

Renewing Catholicism: Toward Recommitting to Gospel Nonviolence throughout the Roman Catholic Church

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I grew up under the brutal dictatorship of Idi Amin. After my high school seminary education, I decided to join the “liberation war” to fight Idi Amin. It was only by God’s grace that I was saved from this lie of liberation through violence. The “liberation war” ended, but then the liberators soon became dictators and we needed another “liberation war” to get rid of the “liberators.” This is a story that is repeated all over Africa. It is a lie. Violence does not end violence—it only creates endless cycles of violence. Nonviolence is a calling, not simply because it “works” but because it is the way of God.

–Fr. Emmanuel Katongole, Uganda¹

Introduction

Jesus proclaimed a universal ethic of nonviolence rejecting violence and killing, returning good for evil, healing divisions, and putting sacrificial love into action for a just, peaceful, and reconciled world.²

In its first three centuries, the Roman Catholic Church publicly practiced the nonviolence that Jesus taught and lived, and since then the spirit of Gospel nonviolence has been kept alive by particular individuals, communities and movements within the Church. Too often, however, the institutional Church has perpetrated or failed to prevent egregious violence, reinforced by a theological, pastoral, and ecclesiastical culture that has often permitted and even sanctified violence.

In our own time, though, the Church has begun to make a critical shift from this culture of justified violence. Over the past half century the Church has taken steps to re-affirm the foundational ethic of nonviolence in papal and episcopal statements, in an expanding body of theological research and biblical exegesis, and in the experience and commitment of Catholic

individuals and communities throughout the world who have been consciously living the nonviolent life as a spiritual journey and as a courageous witness for justice, peace, and reconciliation. In this spirit, Pope Francis has underscored nonviolence as a core value of the Church in many public statements and, most significantly, in his 2017 World Day of Peace message entitled, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.”³

This growing reassertion of Gospel nonviolence is not an accident. In an era of global direct, cultural, and structural violence—and at a time when the Church itself is grappling with its own violence, including clergy sexual abuse—it is no wonder that the Church is actively rediscovering Jesus’s nonviolence. We are living in a time when the Church is being inspired to embrace the way of faithful nonviolence and, in turn, to urge the larger world to discover the power of nonviolent options to address the monumental crisis of violence and injustice it faces today.

This renewed exploration of Gospel nonviolence was underscored by a landmark conference co-sponsored by the Holy See’s then-Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (now subsumed into the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development) and Pax Christi International in Rome in April 2016. The conference—attended by theologians, peace practitioners, and some Church leaders from around the world, including from places grappling with extreme violence—concluded by calling on the Church to “recommit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence.” It urged the Church to integrate Jesus’s nonviolence throughout the life of the Church, promote nonviolent practices and strategies, and to initiate a global conversation on the power of nonviolence.

This paper offers a general framework for imagining how such a recommitment could take place and what integrating nonviolence at every level of the institution could entail. It does this, first, by defining nonviolence in general and then underlining how Gospel nonviolence, for Christians, deepens this general notion of nonviolence by rooting it in how God calls us to live; exploring how this nonviolent way of life calls us to renounce the theology of justified violence and to unleash creative and disciplined ways to challenge violence and to make peace; and presenting an overview of concrete steps that could be taken to re-embrace Jesus’s nonviolence throughout the life of the Church and as part of its mission in the world.

What is Nonviolence?

Although nonviolence has often been dismissed as passive, ineffective, and otherworldly, we are currently in the midst of a revolution in our understanding of this powerful reality.⁴ Definitions of

nonviolence abound, including: the love that does justice (Martin Luther King, Jr.),⁵ transforming power (Alternatives to Violence),⁶ and cooperative power (Jonathan Schell).⁷ Nonviolence is a force for transformation, justice, and the well-being of all that is neither violent nor passive (Pace e Bene).⁸ It is a stand against violence without violence (Stellan Vinthagen).⁹ It is an active form of resistance to systems of privilege and domination, a philosophy for liberation, an approach to movement building, a tactic of non-cooperation, and a practice to transform the world (War Resisters League).¹⁰

The following general framing of nonviolence synthesizes this spectrum of ideas: “Nonviolence is a constructive force, an active method, and a way of life that challenges violence without using violence, transforms and resolves conflict, and seeks justice, peace and reconciliation for all.”¹¹

Gospel Nonviolence

This Sunday’s Gospel has one of the most typical, yet most difficult, teachings of Jesus: Love your enemies (Luke 6:27). Jesus delivered this address in Galilee, at the beginning of his public ministry: It was something of a “manifesto” presented to everyone, which Christ asked his disciples to accept, thus proposing to them in radical terms a model for their lives [...]. This page of the Gospel is rightly considered the “magna carta” of Christian nonviolence; it does not consist in surrendering to evil—as claims a false interpretation of “turn the other cheek” (Luke 6:29)—but in responding to evil with good (Romans 12:17–21), and thus breaking the chain of injustice. It is thus understood that nonviolence, for Christians, is not mere tactical behavior but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is convinced of God’s love and power, who is not afraid to confront evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Loving the enemy is the nucleus of the “Christian revolution.”

–Pope Benedict XVI¹²

Gospel nonviolence shares many elements of general nonviolence. At the same time, for Christians, Jesus’s life and teaching deepens and radicalizes it. Gospel nonviolence begins, not with strategies or methods, but with a foundational understanding of God—and God’s vision for humanity. Jesus made visible the nonviolence of God, who created the universe not out of violence

but out of love. Creation is good, as the Book of Genesis tells us, and human beings are made in the image of the God who declares this goodness. Nonviolence is the nature of creation and points us toward the “new creation,” where all will be reconciled.¹³

In his age rife with structural violence, Jesus proclaimed a nonviolent Reign of God rooted in the unconditional love of God. Jesus called on his disciples to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44); to offer no violent resistance to one who does evil (Matthew 5:39); to become peacemakers; to forgive and repent; and to be abundantly merciful (Matthew 5–7). Jesus embodied nonviolence by actively resisting systemic dehumanization, as when he defied the Sabbath laws to heal the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1–6); when he confronted the powerful at the Temple and purified it (John 2:13–22); when he peacefully but persistently challenged the men accusing a woman of adultery (John 8:1–11); and when, on the night before he died, he commanded Peter to put down his sword (Matthew 26:52).

In his preaching and his life, Jesus revealed that God calls us to the nonviolent life: to make peace with one another; to resist the violence and injustice that threaten or destroy this peace; and to foster a Church and world where the fullness of just peace is the birth right of all. As Pope Benedict XVI declared:

[Jesus] came with only the strength of love, totally without violence, even to the point of going to the Cross. This is what shows us the true face of God, that violence never comes from God, never helps bring anything good, but is a destructive means and not the path to escape difficulties. He is thus a strong voice against every type of violence. He strongly invites all sides to renounce violence, even if they feel they are right. The only path is to renounce violence, to begin anew with dialogue, with the attempt to find peace together, with a new concern for one another, a new willingness to be open to one another. This is Jesus’s true message: seek peace with the means of peace and leave violence aside.¹⁴

Christian nonviolence is a spiritual path rooted in the Gospels and a counter-intuitive strategy for the transformation of the world.

From Just War to Just Peace

War is the mother of ignorance, isolation, and poverty. Please tell the world there is no such thing as a just war. I say this as a daughter of war. We can't respond to violence with worse violence. In order to kill five violent men, we have to create ten violent men to kill them.

–Sr. Nazik Matty, Iraq¹⁵

In my Catholic country, our nuns and priests joined the guerrillas because of the just war paradigm. The Catholic paramilitaries pray to the Virgin before slaughtering people because of the just war paradigm.

–Fr. Francisco De Roux, S.J., Colombia¹⁶

In its first three centuries, the Church wagered that Jesus was utterly serious when he said, “love your enemies” and “peace be with you,” and therefore consistently sought to incarnate the way and discipline of spiritually grounded nonviolence. The early Church offers us a critically important and timely lesson. In our contemporary age of global violence, searing injustice, and catastrophic climate change, the Catholic Church is called to be a global leader and model for powerful nonviolent alternatives. But it can only be this beacon for mainstreaming nonviolent options if it clearly hews to nonviolence itself and explicitly rejects what the late scripture scholar Walter Wink called the “myth of redemptive violence.”¹⁷

This not only means making amends for its own violence, but also using the lens of Gospel nonviolence to renew vibrantly its life and mission, including its spirituality, formation, sacramental theology and practices, pastoral life, ministry, and Catholic social teaching. As one part of this renewal, the Church will be invited to renounce its adherence to and application of just war theories. Considering such a move will no doubt prompt debate, but this dialogue will likely generate the creative tension by which the glaring internal contradictions just war theories pose can become clearer; by which nonviolent options can be more seriously considered; and by which the Church's commitment to living the way of Jesus can become more integrally coherent. It will also invite a more robust exploration of a qualitatively different framework: nonviolent “just peace.”

Such a shift—from just war to just peace—will be part of a larger call to concretely embrace Jesus’s nonviolence as a matter of faith, as a process of Church-wide conversion and healing, and as a way to imagine, educate, and activate the nonviolent life at every level of the Church. The “just war” tradition obscures and undermines the heart of Jesus’s message by legitimating violent combat (and, by implication, the infrastructure, training, resources, and spiritual dedication to making such combat a reality) and, by extension, by providing a foundation for legitimating violence in general.¹⁸

Gospel nonviolence is broader than pacifism or only the refusal to do harm. An active force for peace, justice and reconciliation, nonviolence calls us to:

- Renounce our belief in violence
- Take a stand against violence
- Break the cycles of retaliatory violence
- Pursue nonviolent options

Just War theories undermine each of these. By institutionalizing the admissibility of the violent option, it reinforces a general, if often unconscious, belief in the power of violence. This belief is at loggerheads with a foundational faith in the God of peace and nonviolence that Jesus proclaimed and that the early Church professed. Such a belief has consequences. It weakens our resolute stand against violence. It limits our resolve and capacity to interrupt the cycles of retaliation and escalation. And it too often inhibits our inclination to exhaustively explore nonviolent alternatives. Under just war theologies, the logic and emphasis are on both limiting violence *and* at times justifying violent means, even though some versions are more restrictive than others. In turn, it too often undermines accounting for one’s own violence; stopping the cycle of violence; and pursuing the full range of creative nonviolent options.

Gospel nonviolence opens the space for life-giving alternatives; trains us for active love and healing rather than for fear and killing; and becomes a sign and channel of God’s nonviolent love for the Church and the world. By leaving open the possibility of justified violence, just war theories undermine these facets of Gospel nonviolence. Reliance on just war theories retards the development of nonviolent options; trains us to expect that Christian faith can accommodate

violence; and stands at cross-purposes to the key mission of the Church: being a sign and channel of God's nonviolent love.

We seek to live nonviolently because that is the way God calls us to live. At the same time, the way of nonviolence can often create possibilities for ending violence and for nurturing the seeds of peace and justice, as nonviolent engagement in contexts of enormous violence and injustice throughout the world has increasingly revealed. To reaffirm the centrality of Gospel nonviolence does not mean retreating from conflict, violence, or injustice. Indeed, it is often the most effective and robust response.¹⁹

Were the Church to embrace Gospel nonviolence in a thoroughgoing way, it would prompt both spiritually-grounded and practical alternatives—within a growing culture of Jesus's nonviolence within the global Catholic community—for standing against violence, including in circumstances for which just war theories are often invoked.

In faithfulness to Jesus's nonviolence and in response to the worldwide crisis of violence, we are called to nurture a new identity as nonviolent people in a nonviolent Church, with a clear and deliberate commitment to preaching, teaching, activating, and boldly proclaiming the dynamics of Jesus's nonviolence at every level of our global communion. To return good for evil, to break the chains of escalatory violence and revenge, to stand up to systemic injustice not with violence but with determined love, and to fully trust the God of love and truth rather than the power of violence—were these dimensions of the theology and spirituality of Gospel nonviolence more deliberately integrated into the life of the Church we would more clearly recognize the sacred way and work of peace, reconciliation and nonviolent transformation in our time of monumental crisis and opportunity.

It is in this spirit that the 2016 Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference urged the Church to no longer use or teach just war theories. As the conference document declares,

The Word of God, the witness of Jesus, should never be used to justify violence, injustice or war. [...] Too often the "just war theory" has been used to endorse rather than prevent or limit war. Suggesting that a "just war" is possible also undermines the moral imperative to develop tools and capacities for nonviolent transformation of conflict.²⁰

When reflecting on the role of just war teachings, Cardinal Turkson, Prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, said,

In that case, Pope Francis would say: "You don't stop an aggression by being an aggressor. You don't stop a conflict by inciting another conflict. You don't stop a war by starting another war." Turkson continued, "It doesn't stop. We've seen it all around us. Trying to stop the aggressor in Iraq has not stopped war. Trying to stop the aggressor in Libya has not stopped war. It's not stopped the war in any place. We do not stop war by starting another war."²¹

As part of its work, the 2016 Rome conference directly challenged the implicit assumption that violence is justified because "there is no other way" and, instead, promoted, the new moral framework of "nonviolence and just peace." Just peace includes building a culture of active nonviolence and using and spreading a wide range of nonviolent "best practices" now existing that can be deployed even in the midst of intractable conflicts, including third-party unarmed accompaniment, unarmed civilian protection, peacebuilding strategies, restorative justice processes, social-movement building, and solidarity work. As the conference document put it, "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. We recognize that peace requires justice and justice requires peacemaking."²²

But a Church-wide recommitment to nonviolence will extend well beyond the question of just war. Nonviolence in general, and Gospel nonviolence in particular, are not limited to issues of war and peace, or even narrow issues of social change. Nonviolence is a paradigm of the fulness of life that challenges—and supersedes—the paradigm of violence. It is an orientation and power fundamentally deeper than the orientation and power of violence and invites us to live lives that challenge violence and build constructive, nonviolent options. In spite of the catastrophe of violence we face today, numerous facets of the nonviolent life are growing and deepening, including nonviolent communication, compassionate listening, restorative justice peace circles, peaceful parenting, trauma healing, anti-racism training, diplomacy and nonviolent community-building for personal and interpersonal transformation. Nonviolence is the process of building the

infrastructure for nonviolent lives, relationships, communities, and cultures. It includes education and training; violence prevention and intervention; restorative and distributive justice; just peace and just peace approaches, including nonviolent peacemaking and peacebuilding, unarmed civilian protection, and civilian-based defense; nonviolent action and social movement-building; and the long-term process of fostering just civil societies and cultures of peace and nonviolence.

As the Church increasingly explores embracing the spirituality and practice of nonviolence, it is invited to reflect on how these and many other facets of the nonviolent life can be developed and deepened within its universal communion.

Integrating Nonviolence Throughout the Church

We need a clear message from the Church—from the pope to the grassroots—that the Church stands for nonviolence. [...] The Church is a mother and has a strong weapon: Love for everybody. In South Sudan, the Church has been with all the people but never ever advocated for weapons. [...] The Church has to be a place where there are no guns, and no fear. Whenever I am asked to turn over my weapons [at a checkpoint], I say: “My Lord has already come and taken them all away.”

–Bishop Paride Taban, South Sudan²³

Pope Francis is increasingly inviting the Church to re-commit itself to Jesus’s nonviolence. In a letter to Cardinal Blase Cupich of the Archdiocese of Chicago, Illinois (U.S.A.), Pope Francis wrote: “The consistent practice of nonviolence has broken barriers, bound wounds, and healed nations.”²⁴ In his 2017 World Day of Peace on nonviolence, the Pope pointed out that nonviolence is what Jesus taught and modelled, saying, “To be true followers of Jesus today [...] includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence.”²⁵ And toward the end of this message, he committed the Church to translate this resolve into action when he declared, “I pledge the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence.”²⁶

In commenting on this landmark text, Terrence Rynne writes, “The pope is signalling a true return to the sources for the Catholic Church: Sacred Scripture and the traditions of the early Church. Just as the return to the sources (*ressourcement*) by theologians such as Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, and Karl Rahner fuelled the renaissance of Catholic theology and the magnificent

documents of the Second Vatican Council, so also today the Pope is returning in a fresh way to the sources.”²⁷

Indeed, the Vatican II documents were magnificent—but it took many steps and much effort to begin to translate the impulses toward reform embedded within these towering declarations into concrete changes within the Church, a transformation that in many ways is still ongoing. Similarly, a shift which would see the Church affirm the centrality of Jesus’s nonviolence—moving nonviolence from the periphery of Catholic thought to the center of its life of faith—will require much commitment, creativity, and labor. One effort in this direction for several years has been undertaken by the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International, which has been exploring the advancement of Gospel nonviolence in the Church.²⁸

Most importantly, this possibility will be rooted in our openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, and our prayerful response to our God who calls humanity to the way of peace and nonviolence. As the 2016 Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference’s final statement put it, “In every age, the Holy Spirit graces the Church with the wisdom to respond to the challenges of its time. In response to what is a global epidemic of violence, which Pope Francis has labelled a ‘world war in installments,’ we are being called to invoke, pray over, teach and take decisive action.”²⁹ In this spirit, we invite the Church to:

- Integrate Gospel nonviolence explicitly throughout the life and work of the Church, including in its preaching, education, formation, and ministries at every level of the institution: its dioceses, parishes, agencies, schools, universities, seminaries, religious orders, and voluntary associations; supporting these initiatives by establishing an office focused on nonviolence and just peace within the Vatican (for example, at the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development) and in each diocese around the world;
- Develop nonviolence educational programming in Catholic universities (including departments, majors, and institutes in nonviolence and peace studies), seminaries (training in nonviolence preaching, theology, ethics, and pastoral formation), high schools, and elementary schools throughout the world;
- Encourage Catholics worldwide to study nonviolence and to engage energetically in the development of more effective nonviolent practices for protecting vulnerable

- communities, preventing violent conflict, transforming structures of violence, and promoting cultures of integral peace inside and outside the Church;
- Research and spread the biblical foundations of nonviolence in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures;
 - Recover and elucidate the contribution of nonviolence to classical themes of Christian theology, including Creation, Anthropology, Christology, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology;
 - Articulate and promote a new moral framework based on active nonviolence and just peace (including in the Catechism) that will enable the language of the institutional Church as a moral authority to be more consistent with the nonviolent creativity of the Gospel and its transformative initiatives which break the vicious cycles of violence, including on the Church's teaching on war and peace;
 - Advocate both inside and outside the Church for increased investment in key nonviolent practices, such as restorative justice, nonviolent communication, unarmed civilian protection, trauma-healing, nonviolent resistance, and nonviolent civilian-based defense;
 - Call on the world to develop comprehensive nonviolent approaches to the monumental challenges of our time, including war, nuclear weapons, the arms trade, poverty, economic inequality, racism, sexism, climate change, and environmental destruction; and
 - Learn from and partner with the world's religions to spread and activate nonviolence for peace and justice between religious communities and throughout the world.

Here are four foundational elements that would advance Gospel nonviolence in the Church: (1) a major Church statement on nonviolence; (2) nonviolence and pastoral life; (3) methods of nonviolence; and (4) reflections on Church's violence and nonviolence.

Major Church Teaching: A Foundation for the Nonviolent Shift

Building on papal and Church statements and teachings on nonviolence and peace promulgated over the past half-century,³⁰ a new major Church teaching on nonviolence (for example, an encyclical or other authoritative document) could provide a comprehensive theological, pastoral,

and ecclesiastical framework for the universal Church at every level to renew its commitment to the nonviolent way of Jesus.

While the process of affirming and embracing the centrality of nonviolence to the life of the Church could happen in various ways, an encyclical would boldly invite the Church, and the larger world, to focus clearly and thoughtfully on this foundational ethic. This document would:

- Invite the Church to recover the paradigm shift of nonviolence to which Jesus called us two millennia ago and invite the larger world to mainstream nonviolence in response to the crisis of monumental violence and injustice facing our planet.
- Call on the entire Church to embark on a spiritual journey of conversion, transformation, and healing rooted in a renewed commitment to the way of faithful nonviolence as lived out in so many facets of the Christian life.
- Engender numerous initiatives within the Church, including, for example, language in the Catechism affirming the centrality of nonviolence; the proclamation of a Holy Year of Nonviolence; and a call for a global formation process rooted in Gospel nonviolence.
- Provide a clear framework from which to address innumerable monumental challenges of our time, from the violence of rampant poverty to the catastrophe of war; from the destruction of the Amazon to the threat of nuclear weapons; from the systemic oppression of migrants to the unspeakable suffering caused by human trafficking; and many others. Nonviolence is a theological and practical framework that provides an integrating horizon or links these and many other forms of violence, and an encyclical could illuminate this.
- Offer a clear moral compass for Christians and non-Christians alike in confronting the realities of direct, cultural, and structural violence around the world, supported by specific approaches for transforming and healing this violence.

This major pronouncement would deepen and broaden the Church's teaching on nonviolence and form the basis for accelerating its theological research, catechesis, formation, and pastoral engagement in this regard. It would offer a comprehensive vision, but also lay out practical steps forward for explicitly fostering Gospel nonviolence at every level of the Church.

Gospel Nonviolence and Pastoral Life

The nonviolent renewal being imagined by the Universal Church will come fully alive when it is deeply rooted in the local parish. Following in the footsteps of Jesus and the early Church, each local parish is called to be a nonviolent community, inspired and formed by the call—and challenge—to live Gospel nonviolence.

The nonviolent parish is a space for worshipping the God of peace and nonviolence, learning the ways of nonviolence, supporting one another in living the nonviolent life, and being a resource for nonviolent transformation in one's neighborhood, larger community, and world. The nonviolent parish is supported liturgically (worship services, preaching, sacraments, and paraliturgical practices illuminating Jesus's nonviolence), pastorally (spirituality, formation, retreats, and trainings in the principles and methods of Gospel nonviolence, restorative justice, and conflict resolution), and ministerially (integration of nonviolence principles and methods in the parish's spectrum of direct service programs or social justice projects). Developing theology, programming, preaching resources, and training curricula to support these and other components of the nonviolent parish will be key to advancing Gospel nonviolence in the Church.

Promoting and Spreading the Methods of Nonviolence

Imagine all Catholics being trained to transform conflict and prevent violence in their families, their neighborhoods, their workplaces, their cities, and even in their churches.³¹ Imagine strong Catholic participation in programs for unarmed civilian protection around the world. Imagine if Catholics everywhere were encouraged to study and consciously join or even organize strategic nonviolent campaigns to achieve the just and peaceful world and the healthy planet for which we all long. Imagine if Catholics advocated actively for less spending on military and for increased investment in diplomacy, unarmed civilian protection, early warning systems, trauma healing, trauma-informed programs, and training in conflict transformation, as well as on just and sustainable development, education, and environmental healing. Affirming the centrality of Gospel nonviolence to the life and mission of the Church would more fully open these and many other possibilities of living the faithful, nonviolent life of Jesus in this time of crisis and opportunity.

The Church's Violence and Nonviolence

To call on the Church to embrace Gospel nonviolence means also respectfully urging it to grapple with its own violence. As the final document from the Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference declared, “We confess that the people of God has betrayed this central message of the Gospel many times, participating in wars, persecution, oppression, exploitation, and discrimination.”³² To affirm Gospel nonviolence is to confess our own violence and to perennially open ourselves, as people and as Church, to conversion to the way of Jesus’s nonviolence. At the heart of Gospel nonviolence is a spiritual journey comprised of renouncing our belief in violence, of breaking the chains of retaliatory violence, and of integrating this spirituality of transformation and healing at every level of our lives and our Church.

To urge the world to take up nonviolence requires the Church to humbly address its historical and contemporary violence. Bringing the spirit of the nonviolent Jesus to every level of the Church would include reckoning with clergy sexual violence and other patterns of violence and injustice by confessing this violence, acknowledging the harm, engaging in restorative justice, and opening to *metanoia* including personal and structural dimensions.

It is Gospel nonviolence that calls us to this process of conversion, new life, and restored community. To live Gospel nonviolence includes acknowledging our violence, seeking forgiveness, making amends, praying for healing, and seeking to foster unity and reconciliation.

Conclusion

The final statement of the 2016 Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference in Rome declared,

We live in a time of tremendous suffering, widespread trauma and fear linked to militarization, economic injustice, climate change, and a myriad of other specific forms of violence. In this context of normalized and systemic violence, those of us who stand in the Christian tradition are called to recognize the centrality of active nonviolence to the vision and message of Jesus; to the life and practice of the Catholic Church; and to our long-term vocation of healing and reconciling both people and the planet.³³

We stand at a crossroads. Were the Church to embrace nonviolence in a robust and thoroughgoing way, it would reclaim the nonviolence of Jesus and the early Church at the heart of its identity and spiritual journey in the Twenty-First Century. At the same time, it would likely contribute powerfully to a global shift mobilizing many nonviolent solutions to the monumental challenges of our time.

By deliberately recommitting to the core Gospel value of nonviolence and taking concrete steps to bring it alive throughout the institution and the world, the Church could help the entire global community step back from the brink of catastrophic violence and begin to move more forthrightly toward building a culture of just peace and environmental healing.

Notes

1. Emmanuel Katongole, “The Challenge, Complexity and Failure of Violence,” a presentation at “Path of Nonviolence: Toward a Culture of Peace,” a seminar held at the Vatican April 4–5, 2019. Dr. Katongole is a professor of Theology and Peace Studies and the University of Notre Dame.
2. This paper summarizes and excerpts the content of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative’s unpublished research document, “Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, Pastoral and Strategic Dimensions of Nonviolence” (July 2019), including its “Executive Summary” and “Introduction” (authored by Marie Dennis, Rose Berger, and Ken Butigan) and the chapter entitled, “Integrating Nonviolence throughout the Catholic Church” (authored by Felix Mushobozi, Boniface Mendes, Marie Dennis, Rose Berger, and Ken Butigan).
3. Pope Francis, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” The Holy See, January 1, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-1-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html.
4. The word “nonviolence,” while it has a long history in other traditions, is a relatively new term in Christianity. Increasingly, however, theologians, Church leadership, and Christians in many parts of the world have come to see that this word most effectively characterizes Jesus’s way—a way that combines *both* an unmistakable rejection of violence *and* the power of love and truth in action for justice, peace, and integrity of creation. Nonviolence is a paradigm of the fullness of life, which its etymological roots shine light on.

Nonviolence is the English translation of the Sanskrit term “ahimsa” (literally “non-violence”). Gandhi drew on this ancient term to convey his powerful, active, and deeply grounded approach. As nonviolence scholar Michael Nagler writes in *The Search for a Nonviolent Future* (Novato, CA: Inner Ocean Publishing, 2004),

In Sanskrit abstract nouns often name a fundamental positive quality indirectly, by negating its opposite. Thus, courage is conveyed by “abhaya,” which literally means “non-fear”; or we encounter “akrodha,” “non-anger,” for “kindness,” and the Buddha’s “avera,” “non-hatred,” meaning “love.” The reason ancient India’s great thinkers expressed themselves in this apparently oblique way is that phenomena such as love, absolute courage, and compassion are primordial things that cannot be fully expressed in fallible, conditioned human language. [...] “Ahimsa” is not really a negative term [...]. “Ahimsa” suggests something profoundly positive, which would not be possible to name directly. “Ahimsa,” a kind of double negative, actually stands for something so original that we cannot quite capture it with our weak words.

5. Greg Moses, *Revolution of Conscience: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Philosophy of Nonviolence* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997).
6. “Transforming Power,” Alternatives to Violence Project International, 2019, <https://avp.international/section/section-1-the-building-blocks-other-workshop-content/transforming-power/>.
7. Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and The Will of the People* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003).
8. “Why Nonviolence?”, Campaign Nonviolence: A Project of Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service, <https://paceebene.org/whynonviolence>.
9. Stellan Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works* (London: Zed Books, 2015).
10. “Nonviolence 101,” War Resisters League, <https://www.warresisters.org/store/nonviolence-101>.

11. “The Power and Practice of Nonviolence,” a chapter in “Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, Pastoral and Strategic Dimensions of Nonviolence” (July 2019). This same chapter offers this more detailed overview of some of the facets of nonviolence:

Nonviolence has increasingly been unleashed to create powerful social change. As Gandhi said, “Nonviolence is as old as the hills.” Humanity has been exercising this power from its beginning and has therefore survived and transformed the destructiveness of escalating and retaliatory violence. Beginning in the Twentieth Century, this momentum accelerated with Gandhi’s application of nonviolence to win Indian independence and with the use of disciplined nonviolence by the U.S. civil rights movement. These and other pioneering campaigns have inspired countless nonviolent struggles. Some examples include successful pro-democracy movements in Spain and Portugal (1970s), the Philippines (1986), Chile (1980s), Argentina (1980s), Soviet bloc states including the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, etc. (1989); the thwarted coup in the U.S.S.R. (1991); South Africa (1980s–1990s); Indonesia (1998); East Timor (2000); Serbia (2000); Georgia (2003); Ukraine (2004); Liberia (2005); and Tunisia and Egypt (2011). These are not isolated cases. The Global Nonviolent Action Database has documented over 1,000 nonviolent campaigns, with many of them successfully achieving their objectives. But nonviolence is not limited to civil resistance or large-scale social change. It is a transformative process applicable to all dimensions of life. It is personal, interpersonal and social-structural. It mobilizes nonviolent approaches, nonviolent resistance and nonviolent action for social change—but also the everyday techniques and practices of nonviolence.

12. Pope Benedict XVI, “Angelus,” The Holy See, February 18, 2007, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20070218.html.

13. For a fuller discussion of these formulations, see “Biblical Foundations of Nonviolence,” a chapter in “Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, Pastoral and Strategic Dimensions of Nonviolence” (July 2019).
14. Pope Benedict XVI, Interview, The Holy See, April 11, 2011, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110422_intervista.html.
15. Dominican Sr. Nazik Matty, presentation, Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference, the Vatican, April 11–13, 2016.
16. Francisco De Roux, SJ, presentation, Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference, the Vatican, April 11–13, 2016.
17. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992).
18. See David Carroll Cochran, *Catholic Realism and the Abolition of War* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) for a systematic critique of the Catholic Church’s just war theology. See also the case for just peace as a “new moral framework” replacing just war in two chapters of “Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, Pastoral and Strategic Dimensions of Nonviolence” (July 2019): “A New Moral Framework for Catholic Theology” and “A New Moral Framework Applied.”
19. Empirical research has demonstrated that nonviolent approaches are twice as effective as violent ones. See Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). See also documented “just peace” case studies in Appendix 2, “Examples of the New Moral Framework Applies, in “Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, Pastoral and Strategic Dimensions of Nonviolence” (July 2019).
20. “An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence,” Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, 2016, <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/final-statement-an-appeal-to-the-catholic-church-to-re-commit-to-the-centrality-of-gospel-nonviolence/>.
21. Joshua J. McElwee, “Cardinal Turkson: ‘We do not stop war by starting another war,’” *National Catholic Reporter* September 20, 2016,

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/people/cardinal-turkson-we-do-not-stop-war-starting-another-war#.V-GI-C6WIRU.twitter>.

22. “An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence.”
23. Bishop Paride Taban, presentation, Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference, the Vatican, April 11–13, 2016.
24. Letter from Pope Francis to Cardinal Blase Cupich, April 4, 2017.
25. Pope Francis, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.”
26. Ibid.
27. Terrence Rynne, “Why Pope Francis’ World Day of Peace Message is Such a Breakthrough,” Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, 2017,
<https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2017/04/10/why-pope-francis-world-day-of-peace-message-is-such-a-breakthrough/>.
28. The Vatican has co-sponsored two important gatherings advancing nonviolence. From April 11–13, 2016, the Holy See’s Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (now the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development) and Pax Christi International co- led a landmark conference at the Vatican entitled “Nonviolence and Just Peace.” From April 4–5, 2019, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and Pax Christi International’s Catholic Nonviolence Initiative co-sponsored a follow-up gathering entitled “Path of Nonviolence: Towards a Culture of Peace.” The 2016 conference brought together participants from around the world who represented a broad spectrum of Church experience in creative nonviolence and peacebuilding to contribute to a renewed Catholic understanding of nonviolence. In the wake of this gathering, Pax Christi International launched the global Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI), which has played an important role in moving these possibilities forward and has seen many developments over its first three years. Pope Francis’s 2017 World Day of Peace message was the first ever on nonviolence, a theme that was proposed by conference participants. Many regional and local conferences on nonviolence have been held around the world, including at a series of Catholic universities. Curricula and publications promoting the way and methods of nonviolence have been produced. And since the 2016 conference, Pope Francis has energetically called for nonviolence throughout the world in many statements and

interviews. Beginning in 2017 the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative organized an international popular process of discussion, discernment and research on key themes related to nonviolence and just peace, involving theologians, academics, peacemakers, and some Church leadership. The purpose of this process, encouraged by Vatican officials, was to gather and produce material that could be a resource for a potential encyclical or other major Church teaching. The April 2019 Rome consultation focused on these findings.

29. “An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Recommit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence.”
30. For an overview of these documents, see “The Voice of the Church on Nonviolence— Papal Statements and Church Documents,” a chapter in “Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, Pastoral and Strategic Dimensions of Nonviolence” (July 2019).
31. This section is from Marie Dennis, “Integrating Nonviolence Throughout the Catholic Church,” chapter in Catholic Nonviolence Initiative’s unpublished research document, “Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World: Biblical, Theological, Ethical, Pastoral and Strategic Dimensions of Nonviolence” (July 2019).
32. “An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Recommit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence.”
33. Ibid.