

Just War or Just Peace? An Examination of Two Christian Approaches to the Problem of War and Violence

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Abstract

This paper examines, compares and contrasts the just war theory with a non-violent alternative. It documents the historical development of both theories, culminating in a recent conference that was held in Rome under the leadership of Cardinal Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and Marie Dennis, Co-President of Pax Christi International.

The paper advances arguments by the proponents of each theory and examines papal pronouncements on the subject. The case of Zimbabwe during the liberation war serves as an example of the use of the just war theory by missionaries who supported the liberation struggle. On the other hand, examples of non-violent resolution of conflict in other parts of the world offer an alternative approach. The paper quotes the recent statement that was issued at the end of the Rome Conference that contains a proposal for a papal encyclical on the issue. While putting forward the pros and cons for each point of view, the paper does not take sides but raises questions for further reflection and discussion.

Key Words: just war, just peace, violence, non-violence, terrorism, conflict, reconciliation, extremism, armed struggle, guerrilla warfare, trauma healing, conflict resolution

Introduction

There are wide differences of opinion within the Christian churches on whether war is ever justified or whether the church should take a pacifist position in all cases. This paper examines these different positions, showing how they have developed over the years and how they have been applied in specific cases.

The theory of the just war has been around for almost fifteen hundred years, having first been promulgated by Augustine, when he was Bishop of Hippo in the fifth century. Augustine believed that war should only be waged as a last resort to confront grave wrongs.¹ “Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity,” he declared.²

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas elaborated on Augustine’s ideas, developing criteria for determining when a conflict qualified as ‘just’. In the *Summa Theologica* he wrote that “war could only be waged by a properly instituted authority such as a state; that it could never occur for purposes of self-gain; and that attaining peace must be its central aim.”³

Over the years, as new military technologies were developed and the nature of war changed, these early doctrines were modified but never challenged or changed. This doctrine may have helped to moderate the carnage of war in some cases and may have led to the development of norms of the Red Cross and United Nations enunciated in the Geneva Convention as well as subsequent protocols that call for the protection of civilians caught in crossfire and humane treatment for prisoners of war. The proponents of the just war theory argue that it will always be needed to prevent the worst excesses of war and to protect civilians.

However, there are voices calling for a re-examination of this theory with the view that it no longer suits contemporary methods of warfare with the attendant deadly force that makes little distinction between armed combatants and civilians. Drone attacks in recent years, for instance, have killed many civilians who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Furthermore, developments in theology and social teaching favour a non-violent approach to conflict and call for restorative justice, healing and reconciliation. These voices have grown

¹ Stephan, Maria J, May 26, 2016, “Pope Francis might jettison idea of a ‘just war’”, *Crux/Associated Press*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

louder in recent years and have and elicited responses from many, including Pope Francis who speaks eloquently for the most vulnerable in society and those most affected by war.

Purpose/objective

Advances in modern technology have dramatically changed the nature of warfare and the ways in which war is fought. The founders of the just war theory lived in previous centuries when war was often fought hand to hand and while no less bloody was much less destructive. Looking at the rubble that once comprised historic cities in Syria and Iraq and at the mass exodus of people who are forced to flee from the death and destruction, one is forced to ask at what cost is war being fought in this modern era.

Looking also at the aftermath of war in countries as desperate as Zimbabwe, South Sudan, and Croatia, one may also ask if war has achieved its purpose or whether it has unleashed a cycle of violence and revenge that will engulf future generations. In other words, does the end justify the means? Is it time to re-examine the just war theory? Can this doctrine be revised to suit modern circumstances? Does the doctrine of just peace offer a viable alternative? What does this doctrine entail? How can it be applied to recent outbreaks of violence in various parts of the world? Does it have any relevance in the face of ‘terrorist’ attacks carried out by the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) or those influenced by radical extremism?

This study examines these questions, offering historical background and specific examples of the use of each of the two theories. It raises questions and quotes knowledgeable sources on both sides of the argument in order to offer talking points and guidance on a very controversial topic.

Methodology

This study relies mainly on written sources. The just war theory has a long history and, therefore, much historical information to document how it has been used in specific instances

such as World War I and 2. In recent times, the topic of war and peace has figured in papal documents as well as in statements by regional and local conferences of bishops. This is far too vast a field to explore in any depth but reference will be made to some of the more recent and familiar encyclicals as well as to the Second Vatican Council.

Coming closer to home, I refer to the research that I did as a DPhil student at the University of Zimbabwe on the liberation war in this country. This research utilized both primary and secondary sources. For the sake of this study, I focus on a study conducted by Irish theologian Enda McDonagh at the request of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP).

The just peace theory is relatively new and untested so there is much less evidence to illustrate either its effectiveness or its failure. Therefore, the exploration of this theory relies mainly on documentation from the recent conference that was held in Rome (April 2016) and responses to its conclusions. However, one could well argue that the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1960s and Gandhi's non-violent campaign for an independent India might qualify as examples of this doctrine put into practice.

Findings

The just war theory has provided a tradition of military ethics from as far back as the fifth century. It offers both the criteria for judging the morality of going to war as well as guidelines for the moral conduct of war.

Nine hundred years after Augustine first stated the doctrine, Thomas Aquinas elaborated on the conditions for determining if war is morally justified:

- 1) It must be waged by a legitimate or properly instituted authority such as a state;
- 2) The cause for which it is to be fought must be just;

3) Peace must be the central motive.⁴

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) lists four strict conditions for “legitimate defence by military force.”⁵ They are summarized in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* as follows:

- 1) The damage inflicted must be grave, lasting, certain;
- 2) All other means must be shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- 3) There must be serious prospects of success;
- 4) It must not produce evils or disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated.⁶

World War 1 saw this doctrine being used by leaders in the Catholic Church in the United States. Two weeks after the US Congress declared war on Germany, April 1917, Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore, the virtual head of the US Catholic Church, issued a letter stating that all Catholics were to support the war.⁷

World War II seems to have met the criteria for a just war since it was fought to prevent the advance of Nazism and the extermination of the Jewish people. Controversy, however, surrounds the role of Pope Pius XII at that time. He has been accused by some of not doing enough to rescue the Jewish people and there have been repeated calls for the Vatican to open its archives on this period. In defence of Pius XII, theologian Donald Dorr (2000) described his role as follows: “Peace, and the conditions for a lasting peace, were major themes for him during the years of the war. Following the tradition of Benedict XV, he adopted a neutral stance

⁴Wikipedia.org, just war theory

⁵*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 1992, paragraph 2309.

⁶*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, paragraphs 500-501.

⁷ En.wikipedia.org. just war.

and sought to be seen as a potential mediator. But as the war developed it became increasingly clear that the sympathy of the Vatican lay with the allies.”⁸

The United Nations Convention of 1949 may have been inspired by the just war theory as it produced a series of treaties on the humane treatment of civilians and prisoners of war. Further protocols were added in 1977 and 2005 that were ratified by 196 countries.⁹

It is not clear whether anyone has done a systematic study to determine if these four criteria have been met in any of the wars conducted from the middle of the last century such as the Korean and Vietnam wars as well as the invasions of Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria and the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. This is an important task for researchers to undertake if we are to have factual data to support one position or another.

Advocate for Peace with Justice: Brazilian Archbishop Helder Pessoa Camara

Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camara was a prophet for peace, far ahead of his time. An outspoken critic of inequality and injustice experienced by the poor in the north-east of Brazil, he cautioned against the use of violence to solve the problem. He explained that violence, as a means, rarely achieved its end but merely escalated into further violence, leading to a “spiral of violence”. Although he was a proponent of liberation theology, he did not support armed insurrections such as those taking place in various countries in Latin America.

Frustrated by the world’s seeming indifference to the suffering of the poor, he started a movement called “Action for Justice and Peace” in the early 1970s. As its founder and spokesperson, the diminutive Archbishop travelled around the world pleading for a non-violent approach to conflict. He appealed to universities, churches, trade unions, youth movements, religious groups and other institutions. After six years, he declared: “I concluded that

⁸ Dorr, Donald (2000 – third printing), *Option for the Poor, A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis: 97.

⁹ En.wikipedia.org. just war.

institutions as such are unable to engage in bold and decisive action for two reasons: they can only interpret the average opinions of their members, and in capitalist society they have to be directly or indirectly bound up with the system in order to survive.”¹⁰

Archbishop Camara then decided that his message was for minorities. It would start small but would grow into a huge force that could change the way the world thinks and acts. He knew how difficult it would be, and stated: “We must have no illusions. We must not be naïve. If we listen to the voice of God, we make our choice, get out of ourselves and fight non-violently for a better world.... If we are to be pilgrims for justice and peace, we must expect the desert.”¹¹

Archbishop Camara encouraged these ‘Abrahamic minorities’ to use the tools of social analysis to determine the root causes of poverty and inequality, “We must put an end to violence,” he declared. “To do this we must have the courage to recognize the source of all violence and put an end to injustice everywhere. Poor countries suffer from internal colonialism and neo-colonialism; rich countries allow groups of poor people to remain within them and the rich have become inhuman through an excess of comfort and luxury. It is easy to show that the wealth of the rich countries is sustained by the misery of the poor countries. We must end all this injustice.”¹² His prophetic words still ring true today, 44 years after they were written. His initiative for peaceful change may have influenced those who advocate for ‘just peace’ rather than ‘just war.’

The wisdom of the social teachings of the Church

Archbishop Helder Camara was not alone in advocating an end to violence. One of the first major papal encyclicals to deal with the topic was *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), issued by Pope John XXIII in 1963, the first year of the Second Vatican Council. Addressed to “all

¹⁰Camara, Dom Helder. 1974, *The Desert is Fertile*, Maryknoll: Orbis: 8.

¹¹ Ibid: 23.

¹² Ibid: 38.

people of good will”, the encyclical was written at a time of increased tension between world powers and a growing awareness of the dangers of nuclear war.

In summary, “Pope John XXIII contends that peace can be established only if the social order set down by God is fully observed. Relying extensively on reason and the natural law tradition, John XXIII sketches a list of rights and duties to be followed by individuals, public authorities, national governments, and the world community.”¹³ This optimistic and influential letter ends with this admonition: “Peace will be but an empty sounding word unless it is... founded on truth, built according to justice, vivified and integrated by charity, and put into practice in freedom.”¹⁴

Two years later, the Second Vatican Council issued its ground-breaking document *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope) (1965), officially known as *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Influenced by *Pacem in Terris* as well as the address of Pope Paul VI at the UN General Assembly (October 4, 1965), this document devotes the final chapter to reflections on peace. Introducing the chapter, the Council Fathers state: “... this Council fervently desires to summon Christians to cooperate with all men in making secure among themselves a peace based on justice and love, and in setting up agencies of peace.”¹⁵

The document looks at the nature of peace and the avoidance of war. It also refers to the problem of terrorism and guerrilla warfare, with which the world was grappling at that time. In an indirect reference to the just war theory, the Council says: “...governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted.”¹⁶

¹³ DeBerri, Edward P. and Hug, James E, with Henriot, Peter J. and Schultheis, Michael J, 2003 *Catholic Social Teaching, Our Best Kept Secret*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, and Washington DC: Center of Concern: 58.

¹⁴ Ibid: 61.

¹⁵ Abbott, Walter M. (ed) and Gallagher, Msgr. Joseph (translation ed) 1966 *The Documents of Vatican II*, London and Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman: 290.

¹⁶ Ibid: 293.

The document affirms the right to conscientious objection and condemns the arms race. Finally, it calls for a total ban on war and advocates disarmament.

According to a commentary on the document, “The material on war, while subject to much reworking within the Council, and certainly unsatisfactory to pacifists, does provide some checks on the inordinate use of power. Indeed, the fact that a small group of American bishops felt the document too sweeping in its indictment of nuclear weapons is a left-handed tribute.”¹⁷

Pope Paul VI coined the popular phrase “development is the new name for peace” in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples) (1967). This is the first papal letter dedicated entirely to international development. It came at a time when many African nations were becoming independent and various development agencies were being set up to promote economic growth and prosperity. DeBerri and Hug (2003) summarise the main points made in this important document as follows: “The Pope stresses the economic sources of war and highlights economic justice as the basis of peace. More so than any of his predecessors, Pope Paul VI explicitly criticizes basic tenets of capitalism, including the profit motive and the unrestricted right of private property.”¹⁸

The next pope to focus on social issues was Pope John Paul II who spoke from his experience in Poland, his homeland, of the possibility of revolution by peaceful means. He also criticized the international economic system, stating that it “discriminates against developing nations”.¹⁹ He spoke again of justice, peace, human rights and development in *Centesimus Annus* (One Hundred Years) (1991), written in commemoration of *Rerum Novarum* issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, and considered the advent of social teaching, coming after the collapse of socialism in most of Eastern Europe and the demise of the Communist Party in the Soviet

¹⁷ Ibid, Response by Robert McAfee Brown; 314.

¹⁸ Op. cit. DeBerri and Hug; 69.

¹⁹ Ibid; 94.

Union, *Centesimus Annus* stressed human rights and human dignity. Speaking of peace, Pope John Paul II declared: “A culture of peace needs to promote development and provide the poor with realistic opportunities. This requires interventions on the international as well as the national level (#52).”²⁰

In his “World Day of Peace Message” in 1982, Pope John Paul II issued one of the strongest condemnations of war thus far. He began by comparing classical warfare with the threat of nuclear and biological war. He also spoke of the scandal of the arms race and urged nations to seek effective means of negotiation rather than resorting to military means, concluding “that war is the most barbarous and least effective way of resolving conflicts.”²¹

Pope John Paul II put this belief into action when he strongly opposed the 2003 war with Iraq, arguing that it did not meet the criteria for a just war.²² He sent his envoy, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray to Baghdad to convince Saddam Hussein to cooperate with United Nations weapons inspectors. In spite of intensive efforts by the Vatican to prevent war, the United States and Britain went ahead with their ill-fated mission in Iraq that destroyed a country and left division and violence in its wake.²³

The case of Zimbabwe

Closer to home, the theory of the just war was often cited by missionaries caught up in the liberation war in the 1970s in what was then Rhodesia. Although they struggled to reconcile the use of violence with their faith, many had come to believe that war was necessary to end racial injustice and introduce majority rule. Repeatedly, rural missionaries and the Catholic

²⁰ Ibid; 110.

²¹ Ibid; 33.

²² “Unjust War: Last Ditch Mission,” 16 July 2016, *The Tablet*: 15.

²³ See the Chilcot Report (July 2016) that reaches the same conclusion as Pope John Paul II and criticizes Prime Minister Tony Blair and his government for following the lead of President George W. Bush.

Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) appealed to the Catholic bishops to give guidance in this matter. As the war escalated, church personnel in rural areas, both lay and religious, were confronted daily with life and death choices. They faced a crisis of conscience and the danger of arrest and deportation by the Rhodesian government if they assisted the guerrilla forces of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) or the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Equally, they faced the wrath of the guerrillas if they were seen to be associating with or supporting the Rhodesian forces.

Grappling with this dilemma, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) requested its partner, the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), to carry out a study on "the ethics of the armed struggle." Irish theologian Enda McDonagh was sent to conduct the research in 1978 and concluded that the conditions for a just war had been met in Rhodesia by the early 1970s. His findings were published in a book entitled *The Demands of Simple Justice*.

McDonagh's study presents an overview of theological and historical material on war and peace, tracing the development of the just war theory as well as its limitations. In two field trips to Zimbabwe in 1978, he interviewed dozens of people, particularly missionaries and the lay faithful who were living in the war zones. Reflecting on his assignment, he wrote, "To consider the theological merits of the 'just war theory' as against those of 'non-violence' makes a fascinating debate for theologians. It becomes a matter of life and death for the politically and pastorally engaged in a situation like Rhodesia. And the translation of the debate and its results, however vigorously pursued, are both difficult and risky in the actual war situation."²⁴

After describing the colonial history of Rhodesia, McDonagh posited 15 personal conclusions. While he determined that the criteria for a just war had been met in the case of colonial

²⁴McDonagh, Enda. 1980 *The Demands of Simple Justice, A study of the Church, Politics and Violence with Special Reference to Zimbabwe*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan: 9.

Rhodesia, he felt that both sides in the conflict often violated the use of 'just means' by attacking civilians. He raised concerns about the aftermath of the armed struggle and admonished the country to embark on a national campaign of non-violence to prevent further use of violence in independent Zimbabwe.

Following are four of his major findings or conclusions:

- 1) The basic injustice and source of violence in Rhodesia was the development of a discriminating and exploiting state, which became more obvious with the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965.
- 2) If one accepts the criteria of a just war as applying to a just revolution, the conditions for a just revolution were fulfilled, as far as they are ever likely to be, by the early 1970s in Rhodesia.
- 3) The manner of pursuing the violent revolution and of responding to it frequently violated the criteria of using 'just means by attacks on innocent civilians, use of torture, etc.
- 4) For the sake of the future of Zimbabwe and the rest of Southern Africa, the philosophy, strategy and tactics of non-violent political change should be urgently developed.²⁵

Although his findings, coming as the Lancaster House conference got underway in September 1979, were too late to be of practical use to those faced with choices of life and death each day, it confirmed what many had believed and had indeed acted upon as they supported the liberation forces of ZANLA and ZIPRA.

As I observed in my thesis, "Though couched in scholarly and theological terms, McDonagh's overriding message was a radical one. For the first time, a spokesman for the Church had

²⁵ Ibid: 139-140.

publicly justified taking sides with the liberation forces. It was a vindication for the rural missionary and a break from the tradition of condemning the violence on both sides.”²⁶

Unfortunately, the Church neglected his final point and did little after minority rule to inculcate a spirit of non-violence within the country that had experienced years of extreme violence from the colonial forces of Ian Smith as well as from the violence of the liberation forces against traitors or ‘sell-outs’. The need for peace studies, trauma healing and reconciliation, therefore, remain important unfinished business in the aftermath of the armed struggle.

‘Just Peace’ Conference

The prophetic message of Archbishop Camara and the wisdom of successive Popes since John XXIII have found new disciples in recent times. As today’s world faces a multitude of violent conflicts, an ‘Abrahamic minority’ has arisen to challenge the culture of war that seems to be engulfing the globe. These voices for peace gathered at a conference held in Rome in April 2016, co-hosted by Pax Christi International and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. The Rome Conference raised questions about the just war theory and proposed that it is possible and indeed preferable to use non-violent alternatives.

The ‘just peace’ theory is not entirely new. In fact, it is clearly enunciated in the message of Jesus throughout the New Testament. Closer to our own time, Mahatma Gandhi, a young Indian lawyer, organized his first non-violent protest against unjust laws in South Africa in 1906. Returning to India, he put these lessons into practice in a nationwide non-violent campaign to free India from British colonialism. In 1912, the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa was founded on the principle of change through peaceful means. The

²⁶ McLaughlin, Janice.1998 (second edition) *On the Frontline, Catholic Missions in Zimbabwe’s Liberation War*, Harare: Baobab Books: 40-1.

ANC maintained this commitment until 1961, a year after the Sharpeville massacre.²⁷ Martin Luther King adopted the non-violent approach of Gandhi in his efforts to end racial inequality in the United States in the 1960s. His campaign of civil disobedience linked with his Christian roots had a strong appeal across racial lines and proved successful.

Motivated perhaps by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, an interdenominational group of Christian scholars in the United States advanced alternatives to war in the 1980s. “These included practices like supporting non-violent direct action; cooperative conflict resolution; advancing democracy, human rights, and religious liberty; fostering just and sustainable economic development; and encouraging grassroots peacemaking groups and voluntary associations.”²⁸ This inter-religious dialogue expanded to include Jewish and Islamic traditions and resulted in the creation of an Abrahamic framing of an interfaith just-peacemaking paradigm that was later published in book form.²⁹

Building on initiatives such as these, the Rome gathering brought together about 80 Catholic peace practitioners from 35 countries, many of which were at war. The participants shared experiences of responding non-violently to war and conflict in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Palestine, Croatia, Burundi and Colombia.³⁰ Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, one of the two co-conveners of the conference, expressed concern that just war has too often been used to rationalize wars that produce more harm than good. The Cardinal seems to have the ear of his mentor Pope

²⁷ Hope, Anne. 1998 *Torch in the Night, Worship Resources from South Africa*, New York: Friendship Press: 36.

²⁸ Stephan, Maria J. May 18, 2016 “What happens when you replace a just war with a just peace, in <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/pope-francis-just-peace-catholic-...>

³⁰ “Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference,” May-June 2016, *Newsnotes*, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

Francis, who is sometimes viewed as a “Peace Pope.” At a 2013 prayer gathering at the Vatican, Pope Francis unequivocally stated: “Faith and violence are incompatible.”³¹

Participants at the Rome Conference agreed with him. Most of them came from countries at war or in the midst of conflict and yet they believed that non-violence was possible and indeed preferable to war. Ugandan Archbishop John Baptist Odama, for example, has held peace talks with the Lord’s Resistance Army. Based on his practical experience, he stated: “There is no justice in the destruction of life, of property.” He concluded that there should be “no spending of resources” on military solutions.³²

Francisco Jose de Roux, a Jesuit priest from Colombia, gave examples of non-violent civil action that resulted in the creation of ‘zones of peace’ that kept armed groups away from local communities. The Catholic Church in Colombia helped advance peace talks that culminated in a final settlement at the end of 2015.³³

Speaker after speaker at the conference gave examples from their own experience.

Katarina Kruhonja of Croatia, Bishop Paride Taban of South Sudan, Mairead Maguire of Ireland and Pietro Ameglio of Mexico were among the participants who shared their experiences of practising non-violence in the midst of conflict.³⁴

Non-violence and Just Peace Statement

At the conclusion of the conference, participants affirmed a statement entitled, “An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of the Gospel of Nonviolence.” The

³¹ Stephan, op.cit.

³² Hitchen, Philippa. 23 April 2016, “Building a just peace”, *The Tablet*: 12.

³³ Stephan, op cit. (The terms of the agreement were rejected in a national referendum. A new The government and FARC rebels signed a new agreement in November 2016 that has still to be ratified by Parliament.)

³⁴ Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, May-June 2016, *Newsnotes*, “Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference”: 1.

statement begins with the following declaration: “As Christians committed to a more just and peaceful world we are called to take a clear stand for creative and active nonviolence and against all forms of violence.”³⁵

The statement recognizes various types of violence and the suffering they cause and points to the vision and message of Jesus as the Christian response. It declares: “The time has come for our Church to be a living witness and to invest far greater human and financial resources in promoting a spirituality and practice of active nonviolence and in forming and training our Catholic communities in effective non-violent practices. In all of this, Jesus is our inspiration and model.”³⁶

The statement goes on to quote passages from scripture as well as the words of recent Popes that bolster a just peace approach. Defining what this entails, the statement continues: “A Just Peace approach offers a vision and an ethic to build peace as well as to prevent, defuse, and to heal the damage of violent conflict. This ethic includes a commitment to human dignity and thriving relationships, with specific criteria, virtues and practices to guide our actions.”³⁷

The statement concludes with a list of proposals for action:

- Continue developing Catholic social teaching on nonviolence. In particular, we call on Pope Francis to share with the world an encyclical on nonviolence and Just Peace;
- Integrate the Gospel of non-violence explicitly into the life, including the sacramental life, and work of the Church through dioceses, parishes, agencies, schools, universities, seminaries, religious orders, voluntary associations, and others;

³⁵ Ibid, “Nonviolence and Just Peace Statement.”: 1.

³⁶ Ibid: 2.

³⁷ Ibid: 3.

- Promote non-violent practices and strategies (e.g. non-violent resistance, restorative justice, trauma healing, unarmed civilian protection, conflict transformation, and peace building strategies);
- Initiate a global conversation on nonviolence within the Church, with people of other faiths, and with the larger world to respond to the monumental crises of our time with the vision and strategies of non-violence and Just Peace;
- No longer use or teach “just war theory”; continue advocating for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons;
- Lift up the prophetic voice of the church to challenge unjust world powers and to support and defend those non-violent activists whose work for peace and justice put their lives at risk.³⁸

These suggestions for action are concrete and practical. It is too soon to say whether they will be widely adopted or not.

Summing up the significance of the Conference, Marie Dennis, Co-President of Pax Christi International and one of the Conference organisers, had this to say:

“The Rome conference on nonviolence and just peace urged the Catholic Church to stop suggesting that war can be ‘just.’ While clear ethical criteria are necessary for addressing egregious attacks or threats in a violent world, conference participants, including many who came from war zones and violent circumstances, appealed to the Church to engage in the development of more and more effective non-violent practices for protecting vulnerable

³⁸ Ibid: 3-4.

communities, avoiding violent conflict, transforming structures of violence, and promoting cultures of peace.”³⁹

If Pope Francis heeds the request to issue an encyclical on Just Peace and non-violent alternatives to war, the vision of Marie Dennis, Cardinal Turkson and other peace builders may finally become the official teaching of the Church.

A counter-argument

On the other side of the spectrum are those who not only support the just war theory but maintain that it is more necessary than ever in the light of new and deadly forms of violence. For instance, an editorial in *The Tablet* (23 April 2016) argues: “Just war theory has never been more necessary in international affairs, at precisely the moment when some people are questioning its relevance. It is the moral anchor for the international law of armed conflict, without which the law is left to the mercy of the most powerful states to interpret in whatever way suits them.... Without a moral basis, international law is too easily manipulated, perversely interpreted or ignored.”⁴⁰

The editorial gives examples of recent conflicts that did not meet the just war criteria, for example, British military involvement in Libya in 2011. It also cites the use of drones by the United States to kill its so-called enemies in places like Afghanistan and Pakistan. The editorial declares: “Such morally flawed policies cannot be excused by good results. They are utterly contrary to just war principles.”⁴¹ In other words, the authors believe that just war principles could be used to hold those responsible for their violation.

Although advancing the need for a just war theory or theory, the editorial acknowledges that peaceful means have also been effective in some cases, citing the fall of communism in Eastern

³⁹ Dennis, Marie, 27 July 2016, email message to the author.

⁴⁰ “There is still a case for a just war”, 23 April 2016, editorial in *The Tablet*: 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Europe and the collapse of military governments in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and more recently in Burma. One could also refer to the end of apartheid in South Africa. While the armed struggle carried out by the military wing of the ANC did some damage, far more damaging were the international sanctions and boycotts that hurt the economy.

Giving both sides some leverage, the editorial states: “Tyrannies do sometimes come to an end peacefully, usually from their internal contradictions and from the gradual tacit withdrawal of consent by the people,”⁴² It concludes, however, with a ringing endorsement for just war: “Just war theory restrains the Western instinct to meddle impatiently in internal processes that Western government do not understand. It (just war theory) needs to be restated to suit modern conditions. But without it the world would be a lot more dangerous.”⁴³

New challenges - just peace and ISIS

In recent times, violent extremists under the flag of the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) have taken over sections of Syria and Northern Iraq with the intention of establishing an Islamic Caliphate that will stretch from the Middle East through North Africa and possibly engulf parts of Europe in the manner of the Ottoman Empire. In the process, they have carried out rape, torture, beheadings and cruel means to subdue local populations. In some cases, these *jihadists*, as they have been called, have singled out Christians and other minorities for extermination. Church leaders among these endangered communities have repeatedly pleaded for the world to pay attention to what has been taking place and to take action to protect these groups under their care. Pope Francis has also called attention to their plight. Speaking to journalists on August 14, 2015, he said: “In these cases where there is an unjust aggression, I can only say that it is licit to stop the unjust aggressor.”⁴⁴ Just-war supporters have used this statement to advocate

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Hitchen, Philippa, op.cit: 12.

for an increased military response to protect civilians and entire communities that are in grave peril. At the Vatican conference, Cardinal Turkson put the Pope's comments into context, explaining that Pope Francis went on to state: "I'm not saying drop bombs, make war, but stop the aggressor. The means used to stop him would have to be evaluated."⁴⁵

Testimonies at the Vatican Conference from individuals who were able to make contact with militants in seemingly intractable conflicts such as those in Colombia and the Philippines convinced participants that non-violent strategies could and should be tried with ISIS as well.⁴⁶

Action needed for post-war settlement and reconstruction

International organizations like the United Nations have recognized that the aftermath of war also demands action. This is a neglected area that has the potential to bring together proponents of both doctrines or theories of just war and just peace. Looking at the failure of the peace agreement in South Sudan, for example, one sees that centuries of violence do not turn overnight into peaceful co-existence. In Zimbabwe as well, one can observe the 'spiral of violence' as criticism or any type of opposition is viewed as treason and treated accordingly. The cruel behaviour used during elections is particularly disturbing, and is a stark reminder that the legacy of violence is often further violence.

This type of post-war trauma and violent responses calls for post-war strategies that include war settlement and reparation but also trauma healing and reconciliation. The latter is an area where the churches can lend their expertise and personnel. In Zimbabwe, in fact, the churches have made their contribution to the peace and reconciliation process that is mandated in the new Constitution (2013). Hopefully the contribution of the churches will continue and even increase when the Bill is passed by parliament and the Commission begins its work.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Conclusions

Both theories, just war and just peace, have proponents as well as critics. Just war has been around since the time of the Emperor Constantine and may have played a part in reducing the number of wars as well as promoting humane conduct during wars. It would require in-depth studies to determine if, in fact, the theory has been observed and made any difference.

Just peace seems to have predominated in the first centuries of Christianity when the message of Jesus was still very prominent. The early Christians were cruelly persecuted but did not resort to arms to defend themselves. In recent times, pacifists who opposed military service on the grounds of their faith were often imprisoned. Ben Salmon, for example, was one of the first Catholics to refuse to take up arms in World War 1 and was imprisoned for several years and vilified by both the Church and the State for refusing to serve in the military. His cause has recently been put forward for beatification.⁴⁷

The just war theory may have outlived its usefulness in view of military technology but even more telling are new types of guerrilla warfare being waged by extremists in Syria and Iraq and their followers in Paris, Belgium, San Bernadino, Orlando and Nice. These types of attacks by independent militants who kill using suicide bombs, trucks, guns, knives and axes are not easy to locate or to prevent. Even traditional counter-terrorism strategies may not be effective to halt such dispersed and uncoordinated acts of violence. The proponents of just peace maintain that it is imperative to dialogue with one's enemy and firmly believe that this is possible even with members of ISIL/ISIS. Already various groups are working together to prevent the radicalization of young Muslim men and women.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Salmon, Elizabeth, MM, daughter of Ben Salmon, 2015, dialog with the author, Maryknoll, NY

⁴⁸ Ali, Mustafa, Regional Director of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) and member of the International Board of Pax Christi International, December 2015, dialog with the author, Nairobi, Kenya.

Pacifist communities such as the Quakers and Mennonites in the United States have led the way in promoting non-violence. They have many lessons to teach if scholars, governments and other religious communities are prepared to listen. The Vatican Conference may signal that a new moment has come when this message has found a receptive international audience. If nothing else, the Conference has succeeded in drawing attention to the Christian response to violence in our day and has raised doubts about the continued use of the just war theory.

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