Just Peace Approach: Content and Methodology

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In previous writing, I have outlined the scriptural basis and contemporary historical development of a Catholic just peace approach or tradition, which is both different than and has advantages over the traditions of pacifism or just war.[1] In this essay, I will take this a step further by tightening the particular content and methodology for an integral just peace approach, which I conceive as both a vision and ethic. At this time, the call is for the Catholic Church to shift to a just peace approach consistent with Gospel nonviolence.[2]

As an orienting vision of human flourishing, just peace is rooted in the biblical notion of Shalom or Salaam that "justice and peace shall embrace," 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 generally living under foreign military occupation. For instance, he models the way of just peace by becoming vulnerable, inviting participation in the Reign of God, caring for the outcasts and prioritizing those in urgent need, loving and forgiving enemies, people building, challenging the religious, political, economic, and military powers, healing and trauma healing of persons and communities, praying and fasting, along with risking and offering his life on the cross to expose and transcend

[1] For full article as background, see Eli S. McCarthy "Summoning the Catholic Church: Turn to Just Peace," (2016). https://nonviolencejustpeacedotnet.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/turningtojustpeacecathem.pdf

[2] By "consistent with Gospel nonviolence," I mean the way Jesus loved and called us to love friends and enemies as God's will for us. Yet, this would include not condemning those who draw on violence in genuine atrocity or extreme situations, but also include not morally justifying the use of violence or lethal force. McCarthy, "Summoning the Catholic Church," 23-26.

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.[3]

A just peace ethic includes a commitment to the social conditions which illuminate human dignity and thriving relationships. It includes specific virtues, normative practices, and criteria to guide our actions for:

- Transforming conflict
- Breaking cycles of violence
- Building more sustainable peace

Therefore, this approach can also help prevent, defuse, and heal the damage of violent conflict and mass atrocities.

The 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. As a virtue-based approach consistent with Jesus' way of nonviolent love, it goes beyond pacifism understood as a rule against violence by instead challenging us to become better people and societies in engaging conflict. Thus, nonviolent peacemaking would be a formative practice or even a central, distinct virtue in itself.[4] However it may be conceived the point is that we need to develop the habit of nonviolent peacemaking in our daily lives, particularly to be more prepared for more challenging situations. Other core virtues to help cultivate nonviolent

[3] McCarthy, "Summoning the Catholic Church," 2-3.

[4] Previously I defined nonviolent peacemaking as a virtue or habit that realizes the good of conciliatory love drawing closer friends and enemies; and the truth of our equal dignity and ultimate unity. Core practices to cultivate this virtue include: creating and using an optional Eucharistic prayer with explicit references to Jesus' love of enemies, etc., as well as other types of meditation; training/education in nonviolent peacemaking and resistance, including forming nonviolent peacemaking communities; attention to religious or spiritual factors, especially in government policy discourse, and intra/er-religious dialogue; constructive program or social uplift with particular focus on the poor and marginalized; conflict transformation and restorative justice; unarmed civilian protection; nonviolent civilian-based defense. See McCarthy, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers*, 2012.

peacemaking would include mercy, humility, solidarity, hospitality, courage,[5] justice,[6] etc. Each virtue is a disposition to feel, desire, and act in particular ways that constitute and lead to human flourishing, i.e. they correspond with paradigmatic practices.

Therefore, a just peace approach would provide the following core practices or practice norms as ongoing practices to engage, but also a set of proven practices to draw on in specific conflict situations and at all stages of conflict. Thus, they are relevant not only before and after intense hostilities or war, but also during as essential ways to defuse violent conflict. They can also serve as a guide to what other practices may or may not be consistent with a just peace approach. In other words, it's not an exhaustive, but more an orienting list. This set is drawn from some of Glen Stassen's just peacemaking theory practices but also core practices identified with the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking.

First, prayer or meditation practices, such as creating and using an optional Eucharistic prayer with explicit references to Jesus' love of enemies, would be a key daily practice to cultivate just peace.[7] Fasting often enhances prayer or meditation. It would function as both a form of discernment and solidarity with those suffering.

Second, training and education in nonviolent peacemaking and resistance, including forming nonviolent peacemaking communities would be a key regular practice to cultivate just

[5] The virtue of nonviolent peacemaking clarifies or expands the paradigmatic practices of the virtue of courage to the practice of suffering out of reverence for the dignity of others (and self) by risking, perhaps even giving one's life without the distortion of our dignity created by relying on lethal force or by taking another's life.
[6] The virtue of nonviolent peacemaking would qualify the virtue of justice to focus more clearly on restorative justice with the ultimate intention toward friendship.
[7] McCarthy, Rev. Emmanuel, *The Nonviolent Eucharistic Jesus: A Pastoral Approach,* Wilmington, DE, Center for Christian Nonviolence.

peace. The broader practice would include developing grassroots peacemaking groups and related voluntary associations.

Third, acknowledging responsibility for harm and injustice, along with seeking repentance and forgiveness would be a key regular practice to cultivate just peace.

Fourth, supporting and investing more in nonviolent direct action, especially unarmed civilian protection, nonviolent resistance movements, and nonviolent civilian-based defense would be a key practice to cultivate just peace.[8] Research has demonstrated that nonviolent resistance is twice as effective as violent resistance, and at least ten times more likely to lead to a durable democracy.[9] Unarmed civilian protection is practiced by organizations such as Nonviolent Peaceforce, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Cure Violence, Peace Brigades International, and Operation Dove.

Fifth, using a conflict transformation analysis and restorative justice would be a key regular practice to cultivate just peace. For instance, towards transforming conflicts this would include analysis of root causes, addressing power asymmetries, using various types of diplomacy, and offering independent initiatives to reduce threat. It would also include trauma-healing, survivor-offender conferencing, family conferencing, peacemaking circles, and more truth and reconciliation commissions.

Sixth, attention to religious or spiritual factors, especially in government policy discourse, and expressed in intra/er-religious dialogue would be a key practice to cultivate just peace. A virtue-based just peace approach emphasizes conceptions of the good life, which

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[8] Nonviolent Civilian-Based Defense: http://mettacenter.org/definitions/civilian-based-defense-cbd/

[9] Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, *Why Civilian Resistance Works,* (Columbia University Press: New York, NY, 2011).

persons in the major religious traditions have been reflecting on and enacting for thousands of years. Thus, an open yet critical eye towards the wisdom we can harvest from these and some other conceptions of the good life would yield a constructive contribution.

Seventh, acknowledging equal human dignity by advancing human rights and interdependence would be a key practice to cultivate just peace. This would include the rights identified in the UN Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent covenants. Interdependence builds off this recognition of our shared equal dignity, human rights, and responsibilities to each other in the many ways we are interconnected.

Eighth, fostering just, sustainable, and integral development would be a key practice to cultivate just peace. This would include attention to the constructive program of nonviolence or social uplift with a particular focus on the poor and marginalized. It would also include attention to environmental justice and global health.

Ninth, working with emerging cooperative institutions in the international system with the clear, expressed goal to outlaw war would be a key practice to cultivate just peace. This would include broad civil society coalitions as well as the United Nations. However, with the Catholic church using a just peace approach such collaboration would be clearly focused on advocating for, intervening with, and scaling-up nonviolent practices to transform conflict.

Tenth, significantly and consistently reducing weapons and the weapons trade with the expressed goal of disarmament would be a key practice to cultivate just peace. It is clearly not working adequately to only focus on “offensive” weapons or nuclear/chemical weapons, as the former is too ambiguous and the latter is too limited in addressing the destructiveness continuously being caused by weapons and preparations for war.

In addition to key virtues and practices, a just peace approach would also provide criteria to help guide our action choices and to apply at all stages of conflict, including during violent conflict. They would help us determine which of the core practices to focus on, how to implement them well, and what other practices may or may not be consistent with a just peace approach in a specific situation. Many of these are drawn from Maryann Cusimano Love's list of just peace criteria.

Dignity would be one of the key criteria. This would require action that is consistent with and illuminates the equal, sacred dignity of all people. For example, this would include humanizing rhetoric toward all parties and action consistent with being a gift of God's love, rather than being possessive of one's life.

The human security of all life and the common good for all people and the environment would be another action guiding criterion, i.e. similar to what Cusimano Love calls "just cause." This is not the same as national interests or global strategic influence, much less corporate profit and self-aggrandizement.

Positive peace would be another action guiding criterion, i.e. what Cusimano Love calls "right intention." This would require action that intends and concretely delivers on cultivating human rights, structural justice, and thriving relationships. This is not the same as a negative peace or public order, such as being limited to the absence or management of direct violence.

Participatory process for decision-making would be another action guiding criterion. This would require action and the decision about action which is as participatory or inclusive of the stakeholders as possible.

Right or healthy relationship would be another action guiding criterion. This would require action to cultivate healthy relationship vertically, i.e. between high visibility leaders, middle range, and grassroots, as well as horizontally, i.e. across but within a social level. Healthy relationship would include basic respect and equal, non-discriminatory treatment, etc.

Reconciliation would be another action guiding criterion which would require action to cultivate the healing of broken relationships and the harm done to relationships.

Restoration would be another action guiding criterion. This would require action that restores material destruction, but also personal psychological and spiritual harm.

Sustainability or addressing root causes would be another action guiding criterion. This would require action that does not only bear short-term good, but actually bears such good in a sustainable way. Thus, the action avoids simply dealing with episodes of the conflict, and instead addresses the root causes or epicenter of the conflict. For instance, the action is not likely to lead to a cycle of violent conflict or mere displacement of violence to another area.

Key Methodological Questions

In addition to key virtues, practices, and criteria of a just peace approach, the following would be key questions to ask as one develops a just peace action plan. They are somewhat reflective with the See-Judge-Act approach. All of the following questions should be engaged in collaboration with the key stakeholders and those most directly affected by the conflict.

First, what are root causes of the conflict? To help reveal these root causes it would be helpful to identify how the conflict has been impacting the four dimensions of conflict transformation, i.e. the personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimension.

John Paul Lederach explains these dimensions in the following way. “We can think about these changes in response to two questions. First, from a descriptive view, what does conflict change? And second, from the standpoint of responding to conflict as it arises, what kind of changes do we seek? In the first arena, we are simply acknowledging the common patterns and impact of social conflict. In the second, we recognize the need to identify what our values and intentions may be as we actively seek to respond, intervene, and create change.

The personal dimension refers to changes effected in and desired for the individual. This includes the cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and spiritual aspects of human experience over the course of conflict. From a descriptive perspective, transformation suggests that individuals are affected by conflict in both negative and positive ways. For example, conflict affects our physical well-being, self-esteem, emotional stability, capacity to perceive accurately, and spiritual integrity. Prescriptively, (i.e., relating to what one *should* do) transformation represents deliberate intervention to *minimize* the destructive effects of social conflict and *maximize* its potential for individual growth at physical, emotional, and spiritual levels.

The relational dimension depicts the changes affected in and desired for the face-to-face relationships. Here issues of emotions, power, and interdependence, and the communicative and interactive aspects of conflict are central. Descriptively, transformation refers to how the *patterns* of communication and interaction in relationships are affected by

conflict. It looks beyond visible issues to the underlying changes produced by conflict in how people perceive, what they pursue, and how they structure their relationships. Most significantly, social conflict makes explicit how close or distant people wish to be, how they will use and share power, what they perceive of themselves and each other, and what patterns of interaction they wish to have. Prescriptively, transformation represents intentional intervention to minimize poorly functioning communication and maximize mutual understanding. This includes efforts to bring to the surface in a more explicit manner the relational fears, hopes and goals of the people involved.

The structural dimension highlights the underlying causes of conflict, and stresses the ways in which social structures, organizations, and institutions are built, sustained, and changed by conflict. It is about the ways people build and organize social, economic, and institutional relationships to meet basic human needs and provide access to resources and decision-making. At the descriptive level transformation refers to the analysis of social conditions that give rise to conflict and the way that conflict affects social structural change in existing social, political and economic institutions.

At a prescriptive level, transformation represents efforts to provide insight into underlying causes and social conditions that create and foster violent expressions of conflict, and to promote nonviolent mechanisms that reduce adversarial interaction and minimize violence. Pursuit of this change fosters structures that meet basic human needs (substantive justice) and maximize people's participation in decisions that affect them (procedural justice).

The cultural dimension refers to the ways that conflict changes the patterns of group life as well as the ways that culture affects the development of processes to handle and respond to conflict. At a descriptive level, transformation seeks to understand how conflict affects and changes cultural patterns of a group and how those accumulated and shared patterns affect the way people in a given context understand and respond to conflict. Prescriptively, transformation seeks to uncover the cultural patterns that contribute to violence in a given context, and to identify and build on existing cultural resources and mechanisms for handling conflict."[10]

Change Goals in Conflict Transformation: Transformation understands social conflict as evolving from, and producing changes in, the personal, relational, structural and cultural dimensions of human experience. It seeks to promote constructive processes within each of these dimensions.

- Personal: Minimize destructive effects of social conflict and maximize the potential for personal growth at physical, emotional and spiritual levels.
- Relational: Minimize poorly functioning communication and maximize understanding.
- Structural: Understand and address root causes of violent conflict; promote nonviolent mechanisms; minimize violence; foster structures that meet basic human needs and maximize public participation.

[10] http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/transformation

- Cultural: Identify and understand the cultural patterns that contribute to the rise of violent expressions of conflict; identify cultural resources for constructively handling conflict.

Another key question begins by recalling our orienting vision of flourishing above and the key virtues identified to get us there. Then we should ask who are we becoming as a society and what habits (virtues/vices) are at stake in this conflict?

Then we turn to what are the specific strategic goals for transforming this conflict? We should consider and identify goals for all four dimensions of the conflict as explained above. We should also consider and identify which key virtues we really need to focus on, especially including the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking.

After identifying the specific strategic goals for transforming this conflict, we should ask what practices might we scale-up or develop to reach these goals. We should initially consider the core practices outlined above. Then we should ask would these proposed practices or actions meet the just peace criteria? And then, what actions should we prioritize and sequence to reach the strategic goals?

Some preliminary uses of a just peace approach that have drawn on parts of the above content and methodology have been argued on the topics of lethal drones,[11] nuclear weapons,[12] and the conflict in Syria and Iraq, including ISIS.[13] However, it would be valuable to continue testing this approach including using something akin to the fuller content and methodology described above.

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[11] http://www.cmsm.org/documents/05-30-13_CMSM_Statement_Armed_Drones.pdf
[12] http://americamagazine.org/issue/building-better-peace
[13] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eli-s-mccarthy/religious-leaders-urge-peace_b_5827116.html