



CHAPTER 8

Roman Catholic Teachings on Violence and Peace: The Credible Re-enactment of the Kingdom

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When Pope Francis announced at his now traditional press conference on the flight home from his Apostolic Visit to Japan in November 2019 that he was declaring the use of nuclear weapons immoral and adding a

Positionality: I write as a scholar of Catholic social ethics and a practising Roman Catholic.

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prohibition of their use to the Catechism of the Catholic Church,¹ he was continuing the evolution of teachings on violence and peace that has been occurring within Catholicism since the times of the earliest Christian communities. The teaching of the Catholic Church on all matters is subject to considered and regular reinterpretation as the institution seeks to ‘explain to all how it understands the presence and function of the Church in the world today.’² From the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) onwards, the Church transformed its self-understanding, no longer viewing itself as a state actor but rather as ‘a witness to the truth’, with its role being ‘to save, not to judge, to serve not to be served.’³ This was and is achieved by a continual examination ‘of the signs of the times’ which are interpreted ‘in the light of the Gospel.’⁴ Whilst this has resulted in developments in teaching and practice in a number of areas of Catholic social teaching, such as the creation of the preferential option for the poor, nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in Catholic social teachings on violence and peace. Here, the Church has tethered itself increasingly firmly to the concept of Just Peace—a definition of which it finds in particular in the Gospels. Thus, whilst still acknowledging that direct violence, at times, can be inevitable but not condoning its practice, the Catholic Church now uses the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments to offer the

¹ ‘The Pope: not using or possessing nuclear arms will be added to the Catechism’, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-11/pope-francis-press-conference-japan-airplane.html>, accessed 18 March 2021. The updated passage has yet to be included in the Catechism which is currently being updated. However, in his most recent encyclical, he once more emphasised the immorality of nuclear weapons. *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 3 October 2020, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html, accessed 18 March 2021, §262.

² Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 7 December 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, accessed 18 March 2021, §2.

³ *Gaudium et Spes*, §3. To understand this change in attitude and its consequences see: Kenneth R Himes, *Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict, Cooptation, and Cooperation*, (Maryknoll NY, Orbis, 2013), Emile Perreau-Saussine, *Catholicism and Democracy: An Essay in the History of Political Thought*, trans. Richard Rex, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011) and Maria Power, *Catholic Social Teaching and Theologies of Peace in Northern Ireland: Cardinal Cahal Daly and the Pursuit of the Peaceable Kingdom*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, §4.

concepts and practices needed to overcome the structural violence⁵ that so frequently acts as a precursor to conflict and war. This chapter, which I write as a Roman Catholic and a scholar of Catholic social teaching, will argue that Roman Catholic teaching on violence and peace now focuses on dealing with the causes of violence, and that the ‘responsibility to protect’ can, and should, be achieved by creating a social order based upon the teachings of Christ. First, however, we will turn to the relationship of scripture to tradition in Catholicism, seeking to explain how the interplay between these two elements led to the creation of Catholic social teaching of which teaching on violence and peace forms a vital part.

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

In discerning the canon of scripture, the church was also discerning and defining [its] own identity. Henceforth scripture was to function as a mirror in which the church could continually rediscover [its] identity and assess, century after century, the way in which [it] constantly responds to the Gospel and equips itself to be an apt vehicle of its transmission.⁶

For Roman Catholics, scripture is the single source of divine revelation that is passed down through generations through tradition.⁷ As a community of believers, Roman Catholics are ‘servants of the word of God’.⁸ The Gospels have pre-eminence as they are the ‘principal witness to the life and teaching of the word incarnate.’⁹ But, the Roman Catholic Church stresses that the bible must be approached as a whole. Since 1943 and the

⁵ Structural violence refers to a form of violence wherein some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs and denying their human dignity. The term was first used in 1969. See Johan Galtung, ‘Violence, Peace, and Peace Research’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 1969, vol. 6, no. 3, 167–191.

⁶ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 23 April 1993, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/pbcinterpretation.htm, accessed 19 March 2021, 32.

⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 18 November 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html, accessed 19 March 2021, §7.

⁸ *Dei Verbum*, §10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, §18.

promulgation of the encyclical,¹⁰ *Divino Afflante Spiritu*,¹¹ Catholic biblical scholars have been allowed to make full use of the methods and tools of modern biblical scholarship. This has resulted in a deepening of ‘the Bible’s influence on theology’ with ‘interest in the Bible [growing] among Catholics with the resultant progress in Christian life.’¹² The influence of this upon our understanding of violence and peace has been clear, with the move towards a just peace approach being the result. Tradition, which is the ‘process by which revelation and grace are mediated’,¹³ resulting in the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, enables scripture to be read with the fresh eyes demanded by the new challenges facing each generation.¹⁴ Scripture and tradition are accepted as equals.¹⁵ A teaching which Yves Congar explains thus: ‘Tradition is not a secondary source, alongside scripture from which comes a part not contained in scripture, of the truths of faith but another and complimentary way of handing on these truths.’¹⁶ Together, they form the ‘deposit of faith.’¹⁷

Roman Catholics believe that ‘scripture does not interpret itself.’¹⁸ All members of the Church have a role to play in the interpretation of scripture. This is approached with a ‘hermeneutic of trust’ as ‘it is interpreted in a way that presumes its status as an authentic means of divine self-communication.’¹⁹ Scripture must be read in faith and with deep prayer as a service to the community and the mission of the Church. Roman Catholic interpretation of scripture involves three steps:

¹⁰ An encyclical is the highest form of papal communication, and the contents are official Roman Catholic teaching.

¹¹ Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu: On Promoting Biblical Studies*, 30 September 1943, http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_30091943_divino-afflante-spiritu.html, accessed 19 March 2021.

¹² *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p. 4.

¹³ Stephen F Miletic, ‘Sacred Tradition’ in Russell Shaw (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Catholic Doctrine*, (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 1997), 603–606, 603.

¹⁴ Thus, ‘the development of tradition does not produce new scriptural texts, but rather leads us to read these texts with new eyes.’ Frederick C Bauerschmidt and James J Buckley, *Catholic Theology: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 20.

¹⁵ *Dei Verbum*, §9.

¹⁶ Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: A Historical and Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough, (London: Macmillan, 1967), 64.

¹⁷ 1 Tim 6:20.

¹⁸ Archbishop Charles Chaput, ‘Introduction’, *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, (London: Catholic Truth Society, no date), 3–7, 5.

¹⁹ Bauerschmidt and Buckley, *Catholic Theology*, 19.

1. To hear the word from within one's own concrete situation;
2. To identify the aspects of the present situation highlighted or put in question by the biblical text;
3. To draw from the fullness of meaning contained in the biblical text, those elements are capable of advancing the present situation in a way that is productive and consonant with the saving will of God.²⁰

Through this process, Roman Catholics must try to discern 'what riches God, in his generosity, has bestowed on the nations; at the same time, they should try to shed the light of the Gospel on these treasures, to set them free and bring them under the common dominion of the Saviour.'²¹ The teaching manifest in scripture is viewed as evolving over time and therefore has to be reinterpreted for each new age. This is because 'God is constantly speaking to his Christian people a message that is ever relevant for their time.'²² And as the Second Vatican Council's Constitution, *Dei Verbum* teaches, biblical interpretation provides the data with which the Church's judgement may be matured.²³

JUS AD BELLUM: CHRISTIAN REALISM AND THE JUST WAR TRADITION

Roman Catholic teachings on violence and peace reflect the lived reality of faith, and in particular, the pressures that Christians face in trying to reconcile scripture and tradition with the demands of living in, and encountering the modern world. Consequently, teachings on violence and peace are full of tensions regarding understandings of the nature and meaning of the Christian vocation. In terms of war and conflict, such tensions amount to a fundamental question: should Catholic responses to violence and peace be driven by an ideal of gospel perfection or by socio-political realities? At present, the Roman Catholic Church addresses this question by operating as a dual-tradition institution, with just war and pacifist²⁴ stances both being taught by the magisterium. Matthew A Shadle describes the

²⁰ *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 33.

²¹ Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes: Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church*, 7 December 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html, accessed 19 March 2021, §22.

²² *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 33.

²³ *Dei Verbum*, §12.

²⁴ The teachings on pacifism will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

influence of scripture on these stances thus: “The words of Jesus in the Gospels have inspired pacifists throughout the centuries, whereas those committed to the just war theory have had to situate those sayings in the context of other New Testament passages and natural law thinking.”²⁵ Both sets of teachings share a belief that peace is paramount, but the means of achieving it are different.

The Roman Catholic Church is known for its defence of just war teaching, which begins with a presumption against violence. This is a teaching that emphasises the futurity of the kingdom of God as the ‘Christian just war tradition has been built on the premise that the present world so entangles the disciple in conflict and “brokenness” that gospel fidelity requires compromise action.’²⁶ Thus, war and violent conflict are seen as sometimes necessary to secure peace. As John Courtney Murray, a leading advocate for realism in Roman Catholic approaches to war puts it, the just war position expresses ‘a will to peace, which in the extremity, bears within itself a will to enforce the precept of peace by arms.’²⁷ However, ‘the fact that war is justified does not mean that all actions in it are morally permitted’²⁸ resulting in a ‘rules-based’ approach for political leaders contemplating a resort to war. As Augustine teaches, the concepts of mercy, forgiveness, and love must lie at the heart of any decision to enter into war.²⁹ At present, both the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*,³⁰ list the preconditions for a just war as the following:

The strict conditions for *legitimate defence by military force* require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time:

²⁵ Matthew A Shadle, *The Origins of War: A Catholic Perspective*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 7.

²⁶ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 19

²⁷ John Courtney Murray, *Morality and Modern War*, (New York, NY: Council on Religion and International Affairs, 1959), 16.

²⁸ David Carroll Cochran, *Catholic Realism and the Abolition of War*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁰ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html, accessed 24 March 2022.

- The damage inflicted by the aggressor on the community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- All other means of putting an end to it, must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- There must be serious prospects of success;
- The use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgement of those who have responsibility for the common good.³¹

These conditions have recently been scrutinised by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, in which he argues for an even tighter interpretation of these rules, arguing that they have been abused by those in power. In an oblique reference to the 2003 invasion of Iraq by coalition forces as well as recent instances of cyber warfare, he states that ‘War can easily be chosen by invoking all sorts of allegedly humanitarian, defensive or precautionary excuses, and even resorting to the manipulation of information.’³² This has prompted a renewed debate around the efficacy of just war theory within Catholicism, especially as in footnote 242 of the document, Francis states that ‘we no longer uphold’ Augustine’s concept of just war. In doing so, Francis stops just short of rejecting the just war conditions, but places a major question mark above its role in, and usefulness to, Catholic social teaching. In this, Francis joins his predecessors and the Magisterium who have argued that ‘moral reflection on the use of force calls for a spirit of moderation rare in contemporary political culture.’ Consequently, the responsibility to protect remains the only

³¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/ccc_toc.htm, accessed 24 March 2022, §2309. Note that this section is entitled *avoiding war*.

³² *Fratelli Tutti*, §258. In a speech to the Vatican Diplomatic Corps on 13 January 2003, John Paul II counselled against the invasion of Iraq, stating that the detrimental consequences for civilians would outweigh any benefits the conflict could bring. www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2003/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20030113_diplomatic-corps.html, accessed 25 March 2022.

legitimate reason for the use of violence but even this is being questioned.³³ This evolution, for the most part, is the challenge presented by the nature of modern warfare and, in particular, the threat that it poses to non-combatants.³⁴

JUS IN BELLO: THE CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY MODERN WARFARE

One of the main criteria set out in Just War theory is *Jus in Bello*, which governs conduct in war. The twentieth century has seen changes in the nature, mechanisms, scale and impact of warfare, which have concerned pontiffs since the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. Technological and social advances bring new challenges, which must be reflected on using the wisdom of scripture and tradition as outlined earlier in this essay. As the United States bishops argued in 1983, 'Modern warfare threatens the obliteration of human life on a previously unimaginable scale.'³⁵ In addition, the twenty-first century has seen the advent of new forms of weaponry, such as drones and cyber warfare, the nature and scale of which are only just being confronted by Christian ethicists.³⁶

The influence of changes in the conduct of war can be seen in evolutions in a number of areas governing Roman Catholic teachings on violence and peace. As early as 1922, Pius XI felt the need to teach that the world was in a state of negative peace: 'The nations today live in a state of armed peace which is scarcely better than war itself, a condition that tends to exhaust national finances, to waste the flower of youth, to muddy and

³³ Drew Christiansen, 'Fratelli Tutti and the Responsibility to Protect', 14 October 2020, <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/fratelli-tutti-and-the-responsibility-to-protect>, accessed 24 March 2022. Francis discusses the responsibility to protect in §262 of *Fratelli Tutti*.

³⁴ For a history of the development of modern warfare see Margaret MacMillan, *War: How Conflict Shaped Us*, (London: Profile Books, 2020).

³⁵ United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, 3 May 1983, <https://www.usccb.org/upload/challenge-peace-gods-promise-our-response-1983.pdf>, accessed 23 March 2022, §15.

³⁶ See for example, Kenneth R Himes, *Drones and the Ethics of Targeted Killing*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016) and Matthew A Shadle, 'Towards a Just-War Ethic for Cyber War: Defining Cyber Warfare', 15 June 2018, <https://politicaltheology.com/towards-a-just-war-ethic-for-cyber-war-defining-cyber-warfare/>, accessed 25 March 2022. These threats were alluded to in paragraph 262 of *Fratelli Tutti* but the Magisterium has yet to produce a full response to the implications of these new technologies of warfare.

poison the very fountainheads of life, physical, intellectual, religious and moral.’³⁷ Violence is now endemic within society, not something contained on the battlefield as it was previously believed. The most influential of these scientific and technological advances was the creation of nuclear weapons, deployed by the United States of America in Japan to such devastating effect as a means of bringing the Second World War to an end in August 1945 and still used as a ‘deterrent’ against armed combat today. The existence of nuclear weapons and the capability for annihilation that they pose caused the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to teach that: ‘The increase in scientific weapons has increased the wickedness of war immensely. Action carried out with those weapons can cause vast and indiscriminate destruction which goes far beyond the limits of legitimate defence.’³⁸ In doing so, they were echoing John XXIII who, in the wake of the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis wrote, ‘in this age which boasts of its atomic power, it no longer makes sense to maintain that war is a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice.’³⁹ The *use* of nuclear weapons could never, in Roman Catholic teaching, justify the damage that they would do to humanity, and many Roman Catholics now see campaigning for nuclear disarmament as a necessary outworking of their faith and use non-violent methods to do so.⁴⁰

Developments in the field of psychiatric medicine have also advanced understandings of the impact of war upon the combatant, with PTSD⁴¹ now acknowledged as a common consequence of military service. The

³⁷ Pius XI, *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*, 23 December 1922, §11, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_23121922_ubi-arcano-dei-consilio.html, accessed 12 August 2019.

³⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, §80.

³⁹ John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris: On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty*, 11 April 1963, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html, accessed 25 March 2022.

⁴⁰ One example of such activism is the work of Fr Martin Newell CP who has carried out several ploughshare actions and who highlights the influence of the Gospels on his work when he says: ‘I believe Jesus was a pacifist, and I believe that means I should be one as well. And the implications of that are using non-violent means to work for justice; I’m convinced that non-violent action is a legitimate and positive way of standing up for what I believe in.’ ‘Fr Martin Newell, Priest-Protester’, no date, <https://www.alivepublishing.co.uk/2018/05/fr-martin-newell-priest-protester/>, accessed 25 March 2022.

⁴¹ Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War*, (Hove: Psychology Press, 2005).

concept of moral injury⁴² sustained in war has moved the Roman Catholic Church even further away from viewing any combat as just. Cardinal Cahal Daly summed this up when he described the impact of the Northern Ireland conflict on combatants and non-combatants alike: 'The worst consequences of violence, however, have been moral and spiritual, rather than material. The foundation of all moral principle and the source of all human rights is absolute respect from the sacredness of human life. Human life is now cheaper and more expendable than an armalite rifle.'⁴³ Such attitudes prevent people from experiencing the true purpose of living which is 'to know and love God.'⁴⁴ They result from a failure to recognise God in themselves as well as in those that they maim and kill.⁴⁵

Throughout the twentieth century, war and other forms of violent conflict have also increasingly impacted upon non-combatants, with their deaths being euphemistically referred to as 'collateral damage' by the military. It is now estimated by the United Nations that 90 per cent of the victims of war are civilians.⁴⁶ Rape is a standard weapon of war,⁴⁷ and the use of child soldiers is now commonplace. In addition to killing and psychologically and physically injuring people, war also destroys the structure of societies and prevents human flourishing. John Paul II described the process thus:

⁴² According to Purcell et al, 'moral injury refers to a lasting sense of guilt, shame, and disillusionment that arises from participating in acts that violate or undermine one's deeply held moral beliefs of sense of justice.' Natalie Purcell, Kristine Burkman, Jessica Keysen, Philip Fucella and Shira Maguen, 'Healing from Moral Injury: A Qualitative Evaluation of the *Impact of Killing* Treatment for Combat Veterans,' *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*, published online 18 April 2018, 2. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10926771.2018.1463582>, accessed 22 August 2019.

⁴³ Cardinal Cahal Daly 'Peace is Mightier than the Bomb,' Address for 1979 World Day of Peace', 1 January 1979, Northern Ireland Political Collection, Linen Hall Library, *Addresses on Peace in Northern Ireland, 1976–1983, Volume 2*, P13579.

⁴⁴ *Catechism*, §31.

⁴⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, §19, translation taken from *Catechism*, §27.

⁴⁶ Alexandre Marc, 'Conflict and Violence in the 21st Century: Current Trends as Observed in Empirical Research and Statistics', <https://www.un.org/pga/70/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2016/01/Conflict-and-violence-in-the-21st-century-Current-trends-as-observed-in-empirical-research-and-statistics-Mr.-Alexandre-Marc-Chief-Specialist-Fragility-Conflict-and-Violence-World-Bank-Group.pdf>, accessed 29 March 2021.

⁴⁷ Christina Lamb, *Our Bodies, Their Battlefield: What War Does to Women*, (London: William Collins, 2020).

Recourse to violence, in fact, aggravates existing tensions and creates new ones. Nothing is resolved by war; on the contrary, everything is placed in jeopardy by war. The results of this scourge are the suffering and death of innumerable individuals the disintegration of human relations and the irreparable loss of an immense artistic and environmental patrimony. War worsens the suffering of the poor; indeed, it creates new poor by destroying the means of subsistence, homes and property, and by eating away at the very fabric of the social environment.⁴⁸

The 2003 invasion of Iraq, which subsequently destabilised the entire region, creating further conflict and the rise of ISIS, is a clear example of John Paul II's teachings. Here, papal teachings on violence and peace can be seen to be moving much closer to the teachings of the Gospels. In emphasis on the rights and needs of the poor and oppressed members of society, and the creation of a stable social order that promotes human flourishing, the teachings of the Catholic Church on peace are echoing the message of Christ.

PACIFISM AND NONVIOLENCE: A LEGITIMATE ALTERNATIVE TO JUST WAR

Such changes in the nature of warfare and the reaction of the Roman Catholic Church to them have led to a recognition of pacifism and contentious objection as legitimate stances to be taken by the faithful. As recently as 1956, Roman Catholics were denied the right to refuse to participate in war. But in 1965, the Council Fathers acknowledged the right to contentious objection, stating: 'We cannot but praise those who renounce violence in defending their rights and use means of defence which are available to the weakest, so long as this can be done without harm to the rights and duties of others or of the community.'⁴⁹ This recognition of pacifism is crucial to the role of scripture in teachings on violence and peace. Himes demonstrates that Catholic teaching on pacifism makes three claims:

⁴⁸ John Paul II, 'If you want peace, reach out to the poor', XXVI World Day of Peace Message 1993, 8 December 1992, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121992_xxvi-world-day-for-peace.html, accessed 23 March 2022, §4.

⁴⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, §78.

1. Pacifism is an option that individuals may choose based on sincere belief that war is incompatible with Christian discipleship;
2. Pacifism requires a clear commitment to resist injustice and a desire to promote human rights and the common good; and
3. Pacifism is based on the freedom of the person and the right of individual conscience.

It is not a duty for all but a legitimate option for those who discern a moral calling to oppose the war.⁵⁰ However, I would suggest that in ‘reading the signs of the times’, papal teaching has now moved. The establishment of the positive conception of peace inherent in Catholic definitions of pacifism with their emphasis upon justice and the common good is now the primary focus of Roman Catholic teachings on violence and peace rather than a ‘legitimate option’. This means that violence and peace are viewed through a different lens, one which focuses on the prevention of violence rather than its containment inherent in just war theory. As the Council Fathers taught, ‘Peace is never achieved once and for all, but has to be constantly fashioned’⁵¹ and it is this, which forms the basis of Roman Catholic conceptions of Just Peace.

JUST PEACE: ‘FOSTERING A POSITIVE CONCEPTION OF PEACE’⁵²

Peace is not merely the absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance and balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought by dictatorship. *Instead, is it rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice.* Peace results from that order structured into human society by its divine Founder, and actualised by men as they thirst after ever greater justice.⁵³

⁵⁰ Himes, *Christianity and the Political Order*, p.331.

⁵¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, §78.

⁵² *The Challenge of Peace*, §234.

⁵³ *Gaudium et Spes*, §78, emphasis added. Cf ‘For peace is not simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power; it is fashioned by efforts directed day after day toward the establishment of the ordered universe willed by God, with a more perfect form of justice among men.’ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio: Encyclical Letter on the Development of Peoples*, 26 March 1967, http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html, accessed 31 March 2022, §76.

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council thus demand that Christians seek to free society from war and violence by working for justice. In doing so, it moved the focus of the institution's teachings from just war and its containment of violent conflict to a focus on eradicating structural violence, which was defined by Pope Paul VI in 1967 as:

The material poverty of those who lack the bare necessities of life, and the moral poverty of those who are crushed under the weight of their own self-love; oppressive political structures resulting from the abuse of ownership or the improper exercise of power, from the exploitation of the worker or unjust transactions.⁵⁴

Structural violence, then, is that which prevents human flourishing and stops the achievement of the common good⁵⁵ from being the goal in political, economic and social decision-making. Through such words, the Magisterium was firmly placing teachings on violence and peace on a scriptural footing. The form of positive peace described here can only be achieved by a credible re-enactment of the kingdom of God. Through His incarnation, Christ modelled the form of societal perfection that is required for justice and peace to flourish. An example that, through our baptism, we are compelled to follow. In his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis added another layer to the command, thus:

The Christian ideal will always be a summons to overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today's world imposes on us. Many try to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends, renouncing the social aspect of the Gospel. For just as some people want a purely spiritual Christ, without flesh and without the cross, they also want their interpersonal relationships provided by sophisticated equipment, by screens and systems which can be turned on and off at command. Meanwhile,

⁵⁴ *Populorum Progressio*, §21.

⁵⁵ Although the concept of the common good has been present in the vocabulary of the Catholic Church from the Pontificate of Leo XIII, it was not until the Pontificate of John XXIII that a definition was provided. In both *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* he described the common good as 'the sum total of conditions of social life, by which people may reach their perfection more fully and easily.' John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra: On Christianity and Social Progress*, 15 May 1961, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html, accessed 31 March 2022, §65, and *Pacem in Terris*, §58.

the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.⁵⁶

Hence, as well as improving the material conditions of the poor and the oppressed, we must enter into a Christ-centred relationship with them. In doing so, we can ensure that both the principles of solidarity⁵⁷ and subsidiarity⁵⁸ so crucial to the creation of justice and peace are enacted.

Through such a process, we are expected to create a common vision for the future of humanity that is grounded in scripture; a vision of a society in which the causes of war, conflict and violence no longer exist, and the common good and human flourishing are the norm. This

involves building a human community where men can live truly human lives, free from discrimination on account of race, religion or nationality, free from servitude to other men or to natural forces which they cannot yet control satisfactorily. It involves building a human community where liberty is not an idle world, where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same banquet table.⁵⁹

In doing so, we are committing ourselves to ‘the ceaseless pursuit of the just ordering of human affairs.’⁶⁰ This in-breaking of the kingdom into history requires ongoing work, the realisation of which we are unlikely to

⁵⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium: The Joy of the Gospel*, 24 November 2013, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, accessed 31 March 2022, §88.

⁵⁷ The concept of solidarity compels people to take into account the effect of their actions on others, asking them to strive to promote the common good, whilst standing and working *with* the poor and marginalised rather than myopically focusing on their own desires and needs.

⁵⁸ Subsidiarity affirms the idea that each person has the right to shape their own destiny rather than it being solely subject to external forces. When at all possible, therefore, power and decision-making processes should be exercised at the lowest possible level.

⁵⁹ *Populorum Progressio*, §47.

⁶⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 29 June 2009, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html, accessed 23 March 2022, §78.

experience. It is the complete example of the ‘already but not yet,’⁶¹ the meaning of which is perfectly summed up by Gustavo Gutiérrez OP: ‘the Kingdom is the final meaning in history; its total fulfilment takes place beyond history, and at the same time is present from this moment on.’⁶² But, whilst ‘some would regard these hopes as vain flights of fancy. ...[such] adversity, when endured for the sake of one’s brothers and out of love for them, can contribute greatly to human progress.’⁶³

The concept of just peace is taught through Catholic social teaching, which indicates the different steps that Christians can take to create a new social order. These teachings are produced through prayerful reading and interpretation of scripture, and they are disseminated in the case of teachings on peace through encyclicals and the Pope’s annual world day of peace messages.⁶⁴ Each of these messages concentrates on a different theme, for example nonviolence (2017) and politics (2019), and in doing so, provides material that can be contextualised by the laity and put into action in a manner appropriate to their own situations. As I argue elsewhere, within Catholicism, this moral vision is born from the combination of three elements: the gospel and magisterium, empirical analysis, and most crucially dialogue.⁶⁵ Such a combination is crucial because, as Johan Verstvaeten points out:

Judgements on the world cannot be made merely on the basis of faith propositions. Without social and economic analysis, the faith perspective loses touch with reality or leads to the construction of a world of pious ideas,

⁶¹ George E Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1959), pp. 13–23. This concept has become popularized within Catholic ‘popular’ spirituality see for example James Martin, *Jesus A Pilgrimage*, (New York: Harper, 2014), 170–171.

⁶² Gustavo Gutiérrez OP, ‘The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ’, *Theological Studies*, 2009, vol. 70, 317–326, 323.

⁶³ *Populorum Progressio*, §79.

⁶⁴ Francis’s messages can be found here: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/index.html>, accessed 31 March 2022. See also Maria Power and Christopher Hrynkow, ‘Qualified Advocacy for Just Peace: The Pope’s World Day of Peace Messages (1968–2020) in Historical and Ethical Perspective’, *Peace and Change: A Journal of Peace History*, vol. 45, no. 3, 339–368.

⁶⁵ Maria Power, ‘Alternative Possible Futures: Unearthing a Catholic Public Theology for Northern Ireland’, in Christopher R Baker and Elaine Graham (eds.), *Theology for Changing Times: John Atherton and the Future of Public Theology*, (London: SCM, 2018), 158–174.

which risks being an expression of social alienation rather than a solution to it.⁶⁶

Through the use of such a method, the ‘already but not yet’ emerges for each particular milieu, enabling the binary goals of the church for individuals of personal and communal salvation, or the individual attainment of a place in the heavenly kingdom combined with a contribution to the creation of the earthly peaceable kingdom, to be achieved. At this point in this chapter, it might be useful to outline Roman Catholic teachings on a particular topic and relate them to the definition of peace offered by the Magisterium. Doing so will allow us to understand the form of material and its relationship to Scripture that Catholics are expected to work with as they seek the kingdom of God.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI told us that ‘development is the new name for peace’.⁶⁷ In doing so, he showed that employment of the techniques of development was key to the eradication of structural violence and was the route to justice and peace. Indeed, development was so key to Roman Catholic understandings of peace, that Paul VI created the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace⁶⁸ in 1967 to ensure that human dignity and flourishing in the Global South remained a key focus of the church’s attention. However, the form of development espoused by the Roman Catholic Church focuses on empowerment and equality rather than dependency. Since the papacy of John XXIII, Catholic social teaching has underscored the fundamental need to build a more just global economic system and has been critical of policies that hurt the poor and marginalised. The overarching argument behind this teaching is that every person should be allowed to live in a manner that recognises their dignity and which allows them to flourish.⁶⁹ The massive inequalities between countries, in the Global North and South, must therefore be addressed in a manner that allows less economically robust countries to retain their autonomy. In 1963, John XXIII stated:

⁶⁶ Johan Verstaeten, ‘Towards Interpreting the Signs of the Times, Conversation with the World, and Inclusion of the Poor: Three Challenges for Catholic Social Teaching’, *International Journal of Public Theology*, 2011, 5, 314–330, 317.

⁶⁷ *Populorum Progressio*, §76.

⁶⁸ Information about this commission can be found here: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/index.htm, accessed 19 April 2022.

⁶⁹ *Pacem in Terris*, §122.

Again and again We must insist on the need for helping these peoples in a way which guarantees to them the preservation of their own freedom. They must be conscious that they are themselves playing the major role in their economic and social development; that they themselves are to shoulder the main burden of it.⁷⁰

The teachings on the causes of global inequality have been consistent: the economic system, with its focus on profit margins and the creation of a ‘civilisation of consumerism and waste’⁷¹ has led to the subordination of the human person to a world where ‘a profit-based economic model [dominates] that does not hesitate to exploit, discard and even kill human beings. While one part of humanity lives in opulence, another part sees its own dignity denied, scorned or trampled upon, and its fundamental rights discarded or violated.’⁷² Through this, human beings are no longer allowed to be active subjects in their own lives, and their dignity is violated—a situation which is *the* embodiment of structural violence. This criticism of economic structures (be they capitalist, socialist, or communist) has been a consistent feature of Catholic social teaching throughout the last six papacies.

The Roman Catholic Church has stated that ‘The present state of affairs must be confronted boldly, and its concomitant injustices must be challenged and overcome. Continuing development calls for bold innovations that will work profound changes. The critical state of affairs must be corrected without delay.’⁷³ These profound changes are to be expressed through a global solidarity based upon the teachings of the gospel,⁷⁴ which manifests itself as the preferential option for the poor—that is, to take the

⁷⁰ Ibid., §123.

⁷¹ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis: On Social Concerns*, 30 December 1987, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html, accessed 19 April 2022, §28.

⁷² *Fratelli Tutti*, §22.

⁷³ *Populorum Progressio*, §32.

⁷⁴ In 1971, the World Synod of Catholic Bishops stated the following: ‘Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures, and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of its Creator, we have shared our awareness of the Church’s vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted. The hopes and forces which are moving the world in its very foundations are not foreign to the dynamism of the Gospel, which through the power of the Holy Spirit frees people from personal sin and from its consequences in social life.’ *Justice in the World*, §5.

side of the powerless and the oppressed and to work for their liberation—teaching solidly rooted in the Bible.⁷⁵

But how can this vision or teaching be translated into reality? For a just peace to emerge, human society needs to bear the closest possible resemblance to the kingdom of God, as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount and demonstrated by Jesus' actions throughout His ministry. But how is this to be brought into reality? The entire people of God proclaim the message of the Gospel. Therefore, in the Roman Catholic tradition, the laity is expected to work to bring about the constructive change needed to eradicate the structural violence that is preventing human flourishing and the common good from emerging. This is because just peace is a historical reality, something that Christians can work to bring about as well as an eschatological offer of hope to believers. In *Gaudium et Spes* the laity's vocation in this regard is described thus:

Christians who take an active part in present-day socio-economic development and fight for justice and charity should be convinced that they can make a great contribution to the prosperity of mankind and to the peace of the world. In these activities let them, either as individuals or as members of groups, give a shining example. Having acquired the absolutely necessary skill and experience, they should observe the right order in their earthly activities in faithfulness to Christ and His Gospel. Thus their whole life, both individual and social, will be permeated with the spirit of the beatitudes, notably with a spirit of poverty.⁷⁶

For the laity then, life and faith are to be integrated, and they are expected to work towards a society that realized the Gospel's teachings.

But although the Gospel and Catholic social teaching demand that Catholics work to build a new social order, they do not offer a programme or blueprint for action. This is achieved by a further reading of the 'signs of the times' which allows the teachings of the Gospel and the Magisterium to be translated into any given context. The starting point should be a belief that the world should not be as it is. This was one of the main reasons for Christ's life and His death on the Cross. Catholics are therefore

⁷⁵ See for example Ex 3:9; Ex 8:1; Isa 3: 14–15; Isa 10: 1–2; Lk 4: 18–21; Lk 6: 20–21; Mt. 15: 1–5; and Mk 2: 23–3:6. For a fuller discussion of this, see Donal Dorr, 'Preferential Option for the Poor' in Judith A Dwyer (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 755–759.

⁷⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, §72.

taught that they must use the ideals raised by the Gospel and Magisterium to engage in a critical and ethical reflection on the social order. But because of the position taken by Jesus in the gospels towards the poor and marginalised, there is little room for impartiality.⁷⁷ Consequently, this means that the lived realities of the poorest members of our society must be understood if we are going to work to challenge the structural violence that leads to war and conflict. Once this consciousness-raising is complete, a new moral vision which shows what a just social order would look like must be developed and a method for achieving this decided upon. Then the work of building a just peace begins.

However, the creation of a just peace is something which must emerge in partnership. This stance is best summed up by the phrase ‘active solidarity’⁷⁸ used by John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris*. Solidarity with the poor must be combined with subsidiarity so that Catholics are working with the poor rather than enacting a form of noblesse oblige which serves merely to disempower all of those involved. This is because ‘the promotion of peace flows steadily from our self-understanding as a community centred on the person of Christ.’⁷⁹ The fundamental question that lies at the heart of all Catholic activity orientated towards the establishment of a just peace is *who is my neighbour?* ‘The Gospel makes no distinction between the love neighbour and justice’,⁸⁰ therefore neither should we. The answer to this question is found in the Gospel of Luke and, in particular, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.⁸¹ This parable models for us the creation of a new community that knows no boundaries or outcasts; in which compassion, care, and practical action for those in need are the marks of a life lived in communion with Christ. This parable shows us how we should be in relationship with one another in order to create a just peace. As Pope Benedict XVI teaches:

⁷⁷This is a foundational element of Catholic social teaching. For example Francis states that ‘while it is quite true that the essential vocation and mission of the lay faithful is to strive that earthly realities and all human activity may be transformed by the Gospel, none of us can think that we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice: “Spiritual conversion, the intensity of love of God and neighbour, zeal for justice and peace, the Gospel meaning of the poor and of poverty, are required for everyone.”, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §201.

⁷⁸*Pacem in Terris*, §98.

⁷⁹Pádraig Corkery, *Companion to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Dublin: Veritas, 2007), 101.

⁸⁰Simone Weil, *Waiting for God*, (New York: Harper Modern Classics, 1951, 2009), 85.

⁸¹Lk 10:25–37. Pope Francis recently used this parable in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* to explain why we should ‘resolve our conflicts and care for one another.’ §57.

The Samaritan, the foreigner, makes himself the neighbour and shows me that I have to learn to be a neighbour deep within and that I already have the answer in myself. I have to become like someone in love, someone whose heart is open to being shaken up by another's need. Then I find my neighbour, or – better – then I am found by him.⁸²

The process of changing understandings of the concept of neighbourliness is itself as important as the action of working for a just peace. Here, the intersection of the cross (God (the vertical) and neighbour or community (the horizontal)) becomes real: 'the love of God and the love of one's neighbour converge in the encounter with the other',⁸³ and the mandate given at baptism is enacted and a new community is created.

CONCLUSION

It cannot be denied that there are significant tensions within Roman Catholicism regarding teachings on violence and peace, with a fault line developing between those who espouse just war and those who focus on the structural change that just peace brings. The Roman Catholic Church has, however, been moving towards a just peace approach since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and the Pontificate of Paul VI (1963–1978)—a stance which is firmly rooted within scripture. As a result, Roman Catholics must now try and find a balance in their attitudes towards violence and peace; a balance which takes into account the temporal obligations that Christ's incarnation brings as well as its eschatological hope. This can be achieved by approaching matters of violence and peace through the lens of scripture and tradition to create contextualised solutions that seek to deal with the causes of violence before they become uncontrollable.

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