



*Affirming the vision and practice of active nonviolence
at the heart of the Catholic Church.*

A project of Pax Christi International

Just Peace approach

A Just Peace approach is rooted in the biblical notion of Shalom/Salaam that “justice and peace shall embrace,” (Psalm 85:10) and finds expression in Jesus’ integration of peace and justice. Thus, it reminds us that peace requires justice-making, but also peacemaking is the way to justice. Jesus modeled this approach while living under foreign military occupation. For example, he becomes vulnerable, invites participation in the Reign of God today, cares for the outcasts, loves and forgives enemies, challenges the religious, political, economic, and military powers, along with risks and offers his life on the cross to expose and transcend both injustice and violence. He also leans us toward justice understood as restorative justice, with a focus on the harm done to relationships and how to heal. This just peace approach is consistent with Gospel nonviolence.¹

Just Peace also builds on the trajectory of contemporary popes’ teaching and statements. In the early 1960s, Pope John XXIII wrote about how war is not a suitable way to restore rights. Paul VI linked peace and structural justice and said the Church cannot accept violence, especially the force of arms. John Paul II said violence is evil, it violates our dignity, it is the enemy of justice, and rejected definitively the idea that justice can be sought through recourse to war; he called us not to follow those who train us in how to kill. Benedict XVI called love of enemies the nucleus of the Christian revolution and said it’s impossible to interpret Jesus as violent. Pope Francis focuses us on mercy; he says the true force of the Christian is truth and love, which means rejecting all violence, so faith and violence are incompatible; he says war is the negation of all rights and does grave harm to the environment; that justice never comes from killing; he told us not to bomb or make war on ISIS; and the door is always open to dialogue, even with ISIS.

A Just Peace approach is also being woven together through ecumenical organizations and interfaith collaborations. For example, the World Council of Churches called for turning to a Just Peace approach in 2011 and 2013, as did the book *Interfaith Just Peacemaking* published in 2012.

A Just Peace approach offers a vision of human flourishing with a corresponding ethic to guide our actions. It includes a commitment to the social conditions which illuminate human dignity and cultivate thriving relationships. It focuses on actions to:

- transform conflict,
- break cycles of violence,
- build more sustainable peace.²

¹ Rose Berger, “No Longer Legitimizing War, Christians and Just Peace.” https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/no_longer_legitimizing_war.pdf

² Eli McCarthy, “Just Peace Approach: Content and Methodology.” <https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/just-peace-approach-synthesis-web.pdf>

It offers a set of core virtues or habits 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. As a virtue approach, it goes beyond pacifism “understood as a rule against violence” by instead challenging us to become better people and societies in engaging conflict.³ Core virtues would include nonviolent peacemaking, mercy, solidarity, humility, hospitality, etc.

Some of the core practices include meditation and prayer, education and training in nonviolent peacemaking and resistance, solidarity with the marginalized, interfaith collaboration, nonviolent resistance, unarmed civilian protection, nonviolent civilian-based defense, conflict transformation, trauma-healing and restorative justice, environmental justice, significantly reducing weapons and the arms trade, as well as working with civil society and the UN to both advance nonviolent practices and to outlaw war.

Vatican II and Pope Paul VI made a profound and direct statement that it was “our clear duty to strain every muscle as we work for the time when all war can be completely outlawed.”⁴

A Just Peace approach also incorporates just peace criteria that would guide our action choices and apply at all stages of conflict. Some examples of such criteria include:

- human dignity of all people
- positive peace (includes structural justice)
- participatory processes
- healthy relationships
- reconciliation
- restoration
- sustainability⁵

A Just Peace approach has been articulated by theologians, ethicists, and political scientists on the issues of drones, nuclear weapons, Syria, and ISIS.⁶

A Just Peace approach has many advantages compared to just war approaches. For instance, it has less risk of abuse as well as better helps us to imagine, develop, and commit to nonviolent practices, while cultivating just peace consistently throughout all stages of conflict. Further, it is less likely to yield massive preparations for war which also divert needed resources; more likely to actually prevent, limit, and move us toward outlawing war; better addresses the role of personal and cultural habits formed by war; and is more consistent with Jesus’ call to love as he loved us.

³ Eli S. McCarthy, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers: A Virtue Ethic for Catholic Social Teaching and U.S. Policy*, 2012.

⁴ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965, par. 81. Pope Paul VI, World Day of Peace Message, 1975.

⁵ Adapted from Maryann Cusimano Love, “What Kind of Peace Do We Seek?” in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, 2010.

⁶ <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/resources/>