

PEACE: The Challenge of Living the Catholic Tradition

“Stop looking for peace; give yourselves where you are. Stop looking at yourselves -- look instead at your brothers and sisters in need. Be close to those God has given you in community today; work with the references which God has given you today. Ask how you can better love your brothers and sisters. Then you will find peace” (Vanier 1989, 17).

“Barbarians overwhelm Europe while abbots condemn as murder the shedding of blood, even in a just war, and stop armies single-handedly with a message of peace; knights wage ‘holy wars’ while friars and missionaries speak of love and toleration of the non-Christians and troubadours mock the ways of the soldier; Renaissance popes lay waste to cities while Humanist scholars move readers to peace and the imitation of Christ; modern bishops bless field artillery while college students seek to live the message of the gospels; nations threaten nuclear destruction and citizens prepare for death or lonely survival while popes and bishops speak for peace and hope” (Musto 1986, 4).

Introduction

Catholic tradition as a whole supports and favors peacemaking efforts. In identification with and imitation of Christ, the consistent practices expressing the beliefs of the Catholic Church in the world are peace-seeking. Some insist that fidelity to this Catholic tradition at times requires the use of violent forces. The just war theory and the Crusades movement are examples of justified violence in Catholic Church history. The conclusion that some peacemaking efforts require violence is only validly reached, however, by the assumption of a misconception: in order for violence to be justified in peacemaking efforts, one must assume that the faithful living of the Catholic Peace Tradition requires one’s engagement in violence. This is a false assumption, as we will see. When we examine how peace has been defined and sought after in the history of the Church, it becomes clear that Catholics have consistently upheld peace and condemned violence. Hence, we must conclude that no peacemaking efforts may deem violent forces a necessity. In the tradition of the Catholic Church, we are challenged to continue working for peace in ways that are not violent, but peaceful.

I. The Historical Development of Peace

To show that the Catholic Church has consistently upheld peace and condemned violence, it is necessary that we examine how peace has been sought after and lived in the tradition of the Catholic Church. Dr. Ronald G. Musto, a professor of Medieval and Renaissance History, has completed extensive research to compose an historical account of peacemaking from a Catholic viewpoint. I briefly summarize here his work compiled in *The Catholic Peace Tradition*.

The meaning of peace and the various historical efforts made for peace can be traced from biblical to modern times. Between the period of 33 – 300 AD, from the time of Paul to Constantine, Christians actively affirmed non-violence. Their positive peacemaking efforts aimed at converting Rome and overturning its social and ethical life to reflect a new relationship between God and humanity. They understood peace to begin in an individual’s heart, necessarily working outward to some form of external manifestation, resulting in institutional change. Early Fathers of the Church spoke against war and emphasized killing as a mortal sin. When forced to acknowledge the Roman gods, Christians offered their lives in martyrdom; by imitation of Christ they hoped to usher in the new kingdom.

Between the second and seventh centuries, between the reigns of Constantine and Charlemagne, the early church came to be accepted and favored by the Roman Empire. The church and the empire mutually influenced each other for the sake of survival, becoming increasingly integrated. Joint efforts were made to assist in civil life, including military service, and a distinction was made between inner peace and the external condition of peace. Peace became associated with one's right to order and harmony, determined by the divine justice administered through the clergy.

Within an increasingly imperialized church, Christian thinkers such as Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo retained the gospel meaning of peace. Ambrose highlighted for the early Christians that the Lord, not weapons, protects them. Augustine contributed to the growing dichotomy between the internal attitude of 'true' peace and the external 'false' peace of the world, but condemned violence utilized for peacemaking as "a perverted imitation of God" (Musto 1986, 49). Numerous men and women in this period boldly defended justice by nonviolent means.

A rise of Islam in North Africa and Spain in the seventh and eighth centuries focused peacemaking efforts on the protection of the oppressed and nonviolent evangelization in the face of pagan hostility and violent Christian kings. The rise of Charlemagne's dynasty in the Western Roman Empire (800s), the re-initiation of invasions, and a renewed militarization of the Christian society, however, altered Christian concepts of peace. For the sake of protection from external threats, and for internal order, new theories emerged to relate the political and spiritual dimensions of leadership in Christian society. Peace, understood to be a gift provided by the empire, was imposed from above and guaranteed by force (Musto 1986, 63). An increasing distinction was made between external peace (social order) and internal peace (of the heart, mostly restricted to clerics and monks). Those who did not recognize the supreme power of the Christian emperor were considered enemies of the faith, and holy war was justified by models found in the Hebrew Scriptures. The peace of the gospels was in large part relegated to the clergy; however, some prominent intellectual leaders continued to ponder and apply the New Testament meaning to contemporary society. Several monastic voices expressed a biblical understanding of peace, and provided living examples of a peace tradition that aided the poor and sought after social justice. Saints abandoned their military service for monastic life.

The First Crusade, launched in 1095 by Pope Urban II at the Council of Clermont, defined Moslems as disturbers of Christian peace and claimed the cross as a symbol of peace and penance. "Peace had once again come to be defined by those who wielded political power, a power maintained by violence" (Musto 1986, 76). Voluntary poverty movements arose in criticism of the Crusades and seeking alternatives to violence. Groups of lay people renounced wealth and lived in simplicity and peace, devoting themselves to works of mercy in imitation of the gospel (Musto 1986, 81). The religious orders of Francis of Assisi and Dominic of Guzman emerged by inspirations to "poverty and a life of wandering preaching, the attempt to confront and win over heretics by nonviolence through reason and ethical persuasion" (Musto 1986, 83). From these arose Third orders, the lay affiliates of the religious orders, and other popular peace movements formed to focus on peacemaking efforts. By the late thirteenth century, opposition to the Crusades had become so widespread that the *Opus tripartitum* (Work in Three Parts), an unintentional "monument to peacemaking in the era of the Crusades" (Musto 1986, 96), was composed at the pope's request.

Between 1100 and 1500, peace became more closely associated with justice and a mistaken theory of just war developed. A Roman notion Christianized by Augustine and carried into the Middle Ages by Isidore of Seville, a war was considered just if it was waged by legitimate authority, had a just cause, and was fought with the intention of the restoration of peace. While such requirements

condemned aggressive or vengeful war for the sake of acquiring wealth or territory, “the theory of just war is not Christian in any proper sense of the word: it has no biblical, theological, or canonical foundation” (Musto 1986, 104). The papacy at times protected pacifist groups who refused to take up arms, but excommunicated many who disobeyed the command to conform. “In the last analysis, when all the powers of authority command a course of action that runs contrary to God’s law, truth resides in the totality of the Mystical Body. But the individuals who make up that body must still decide according to the truth, like Christ and the early martyrs, risking even persecution and death” (Musto 1986, 109).

New political and social organization in Europe, initiated by an increase in monarchical power that led to conquering of lands and accumulation of wealth, fostered a glorification of war. The theatre, pulpit, and even children’s textbooks became avenues to stress an unquestioned obedience to rulers and to criticize pacifists as traitors. Renaissance Humanists “used their considerable literary talents and a command of the printing press to confront the power lusts and warmongering of Europe’s rulers before a wide and receptive audience.” (Musto 1986, 135). Thomas More entered King Henry VII’s service to subtly influence society toward reform. He attacked the values, social behavior, education, and pastimes of the ruling classes in his efforts to speak against war and violence. Desiderius Erasmus, after witnessing Pope Julius II’s armored and victorious entry into Bologna in 1506, worked diligently to condemn war and the use of weapons (Musto 1986, 122). Making a plea for peace based on the call of Christ to ‘love one another,’ he said, “If we acknowledge Christ as our authority, Christ who is Love, and who taught nothing . . . that is not love and peace, come, let us follow him, not only in name . . . but in our actions, in our lives”(qtd. in Musto 1986, 127).

Between the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), the Catholic peace tradition was diminished by the rise of absolutism, the Counter Reformation, and overall decline in attentiveness to Catholic spirituality (Musto 1986, 153). Doctrinal dissent was prohibited among intellectuals -- enforced by the Inquisition and the *Index of Prohibited Books* -- and a defensive stance, fearful of ‘heresy,’ regulated education. Lay participation in the life of the Church was drastically decreased. With little room for dissent or positive peacemaking, Catholic spirituality became more internal and passive: the movements of Jansenism and Quietism stressed inner peace and rejected religious activism (Musto 1986, 155). Nationalism of the 18th century replaced Christian values with forced militarism and the rejection of Christian morality, and most printed works produced by intellectuals to spread the original message of the Humanists were prohibited by the *Index* (until 1965, when the ban was removed).

The wars of the 20th century caused serious reflection on the meaning of peace. Around the time of the Vatican Councils, the Catholic Church shifted from papal authoritarianism and fear to a theology of liberation and discovery of the truth and spiritual strength residing not only in its head but in all its members.

Papal thought became characterized by its increasingly sharp critique of capitalism and its systems of exploitation, by a doctrine that the rights of private property were limited by social function, by a rededication to problems of poverty, social repression and exploitation, by a concern for workers, and by a belief that government must intervene on behalf of the disenfranchised, the poor, and the exploited” (Musto 1986, 169).

Catholic social action blossomed to support human rights, international cooperation, and a world order.

The Vatican became established as an international peacemaker largely through the efforts of popes from Leo XIII to John XXIII. Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) defined the foundation of peace to be charity and justice and “supported an international forum that would guarantee peace without diminishing the rights of sovereign states” (Musto 1986, 171). Benedict XV (1914-1922), titled the “Pontiff of Peace,” called for peace without victory during World War I, even going so far as to propose peace plans for each side. Pius XI (1922-1939), in his encyclical *Ubi Arcano Dei*, stressed justice as the means to removing obstacles to true Christian love and for attaining peace. During World War II, Pius XII’s diplomatic and internationalist approach excluded any outright condemnation of the genocide committed against the Jews and other minorities. Despite this seemingly silent consent to the Nazis, widely criticized, Pius XII had a record of a similarly silent effort to save the Jews, Slavs, and other displaced and persecuted people during the war: “more than 800,000 Jews were saved through the pope’s offices” (Musto 1986, 176).

Resistance to the Second World War was often passive, involving protests of Nazi officials and increased attendance at processions and religious services; emphasis on patriotism and pride in the nation (not the regime) were the justification used to fight in Hitler’s wars, and a growing distinction between Catholics’ ‘orthodox piety’ and ‘secular business and politics’ allowed good Catholics to also be good Germans. The majority of Catholic leaders trusted in diplomacy and patriotism, and the laity trusted the leaders, which hindered peacemaking efforts at a time when most leadership failed the Catholic Peace Tradition. Even in these times, there were numerous individuals who risked their lives to stand for truth and speak for peace. In courageous acts that led many to martyrdom, they stressed that obedience to authority was important only insofar as it did not prevent obedience to God.

With the election of Pope John XXIII came a great shift in the way the Church viewed peace: “A moral theology concerned with defining and limiting war moved to a theology of peace aimed at implementing the Sermon on the Mount” (Musto 1986, 187). John XXIII, while retaining a hierarchical view of the Church, placed an emphasis on the role of the laity and the centrality of each individual in human institutions. The search for peace became focused on the needs of every individual to contribute as well as to be provided for. The meaning of peace and justice took into consideration the distinctions between the rich and poor, and the imbalanced distribution and use of world resources. On April 11, 1963, John XXIII presented the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) as an address to the entire world. In it, he identified the priority of the individual conscience and of obedience to God over any human authority, and described hopes for peace to contribute to the extermination of racism, the equal sharing of resources, and mutual cooperation and Christian love lived between all people, classes, and nations.

The Second Vatican Council document *Guadium et Spes* (1965) stressed that peace is not something imposed but something rising from within each person to maintain the world order God created and intends. The document defined war as the product of human sin and, while reserving the right of a country to defend itself, challenged the world to address the needs of the Third World and to work for a community of nations that cooperates mutually in economic, social, and political efforts to achieve justice and peace. Vatican II “marked the end of the church’s ambition to secular power and reaffirmed its biblical mission to the poor and the oppressed.” (Musto 1986, 193)

Paul VI vigorously continued John XXIII’s program of reform and call for peace. In the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples), he made connections between the arms race, Third World poverty, and the need to redefine peace based on the challenges set forth by Vatican II. He proposed the new definition of peace to be ‘development’, encompassing cultural,

social, political, and economic aspects of life. Stressing that peace is not merely the absence of war but a daily seeking and following of God and the order intended by God for creation, he encouraged Christians to take initiative in implementing peacemaking efforts into local customs and laws.

II. Current Meaning of Peace

Within the past 20 years, the Catholic hierarchy has made statements in defense of the biblical notion of peace (the peace of Jesus, the peace of the kingdom of God, the peace of the original and intended order for all of creation). Efforts to distinguish appropriate actions for peace from unacceptable forms of ‘peacemaking’ have been made in bishops’ statements, addressing issues of morality. The 1983 *Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response* did not eliminate -- but drastically reduced -- the possibility of a just war. Church leaders and laity alike have offered statements and action to support peace with prayer, protests, and concrete action.

Peace, in the most modern sense of its definition, emphasizes the unity and harmony among all of humanity, and right order among all of creation (Komonchak, Collins, and Lane 1987, 749). Built on justice and fidelity to God’s law, the Messianic hope that anticipates Christ’s return longs for and believes in the ultimate reign of peace. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* connotes peace with charity, respect for and development of human life, fraternity and free communication among all. Peace denounces murderous anger and hatred, revenge and bloodshed, the destruction of select peoples (ethnic groups, minorities) or vast areas and its inhabitants (CCC [1994], 556). The *Catechism* urges all to pray, and obliges all to work for the avoidance of war. Citing the fifth commandment’s forbiddance of the intentional destruction of life, the Catholic Church severely limits justification for war to a last resort: “governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed” (CCC [1994], 554). Strict conditions are placed on the cause for and means of engaging in war.

In faithful continuation of the Catholic Peace Tradition, Pope John Paul II was a consistent spokesperson for peace, taking advantage of occasions dedicated to peace to reiterate the words of his predecessors. Highlighting John XXIII’s confidence in the possibility of peace, John Paul II’s message for the January 1, 2003 World Day of Peace challenged us to further the revolutionizing of economic and social progress that began in *Pacem in Terris*. He envisioned a peace that requires all humans to engage in mutual cooperation to “defend human rights, bolster global institutions, aid the poor and build a culture of peace” (Pacem in Terris 40 Years Later [2003]).

III. Unanswered Questions

The Catholic Peace tradition is represented throughout history. An active force in the world that seeks positive reconciliation among people and with God, peace -- in the proper understanding of its definition -- is based on love. Peace is the way to, and the final result of, salvation. There is little doubt as to the meaning of peace; however, many questions remain unanswered as we seek to allow Christ to actualize the peace of God’s kingdom in our midst.

The peace that is intended by God in the order of creation has been the hope, the prayer, and the goal of peacemaking efforts throughout the history of the Catholic Church. Still, it remains an ideal. Why, if the desire for peace is essential to humanity, has peace not yet been attained in so many areas of our world? Why do we still have a “Third World”? How are governments allowed to utilize oppressive forces that destroy rather than provide freedom? How is disproportionate use of world resources

tolerated? In this age of technology and communication, why do we resort to violence in efforts to resolve conflicts? Such questions challenge us to consider what peace demands of us today.

In our world situation, what alternatives can we offer to violence in effective peacemaking efforts? How can injustices of oppression be addressed without the force of aggression and violence? What can be done to honor commitments made to the poor (*Pacem in Terris 40 Years Later* [2003])? How can the “xenophobia which closes nations in on themselves, ideologies which foster racial hatred or religious intolerance, and unjust or arbitrary border closings which separate families” (Komonchak, Collins, and Lane 1987, 752) be converted to policies of peace? How can we continue and deepen “processes already in place to meet the almost universal demand for participatory ways of exercising political authority, and [foster] transparency and accountability at every level of public life” (John Paul II 2002)?

The challenges are numerous, and demand our attention. Pope John Paul II offered an avenue through which we may creatively channel our modern peacemaking efforts when he chose “Media at the Service of Authentic Peace” as the title for his message for the 2003 World Communication Day (June 1, 2003). John Paul II observed that “peace, justice, and social stability are still lacking in many parts of the world. . . . [That] terrorism, conflict, . . . threats and counter-threats, injustice, exploitation, and assaults upon the dignity and sanctity of human life . . . are dismaying realities of our times” (John Paul II 2003). Meanwhile, he noted, “the power of the media to shape human relationships and influence political and social life . . . has enormously increased” (John Paul II 2003). The media must be used to communicate truth, break down barriers of mistrust, offer free access to sufficient information, bring peoples together in understanding and respect, and rise above commercial concerns to serve the needs of humanity (John Paul II 2003).

Besides the media of technology, every human is a medium of communication. We must challenge others to be representatives of peace, and we must be communicators of peace ourselves. We must be willing to work for reconciliation in areas of conflict, we must volunteer our wealth to alleviate the poverty of others, we must have compassion for our neighbor, protect and share our resources, speak with love and *be* peace. The Catholic Peace Tradition stands behind and before us; let us be moved to live it as our own.

Conclusion

Clearly, Catholic tradition –founded in Sacred Scripture -- supports and favors peacemaking efforts. The “moral and religious commitment to a positive peacemaking based on the gospels . . . finds nourishment from a long, long history of individuals and groups, clerical and lay, men and women, of all social levels and occupations, who have never let the message of peace be stilled” (Musto, 1986). Fidelity to this tradition prohibits the use of aggressive forces of violence, and challenges us today with questions of practical and effective application of peacemaking efforts:

The fullness of eschatological peace remains before us in hope and yet the gift of peace is already ours in the reconciliation effected in Jesus Christ. . . . Because we have been gifted with God’s peace in the risen Christ, we are called to our own peace and to the making of peace in our world. As disciples and as children of God, it is our task to seek for ways in which to make the forgiveness, justice and mercy and love of God visible in a world where violence and enmity are too often the norm. (U.S. Bishops 1983)

Identification: Sr. Donna Jean Kemmetmueller is a member of the Daughters of Saint Paul, an international congregation dedicated to media evangelization. She joined the Pauline community in 1993 and has been involved in the apostolate of communicating Christ in various capacities since that time. Currently, she resides in St. Louis, MO where she assists in the apostolic work her community is engaged in through their Pauline Book and Media Center. Sr. Donna Jean completed her M.A. in Theology at St. Louis University in January, 2005.

REFERENCE LIST

- Broderick, Robert C. 1976. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. [1994]. Mission Hills, CA: Benziger Publishing Co.
- Clark, Robert Michael. 1994. *Towards a Theology of Peace: Contributions to an Understanding of Non-Violence From the Thought of Bernard Lonergan*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services.
- John Paul II. 2002. *Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment, Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*. <http://www.zenit.org>; accessed 18 December 2002.
- John Paul II. 2003. *Media at the Service of Authentic Peace, Papal Message for World Communications Day, 2003*. <http://www.zenit.org>; accessed 25 January 2003.
- Komonchak, Joseph A., Mary Collins, and Dermont A. Lane, eds. 1987. *The New Dictionary of Theology*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Musto, Ronald G. 1986. *The Catholic Peace Tradition*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- _____. 1987. *The Peace Tradition in the Catholic Church: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- _____. 1993. *Catholic Peacemakers: A Documentary History, Volume I: From the Bible to the Era of the Crusades*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- _____. 1996. *Catholic Peacemakers: A Documentary History, Volume II: From the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century, Part I*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- National Conference of Catholic Bishops. 1993. *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*. <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/harvest.htm>; accessed March 2003.
- Pacem in Terris 40 Years Later. [2003]. *America*, 20-27 January, 3.
- U.S. Bishops. 1983. *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. <http://www.osjspm.org/cst/cp.htm>; accessed March 2003.
- Vanier, Jean. 1989. *Community and Growth*. New York, NY: Paulist Press.