

- 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 nonviolence 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 nonviolent activists whose work for peace and justice put their lives at risk.”⁸

Again, we agree with and support *most* of the *Appeal*. We part company with it, however, primarily over two statements found elsewhere in the *Appeal* and the fifth bullet point above:

“We believe there is no ‘just war.’”

“Suggesting that a ‘just war’ is possible also undermines the moral imperative to develop tools and capacities for nonviolent transformation of conflict.”

“We call upon the Church we love to ... no longer use or teach ‘just war theory.’”

The remainder of this roundtable presents each of our critiques of the sentiments expressed in the forty-five words of those three statements.

I.

The Nonviolence–Just War Nexus

Gerald Schlabach wrote that a key test of progress for Catholicism in its dialogue with the historic peace churches on nonviolence and the use of force would be that the church’s teaching on nonviolence would become “church

⁸ Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, *An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Non-Violence*.

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wide and parish deep.”⁹ While modern Catholic social teaching has recognized nonviolence since the time of the Second Vatican Council, and Pope Saint John Paul II gave nonviolence strong, formal endorsement in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, the church’s teaching on nonviolence is hardly known in the pews.¹⁰ If they are familiar at all with Catholic teaching on peace and war, most Catholics would know the just-war tradition, especially through the US bishops’ 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*.¹¹ But the newer and still relatively slight teaching on nonviolence is hardly known at all. Only by rare exception do Catholic preachers address issues of peace and war.

World Day of Peace Message

In his 2017 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis began a process of enriching that teaching and, with the help of Pax Christi International, inviting a process of reflection and study on nonviolence and peacemaking across the universal church.¹² For all its praise of the history and practice of nonviolence, the message nonetheless regards nonviolence as a complement to just war, though it refers to the just-war principles in a circumlocution as “moral norms.” “Peacebuilding through active nonviolence,” the message reads, “is the natural and necessary complement to the Church’s continuing efforts to limit the use of force by the application of moral norms.”¹³ This formula, “the natural and necessary complement,” accurately reflects the place of nonviolence in Catholic social teaching since Vatican II. In particular, it corresponds to the stipulation inherent in *Gaudium et Spes*,

⁹ See Gerald W. Schlabach, “Just Policing: How War Could Cease to Be a Church-Dividing Issue,” in *Just Policing: Mennonite-Catholic Theological Colloquium, 2002*, ed. Ivan J. Kauffman, Bridgefolk Series, no. 2 (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2004), 19–75.

¹⁰ For Vatican II’s cautiously phrased endorsement of nonviolent resistance, see *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), §78, in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, expanded ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010). John Paul II’s strong endorsement of nonviolent direct action is found in his reflections on the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 in *Centesimus Annus* (On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*), §23 and 25, in O’Brien and Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought*. In §51, he endorses nonviolence in both domestic and international affairs.

¹¹ See *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response*, in O’Brien and Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought*, §§604–88; for the bishop’s articulation of the just-war canon, see §§80–110.

¹² Pope Francis, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.” See also Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, February 18, 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20070218.html.

¹³ Pope Francis, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” §6.

§78, that we are obligated to defend human rights—by nonviolence where possible, and by limited force when necessary.¹⁴

In his message to the April 2016 Roman conference on just peace, which gave rise to this roundtable, Pope Francis himself called the attention of the conferees to what I call Vatican II's Great Proviso, the recognition that in a conflicted world "governments cannot be denied the right to legitimate defense once every means of peaceful settlement has been exhausted."¹⁵ So, it appears, the Holy Father, like the council, sees nonviolence and just war as complementary parts of the church's peace teaching. It is that complementarity I want to discuss here, especially as it is now realized in the Responsibility to Protect.

A Composite Teaching

Some regard the church's composite teaching as unstable or even contradictory, but it is so only if one confuses nonviolence with pacifism, that is, unqualified opposition to all war and any use of force. If one sees active nonviolence as a tool for vindicating rights and building peace, as the council did, it may be regarded as part of a continuum of (noncoercive or mildly coercive) remedies against injustice that at some point may give way, on consideration, to more coercive means like sanctions and military intervention. This is precisely the perspective of the US bishops in their 1993 pastoral statement "The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace."

In that document, the bishops conditioned the use of force against grave injustice on the exhaustion of nonviolent methods. "Our constant commitment," they wrote, "ought to be, as far as possible, to strive for justice through nonviolent

¹⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, §78 reads: "We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence to the vindication of their rights and resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided that this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself." The last part of the sentence assumes, of course, that rights will be secured by other, i.e., violent means, an assumption clarified in §79.

¹⁵ See "Nonviolence Conference: Message from Pope Francis at the Opening of the Conference on Nonviolence and Just Peace," Pax Christi USA, April 12, 2016, <https://pax-christiusa.org/2016/04/12/nonviolence-conference-message-from-pope-francis-at-the-opening-of-the-conference-on-nonviolence-and-just-peace/>. For the pope's citation of *Gaudium et Spes*, see §79, para. 5. See also Joshua J. McElwee, "Landmark Vatican Conference Rejects Just War Theory, Asks for Encyclical on Nonviolence," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 14, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/landmark-vatican-conference-rejects-just-war-theory-asks-encyclical-nonviolence>. McElwee's reporting gave rise to the widely held misperception that the conference aimed at rejection of the just war, when its primary purpose was to deepen the stream of thought known as "Just Peace."

means.” Then they added: “But, when sustained attempts at nonviolent action fail to protect the innocent against fundamental injustice, then legitimate political authorities are permitted as a last resort to employ limited force to rescue the innocent and establish justice.”¹⁶ The serious application of nonviolent means, therefore, is a condition for considering the use of force.

In his full-throated advocacy of nonviolence in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, Pope Saint John Paul II praised the persistence of the nonviolent activists who in the late 1980s overthrew Communist Party rule in Eastern Europe. “While always refusing to yield to the force of power, [the protestors] succeeded time after time in finding effective ways of bearing witness to the truth.”¹⁷ The persistence of repeated attempts, then, is essential to the serious application of nonviolent remedies.

The late John Howard Yoder argued that serious exploration of nonviolent alternatives raises the bar for determining the point of last resort for forceful resolution of conflict.¹⁸ As Yoder argued, the exhaustion of nonviolent alternatives is one of the measures for judging whether just-war thinking is morally credible.¹⁹ The International Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue regarded just war as a point of divergence between the two communities; nonetheless it observed that “both Catholics and some Mennonites acknowledge that when all recourse to nonviolence has failed, authorities may use force in the defense of the innocent.”²⁰ Note well, their imperfect convergence was on the duty of the state to defend human rights.

It is fair to conclude, therefore, that the encouragement of education and formation in nonviolent peacebuilding is not intended to abandon just-war thinking, but to expand the hitherto marginal role of nonviolence in Catholic life and in the thinking of just war theorists in the Catholic tradition.²¹ The latest World

¹⁶ USCCB, *The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace: A Reflection of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Tenth Anniversary of “The Challenge of Peace”* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1993/2001), 10.

¹⁷ Pope John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of “Rerum Novarum”*: *Centesimus Annus* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1991), §23.

¹⁸ See John Howard Yoder, *When War Is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 72–73; also see USCCB, *Harvest of Justice*, 11: “Obligations to develop and employ nonviolent alternatives to war ‘raise the threshold for the recourse to force.’”

¹⁹ For Yoder’s ideas on making just war credible to nonviolent eyes, see Yoder, *When War Is Unjust*, 71–80.

²⁰ See *Called Together to Be Peacemakers: Report of the International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference, 1998–2003*, abridged ed., Bridgefolk Series (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2005), 59–60, §§187–88.

²¹ One implication of this debate is that just-war thinkers should be more critical of one another’s use of the just-war tradition when it is used to rationalize the use of force

Day of Peace message, then, read on its own terms, not only encourages nonviolent activists and peacemakers, but is also a “challenge for political and religious leaders, the heads of international institutions, and business and media executives to adopt [nonviolence] . . . in the exercise of their respective responsibilities.”²² The task it sets for the church, including especially Catholic just-war analysts, is to make the principles and practices of active nonviolence as familiar and natural to Catholics, and the public generally, as those of the just war.

Nonviolence–Just War Nexus and R2P

The deepening and expansion of teaching on nonviolence proposed by Pax Christi and endorsed by Pope Francis will serve to enrich Catholic teaching on peace and war. One can see the complementarity of nonviolence and just war already displayed in the articulation and practice of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), the emerging UN rules for humanitarian intervention, where both nonviolent alternatives and just-war tests are integral to the practice.²³

While enforcement forms just one pillar of R2P, it is arguably the best-known and most-debated of the three. The other two pillars are prevention and rebuilding.²⁴ According to the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), the blue-ribbon group that proposed the principle adopted by the UN High-level Meeting in 2005, “‘prevention’ is the single most important dimension of the responsibility to protect.”²⁵ “Less intrusive and coercive measures,” the commission argued, must be considered and tried before the more overt and aggressive methods of enforcement are employed.²⁶

Indeed, while countries that have required international military enforcement, like Libya, stand out in public perception, the countries where

uncritically in a permissive way. Peer criticism would make just-war analysis more credible in others’ eyes.

²² Pope Francis, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” §6.

²³ For the church’s position on R2P, see Pope Benedict XVI’s Address to the United Nations General Assembly, April 18, 2008, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080418_un-visit.html.

²⁴ See Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas in Action*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 110.

²⁵ *Ibid.* See also Thomas G. Weiss, *A History of Humanitarianism* (forthcoming), chap. 4, p. 10 [rev. ms]. On the development of the concept of the Responsibility to Protect, see Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 97–132.

²⁶ Cited in Weiss, *A History of Humanitarianism*, chap. 4, p. 10 [rev. ms].

preventive measures have succeeded, like Kenya, are at least as numerous.²⁷ The primary responsibility for preventing atrocities falls, in the first place, to the sovereign state itself. Among the preventive measures former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged on governments were intercommunal dialogue, programs that promote inclusiveness and counteract exclusivist ideologies, and rapid response to human rights violations.²⁸ Activities on the part of international actors, the secretary-general added, include commissioning “special envoys, mediators, peace operations (peacekeepers), and regional (peacekeeping) offices.”²⁹ In addition, the secretary-general observed that international actors can assist in building capacity for national electoral commissions and human rights institutions, facilitating security sector reform, and fostering independent media and anti-incitement activities.³⁰ All these measures are the global face of institutional nonviolence.

Efforts at prevention, of course, do fail. Nonviolence, even when it is systematically pursued, can fall short in the defense of human rights, presenting political authorities with the question of whether or not to use force in the defense of the vulnerable innocent. This is the point where traditional just-war criteria come into play. The ICISS’s “precautionary principles” offer a slightly modified set of just-war standards. They include right intention, last resort, proportional means, and reasonable prospects. The ICISS assumes that if atrocities cannot be prevented nonviolently, then protection of the vulnerable and ending of atrocities constitute just cause for the legitimate use of force.³¹

In Libya, we have seen that limited military enforcement is not necessarily a solution for mass atrocities; and in the Syrian catastrophe we have witnessed the downside of the caution exercised in weighing “the reasonable prospects,” what just war calls the prospect of success.³² At least for the moment, we may have reached the existing limits, short of full-scale war, of

²⁷ The Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect at the City University of New York, Graduate Center is a major source of documentation on R2P. See <http://www.glob-alr2p.org/resources/335>. For ongoing reviews and explorations, see Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s annual reports on R2P from 2010 to 2012.

²⁸ See Ban Ki-moon, “A Vital and Enduring Commitment: Implementing the Responsibility to Protect,” UN document A/69/981-S/2015/500, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/798795?ln=en>, §22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, §26.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, §31.

³¹ See Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 115–17, 120–21, on the adaptation of the just-war criteria as “precautionary principles” of R2P.

³² See Thomas G. Weiss, “In Libya, Political Will Catches Up with the R2P Norm,” *World Politics Review* (online), June 28, 2011, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/9309/in-libya-political-will-catches-up-with-new-r2p-norm>; and Weiss, “Military Humanitarianism: Syria

stopping mass atrocities when they are under way. But the international effort to protect vulnerable populations, as flawed as it is, represents an advance over the sovereign immunity that so long protected perpetrators of mass atrocities on their own people or neighboring ethnic groups.³³ It also represents a working alliance between nonviolence, at a professional and institutional level, and the use of rule-governed armed force in the maintenance of a peace that upholds the dignity and rights of humanity.

In a way, R2P was made possible by a post-Cold War liberal order that itself is troubled in the Atlantic community that gave it birth.³⁴ Nonetheless, R2P represented a revolution in the post-Westphalian normative order, and it has given rise to a complex of institutions, roles, and practices that could well endure beyond the current Western political distemper.³⁵ At present, it provides recourse for victims of smaller, less complex humanitarian emergencies. It is quite possible that the R2P institutions and practices created over the last two decades could survive the present global disorder, and will continue to evolve to meet the challenge of a future Syria or Libya.

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II.

Just War and Imagination Are Not Mutually Exclusive

The *Appeal* declares, “We believe that there is no ‘just war,’” because it has been “used to endorse rather than prevent or limit war,” and it “undermines the moral imperative to develop tools and capacities for nonviolent

Hasn't Killed It,” *Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2014): 7–20, <https://www.futureun.org/media/archive1/reports/MilitaryHumanitarianism-WeissTWQ.pdf>.

³³ On the imperfect success of R2P, see Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention*, 169–73.

³⁴ See, for example, Robert Kagan, “The Twilight of the Liberal World Order,” Brookings Institute, January 24, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-twilight-of-the-liberal-world-order/>.

³⁵ On the evolution of thinking on responsibility to protect, see Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention*, chap. 4, “New Thinking: The Responsibility to Protect,” 97–132; and on the institutionalization and implantation of the principle, see chap. 5, “So What? Moving from Rhetoric to Reality,” 133–73.

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