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EMERGING HORIZON OF NONVIOLENCE

Eli McCarthy♦
Georgetown University

Abstract

The theological discourse and praxis of nonviolence has a range of expressions. At the same time, there are some predominant descriptions of nonviolence which narrow our view or even obstruct our praxis. These have critical implications for our approach to spirituality, conflict, and policy. In this essay, I unpack an emerging horizon of nonviolence from a theological perspective. This includes recognizing nonviolence as the *positive* reverence for dignity and life and thus, also the constant effort to avoid dehumanization and participation in other types of violence. I begin by describing a robust sense of nonviolence arising from global consultations with persons in violent conflict zones over the past five years or so. Next, I explain the different characteristics with some examples and analysis. I will demonstrate the value of this more robust approach to nonviolence drawing on some prominent voices in the Asian context. Finally, I identify some critical implications for the Catholic Church and religious institutions, government policy, and educational institutions.

Keywords: De-colonization; Dignity; Integral Ecology; Intersectionality; Nonviolence

The theological discourse and praxis of nonviolence has a range of expressions. At the same time, there are some predominant

♦ **Eli McCarthy, PhD**, teaches at Georgetown University in Washington DC in Justice and Peace Studies. He has published an edited book called *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Breaking Cycles of Violence and Building Sustainable Peace* (2020) and *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers: A Virtue Ethic for Catholic Social Teaching and U.S. Policy* (2012). From 2012 to 2020 he served as the Director of Justice and Peace for CMSM, which is the leadership conference of all the U.S. Catholic men's religious orders. This enabled him direct advocacy experience on influencing U.S. policy. He also coordinates the DC Peace Team which offers training in nonviolent communication, restorative justice circles, bystander intervention, along with providing unarmed civilian protection and accompaniment deployments. Email: esm52@georgetown.edu

descriptions of nonviolence which narrow our view or even obstruct our praxis. These have critical implications for our approach to spirituality, conflict, and policy. One of these predominant descriptions is that nonviolence is primarily negative, i.e., the avoidance of violence. Another is that nonviolence is primarily a tool or strategy. Another is that nonviolence is a general rule with exceptions for permitting violence. Another is that nonviolence is about passivity. Another is that nonviolence is simply pacifism. I address the drawbacks of many of these in my book *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers*.¹

In this essay, I unpack an emerging horizon of nonviolence from a theological perspective. I begin by describing a robust sense of nonviolence. Next, I explain the different characteristics with some examples and analysis. I will demonstrate the value of this more robust approach to nonviolence drawing on some prominent voices in the Asian context. Finally, I identify some critical implications for the Catholic Church and religious institutions, government policy, and educational institutions.

I am drawing on recent global consultations over the past five years including those living in violent conflict zones. Some of these violent conflict zones included Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, South Sudan, Congo, Nigeria, Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, Philippines, Korea, and Sri Lanka. The global consultations included conferences in Rome which were co-sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace along with Pax Christi International in 2016, as well as the Dicastery of Integral Human Development and Pax Christi International in 2019. Numerous regional gatherings, grassroots leaders, academic conferences, UN and government sessions, and global roundtables also contributed.

Emerging from these theological encounters is a description of nonviolence as the *positive* reverence for dignity and life and thus, also the constant effort to avoid dehumanization and participation in other types of violence. The praxis of nonviolence is always contextual. And there are key characteristics emerging about nonviolence:

- a core Gospel value and the way of Jesus,
- a spirituality, way of life, a distinct virtue and capability
- the power of love and imagination in action

¹Eli McCarthy, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers: A Virtue Ethic for Catholic Social Teaching and U.S. Policy*, Pickwick: Eugene, OR, 2012.

- the path to fuller truth
- the path to de-colonization and justice
- rooted in and drawing from indigenous resources
- a cross-cutting and intersectional praxis
- constitutive to integral ecology
- a strategic methodology and constructive force for
- breaking cycles of violence (direct, structural, systemic, cultural)
- protecting all people and our common home
- building a sustainable peace
- integral disarmament

Key Characteristics of Nonviolence

Let us explore this robust description and key characteristics. *As the positive reverence for dignity and life*, we see more clearly that nonviolence is not simply or even primarily about a negative. Gandhi drew on the Sanskrit term “ahimsa” which translates into non-harming or nonviolence.² Notably, in Sanskrit abstract nouns often name a fundamental positive quality indirectly, by negating its opposite, such as “avera” (non-hatred) to convey love. Nonviolence is the positive reverence for dignity and life because it most clearly illuminates the dignity of all people and is consistent with our shared human dignity.

Our dignity arises from being made in the image and likeness of God. We are sacred gifts such that our life is not only given from another, but also given out of Love and for Love. As gifts, we are challenged to live in a way that is consistent with gift. That is, a way of valuing our self, offering our self, valuing others, and illuminating the gift of all people. In contrast, we enter into the way of violence as we turn to the logic of de-humanization in the forms of self-possessiveness and destruction of others. This way often includes structural and cultural types of violence.

In turn, Pope John Paul II argued that “violence destroys ...our dignity,”³ while Cardinal Ratzinger, soon to be Pope Benedict, argued

²Also see Peter Gonsalves, *Gandhi and the Popes: From Pius XI to Francis*, Peter Lang, Jan. 22, 2015. “Pope Francis and Gandhi: Five Keys to leading by Example,” interview in *Aleteia*, Jan. 30, 2021.

³Pope John Paul II, quoted in Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church*, London: Continuum, 2004, 496; and in “Holy Mass in Drogheda, Ireland,” The Holy See, September 29, 1979,

that “violence degrades the dignity of the victim and perpetrator.”⁴ And Pope Francis calls us to “respect our deepest dignity and make active nonviolence our way of life.”⁵

Lisa Sowle Cahill argues that killing “involves an offense against the dignity of human life,” even in difficult, “dilemma” situations.⁶ She also points out that “killing is patently incompatible with love of neighbor and the example of Jesus, even if Jesus’s example and teaching also urge us to take risks to help those in mortal danger.”⁷ Killing is inconsistent with human dignity by obstructing empathy, failing to be a gift to others, devaluing the sacred gift of others, and creating ongoing trauma in the parties directly involved as well as other community members. The advancing scientific acknowledgement of trauma, perpetrator induced syndrome, moral injury, and brain distortion from killing illustrate this reality.⁸

Nonviolence is a core Gospel value and the way of Jesus. He models the way of nonviolence by becoming vulnerable; inviting participation in the reign of God; caring for the outcasts; prioritizing those in urgent need; loving and forgiving enemies; challenging the religious, political, economic, and military powers; healing persons and communities; praying and fasting, along with risking and offering his life on the cross to expose and transcend both injustice and violence. In the face of sin, Jesus overcomes through active, creative, nonviolent resistance.

http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jpii_hom_19790929_irlanda-dublino-drogheda.html.

⁴Sacred Congregation, for the Doctrine of Faith. “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation.” Aug. 6, 1984; section xi, paragraph 7, http://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_df84lt.htm.

⁵Pope Francis, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” World Day of Peace Message, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html.

⁶Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: Pacifism, Just War, and Peacebuilding*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019, 125, 153.

⁷Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Catholic Tradition on Peace, War, and Just Peace,” in *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020, 42, <http://press.georgetown.edu/book/georgetown/just-peace-ethic-primer>.

⁸Rachel MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*, Lincoln, NE: Praeger/Greenwood Publishing, 2005. Robert Muller, “Death Becomes Us: The Psychological Trauma of Killing,” in *Psychology Today*, Feb. 21, 2014, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/talking-about-trauma/201402/death-becomes-us-the-psychological-trauma-killing>.

Pope Francis implores us:

To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence. As my predecessor Benedict XVI observed, that teaching “is realistic because it takes into account that in the world there is *too much* violence, *too much* injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with *more* love, with *more* goodness. This ‘*more*’ comes from God.” He went on to stress that: “For Christians, nonviolence is not merely tactical behaviour but a person’s way of being, the attitude of one who is *so convinced of God’s love and power* that he or she is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one’s enemy constitutes the nucleus of the ‘Christian revolution.’” The Gospel command to *love your enemies* (cf. Lk 6:27) “is rightly considered the *magna carta* of Christian nonviolence. It does not consist in succumbing to evil..., but in responding to evil with good (cf. Rom 12:17-21), and thereby breaking the chain of injustice.”⁹

Nonviolence is also a spirituality, way of life, a distinct virtue and capability. Archbishop Chong of Fiji exclaimed that “God’s vision for humanity is the nonviolent life.”¹⁰ As a spirituality, it opens us deeper to the way of God. We are invited to become a certain type of person in our daily life as we interact with the cosmos and the Creator. We are challenged to cultivate a particular set of virtues as constitutive of human flourishing, such as mercy, compassion, empathy, humility, courage, solidarity, hospitality, and justice. In addition, nonviolence is a distinct virtue that actualizes conciliatory love by drawing adversaries toward partnership; and illuminates the truths of our deepest dignity and ultimate unity.¹¹ In turn, through this formation we develop a capability for creative nonviolent action in ever-enlarging complex situations.

Nonviolence is the power of love and imagination in action. It is critical to acknowledge the power of nonviolence. We should no longer be obstructed by the false myth of nonviolence as passivity. It is a power, particularly of love. Initially actualized in the power of God creating us out of Love and seeped through the “grain of the universe” or the abounding Grace that overcomes death and violence. As creative love, it is also the logic of imagination. Here, I am not speaking about any kind of newness, such as a new idea, a new drone, a new nuclear weapon, or a new way to deceive. Rather,

⁹Pope Francis, “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace,” World Day of Peace Message, 2017, par. 3.

¹⁰Rose Berger, “Fiji Archbishop Advocates Nonviolence to Help Stabilize Social Unrest,” in *National Catholic Reporter*, Oct. 8, 2019.

¹¹McCarthy, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers*.

nonviolence is the power of the imagination consistent with creative love. It entails the imagination for better ways to care for those on the margins, to forgive those we struggle with, to strategize nonviolent movements, to develop unarmed protection mechanisms, etc.

Nonviolence is the path to fuller truth. Gandhi used the term Satyagraha to describe his nonviolent movement and training. The term translates to grasping/holding firmly to truth, which sometimes has been referred to as truth-force or soul-force. In turn, nonviolence was about acting in accord with the Truth of our reality, i.e., realism; and as the way to illuminate the aspects of the Truth we have yet to grasp.¹² Too often Christian 'Realists' and other scholars dismiss the language and robust ethical implications of nonviolence by presuming nonviolence is inconsistent with the 'truth' of reality. They are helpful in terms of ensuring we take the fullness of sin seriously. Yet, they often claim the pervasive reality of sin makes nonviolence an 'ideal,' naïve, something primarily for interpersonal relationships or for after the eschaton, or simply a limited tool in the politically responsible leaders toolbox. Yet, such claims often overstate the dominance of sin and understate the Truth that Grace abounds (Rom 5:17). Although sin continues in significant destructive ways, and thus, suffering may occur through our nonviolent resistance; the ultimate power of reality is Grace, even if it doesn't appear on occasion to work as we may envision in the short-term. We know that it is working, especially when strategic, and this often comes to light in the longer-term. This Grace is the way of nonviolent Love. This is what nonviolence as the path to fuller truth helps us to recognize and actualize. As Benedict XVI observed, Jesus' teaching about nonviolence "is realistic because it takes into account that in the world there is *too much* violence, *too much* injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with *more* love, with *more* goodness."¹³

Further, Gandhi acknowledged that each person offered a piece of the truth, and thus, as far as we destroy others, we would limit the contribution they could offer to the broader Truth we seek together.¹⁴

¹² Michael Nagler, "Hope or Terror? Gandhi and the Other 9/11" (Petaluma, CA: Metta Center for Nonviolence, 2013).

¹³ Pope Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," World Day of Peace Message, 2017, par. 3.

¹⁴ Mohandas Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers*, ed. Krishna Kripalani (New York: Continuum, 1980); and Richard L. Johnson, ed., *Gandhi's Experiments with Truth: Essential Writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

As far as Jesus is considered the Way, the Truth, and the Life, (Jn 14:6) he models nonviolence as the way to the Truth. Archbishop Chong explains that “peace and nonviolence are fundamental values of the world’s classic religions,” as they offer us ways to search for Truth.¹⁵ For example, reflecting on Hinduism, he claims “the concept of Karma is essential to Hinduism and is opposed to killing or violence. According to the law of Karma, violence begets violence, and this is not the will of Brahman.”¹⁶

Nonviolence is the path to de-colonization and justice. Colonization manifests in the domination of other lands and other peoples, as well as how our minds and hearts can be colonized. Nonviolence offers us a way out of domination. It challenges us to acknowledge harm and bias, to repair and un-learn, as well as to commit to and construct just systems. It is anti-racist and anti-sexist. Practices of restorative and transformative justice actualize nonviolence as the path to accountability and a sustainable justice.¹⁷ Although we can often dominate others or displace violence elsewhere, these shadowy or illusory forms of justice manifested as ‘retribution,’ or ‘justified violence’ do not yield a sustainable justice much less de-colonization.

Nonviolence is rooted in and drawn from indigenous resources. A particular expression of this is the indigenous practice of restorative circles, which is the grounding for proliferation of restorative justice practices around the world. Another critical expression is the deep sense of unity both through ancestors and through the web of ecology. For example, Honduran environmental and indigenous leader Berta Cáceres was the co-founder of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). “Berta had led the Lenca people and other indigenous communities in a nonviolent struggle for the integrity of their territories and their sovereignty.”¹⁸ She risked her life and was killed for her nonviolent resistance in 2016.

Nonviolence offers us a cross-cutting, intersectional praxis to 1) see more clearly how key issues intersect and 2) provide more

¹⁵Berger, “Fiji Archbishop,” 2019.

¹⁶Berger, “Fiji Archbishop,” 2019.

¹⁷ Miriam Krinsky and Taylor Phrase, “Accountability and Repair: The Prosecutor’s Case for Restorative Justice,” *New York Law School: Law Review* 64, 1, Jan. 2020, https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1449&context=nyls_law_review.

¹⁸Scott Wright, “Signs of the Times: Transforming Creation through Nonviolent Resistance,” Mar. 4, 2021, <https://columbancenter.org/signs-time-transforming-creation-through-nonviolent-resistance>.

sustainable ways of intersectional transformation. Martin Luther King Jr. exemplified this when he wrote about the “three evils” that were interconnected: racism, materialism, and militarism. The nonviolent social movement he engaged increasingly integrated these issues, and thus, increasingly manifested the way of nonviolence. Another area this aspect is illuminated entails the climate crises and its relationship to various types of violence.

For example, using the lens of nonviolence to explore the intersection of climate and violence, we can more clearly see that climate change is strongly linked to human violence. When significant shifts in climate occur, studies have shown increases to domestic violence, rape, assaults and murders, ethnic violence, land invasions, police violence, and war.¹⁹ For instance, the loss of arable land due to climate change was a key factor in the mass atrocities and extensive violence in Sudan. The link between environmental degradation and increasing gender-based violence is also being more clearly identified, as well as how gender-based violence is used to suppress environmental defenders; and thus, disrupts our capacity to address climate change.²⁰

Yet, nonviolence also helps us to see how the ecological destruction that spurs climate change is systematic, and thus, a form of structural violence itself. Further, such destruction is also enabled by other forms of structural violence, such as massive inequality and fossil fuel extraction; by cultural violence, such as habits and attitudes of indifference or domination; and by direct violence, such as the preparation for and engagement in war. For example, research has shown that

war and preparation for it are fossil fuel intensive activities. The United States of America’s military’s energy consumption drives total U.S. government energy consumption. The Department of Defense is the single largest consumer of energy in the U.S., and in fact, the world’s single largest institutional consumer of petroleum... Since 2001, the DOD has consistently consumed between 77 and 80 percent of all U.S. government energy consumption.²¹

¹⁹University of Cal-Berkeley, “Climate Strongly Affects Human Conflict and Violence Worldwide, Says Study,” in *Phys.Org*, Aug. 1, 2013, <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-climate-strongly-affects-human-conflict.html>.

²⁰Fiona Harvey, “Climate Breakdown is Increasing Violence against Women,” in the *Guardian*, Jan. 29, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/29/climate-breakdown-is-increasing-violence-against-women>.

²¹Neta Crawford, “Pentagon Fuel Use, Climate Change, and the Cost of War,” in *Costs of War*, June 12, 2019, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/>

War itself also does grave and lasting harm to the environment, such as to water, air, soil, forests, species, and habitats.

Nonviolence is constitutive to integral ecology. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis lays out an exquisite description of integral ecology, which is itself a demonstration of intersectionality. Francis describes an integral ecology as environmental, economic, social, and cultural as well as an ecology of daily life consistent with the common good and justice between generations. In order to live in accord with these intersections and into this vision of integral ecology the way of nonviolence is critical. Archbishop Chong explains that in contrast to violence, “active nonviolence is a spirituality and a way of life that safeguards human dignity and the integrity of creation.”²²

Arising from this encyclical has been a *Laudato Si'* Action Platform developed by a broad consultation with the global Catholic community. The goals include a response to the cry of the earth, response to cry of the poor, ecological economics, adopt simple lifestyles, ecological education, ecological spirituality, and participatory action. Nonviolence is essential to reaching each of these goals.²³

Living simply in our being and communities is crucial for preventing over-consumption and violent conflict, as well as cultivating integral ecology. A discipline of communion with all creation cultivates the sense of a shared journey and a common home to better enable us to engage conflict constructively. Such a discipline also better enables us to live in accord with what Christian scholars and Pope Francis call the “intrinsic value of all creation, which is more than its usefulness to humans.”²⁴ To fully actualize this reality along with integral ecology we will need to increasingly commit to active nonviolence. Because work for integral ecology helps us see and embrace our interconnectedness more clearly, it enables us to also see the value and need for the way of active nonviolence.

Nonviolence is a strategic methodology and constructive force for breaking cycles of violence (direct, structural, systemic,

cow/imce/papers/2019/Pentagon%20Fuel%20Use%2C%20Climate%20Change%20and%20the%20Costs%20of%20War%20Final.pdf.

²²Berger, “Fiji archbishop,” 2019.

²³Marie Dennis and Ken Butigan, “Gospel Nonviolence for a *Laudato Si* Future,” 2021, <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2021/04/23/gospel-nonviolence-for-a-laudato-si-future/>.

²⁴Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 2015, par. 115, 140, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

cultural), protecting all people and our common home, building a sustainable peace and integral disarmament. Nonviolence is strategic. Particularly social movements, campaigns, coalition building, advocacy, civilian-based defence, unarmed civilian protection deployments, and peacebuilding illustrate the strategic aspects of nonviolent action. These take critical planning, clear goals, contingencies, identifying strengths and vulnerabilities, sources of power and pillars of support, potential allies, leadership development, tactical skills, etc. Nonviolence is also a constructive force that exercises power to help build a vision of sustainable peace. Gandhi saw the constructive program of nonviolence as the most important since it built unity in the movement, met the needs of the community, and generated momentum of positive concrete action. Gandhi included programs for education, housing, and health as part of this constructive program. Limiting nonviolence to protests or civil disobedience misses the constructive force of nonviolence.

Nonviolence as a strategic methodology illustrates how resistance can achieve its political goals and shift power away from the oppressor even without a 'change of heart' by the oppressor. Recent history has demonstrated that this has worked against very ruthless leaders.²⁵ In fact, recent research has discovered that contemporary nonviolent resistance movements have been twice as successful in achieving their political objectives as violent revolutions. Even more telling, successful nonviolent movements have led to "durable democracies" at least ten times (some argue thirty times) more often than so-called "successful" violent revolutions.²⁶ For example, Archbishop Chong explained about Fiji that "Our political campaigns should use nonviolent methods. Violent (coups) methods as we

²⁵Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005. This includes leaders like Slobodan Milosevic, Ferdinand Marcos, Augusto Pinochet, along with repressive systems such as the Soviet Union and Apartheid, as well as Hitler, e.g., Denmark, Norway, and the Rosenstrasse Protest.

²⁶Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civilian Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2011, 7, 213-14. Of the three cases given of "successful" violent revolutions that led to basic "durable democracies," at least two are questionable and certainly not promising models. The Bengali campaign in 1971 has had major political corruption, coups, military leaders, etc., for twenty years afterward. The Jewish resistance in 1948 has certainly still maintained significant habits of violence, both direct and structural, e.g., the occupation of Palestine. The Costa Rica campaign ending in 1948 was quite short and mixed with significant nonviolent action, but ultimately, they decided to disband their entire military, which still holds today. If we use their numbers and take out these first two, then it may be "thirty times" more likely.

witnessed in Fiji in the last thirty-two years, only beget more coups and denies human and economic development.”²⁷ To the degree such nonviolent resistance movements become integrated with the virtue of nonviolent peacemaking, I suggest their success would be even higher, especially regarding durable democracy and, more significantly, a sustainable just peace.

Implications

There are many ever-expanding implications of this emerging horizon of nonviolence. For this essay, I will briefly identify some examples for three sectors to open further analysis: the Catholic Church and Religious Institutions, Government Policy, and Education.

Catholic Church and Religious Institutions

For religious institutions and particularly the Catholic Church, this emerging horizon invites and challenges us to mainstream the language of nonviolence. Even though debates, nuances, and ethical dilemmas continue, we must no longer shy away from the language of nonviolence. It offers a unique clarity and incisiveness which the language of peace, pacifism, and peacebuilding too often miss, or they too easily get co-opted. Marie Dennis and Ken Butigan explain,

The language of “peace,” “peacebuilding” – even “a culture of peace” – alludes to the great goal we are seeking, and even to some of the steps that move us in that direction. However, “nonviolence” and “nonviolent methods” more sharply illustrate both the goal and the way to achieve it. Peace requires what nonviolence explicitly does. The word “nonviolence” unmistakably lifts up, grapples with, and lays bare the reality of violence and the urgent need to challenge and transform it; the word “peace” does not so clearly do so. In fact, “peace” can side-step the transformation of violent social structures and systems, settling instead for an abstract ideal, an inner state, the absence of conflict or the result of dominating violence. Furthermore, effective peacebuilding often needs and depends on a more comprehensive nonviolent praxis, such as nonviolent resistance, unarmed protection, and civilian-based defense.²⁸

²⁷Berger, “Fiji archbishop,” 2019.

²⁸Marie Dennis and Ken Butigan, “The Good News of Peace and Nonviolence: How Nonviolence is Essential to a Culture of Peace,” Feb. 2020, <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Nonviolence-is-essential-to-peace-Feb-2020.pdf>. Véronique Dudouet, “Powering to Peace: Integrated Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding Strategies,” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, April 2017. Nadine Bloch and Lisa Schirch, *Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding: An Action Guide*, Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2018.

Pope Francis was clear about mainstreaming nonviolence in his message “Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace.” The Japanese Catholic Bishops Conference endorsed the 2016 “Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence.”²⁹ Archbishop Antonio Ledesma, SJ, of the Philippines also endorsed the appeal with thousands of others.³⁰

With the attention to the language comes the challenge to convey the robustness of this horizon of nonviolence, not merely in theory but especially in praxis. One critical step would be for the Catholic Church to add to the Catechism a robust description of nonviolence, key nonviolent practices, and the norms of a just peace ethic as was called for in the statement from the 2019 consultation on nonviolence and just peace at the Holy See’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.³¹ Key nonviolent practices would include restorative justice, nonviolent communication, unarmed civilian protection, trauma-healing, nonviolent resistance, and nonviolent civilian-based defence. Developing the theology of nonviolence as well as the contributions of various religious traditions to nonviolence would be another critical line of effort. Pope Francis and his engagements with Islamic leaders is one significant example of this effort.³²

Government Policy

Another significant sector of impact is government policy. Archbishop Chong from Fiji says, “A key part of building peace is building just political, social, and economic institutions—ones embedding norms of nonviolence, equity, dignity, and participation—at the international, national, and local levels.”³³ Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Filipino prelate and Permanent

²⁹ Catholic Bishops Conference of Japan, Aug. 2, 2016, <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2016/08/02/japanese-bishops-endorse-appeal/>.

³⁰Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, “Organizational and Individual Endorses of Appeal,” <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2016/08/01/organizational-and-individual-endorsements-of-the-appeal/>.

³¹ “Nonviolence Nurtures Hope: Can Renew the Church,” April, 2019, <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2019/11/18/nonviolence-nurtures-hope-can-renew-the-church-2/>.

³²Josh McElwee, “Francis tells Iraqi faith leaders: Violence in name of Religion is Blasphemy,” in *National Catholic Reporter*, Mar. 6, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-tells-iraqi-faith-leaders-violence-name-religion-greatest-blasphemy>. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, Oct. 3, 2020.

³³Archbishop Peter Loy Chong, “Be Servants of Peace,” in *The World News*, Apr. 18, 2019, <https://theworldnews.net/fj-news/archbishop-peter-loy-chong-be-servants-of-peace>.

Observer of the Holy See to the UN regularly cited Francis' message on "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace" during a UN session in 2017.³⁴

This emerging horizon of nonviolence shifts the focus of government policy towards a positive reverence for the dignity of all, including adversaries or 'enemies.' This is a critical re-orientation that better enables policies for de-colonization, intersectional analysis, integral ecology, breaking cycles of violence, and building a sustainable just peace. Investments and priorities would start to move in this direction and away from the proliferation of weapons. Pope Francis has been consistent with previous popes with their strong critique of the proliferation of weapons. "The test on politics is war; the test on the honorability of a nation for me is: 'Do you make weapons? Do you promote wars? Do you earn your wealth because you sell weapons so others can kill themselves?' It is there that we can see if a nation is morally sound."³⁵

Catholic, religious, and other advocacy organizations could collaborate to move our policies in these directions. They can utilize the Just Peace ethic as a moral framework to guide policymakers in accord with this emerging horizon of nonviolence.³⁶ Bishop Anthony Taylor explicitly calls for this shift to a Just Peace approach to conflicts.³⁷ Pax Christi International released a policymaker's toolkit toward these ends.³⁸

This approach to policy is about acknowledging nonviolence as the orientation and committing to a process of growing in a robust praxis of nonviolence. There may be situations along the way when government actors are not ready for completely nonviolent responses, but this is the vision they would explicitly be working

³⁴"UN Peace-making forum responds to Pope Francis, demonstrates optimism," in *National Catholic Reporter*, Mar. 14, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/un-peace-making-forum-responds-pope-francis-demonstrates-optimism>.

³⁵Francesco Merlo, "Pope to Scholas Occurrentes: A nation at war is not morally sound," in *Vatican News*, May 20, 2021, https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-05/pope-francis-scholas-occurrentes-meeting.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NewsletterVN-EN

³⁶*Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*, ed. E. McCarthy, Georgetown University Press: Washington DC, 2020.

³⁷Bishop Anthony Taylor, "Just Peace: world conflicts need to be resolved nonviolently," in *Arkansas Catholic*, Sept. 23, 2020, <https://www.arkansas-catholic.org/columns/column/6684/Just-Peace-World-conflicts-need-to-be-resolved-nonviolently>.

³⁸Pax Christi International, "A Policymaker's Tool for Effective Nonviolent Strategies for Sustainable Peace," Sept. 2021.

toward. The role of the Catholic Church as well as religious institutions and persons would be to focus governments on significantly growing in nonviolence and just peace, rather than to legitimate or endorse violence.³⁹ In turn, our society would more effectively and urgently move forward in that direction as well as away from war, structural violence, and cultural violence.

Educational Institutions

Jasmin Nario-Galace, Executive Director of the Center for Peace Education at Miriam College in the Philippines argues that

Catholic institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, must continue developing virtues and popularizing social teachings on nonviolence. Nonviolence must be integrated into the life of the religion, including through schools under their care. Religious traditions have shared teachings on nonharming, love, justice, reciprocity, solidarity, respect for human dignity, and compassion. These must be vigorously taught if we want to contribute to ending war and suffering. Religious traditions must teach and model nonviolent practices such as conflict transformation, peacemaking, and peace building. They must speak against war and other forms of violence – psychological, structural, cultural, or armed.⁴⁰

Fr. Stephen from Sri Lanka says, “The Church in Sri Lanka has a very good fertile soil where she could plant the seeds of nonviolent communication for a deeper reconciliation starting with the children and youth.”⁴¹

Catholic educational institutions can take the lead in transforming education by identifying in their mission statements a commitment to the value of nonviolence and growing in the praxis of nonviolence. DePaul University in Chicago, IL of the United States offers a recent example of this shift in their mission statement.⁴² In addition, educational institutions are challenged to develop departments,

³⁹Eli McCarthy, “Catholic Nonviolence: Transforming Military Institutions,” in *Ethical Expositions*, Jan. 6, 2020, <https://expositions.journals.villanova.edu/index.php/expositions/article/view/2489>.

⁴⁰Jasmin Nario-Galace, “Women Count for Peace,” in *Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*, ed. E. McCarthy, Georgetown University Press: Washington DC, 2021, 251.

⁴¹Fr Ashok Stephen, preparatory paper for Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference, 2016, <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ashok-stephen-sri-lanka.pdf>.

⁴²DePaul University, “Fundamental and Emerging Commitments,” <https://offices.depaul.edu/mission-ministry/about/Pages/mission.aspx>.

graduate programs, and courses in nonviolence.⁴³ Such programs and courses should include specific nonviolent skill building as well as supplement them with training opportunities throughout the year. Such skills would include nonviolent communication, strategic nonviolent resistance, restorative circles, bystander intervention, unarmed civilian protection, and just peace advocacy, etc.

Conclusion

In this essay, I unpacked an emerging horizon of nonviolence from a theological perspective. I offered a robust description as well as some examples of different characteristics. I sought to demonstrate the value of this more robust approach to nonviolence drawing on some prominent voices in the Asian context. I briefly alluded to some implications for the Catholic Church and religious institutions, government policy, and educational institutions as a way to stir the imagination and plant the seeds for further reflection as well as praxis.

⁴³ Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, "Recommended Academic Programs to Advance Nonviolence," <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2018/05/14/peace-education-and-parenting-materials/>.