic to guide our actions to prevent, defuse, and heal violent conflict. As a vision, it expresses the reality of Shalom and the integration of peace and justice as modeled by Christ. As an ethic, it offers a way of justice via peace-making and peace via justice-making. This entails an understanding of just peace, which includes a moral commitment to illuminating human dignity, but also ensuring human rights and cultivating thriving relationships. This ethic offers a set of core virtues to form our character and shape core practices, as well as to both orient and better apply a set of just peace criteria for specific actions to engage conflict. As a virtue approach, it goes beyond pacifism "understood as a rule against violence" by challenging us to become better people and societies in engaging conflict. The qualification of justice as restorative, the attention to conflict transformation, the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking, and the recognition of means/ends reflectivity are each key elements of this ethic. In turn, I think the Catholic Church should no longer utilize the "just war" language or appeal to the concept of justifiable war. Such utilization will restrain our just peace imagination and our will to embody just peace practices.⁸

Fourth, I think the Catholic Church should intentionally create communities experimenting with a robust commitment to Gospel nonviolence. Fifth, I think the Catholic Church should significantly increase investments in nonviolent practices, especially unarmed civilian protection, nonviolent resistance, and restorative justice; while calling on other organizations and governments to do the same. I think our parish communities should each get regular training in a broad range of nonviolent skills and develop community peace teams. These peace teams could provide peace education, unarmed civilian protection, restorative circles, etc. They could be based on Gandhi's Shanti Sena and present examples, such as the Meta Peace Team, DC Peace Team, Portland Peace Team, Baltimore's Safe Streets, etc. I think our Catholic schools and universities should develop Just Peace Leadership Corps (JPLC) that would train the future leaders of nonviolent conflict transformation. These JPLC programs could work like the U.S. military based programs of Junior Reserved Officer Training Corps (JROTC) and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), but in Catholic schools they might now even replace any such programs.

We have a lot of opportunity as Catholics today. Let us move with the Spirit and breakthrough our imaginations. Pope Francis boldly and truly proclaims, "Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare."

⁷ Eli S. McCarthy, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers: A Virtue Ethic for Catholic Social Teaching and U.S. Policy*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pickwick Publishers, 2012). Also, see the pre-conference paper on Just Peace.

⁸ Eli S. McCarthy, "Summoning the Catholic Church: Turn to Just Peace," 2016.
<https://georgetown.academia.edu/EMcCarthy/Drafts>



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