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War and Peace in the New Millennium

As the United States wages its “war on terrorism” and contemplates initiating an additional war against Iraq, the matter of the ethics of war has taken on an urgency not equaled in some time. The current situation carries with it what is at once an opportunity and a responsibility to rearticulate Catholic social teaching to address a new era marked by such issues as globalization, international terrorism, and humanitarian intervention.

Over the centuries, Christian belief has by no means underwritten a consistent and unitary stance on the problem of violence and injustice. There is, rather, a spectrum of positions that have coexisted and contended with one another historically (cf. Bainton 1960). At one extreme is the non-resistance suggested by the injunction in the Sermon on the Mount not to resist one who is evil. A similarly pacifist but distinctly more activist attitude, often associated with the Quakers, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, and other advocates of peaceful social change, is that of nonviolent resistance. Crossing over the sometimes elusive boundary between violence and nonviolence brings us to the just-

war stance introduced into Christian tradition by Ambrose and Augustine. We encounter further positions—some varieties of liberationism, for example—that loosen one or another of the central just-war constraints on violence before arriving at the holy war mentality’s embrace of unmitigated, indiscriminate violence.

Within this spectrum, the weight of Catholic thought centers on the possibilities of nonviolent resistance and just war. At the time of World War II, Catholics applying for conscientious objector status could expect to have their cases dismissed out of hand in light of Pius XII’s rejection of pacifism. Since Vatican II, however, institutional Catholic teaching has come to support both nonviolence and just war as viable ethical positions—however elusive the theological and theoretical grounds for endorsing the two seemingly opposed views might remain (see Miller, 1991). Indeed, under the tutelage of John Paul II and in the wake of the stunning success of nonviolent revolutions around the world in the late 1980s, the Church’s focus on nonviolence has, arguably, eclipsed the traditional focus on just-war reasoning. This

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shift was signaled in the American context by the subtle transition from the U.S. bishop's statement in 1983 in *The Challenge of Peace* that "peace must be built on the basis of justice" (USCCB, 1983, par. 56) to the title of their reflection on the topic ten years later, "The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace" (USCCB, 1994).

Both the idea of just war and the agenda of nonviolent resistance are currently undergoing a process of reassessment in light of changing historical conditions. Where traditional conceptions of just war were shaped by conflicts among states in the post-Westphalian world, recent cases of armed humanitarian intervention in places such as Somalia or Kosovo have reconstituted the conception of moral community invoked, replacing the nation-state with a transnational conception of the common good. At the same time, the threat of attack from a global terrorist network (as in Yemen, Kenya, or Indonesia) departs from standard just-war assumptions about both the attacker and the attacked. New technological possibilities (missile defense systems, cyberwar) further tax the theory's received categories. In the face of these challenges, the just-war tradition is faced with the daunting task of reapplying its central premise: that violence in the interest of restraining injustice may be licit under certain concrete criteria of limitation.

The contending conviction of nonviolent resistance—that violence is not a morally acceptable or effective means to the goal of peace with justice—is also encountering new frontiers. The cumulative experience of intergovernmental and non-governmental aid organizations has furthered our understanding of the ways in which economic deprivation, ecological degradation, and unbridled conflict fuel one another—and generated corresponding insights into the need for interlinked strategies of conflict resolution and sustainable development

(cf. UNCED, 1992). Catholic social thought has incorporated these insights in teaching that the pursuit of human rights, authentic human development, solidarity, and world order are indispensable components of any strategy for promoting peace (Christiansen 2001). The need to realize the restorative potential of forgiveness and reconciliation—illustrated to the world through South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee—has been driven home more recently by John Paul II's mantra in response to the events of September 11, 2001: "No peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness" (John Paul II 2002). Peace education; techniques of conflict transformation such as those pioneered by the Mennonite thinker John Paul Lederach or by the international lay Catholic Community of Sant'Egidio; and research on techniques of nonviolent social change used, for example, in the political transitions of 1989, in Bishop Belo's campaign in East Timor, or in the ouster of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia all remain resources that are largely untapped (Appleby, 2000).

The two stances, just-war reasoning and nonviolent resistance, yielded contrasting perspectives on the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan. While Catholic devotees of nonviolence were clear in their condemnation of a massive attack on a sovereign state with significant civilian casualties, the statement approved by the majority of U.S. bishops upheld the possibility of resorting to war in response to terrorist attacks, even if the bishops were careful to qualify this point in various ways: war was viable only as part of a broader effort to remedy various injustices, only insofar as it targeted those directly responsible and spared civilians and infrastructure as much as possible, and only in concert with a comprehensive program of peacebuilding and development assistance (USCCB, 2001).

The prospect of a war on Iraq, however, has brought the two sides closer together. In the debate about a potential U.S. attack, in addition to various realist arguments that eschew the importance of moral considerations altogether, four main sorts of ethical arguments for intervention have been invoked. One is an argument for humanitarian intervention on the grounds of systemic, sustained, widespread and serious human rights abuses—in this case, especially against the Kurdish and Shi'a populations. A second envisions a war of enforcement designed to uphold the rules of the international community with regard to weapons inspections. A third appeals to self-defense against terrorism and the future use of weapons of mass destruction. The fourth is a plea for regime change in the interest of liberating the Iraqi people from the reign of a tyrant.

While a just-war stance is receptive to arguments of the first sort, the relevant criteria have simply not been met in recent years, partly because a sort of humanitarian intervention—"no-fly zones"—is already in effect and has successfully helped prevent large-scale abuses. A war of enforcement presupposes the legitimacy and viability of an international authority in a manner that many just-war advocates find at the very least premature. The demand for regime change is tantamount to an insistence on unconditional surrender, a measure that, John Courtney Murray noted in regard to Japan during World War II, violates the standard of right intention (Cahill, 1994, 207–8). Hence just-war theorists have focused their analysis primarily on the argument from national self-defense.

Here, the threshold criterion for legitimate military action is just cause, and many, including the bishops, have pointed out that this crucial criterion has not been met. Why? It is not that the notion of just cause does not allow for pre-emptive attacks; it

does (Walzer, 2000, 74–85). Such instances, though, are sharply constrained: they must be responses to a threat that is grave, imminent, highly probable, and extremely costly if left unmet (Galston, 2002). Attacks designed to meet a lesser threat, of the sort which Iraq is generally agreed to constitute at present, are *preventive*, not pre-emptive, and do not fall within what the tradition considers just cause (Walzer, 2002). In addition, the case for war faces substantial hurdles in the principles of legitimate authority, which, on a Catholic reading, entails a clear international sanction; proportionality and reasonable hope of success, which are complicated by the regional implications of a war; and non-combatant immunity, which remains endangered despite advances in "smart" weapons technologies. It is based on these principles that the U.S. bishops have counseled against launching a full-scale war on Iraq (USCCB, 2002).

The peacemaking approach has been to argue that the objectives of protecting human rights, establishing order, protecting U.S. interests, and overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime are all best sought through a program of strategic nonviolence. Its proponents insist that the Iraqi people possesses adequate internal resources for exercising resistance against Saddam Hussein; moreover, they contest the validity of the widespread assumption that pacifism can work only against relatively tolerant regimes (Ackerman and DuVall, 2000).

The convergence of just-war and non-violent views of Iraq may be seen as symptomatic of a deeper development in Catholic attitudes toward war. The recent prominence given by John Paul II and the Vatican to peacemaking and nonviolent tactics has subtly altered the just war theory itself, for example by cementing the defensive character of just cause, raising

the profile of the oft-overlooked criterion of comparative justice, and stiffening the standards for last resort. Even more significantly, recent church pronouncements have tended to hold up cases of humanitarian intervention and resistance to terrorism as the only sorts of cases in which just cause might obtain. What is distinctive about this focus is that it signals a shift from the discourse of war (between contending groups) to the discourse of policing or law enforcement (within a community). This shift is notably illustrated in John Paul's recent World Day of Peace address. There, the pope characterizes terrorism as committing "intolerable crimes," as itself constituting "a true crime against humanity," marked by an attempt to achieve a "radical breakdown of order"; "The guilty must be correctly identified," he adds, "since criminal culpability is always personal and cannot be extended to the nation, ethnic group, or religion to which the terrorists may belong." While there is a right to defend oneself against terrorism, a truly just, faithful and reasonable response requires above all forgiveness and reconciliation (John Paul II, 2002).

This trajectory of Catholic thought on war and peace suggests a striking analogy with another front in the ethics of criminality and killing: the issue of capital punishment. In the wake of *Evangelium Vitae*, the death penalty remains a possibility *in principle* for Catholic moral theology that is, however, stripped of most of its traditional justifications and rejected *in practice* on prudential grounds, as inapplicable to typical modern societies (John Paul II, 1995, no. 56). Depending on the fortunes of the ongoing construction of an effective international legal order, a Catholic teaching that allows for the justifiable recourse to war in theory alone and effectively rules it out in practice may not be far behind.

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