

A People's Movement as a Condition for the Development of a Just Peacemaking Theory¹

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As the United Church of Christ document *A Just Peace Church* states: "Just peace requires peacemakers."² I believe that a just peacemaking theory presupposes not only individual peacemakers, but a community of peacemakers.

The norms of a just peacemaking theory should not assume that the only or primary agents of action are heads of state or the leaders of revolutionary groups vying for power. Making peace is increasingly a function of a combination of many actors within the international system: people's movements, nongovernmental organizations, leaders of nation states, and international organizations. Later in this article I will focus upon how the world's religions, in particular, have contributed and can contribute to a people's movement of peacemakers. The development of a just peacemaking theory, in fact, is largely possible because there exists on an increasingly growing worldwide scale a people's movement that shares an implicit set of norms. The goal of just peacemaking theory is to make explicit the norms that are already shared by a network of interlocking groups of people at a more grass-

roots level. I cannot here describe this relatively new phenomenon in history, but the following developments (among others) can be cited:

1) a growing knowledge, awareness, and experience (recently evident in the collapse of the Soviet Empire) of nonviolent movements for social change in the traditions of Gandhi and King;

2) an interlocking network of NGO's and INGO's that bring pressure to bear on governments all over the globe on everything from human rights to arms control and reduction;

3) an increasing networking and cooperation worldwide of people across confessional and religious boundaries and barriers;

4) the coming together of these people into clusters of local organizations, peace and justice groups in churches, and interfaith committees—not just isolated individuals;

5) a strengthening of international governmental organizations that may be able to work more effectively on common human problems (perhaps we may be seeing the emergence of a United Nations World Disaster Relief Force [UNWDRF]);

6) increasing awareness and study of the vast repertoire of processes and skills by which most people make peace most of the time, and with that knowledge the possibility of extending those processes to an ever wider sphere of human interaction.

Having said this, however, I must acknowledge that the worldwide network represents a small minority (especially those who work at the peacemaking vocation intentionally) in a world that is in a rather desperate situation. The world is threatened by a number of major unresolved armed conflicts, people living in desperate situations of poverty and hunger, serious abuses of human rights, as well as major environmental problems. These desperate world-needs require that we extend and expand the global peacemaking network. One way that network can be expanded is for ethicists to seek to identify those norms that can provide a framework for increased cooperation and mission in the world by people of diverse cultural, national, and religious orientations. I come to this worldwide network of persons as a Christian pacifist. That vision continues to shape my orientation and my sensitivities, but I am less and less interested in defining the pacifist position over against other positions. I seek for more of what I have already experienced, increasing convergence among points of view. There is also a fundamental pragmatic (and ethical) reason for seeking to identify those norms that can be a basis for convergence among positions. We must find a way to develop a

1. Portions of this essay have been published as "Religion and Nonviolent Action" in *Protest, Power, and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from ACT-UP to Women's Suffrage*, ed. Robert S. Powers and William B. Voegelé (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), a project of the Albert Einstein Institution, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

2. Susan Thistlethwaite, ed. *A Just Peace Church* (New York: United Church Press, 1986) 60.

"global civic culture," to use Elise Boulding's phrase, if we are to have any chance of meeting the serious challenges of our globe.³

Why is a citizens' movement of peacemakers and peacemaking groups so important? What do they do?

1) A transnational network of people who are organized to learn from each other and act in concert can partially transcend the narrow self-interest and myopia that often characterize groups in conflict.

2) A citizens' movement, committed more to peacemaking processes than to defense of governmental or bureaucratic interest or to quick fixes (often with armed force) in a single conflict, can help keep before people the long view, the kind of perseverance that is needed so that a just peace can emerge over generations.

3) Citizens' groups can be advocates for the voiceless, especially those who are poor and powerless.

4) A transnational people's network has less investment in defending what has been. Persons in the movement can free our imaginations to think of alternatives to established patterns of behavior and the narrow range of options we often consider in resolving conflict.

5) People within a citizens' movement can play a servant role, working behind the scene in mediating conflict without needing to be in the limelight or take credit. People without strong attachment to governments or people who do not bring to a conflict a strong self-interest can gain the trust of parties and serve in a mediating role.

6) Citizens' movements can help to initiate, foster, or support transforming initiatives, an idea developed especially well by Glen Stassen,⁴ where existing parties need support and courage to take risks to break out of the cycles that perpetuate violence and injustice. Stassen tells the fascinating story of the role of citizens groups in encouraging the adoption of the zero solution in the late 1980s on intermediate-range missiles in Europe.

7) A citizens' network (particularly as that is institutionalized in voluntary associations) can sustain concern and interest when the media and world opinion are unaware, forget, or flit about from one thing to the next. One year it is Somalia. Earlier it was Iraq. Where will our attention be next year?

3. Elise Boulding, *Building a Global Civic Culture: Education for an Interdependent World* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1988).

4. Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

8) A citizens' network of NGO's and INGO's can often be a source of information and knowledge that persons in positions of governmental authority lack. I am convinced that perhaps the primary service performed by the Washington D.C. Office of the Mennonite Central Committee is to circulate returned workers from around the globe to the U.S. Congress. I have seen the power and significance of such testimony on a number of issues, as well as their impact in informing their home communities.⁵

9) Citizens' groups can also resist governments when they behave unjustly, or are short-sighted or arrogant, thinking they know more than they do, or thinking they can control futures that are in fact not under their control.

10) Churches and other religious groups can serve a special role in nurturing through worship a spirituality that sustains courage when just peacemaking is unpopular, hope when despair or cynicism is tempting, and a sense of grace and the possibility of forgiveness when just peacemaking fails.

Religion, while often contributing to violence in our world, can also be a source for building a network of peacemakers. To build a global civic culture of peacemakers, we must find ways to transcend religious differences in order to find common themes among the plurality of religions that can nurture a peacemaking culture.

Religion nurtures, supports, and contributes to nonviolent action in four fundamental ways. First, religion can legitimate strategies of peacemaking and nonviolent action (and delegitimate violence) through its symbols, myths, belief systems, and ethical norms. Second, religious institutions (the small cell, congregation, ashram, base community, interfaith organization, mosque) can give leadership or provide "space" in a society for the development and practice of nonviolence. Third, religion can foster a spirituality of truthfulness, hope, courage, patience, and willingness to suffer to sustain a movement of nonviolence under difficult conditions of struggle for change. And finally, religion contributes to the repertoire of methods of nonviolent action (prayer, fasts, vigils, love, talking with the enemy).

One of the major ways religion supports nonviolent action is to legitimate nonviolence and delegitimate violence. The legitimization of

5. See the documentation of this impact in the research of Keith Graber Miller, *American Mennonites Engage Washington: Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves?* (Washington, D.C.: University Press, 1996).

violence is deep and pervasive in all the major world religions. The ancient mythologies of Babylonia and Greece honored tribal war gods. Both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an have holy war traditions. After Constantine, the Christian Church aligned itself with empires and kings and supported the crusades, inquisitions, and religious persecution. The virtues of the warrior are glorified in the Zen Buddhist traditions of Japan or the Bhagavad Gita of India. The dominating paradigm of most religious traditions is the "myth of redemptive violence," that peace and justice are best won or maintained through the use of violent means. Religious traditions also have a strong interest in legitimating the prevailing political authority. This happens in the Christian tradition in many interpretations of texts such as Rom 13:1-7 (submit to the authorities) or in the concept of the Divine Right of Kings. In Hinduism the Laws of Manu legitimate the existing caste system.

The religions also contain stories and teachings that support peacemaking and nonviolent action and challenge the myth of necessary violence to preserve the existing order. During the last several decades especially, many religious traditions have experienced a conflict over interpretation, as groups claim religious traditions for support of nonviolent struggles for justice while others deny them that claim. Since the myths, symbols, and belief systems of religions are ways of interpreting the world, nonviolent struggles are often battles with opposing views to define the world in ways that are consonant with peacemaking and justice.

Religions can legitimate nonviolent action several important ways. Religious belief systems provide a transcendent frame of reference that empowers people to challenge the conventional view that violence is necessary for maintaining or transforming the existing social order. They also provide alternative visions of a peaceful order, an alternative dream or vision of how the world can be constructed. Religions develop universal conceptions of the human race that undermine conventional divisions between insider and outsider, friend and foe. And they enliven the human imagination and open the human spirit to consider ways to risk conflict by nonviolent means. They give hope for achieving justice and reconciliation nonviolently.

The Eastern religious traditions tend to search for an alternative to violence through a personal inward quest. Gandhi reinterpreted violent warfare in the Bhagavad Gita symbolically, as an inward spiritual struggle of the soul between light and darkness. The contemporary Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh drew from the resources of

the Buddhist tradition of right mindfulness and meditation to resist the Vietnam War with the spirit and practice of nonviolence. Buddha's teachings reflected in the Dhammapada are profoundly nonviolent. The Buddha views the root of violence as ego-centeredness. Through detachment from self-centeredness by means of the eightfold path, human beings can achieve "right mindfulness," a state of calm that brings humans into peaceful relations not only with fellow humans, but with the whole universe. The *Tao te Ching*, a classic Chinese text, became popular during the 1960s in the youth counterculture of the West because of the way it turns a central value of Western culture on its head: it advocates peace through humility and meekness rather than through striving and the quest for power.

The monotheistic traditions search for the answer to violence by seeking a right relationship with God. Though the Hebrew Bible seems to legitimate violence by God's chosen people against God's enemies, it also contains stories of "outsiders" like Hagar and Ishmael who are objects of God's compassion and who also receive God's promises. Many interpretations, especially theologies of liberation, claim that the Hebrew Bible primarily takes the side of the poor and oppressed. Such a view can undermine existing unjust social systems, though liberation theologians differ as to whether violence or nonviolence is the appropriate means to pursue justice. The Hebrew prophets challenged nationalism and war as well as the power of elites who acted unjustly. The universalism of the Hebrew Bible is reflected in the prophet Jeremiah, who calls on Jews carried into exile to Babylon to seek the *shalom* (well-being) of their enemy, Babylon. Jewish rabbis of the Diaspora interpreted faithfulness to the Torah to be the practice of deeds of loving kindness. This view became the fundamental foundation for Jewish ethics as the Jewish community lived for centuries as a nonviolent minority in the context of repression and persecution.

Christians are reappropriating the early church before Constantine and the life and teachings of Jesus as a model of peacemaking and nonviolence. Scholars such as Walter Wink are challenging the view that Jesus advocated nonresistance or passivity before enemies in the face of injustice. Instead they see in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as a model of nonviolent confrontation, a third way between violent revolution and passivity.⁶

6. Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

After St. Augustine the just war theory served to legitimize the use of violent force to preserve some semblance of order and justice in a world of sin. This view seems to be in tension with the example and teaching of Jesus, though not all scholars agree that Jesus taught and practiced absolute nonviolence. The horrors of modern warfare and the skepticism about the efficacy of revolutionary violence have caused many in the twentieth century to reassess the "just war" tradition. This tradition has become more a moral framework to foster just peacemaking and practical nonviolence and increasingly less an instrument for the justification of war. This peacemaking theme is central in Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* and in the 1983 pastoral letter of the U.S. Catholic bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*. Within the World Council of Churches the reassessment of nonviolence is reflected in the 1973 study document *Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice*.

A new challenge to the legitimation of violence has been advanced by many feminist theologians who believe that violence is rooted in patriarchy and the mythology of a patriarchal God. They reinterpret Christianity and other religious traditions by the development of alternative symbols and stories that emphasize equality and mutuality rather than dominance and submission. A practical example is Rigoberta Menchu's nonviolence, which is nurtured both by her own indigenous culture of Guatemala as well as by stories from the Bible.

The common perception, especially in the West, is that Islam is a religion of violence. But this interpretation has been challenged by many Muslims. Muslims can cite the example of the prophet Muhammad during the Meccan period, before his flight (Hegira) from Mecca to Medina, when he struggled nonviolently against those who wanted to suppress the faith. The Sufis and contemporary peace-minded Muslims have also emphasized that for the Qur'an the greater jihad (holy war) is the inner struggle of a person to be in submission to God, much more central than the lesser jihad of external war. The Indian Muslim Ghaffar Khan, a contemporary of Gandhi, developed a principled nonviolence.

Though religious symbols, myths, and belief systems play a critical role in shaping human behavior, these ideas are often powerless if they are not institutionalized. The ashram was central to the success of Gandhi's nonviolent struggle in India. Bishop Desmond Tutu and the South African Council of Churches have been in the forefront

in advocating nonviolence in the struggle in South Africa. Religious institutions, the leaders of religious organizations, and ordinary people who practice religion daily play a very important role in nurturing and sustaining nonviolent action. As movements come and go, and the popularity of a cause begins to wane, religious organizations and leaders often provide key support and staying power. Religious institutions represent a "space," even in the most repressive societies, that is not easily controlled by the dominating political system. They can thus become a center for teaching and organizing. Religious institutions can also model alternative ways of living that put the lie to so-called inevitable hatreds by bringing together persons of diverse religious, national, racial, ethnic, ideological and economic background. Out of intense loyalty grounded in the authority of religious tradition, ordinary people act and shape social reality regardless of whether they are always conscious of how they impact the world.

In the Philippine struggle against Marcos and the numerous nonviolent struggles in Latin America, archbishops, bishops, priests, nuns, and Christian base communities have played key roles. In the Philippines, for example, Sister Milar Rocco was teaching her students about active nonviolence when she learned that defense minister Enrile and General Ramos had defected and were expecting to be bombed. Together with her students they encountered the soldiers still loyal to Marcos by offering them food and talking to them. Fifty of the soldiers said they wanted to surrender, so the nuns formed a chain around them to "protect" them and led them to join Enrile and Ramos. In the Philippines the International Fellowship of Reconciliation provided leadership and training in nonviolent action. Daniel Buttry's recent book, *Christian Peacemaking: From Heritage to Hope* (Judson Press, 1994), is especially helpful in documenting the widespread employment of nonviolent direct action and conflict resolution, often based in religious groups, to resolve conflict nonviolently.

In Vietnam, Thailand, and Burma, Buddhist monks have given leadership in protest of human rights violations and movements for nonviolent social change. Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of Burma's national hero, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, and advocate of nonviolence and democracy, connects her struggle explicitly to the teachings and institutions of Buddhism. The Tibetan nonviolent struggle for human rights is inspired by the exiled Dalai Lama.

The revival of Islam nurtured in the mosques throughout Iran was critical in the overthrow of the Shah in 1978-79 by nonviolent di-

rect action. Islamic women played a vital role in the mass protests. In the Palestinian Intifada, mosques became organizing and teaching centers. Frequently marches and demonstrations began at mosques, or were linked to key religious rituals.

The civil rights struggle in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s was centrally linked to the African American church and the African American preacher, who was the most important leader in the community. Rosa Parks and other African American Christians did not just learn nonviolence in 1954. They had been nurtured in nonviolence through the singing of spirituals and through biblical preaching.

In 1981 a youth pastor and some young people started weekly Monday prayer services for peace at the St. Nicholai Church in Leipzig, East Germany, one of the small seeds planted early that contributed to the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. In 1988 these prayer services became the locus of increasingly larger groups of East German citizens who gathered to discuss social issues and organize marches. By October 1989, 300,000 persons gathered in Leipzig to demonstrate despite police harassment and arrests.

Religion also nurtures a spirituality that is essential to nonviolence. Critical to nonviolent action is the willingness of persons to cross the barrier of fear, to be able to say "no" to illegitimate authority without fear of sanctions and death. Vaclav Havel's courageous action in communist Czechoslovakia is a profound demonstration of what it means "to live within the truth" rather than "living a lie."

The motto of Quaker nonviolent action has been "speak truth to power." Religion nurtures virtues that are central to nonviolent movements such as courage and the willingness to suffer, overcoming hatred of the enemy and enduring abuse without retaliation, hope and patience during a long period of struggle, trust in the possibility of the miracle of transformation when the evidence for change appears bleak, joy even in the midst of suffering and pain, realism that guards people from disillusionment by making them aware of the depth of human evil and the persistence of systems of domination and injustice, and humility about their own lack of knowledge and need for wisdom.

Gandhi's nonviolence was integrally tied to his awareness that each position he took was an "experiment with truth." He prepared himself for action by fasting, meditation, and prayer. Dorothy Day was able to practice "the harsh and dreadful love" (one of the mottos of the Catholic Worker Movement) of Father Zosima in Dostoyevsky's

Brothers Karamazov by drawing sustenance from daily participation in the Mass. The icon of the Russian Orthodox Church kept alive the spirituality of the Russian people during the dark days of communism. Thich Nhat Hanh practices disciplines of meditation and breathing exercises in order to maintain internal control and calm in the midst of hatred.

Numerous nonviolent movements draw inspiration and courage from the examples of martyrs who have died for the cause. The music of the black spiritual was central in both the joy and endurance of people in the civil rights struggle. One could name a host of religious thinkers, saints, and also artists and creators and makers of music, who nurture the spirituality of movements of nonviolence such as Martin Buber, Abraham Heschel, Simone Weil, Julian of Norwich, St. Francis, Thomas Merton, Kathe Kollwitz, hymn writers from many traditions, and many others.

Religion also provides nonviolent movements with a repertoire of actions. Simple deeds of kindness and charity in the context of hatred and violence can disarm an opponent or undermine his morale. A symbol (a cross, salt, the spinning wheel) can become a powerful unifying force in a movement. Nonviolent movements frequently utilize the power of prayer, fasting, meditation, silence, sanctuary, religious processions, key festivals or religious rituals, remembrance of martyrs or saints, funerals, songs and chants, gatherings at churches, mosques, temples, or other sacred sites. Any genuine religious act is potentially an act of nonviolent protest because it brings people into relationship with a transcendent reality and power that challenges systems of injustice and violence.

One of the challenges for the world's religions is to overcome their violence toward each other. The "commitment to a culture of nonviolence," signed by around 150 religious leaders at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, may signal an era of more peaceful relationships among religious traditions. Though religious traditions have contributed and continue to contribute to warfare and violence, the world's religions have a marvelous history with common themes of nonviolence and peacemaking that can contribute to development of a people's movement to nurture and sustain a global culture of peace. A just peacemaking theory will be powerful and impact the world only if it is supported and sustained by a worldwide network of actors ready to put into practice the processes of just peacemaking.