

The Abbey Center for the Study of Ethics and Culture Conference: To Develop a Just Peacemaking Theory

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For sixteen centuries we have debated about restraining or limiting war, using two paradigms: pacifism and just war theory. Many thoughtful persons say it is now past time to develop a third paradigm—a just peacemaking theory—that focuses not only on restraining war, but on creating peace. We have needed it before, but we need it especially now, to guide us in our newly hopeful and newly dangerous world context.

In their pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops say:

Recognition of the Church's responsibility to join with others in the work of peace is a major force behind the call today to develop a theology of peace. Much of the history of Catholic theology on war and peace has focused on limiting the resort to force in human affairs; this task is still necessary, . . . but it is not a sufficient response.¹

Official statements of the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have also called explicitly for a just peacemaking theory.² So have books by

1. U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1983) paragraph 23.

2. Susan Thistlethwaite, ed., *A Just Peace Church* (New York: United Church Press, 1986) v, 134; United Methodist Council of Bishops, *In Defense of Creation* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986) 13, 24; General Assembly, *Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling* (New York: The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1980) 20.

many of the panelists who participated in the Abbey Center for the Study of Ethics and Culture Conference at the Abbey of Gethsemani October 28–30, 1994.

The conference included eighteen scholars who had drafted the major Church statements on peacemaking during the past decade, written books arguing the need for a just peacemaking theory, or offered special expertise: Steven Brion-Meisels, John Cartwright, Michael Dyson, Duane Friesen, Alan Geyer, Gary Gunderson, John Langan, S.J., Edward LeRoy Long Jr., Patricia McCullough, Peter Paris, Rodger Payne, Bruce Russett, Paul Schroeder, Michael Smith, Glen Stassen, David Steele, Ronald Stone, and Susan Thistlethwaite. In addition, Bryan Hehir, David Hollenbach, and Barbara Green are participants in the project who were unable to attend the Abbey Center Conference. Abbot Timothy Kelly served as host. Peter Paris served as moderator.

In addition there were twenty invited distinguished guests, mostly from the Louisville and Lexington area, who provided community feedback, stimulation, and reality-testing on the practicality of the proposals that emerged.

It was a working conference, not merely an exchange of ideas. The purpose was to probe whether we might be able to work toward consensus on the ingredients of a just peacemaking theory.

At Vigils at 3:15 a.m., the monks and those conference participants who were awake prayed these words: "O God, give justice to thy kingdom; Let the mountains show forth peace. . . . Give pity to the meek, and justice to the poor." This prayer dedicated our conference.

What Is Just Peacemaking Theory?

How Does It Relate to Pacifism and Just War Theory?

Like just war theory, just peacemaking theory is a set of principles for evaluating policy.³ Just war theory evaluates the rightness—or wrongness—of a policy to make war. Just peacemaking theory evaluates the adequacy of a government's initiatives—or its lack of initiatives—to make peace. We believe it is inadequate to limit debate to whether it is right to make a particular war; we want to focus debate on initiatives to make peace so war will not be the only resort. So just

3. Dana W. Wilbanks and Ronald H. Stone, *Presbyterians and Peacemaking: Are We Now Called to Resistance* (New York: Advisory Council on Church and Society, 1985) 44.

peacemaking theory is an expression of ethical principles affirmed by a church for evaluating governmental policies that promote or hinder international peace and justice. Some Christians recognize the source of just peacemaking principles to be revelation in Scripture, others regard them as a discernment of the moral law of the universe or the logic of moral discourse, others take them as grounded in study of the historical processes that lead to peace, and most base their just peacemaking theory in some combination of these scriptural, philosophical, and historical/empirical sources.

A just peacemaking theory should supplement, not replace, pacifism and just war theory. The relationship will be dialectical and neither simplistically symbiotic nor merely polarizing. The imperative of taking initiatives to make peace is implied in both pacifism and just war theory. But when pacifism and just war theory debate, the debate naturally focuses on their point of disagreement: Is it permissible to make war? They lose focus on the initiatives to make peace. Just peacemaking restores that focus. It highlights and magnifies the concern for peacemaking initiatives that is implied by pacifism and just war theory, and that most pacifists have emphasized. Just peacemaking will not always succeed, however, and we will still need pacifism and just war theory to guide the debate if just peacemaking fails.

Just-peace thinking must be a new creation that respects the concerns of pacifists and just war theorists for the restraint of particular evils, yet seeks to prevent the development of the very crises to which they offer criteria for a moral response. Focusing early and determinedly on steps of just peacemaking may provide the space for pacifism and just war theory to do their work before the momentum of war gathers such strength that their debate is too late.

Just-peace theory can be embraced with equal integrity by pacifists and nonpacifists. Under just-peace thinking the burden of proof shifts from those who would resort to violent conflict as an extraordinary means to those who do nothing to seek justice and peace in the daily course of events—or those who claim to be seeking peace but are not taking the essential steps for peace.

Just peacemaking has a place in the formation of public policy at every time and place and not merely at times of tension. Just peacemaking not only responds to crisis situations, but also creates an ongoing agenda for normal times as well as crises. Governments and citizens—and churches and people of faith—have an obligation to support these peacemaking practices both in long-term work to build

conditions that make peace more likely, and in crisis situations where peacemaking initiatives can make war less likely. In crisis situations they specify initiatives that should be tried before governments resort to war. We believe they are a test of the sincerity of governments' claims that they are trying to make peace. They can guide people in prodding governments to take peacemaking initiatives. We sense that our world is at once more dangerous, more in need of peacemaking initiatives, and also more open to initiatives to make peace. At the same time, we must say realistically that our world has forces that resist peacemaking initiatives. Therefore people need to encourage and prod their churches and their governments to push for peacemaking initiatives where there are opportunities.

The idea of justice governing just peacemaking is not primarily the forceful restraint of those who have violated some standard of civil decency, but creative, engendering, and liberating—focusing attention on achieving fair, open, trusting relationships between groups and freeing us from vicious cycles that drive us toward war. The mode of reasoning in just peacemaking is not primarily the means-and-ends reasoning of just war theory, but diagnosis of causes of unpeace and prescription of essential steps for *shalom*.

Just peacemaking seeks the reconciling path of cooperation with others in a blending of wills, rather than forcing others; but it, too, must wrestle with the need to grow an international network that resists tyrants and aggressors. It seeks to maximize cooperation rather than submission; “power with” rather than “power over.” It engenders initiatives at every stage, attempts reconciliation in every situation, and seeks joint achievements of righteousness rather than a coerced blocking of malfeasance.

In sum, there will be many similarities and also some significant differences between just war theory as it has developed across the years and a theory of just peacemaking as we envision it:

- Both are concerned with the advancement of human well-being through political processes.
- Both are premised on a belief that political affairs are subject to moral guidance and constraints.
- Both are situation-pertinent, but not situation-specific; that is, while they enunciate general principles that can be applied to concrete decisions, they do not set forth an analysis or set of mandates for one particular historical situation.

- Both are systems of ethical reflection that employ general wisdom and ordinary experience to the problem they address rather than an exegetical use of biblical modes of thinking.
- Just-peace theory will likely be proactive rather than reactive. It will attempt to furnish guidance for taking hopeful initiatives rather than to provide restraints and strictures over problematic impulses and vitalities. While just war thinking employs the concept of “last resort” to signify the conditions that warrant the use of force, just peace thinking will concentrate on the steps that ought to be taken to alleviate conditions that lead to hostilities.
- Just-peace theory will foster and cultivate activities that are fruitful and creative (even remedial) in purpose and quality rather than concern itself with limiting or proscribing activities that are punitive and/or potentially destructive.
- Just-peace theory is primarily concerned with what can be accomplished by persuasion, whereas just war theory has been mainly concerned with what conditions require coercion or threat of coercion. This distinction cannot be complete and total, since forms of peacekeeping are developing that depend upon the employment of military force to maintain agreed-upon commitments. But peacekeeping activities are low-level uses of military presence, far different from overt war between nations.
- Just peacemaking provides criteria not only for heads of state, but for the callings, involvements, and activities of all persons, voluntary associations, congregations, church or faith groups, and nongovernmental organizations. These all need criteria for guiding their own peacemaking, for prodding governments to take steps for peace, and for seeing through governments’ claims to be seeking peace when they are insincere or ineffective. The essay by Duane Friesen that follows this essay explains the importance of organized faith-groups working for peacemaking. Just peacemaking is directed to communities of faith and people’s advocacy groups, as well as to decision-making processes within the international community (including officials of bodies like the United Nations and the World Court or World Bank) and not only to the leaders of nation-states.
- Just-peace thinking relates to other spheres of moral concern (particularly to concerns for liberation, for political freedom, for social justice, and for ecological responsibility) and cannot deal with conflict as an isolated moral problem.

Why Is Just Peacemaking Theory Emerging Now?

Over fifty years ago the world was stunned by the horror and devastation of World War II and the threat of atomic and nuclear weapons. The reality of that universally perceived threat persuaded people and institutions to develop new networks and practices to try to prevent another world war and the use of nuclear weapons. Many of these new networks and new practices have not been widely noticed, or have been seen as small and imperfect contributions in the face of such a large threat. Now fifty years have passed and we have avoided those two specters—world war and the use of nuclear weapons. New practices, such as the spread of democracy and human rights; conflict resolution methods; sustainable economic development; arms control and reduction; the step-by-step building of international networks politically, economically, and culturally; the nonviolent direct action that has brought the remarkable changes in the Philippines, Eastern Europe, and South Africa; and the independent initiatives strategy that has brought a rapid reduction of nuclear weapons, are actually getting results in ways many have not noticed. These are not disembodied ideals disconnected from power considerations, but historically situated processes or practices that actually function, though imperfectly, to discipline power—a bit here and a bit there—and they add up. Working together, they are in fact pushing back the frontiers of war. France, Germany, England, and Western European nations—once the igniters of world wars—have now moved well beyond making war against each other. No democracy has fought another democracy in this century, and democracy is spreading. We believe we are now at a moment of *kairos* when it can serve useful purposes to name these actual processes, to call attention to them, to support them ethically. This is the contribution we hope to make.

At the same time, the threat and the reality of war are still enormous. The destructive power of weapons still continues to grow. Civil wars are rife, and can be unimaginably genocidal. Our generation is using up essential, nonrenewable resources as if there were no future to be concerned about, and the resulting scarcity can be a major cause of war. War by other means—especially economic—causes millions to die and millions more to live in misery. The enormity of the threat spurs us on to strengthen the steps of just peacemaking because they are so badly needed.

At the abbey conference, Tom Mullaney, chair of the board of the Abbey Center, offered a moving meditation in the words of Thomas Merton. At one point he read these words:

Finally, we must be reminded of the way we ourselves tend to operate, the significance of the secret forces that rise up within us and dictate fatal decisions. We must learn to distinguish the free voice of conscience from the irrational compulsions of prejudice and hate. We must be reminded of objective moral standards, and of the wisdom which goes into every judgment, every choice, every political act that deserves to be called civilized. We cannot think this way unless we shake off our passive irresponsibility, renounce our fatalistic submission to economic and social forces, and give up the unquestioning belief in machines and processes which characterizes the mass mind. History is ours to make. Now above all we must try to recover our freedom, our moral autonomy, our capacity to control the forces that make for life and death in our society.⁴

We want to avoid either fatalism or ahistorical idealism. When we speak of the practices of just peacemaking, we are speaking not merely of what *ought* to happen ideally, but what is actually in process of happening in our time of historical change because it serves functional needs in the midst of the power realities of our time. We name and encourage these practices because they do demonstrably function to reduce causes of war and to grow peacemaking processes. We hope to make a contribution by naming their moral importance. We hope to say something that is not merely a wish, but an encouragement of redemptive processes that are emerging in our time and a choice to participate in them, to add our energy to them.

Just peacemaking is emerging now in Church statements from different traditions, calling for a positive theology of peace and not only a negative restraint on war. These statements are being written because of the influence of prophets like Thomas Merton and Pope John XXIII, because of discernment of the signs of the times, and we believe because of the work of the Holy Spirit among us.

Just peacemaking theory is evolving through ecclesiastical processes and moving toward consensus.⁵ The ethicists who came to

4. Thomas Merton, *The Nonviolent Alternative* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980) 78–79.

5. Glen Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) 209–30. Ronald Stone, a Presbyterian, wrote the following paragraphs, but here cites Stassen.

the abbey conference are participants in these ongoing discussions; they are part of a developing expression of church thought and practice. The recent Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) statement is evidence of the ecclesiastical movement toward consensus:

The church in the nuclear age must shift its energies from considerations of just war to the urgent and primary task of defining and serving a just peace. A nuclear stalemate, or even the elimination of all nuclear arms, is still far from God's shalom. Shalom is the intended state of the entire human race. It involves the well-being of the whole person in all relationships, personal, social, and cosmic. Shalom means life in a community of compassionate order marked by social and economic justice. Peace without justice is no peace; that is why the Bible so often reflects God's special concern for the poor and powerless.

The great biblical visions of global peace—swords into plowshares, every family under its own vine and fig tree—are fundamental to thinking about just peace. Such a peace is ultimately God's gift; we need to avoid the proud illusion that we can create it by human effort alone. But Christian obedience demands that we move toward that peace in all possible ways: by extending the rule of law, advocating universal human rights, strengthening the organs of international order, working for common security and economic justice, converting industry to peaceful production, increasing understanding of and reconciliation with those we identify as enemies, developing peacemaking skills, constructing concrete manifestations of just peace across barriers of conflict and injustice, and other means.⁶

Understanding our work from a Presbyterian and Niebuhrian tradition,⁷ one can see continuity between our work now and the work of the Federal Council of Churches fifty years ago, in 1940–1947, on a just and durable peace: *The Statement of Guiding Principles*, with thirteen principles of peacemaking, and the more politically oriented *Six Pillars of Peace*.⁸ That period of the Federal Council of Churches' work

6. *Christian Obedience in a Nuclear Age* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church U.S.A., 1988) 8.

7. As Ronald Stone, who wrote these words, does.

8. See: *A Righteous Faith for a Just and Durable Peace* (New York: Commission to Study the Bases of a Just and Durable Peace, 1941); Jessie J. Burroway, "Christian Witness Concerning World Order, 1941–1947" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1953) 14–17.

on international relations was probably the high point of public policy influence in international relations of Protestant churches in this country. The principles developed then provided a strong basis for churches' work to prepare U. S. public opinion to support the United Nations and to lobby the Senate to vote for the United Nations. Recent Church statements and our work on a just peacemaking theory carry on a strong Church tradition, both Protestant and Catholic, since the beginning of World War II.

What Practices Are Emerging as Essential Steps of Just Peacemaking?

The process of developing a consensus just peacemaking theory is not yet finished, and the practices of just peacemaking are not yet finally decided. But we have continued our work since the abbey conference. We are working toward another conference in which we hope to agree on a consensus just peacemaking theory. Papers are being written on ten essential practices of peacemaking, a sort of peacemaking Ten Commandments:

1. Talk with the adversary, respect their valid interests, and use methods of conflict resolution.
2. Respect and support nonviolent direct action for justice.
3. Take independent initiatives to reduce threat and distrust.
4. Respect and support international peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peacebuilding, international law, and perhaps humanitarian intervention.
5. Act so as to strengthen the growing international linkages that weave nations together and reduce international anarchy.
6. Reduce offensive weapons and weapons trafficking.
7. Acknowledge wrong and practice forgiveness.
8. Spread human rights, religious liberty, and democracy.
9. Foster sustainable economic development that meets basic human needs.
10. Respect and support people's movements—organizations of citizens independent of governments.

Can You Explain a Few of These Practices, if Only Briefly?

The commitment to international law and international organization, expressed in Church statements of fifty years ago, is also a present commitment of recent Church statements on peace and war. Similar commitments to strengthening the United Nations are found in all of our traditions. Basic themes of covenantal government, covenantal responsibilities, universal will of God, and law from a central source are all imperfectly represented in the existing machinery of international relations, in international law, and the United Nations. This principle of just peacemaking theory may be stated: "To be regarded as fulfilling the principles of just peacemaking, a governmental policy must not contravene international law or the will of the universal community of nations as expressed by the United Nations."

Many policies of the United States clearly fall within normal expressions of such a principle. The principle would provide a clear norm for opposing U.S. war actions in Nicaragua and Panama, and the nonpayment of United Nations assessments by recent U.S. administrations. It is a principled way of recognizing the representative of the voices of most peoples and of limiting sovereignty. It is of course arguable that the principle should be put positively rather than negatively: Just peacemaking requires compliance with international law and the will of the universal community of nations as expressed by the United Nations.

We can also learn from the historical clash between Paul Tillich and John Foster Dulles. Tillich criticized the work of the Federal Council of Churches Commission on a Just and Durable Peace and clashed with its lawyer, chairman John Foster Dulles.⁹ Dulles was right in emphasizing law, international organization, and in moving the churches and indirectly the government to develop the United Nations. Tillich, however, was right in emphasizing the dynamic nature of life; he contended that no status quo could be made durable. Tillich did not oppose order, but he was more concerned that in a world in revolution the imperative of social-economic security be achieved. Today we recognize it even in our cities. If hope for socio-economic security or justice is lost, peace is lost. A divided world of affluence and malnutrition is neither stable nor peaceful. The principle

9. Paul Tillich, *A Theology of Peace* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) 73–87.

could be expressed: "To be regarded as fulfilling the principles of just peacemaking, a government policy must not, in its expression in treaties, international monetary policies, and international economic strategies, reduce the social-economic welfare of the suffering."

This principle, like the previous one, allows for humanitarian policies, rational economic planning, and international agencies, but it denies them the freedom to inflict more suffering through imposition of unemployment or anti-welfare or encouraging long-term dependency roles. It is congruent with work in the churches going forward under norms of sustainable economic development that meets basic economic needs justly. It does not negate privatization of inefficient state corporations, but it prohibits policies that can be shown to reduce health, food, housing, and transportation for the poor.

A third peacemaking practice we focused on is the new strategy of independent initiatives devised by the social psychologist Charles Osgood to reduce threat and distrust. The strategy of independent initiatives is a partial response to the opening words of Thomas Mullaney's reading from Thomas Merton: "At the root of all war is fear."

The practice of independent initiatives is designed to de-escalate hostility when the sense of distrust and threat are major causes of that hostility. One side takes a series of initiatives—visible actions, not mere words—independent of the slow process of negotiation—to decrease the other side's distrust or perception of threat. It may pull back some troops or weapons or open up some trade or halt nuclear testing. Although independent initiatives should decrease the threat to the other side, they should not leave the initiator weak, because the initiating side would then become driven by fear. The timing for each initiative should be announced in advance and carried out regardless of the other side's bluster: to postpone confirms distrust. There should be clear explanation of the purpose: to shift the context toward de-escalation and to invite reciprocation. There should be a series of initiatives inviting reciprocation and increasing if the adversary does reciprocate significantly.

The method of independent initiatives is successfully being used by governments to resolve antagonisms and produce mutual disarmament. It is spreading. It is a feedback loop with positive feedback because it works; it resolves conflict.

It was used by the United States and the Soviet Union to achieve freedom and neutrality for Austria in spite of the Cold War,

rather than leaving it divided between East and West as Germany was. It was advocated by peace movements, eventually persuading the U.S. Congress, President Gorbachev, and President Bush to take independent initiatives to rid the world of medium-range and shorter range nuclear weapons, and reduce long-range nuclear weapons from 35,000 to 6,500. It was used to create the atmosphere for beginning talks between Israel and the P.L.O.

The problem is that it is not widely understood, so when it succeeds, often we do not see what is occurring, and those opposed to reducing tensions characterize it as giving away everything to an enemy. We need to spread the knowledge of it not only so we can encourage antagonists internationally and interpersonally to take independent initiatives, but so we recognize it when it occurs and can give thanks and tell our neighbors.

God's grace is about as independent an initiative as there is. At vespers, the monks at the abbey read from 1 John 3:

This is the proof of love,
that he laid down his life for us,
and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.
If anyone is well off in worldly possessions
and sees his brother in need,
but closes his heart to him,
how can the love of God be in him?
Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk,
but something active and genuine.

Independent initiatives cannot be mere words; there is too much distrust and fear for mere words to heal. They are actions, visible actions to distrust and fear.

If we see our sister/brother adversary in need of being freed from distrust and fear, and we are well off in the capacity to take an initiative to decrease that need, and instead we close our hearts to our adversary, how can the love of God be in us?

In the following essay, Duane Friesen develops another dimension of just peacemaking more fully: Respect and support people's movements—organizations of citizens independent of governments—with particular attention to groups grounded in religious faith.