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FROM JUSTICE TO BEYOND JUSTICE: RETRIEVING CHRISTIANITY'S ORIGINAL INSPIRATION OF RADICAL INCLUSIVITY

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Abstract

For so many centuries Christianity got wedded to imperial religiosity and became enmeshed in warfare, violence, oppression, sectarianism, and exclusion. Its secular involvement in battles and wars was legitimized by the centuries-old Just War Theory, an ethical theory which had been systematized by Augustine and Aquinas. This effectively and tragically compromised Jesus' foundational vision of the New Reign of God with its radical character. In April 2017 a special Vatican conference co-hosted by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and *Pax Christi* came out with a statement rejecting the Catholic Church's long-held traditional teaching on the just war theory. They reasoned that the theory has too often been used to justify violent conflicts and recommended that the global church must reconsider Jesus' teaching on nonviolence. Making the daring step of rejecting the centuries-old just war theory warrants a compelling retrieval of Christianity's original inspiration and counter-cultural paradigm of prophetic inclusivity that is grounded on compassion.

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Introduction

Ancient and present-day religions which preach and teach peace as a fundamental human and religious value could not insulate

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themselves from the existential reality of conflict of local or worldwide scale. Most of them have ethical teachings that accommodate and justify the reality of war, however abhorrent it is.[1] Christianity is no exception. From its religious womb was developed the universally known Just War Theory in response to the changed cultural and historical context Christianity found itself in. The systematic conceptualizations came from the reflections and writings of Augustine, developed by Aquinas and re-appropriated by subsequent thinkers and theologians.

The just war theory did not emerge during the New Testament period up until the third century A.D. although the conceptual roots are found in the writings of the ancient Greek philosopher Cicero. In Jesus' time people were expecting an apocalyptic intervention of God in history. That was why Jesus could single-mindedly teach and exhort his disciples to give away all one's properties, not to be concerned about clothing and shelter, and to leave one's family behind in order to join him in his preaching itinerary without money or possessions. In addition, most of Jesus' hearers had no prospect of participating in the decisions of their government and affecting the welfare of other persons and nations. Neither did they see themselves as responsible for the welfare of the planetary ecology.[2]

The hitherto rising but clandestine Christianity was not a religion of the nation-state, thus had no traditional or historical interest in the problem of religion and political power. Instead the early Christians saw themselves as living in a new world or way of life that was "in" but not "of" the surrounding culture. They took their cue from Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom or reign which Jesus offered as a gift.[3] Since discipleship as the fundamental response to the gift presupposes conversion towards a reoriented life it challenges his followers to live lives in line with God's perfect righteousness and mercy (Mt 5:48) with all its practical implications. The Christian social ethics question was framed in terms of defining the substance of the

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[1] Cf. Thomas A. Shannon, *What Are They Saying about Peace and War?* New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1983, 4-9. As representations, the author mentions Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Greece and Rome, Judaism, Islam, Jainism, and Christianity.

[2]Richard Heirs, "Pivotal Reactions to the Eschatological Interpretations: Rudolf Bultmann and C.H. Dodd," in *The Kingdom of God in Twentieth Century Interpretation,* ed. Wendell Willis, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987, 18, and idem, *Jesus and Ethics: Four Interpretations,* Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968, 132, 148-149 cited in Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, 22.

[3]Victor Paul Furnish, "War and Peace in the New Testament," *Interpretation* 38 (October 1984) 363-79 cited in Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, 39-40.

life of converted discipleship, as well as to express in practical terms the meaning of Christian moral faithfulness in a sinful world.[4]

In the fourth century A.D. Constantine's declaration of Christianity as the empire's official religion brought about unprecedented peace and stability to a religion which had been persecuted by his predecessors for 300 years. Consequently, Christianity shed off its underground religious status and was thrust to the mainstream of the society. Constantine offered peace, and peace maintained in the empire meant peace for Christianity. State interests and concerns began to intersect with those of the religion. This influenced the attitudes of contemporary Christian thinkers concerning war and military service towards the legitimacy of violence in the name of the state. The question "is no longer whether participation in war is justified but what conditions should govern the right to declare war (*ius belli*) and what rules should be observed in waging it (*ius in bello*)."[5] In turn, Emperor Constantine made it sure that its newly proclaimed state religion would be safe from dangers particularly from possible barbarian invasions. This was a historical development which the earlier Christian writers did not anticipate or expect.[6] The change of socio-religious status moved Augustine and his contemporaries in the fifth century A.D. "to contemplate Christian transformation of society in a way unimaginable to their forebears."[7] The empire-friendly idea that "large-scale social change may require the use of force against those unconverted to Christianity's truths"[8] found its way into the religio-ethical tradition of the church. The church began to accept punishment such as violent coercion provided it safeguarded the common welfare by removing the roots of discord and deterring future infractions. "As chastisement, punishment may encourage reform, and even if death results, punishment cannot harm its object in any essential (spiritual) way."[9] As the state was now the secular ally of the religion, Christianity began to assert what it considered its "historic mission," that was, "to dominate, to absorb, to lead a whole Empire."[10]

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[4]Cahill, *Love Your Enemies,* 40.

[5]Cahill, *Love Your Enemies,* 55; see Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service*, Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983, 80.

[6]To get a good idea of the ethical positions of two early Christian writers, Tertullian and Origen, on nonviolence, see Cahill, *Love Your Enemies,* 41-56.

[7]Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, 69.

[8]Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, 69.

[9]Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, 69.

[10]Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, New York: Dorset Press, 1986; originally published by Univ. of California Press, 1967, 214 cited in Cahill, *Love your Enemies*, 75.

Indeed, even after the Constantinian period Christianity gradually influenced the transformation of the secular state and metamorphosed into Christendom. With its imperial religiosity the religion became enmeshed in warfare, violence, oppression, sectarianism, and exclusion with the just war theory backing it up. Several centuries later, even with the de-coupling of the Catholic Church from the affairs of the secular state brought about significantly by the codification of the separation of church and state provision in the western constitutions the Church continued to assess wars using its traditional just war theory.[11]

Aim of the Paper

The recent realization expressed by some 80 Catholic ethicists that the theory has too often been used to justify violent conflicts and wars led to the recommendation that the global church must reconsider very seriously Jesus' teaching on nonviolence.[12] The group composed of ethicists from different nationalities participated in a special Vatican conference co-hosted by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Pax Christi in April 2017. They came out with a statement repudiating the Catholic Church's long-held traditional teaching on the just war theory and made an appeal to the pope to produce an encyclical on nonviolence, or some other "major teaching document" reorienting the church's teaching on violence.[13] Their statement did not come out of the blue like a bolt in the sky. Some ten years earlier before its publication, John Kleiderer, et al, may have unwittingly helped prepare the ground for the daring appeal with the observation:

> The horrors of two world wars, the second ending with the use of the most deadly (*sic*) weapon humankind had ever seen at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, prompted a reconsideration of the possibility of a just war. The morality of war, the just war tradition, and the participation of Catholics in war began to be questioned in ways they hadn't been for centuries.[14]

My essay wishes to take part in the conversation following the group's plea addressed to the Catholic Church in particular to

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[11]John Kleiderer, Paula Minaert, and Mark Mossa, *Just War, Lasting Peace: What Christian Traditions Can Teach Us*, gen. ed. Dolores R. Leckey, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006, 24-29.

[12] For some historical precedents see Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory*, 119-148. She offers the Crusades, Joan of Arc's story, and the Puritan revolutionaries as examples of war waged in God's name.

[13] https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/landmark-vatican-conference-rejects-just-war-theory-asks-encyclical-nonviolence (retrieved 2Nov2017).

[14]John Kleiderer, et al, *Just War*, 24.

reconsider very seriously today Jesus' teaching on nonviolence and peace. It will offer a re-reading of the sacred texts in a new light for a closer access to the spirit of the texts. This will enable us to recover those elements of the biblical, particularly New Testament, tradition on peace and nonviolence which have been unwittingly and paradoxically relegated to the level of mere option, one among the many, by the institutional church's well-intentioned desire to make its ethical teachings relevant to changing historical and cultural situations over more than 1500 years.[15] Arguably, the Pontifical Council of Peace and Justice and Pax Christi would not have made a stand against the Just War theory without a solid gospel grounding.

In fairness, the just war theory proposed by Augustine and Aquinas and subsequently rearticulated by later Christian thinkers and writers did not mean to gloss over the nonviolent thrust of the Sermon on the Mount "but… to transmute its practical impact to another level or sphere."[16] To restrict the practical force of NT sayings against violence ("turn the other cheeck," "go the second mile," "love your enemies") they made the following qualifications: the sayings define a "higher" Christian life (for example of the clergy) but need not be taken literally on the "lower" plane (e.g. by the laity); they must be interpreted strictly regarding actions one one's behalf but not if one is removing or preventing harm to others; they apply to the inner realm of loving intention but not to the outer realm of just action; and they apply to the decisions of private citizens but not to those of public authorities acting in an official capacity (who have the right to command their subordinates, e.g. soldiers).[17] Cahill looks at these as 'maneuvers' "to make the Christian life more feasible in light of the other social obligations of the Christian" and as expression of "a growing perception that the life of kingdom discipleship is not only not fully accessible in this life, but *must be explicitly deferred* (italics, mine) in order to accommodate duties entailed by membership in multiple, intersecting communities of identity, both religious and secular."[18] Aquinas, himself, did not allow the more radical implications of Jesus' nonviolent example and teachings to challenge seriously his essentially philosophical-moral perspective. The realism represented by Augustine and Aquinas which entered

[15]For a helpful presentation of the shifting thought of the Catholic social teaching on peace and violence after the second world war, see Kleiderer, et al, *Just War,* 24-29.

[16]Cahill, *Love Your Enemies,* 56.

[17]Cahill, *Love Your Enemies,* 90.

[18]Cahill, *Love Your Enemies,* 56.

Christianity in the earlier centuries resulted in the weakening of the counter-cultural character of the gospel.

The following portion of the paper brings the readers *ad fontes* to the radical implications of the gospel teaching on solidarity, love of enemies, non-violent resistance, and compassion. This is offered as a biblical grounding presented in thematic form of the anti-just war theory articulated by the above cited Catholic ethicists for a faith-informed ethical reflection.

Solidarity for Inclusion

Solidarity is not a biblical word but expresses one of the most fundamental concepts in the Bible: the Hebrew notion of collectivity.[19] It ranked third in the hierarchy of Jewish values, after prestige and money. Individualism did not make sense in the ancient world. The basic unit was extended family founded on the cultural norm that the honour of one was the honour of all, the shame of one was the shame of all. Solidarity was also practiced with friends, with one's co-workers or co-traders, and within the confines of an elitist 'sect', like that of the Pharisees or the Essenes. The 'chosenness' doctrine precluded universal solidarity. In the Old Testament to love one's neighbour was to exclude one's enemy. One's neighbour was one's kin, the person close to him, a member of his group. To love your neighbour was to experience solidarity. Only one's kinsperson was to be treated as another "self." Lev 19:16-18 expresses the confined relationship: "You must not slander *your own people*… You must not bear hatred for *your brother*… You must not exact vengeance… against the children of *your people*. You must love *your neighbour as* yourself (Lev 19:16-18).

In contradistinction to the Jewish discriminatory culture, Jesus proclaimed God's kingdom as one based upon the all-inclusive solidarity of the human race. He extended one's neighbour to include one's enemies: *You have learned how it was said: you must love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say this to you: love your enemies* (Mt 5:43-44); *Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly* (Lk 6:27-28). In Jesus' envisioned kingdom-rooted society, love must go beyond loving those who love us (Lk 6:32). Group solidarity (loving those who love you) is not a virtue for Jesus. Instead he was appealing for an *experience of solidarity*

[19]Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2008, 73 in 73-82.

with humankind, an experience that was non-exclusive, not dependent upon reciprocity. Solidarity with humankind is the basic attitude. It must take precedence over every other kind of love and every other kind of solidarity. Jesus was so passionate about making the all-embracing solidarity as the ultimate basis of human relationships that he stated in strong terms: If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple (Lk 14:26). "Hate" in the biblical sense of the word means detachment from family. If love is solidarity, then hate means non-solidarity. What Jesus was asking for here is that the group solidarity of the family be superseded by a more basic solidarity with all humankind. He is not saying that we should love our loved ones less. What is being altered is the *basis* of the love: they are not to be loved just because they happen to be your family and relatives but because they too are persons. They are to be loved with an inclusive love.[20]

Bruce J. Malina, a social scientist and an acknowledged authority on the study of the Hebrew culture has pointed out that in the ancient world, there were two kinds of honour.[21] The first is ascribed honour, which is a value given to a person in public based on his family, bloodline, and heritage. The second, achieved honour, is the worth given to a person based on what one has accomplished usually through competition or challenge or rivalry or warfare. This was a tradition which enhanced the divisive culture of insiders vs. outsiders. The Gospel value of compassion served as an antidote to the cultural phenomenon of honour versus shame in the Hebrew culture. It rejects alienating outsiders while embracing and seeking to bring in all from the outside. It desires to empower and liberate the others with a freedom whereby they themselves can choose options for self-empowerment. This is the gospel way leading towards establishing interconnections that can facilitate breakthrough for others as well and lead to mutual empowerment.

Tom Drake-Brockman proposes a compassionate incarnational humanism that reminds us that Christian salvation is about the mutual empowerment we make possible for each other following the exemplary inspiration of Jesus himself.[22] Incidentally, the post-colonial Bible scholar, John Dominic Crossan, has introduced a novel

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[20]Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, 73-82.

[21]Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001.

[22]Tom Drake-Brockman, *Christian Humanism: The Compassionate Theology of a Jew Called Jesus*, Sydney: Dennis Jones and Associates, 2012.

English translation of the Greek *basileia tou theou* ("kingdom of God"). His preferred rendition is "The Companionship of Empowerment."[23] Diarmuid O'Murchu explains in behalf of John Dominic Crossan why "The Companionship for Empowerment" is closer than the generally known "Kingdom of God" to what Jesus stood for and envisioned as expressed in his teachings and deeds. For one thing, Jesus spoke in Aramaic, not Greek but the language of the gospels is Greek.[24] The companionship for empowerment is a companionship of equals. This runs contrary to what the word "kingdom" represents: kingship, royal privilege, and royal power *over*.[25] A contemporary Christian author is equally blunt: "the notion of the 'Kingdom of God' was not in fact an endorsement of everything that kingship represented."[26] The title given by the Christian Roman Empire, to the Imperial Christ as the Pantocrator, the ruler of the universe, is a reversal of what the Kingdom of God stands for, a turn-around from a Jesus who, in fact, shunned kingly titles.[27] Contemporary biblical scholarship reveals a Jesus who "used the phrase in a highly equivocal and provocative manner. (He) challenged kingship and all its inherent values; more shocking still he denounced it to the point of ridicule and insignificance… Jesus was laying the foundation for 'an upside-down Kingdom,'"[28] where mutual empowerment is the operative social principle.

Love of Enemies

Jesus' primordial vision of the Kingdom as Christianity's foundational guide to living righteously is the unique Christian flavour in responding to acts of violence. The Sermon on the Mount is the discerning context for a more responsible interpretation of what loving one's enemies meant originally and its significance for us

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[23]John Dominic Crossan, "Jesus and the Kingdom," in *Jesus at 2000,* ed. Marcus Borg, Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997, 42, and *The Birth of Christianity*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998, 337 cited in Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory: A Rediscovery of the Revolutionary Jesus*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2011, 30.

[24]O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory*, 29-32.

[25]See Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Society* II, Delhi: ISPKC, 2002, 106-110.

[26]O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory,* 29.

[27]See Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Catching Up with Jesus: A Gospel Story for Our Time*, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2005, 7-16.

[28]O'Murchu, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory,* 30. See Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside Down Kingdom*, Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1990; cf. Georges Casalis, "Jesus – Neither Abject Lord nor Heavenly Monarch," in *Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies,* ed. José Miguel Bonino, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984, 72-76; also Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Freedom,* 81-104; *Jesus and Society* II, Delhi: ISPKC, 2002, 56-61, 106-110.

today. Many contemporary scholars following the lead of Joachim Jeremias understand the Sermon on the Mount as requiring a deeper conversion to enable the believer to embrace more authentically life in the new Reign of God.[29] The peace activist-theologian John Dear locates the command to love our enemies at the centre of the Sermon on the Mount, the Magna Carta of Christianity.[30] The biblical scholar Walter Wink considers the love of enemies as "the litmus test of authentic Christian faith."[31] The key text is recorded in Matthew 5:43-48: You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get?

Durmuid O'Murchu cites John Piper as having observed that the "negative command to renounce retaliation is never found in the New Testament without the corresponding positive command to behave proactively." [32] He shares the following exegetical-hermeneutical analysis:[33] Matthew 5:43-48 seems to reflect an earlier strand found in 1 Thessalonians 5:15 and Romans 12:14, 17-20 which commands to not pay back evil. The Greek word used to translate love [34] is *agape,* which denotes a quality of unconditional love attributable to the Godhead itself. Enemy-love requires "a renewed mind which can prove the perfect will of God."[35] This speaks of a radical a transformation to which Jesus is summoning his followers.

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[29]See Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*,London: SCM Press, 1958.

[30]See John Dear, *Jesus the Rebel: Bearer of God's Peace and Justice,* foreword by Daniel Berrigan, Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward, 2000, 39.

[31] Cited in O'Murchu, *Inclusivity,* 17. See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992; *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of Man*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

[32]John Piper, *Love Your Enemies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 34-35 cited in O'Murchu, *Inclusivity,* 18.

[33]For a supplementary reading with an expanded scope, see Donald Senior, "Jesus' Most Scandalous Teaching," in *Biblical and Theological Reflections on 'The Challenge of Peace,'* ed. John T. Pawlikowski and Donald Senior, Wilmington, Deleware: Michael Glazier, 1984, 56-68. See Terrence J. Rynne, *Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008, 84-132. The author presents four modern-day Christian theologians who have embraced nonviolence that includes Wink.

[34]Other Greek renditions are *stergein* (love for a family member), *eros* (sexual love), and *philia* (intimate human love).

[35]John Piper, *Love Your Enemies: Jesus' Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Early Christian Paraenesis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, 174 cited in O'Murchu, *Inclusivity,* 19.

This is difficult to practice: the love reaching out to the hated other. For Paul, this is only possible by the grace of God: *My grace is sufficient for you* (2 Cor 12:9).

The enemy-love is the supreme challenge of Christian faith. Without this radical embrace, the great commandment to love God and one's neighbour loses its originality and empowering depth as suggested by scholars, ancient and modern.[36] The *lex taliones* (an eye for an eye, stated explicitly in Ex 21:22-25; Lev 24:17-22; Dt 19:15-21), which was adapted from the pre-Hebrew Scriptures' Babylonian law code of Hammurabi (c. 2285 B.C.) was actually more than exacting vengeance to the offender as commonly misconstrued. The Mosaic law provision was designed to advance the cause of justice and prevent persons from retaliating for vengeance. The offended or injured could go to the governing judicial authority to seek redress. The "a life for life," or "an eye for an eye," or "a tooth for a tooth" punishment was meant to be commensurate to the gravity of the crime (proportional justice). It was strict but fair and designed to deter crimes. For ancient societies the *lex taliones* was a kind of an imposition for mercy which limited vengeance while respecting human dignity.

The Sermon on the Mount, however, challenges us to go beyond *lex taliones.* O'Murchu elaborates:

> The challenge and call to love one's enemies… is a new requirement exceeding the balancing-out envisaged in the *lex taliones* but also inaugurating a more courageous and proactive commitment to the righteousness—peace and justice—already highlighted in the Jewish Torah.

He clarifies that,

> (w)hat is new… in the injunction… does not abrogate what we inherit from the Hebrew Scriptures but invites deeper levels of integration in how the injunction is to be lived out in daily life. And central to this novel

[36]John Meier has written: "'Love your enemies,' finds no exact iteration in the Old Testament or Qumran, or inter-testamental literature prior to A.D. 70, or even in literature that is especially relevant to this topic, namely, pagan philosophical works. By 'exact iteration' I mean that no parallel, however, close in thought or spirit, uses the terse, stark juxtaposition of the ever-popular direct imperative 'love' with the impossible object 'enemies'… Nowhere though in the huge amount of material that ancient parallels provide us do we find the terse, direct disturbing command, 'Love your enemies'… The troubling content is embodied in a troubling formulation, all the more forceful for its brevity and originality… [This command] goes back to the historical Jesus", John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Re-thinking the Historical Jesus,* vol. 2/vol. 4 [New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 200], 531, 550, 573, cited in O'Murchu, *Inclusivity,* 19-20.

> integration is a quality of radical inclusiveness, much more explicit and demanding than we find in the requirements of Torah (the Jewish law).[37]

Jesus was so serious about the "new" that he exhorted his audience to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees lest they did not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 5:20). The new righteousness requires more overt empowerment, more extensive inclusiveness, more mutual embracing of differences.

Being consistently faithful to the injunction of loving one's enemies meant for Jesus responding to evil with *nonviolent resistance*. The gospel's call for inclusiveness which suggests being in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed people of his day was not sympathetic to the use of violent methods to oust the Roman imperialists. Nonetheless, Jesus did embrace "a more radical critique, creating among his apostles, disciples, and followers an inclusive liberation and empowerment, inviting Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, men, women, rich, poor, slave, and free into a new sense of freedom and release from bondage and slavery."[38]

Nonviolent Resistance

Reinforcing the Christian commitment to nonviolence is Luke 16:16 that paradoxically talks about the "violent" inbreaking of the new Kingdom: "The Law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone enter it violently." Matthew 11:12 renders a nuanced version: "From the time of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence and people of violence take it by force." Following William Barclay's suggestion in order that we get close to the intended meaning of both versions, we fuse the two into one edition in these terms: *Always my kingdom will suffer violence; always savage people will try to break it up, and snatch it away and destroy it. Therefore, only the one who is desperately in earnest, only the one in whom the violence of devotion matches and defeats the violence of persecution will in the end enter it.* The integrated version brings out to the fore the implied call to conversion or change of heart for those open to accepting Jesus' gospel of nonviolence.

Walter Wink regards the Sermon on the Mount as the primary basis for nonviolent, inclusive love, and reminds us about Jesus' unambiguous commitment to nonviolent praxis.

> The God whom Jesus reveals refrains from all forms of reprisal and demands no victims. God does not endorse holy wars or just wars or

[37]O'Murchu, *Inclusivity,* 22.
[38]O'Murchu, *Inclusivity,* 23.

> religions of violence. The reign of God means the complete and definitive elimination of every form of violence between individuals and nations.[39]

This is not to say that Jesus was passive in the face of injustice and evil. On the contrary, passivity and violence he dislikes, and he showed us the way—the only way possible—of refusing to become like the evil, the oppressor, the enemy.[40]

There are three injunctions the Sermon on the Mount which, for Wink, captures the nonviolent vision of Jesus. They are: [1] "But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Mt 5:39); [2] "and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well" (Mt 5:40); [3] "and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Mt 5:41). The texts are preceded by Jesus' "(y)ou have heard that it was said 'An eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth.' Do not resist an evil doer." These are misconstrued verses suggesting on the surface that Jesus prefers passivity; in fact, the wrong reading has caused many Christians to adopt a cowardly and complicit attitude in the face of injustice. "Do not resist" seems to counsel against any opposition to evil in favour of submission. Interpreting "going the second mile" (as well as 'gratuitously' "giving one's coat," mine) means platitude to the soldier. If one is unable to uncover the underlying contextual meaning of the texts, it encourages, as it has, collaboration with the oppressor and disparages attempts at fostering structural change.[41]

Wink first comments on the widely misunderstood verse, "Do not resist." He traces the source of the flawed understanding: inaccurate translation. The court translators who were commissioned by King James (17th century C.E.) rendered the Greek *antistenai* as "resist not evil," in effect, translating nonviolent resistance to docility. He continues,

> Jesus *did not* tell his oppressed hearers not to resist evil. That would have been absurd. His entire ministry is utterly at odds with such a preposterous idea. The Greek word is made up of two parts: *anti,* a word still used in English for "against," and *histemi,* a verb that in its noun form (*stasis*) means violent rebellion, armed revolt, sharp dissention…[42]

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[39]Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 149; cf. James Alison, "Love Your Enemy: Within a Divided Self," www.jamesalison.co.uk/texts/eng50.html.

[40]Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 189.

[41]Walter Wink, "Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way," in *Christian Peace and Nonviolence,* ed. Michael G. Long, foreword by Stanley Hauerwas, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011, 8.

[42]Wink, "Jesus and Nonviolence," 9.

He offers "a proper translation" which is, "Don't strike back at evil (or, one who has done you evil) in kind" or "Do not retaliate against violence with violence." He then turns our attention to the Scholars Version, whose translation he regards as brilliant: "Don't react violently against the one who is evil." The rendition resonates with the claim that "Jesus was no less committed to opposing evil than the anti-Roman resistance fighters."[43] The difference is on how to fight evil. The Greek *antistenai* is not the same as submission.

Wink offers a rather detailed exegetical-hermeneutical reading of the Sermon's three injunction mentioned earlier.[44]

[1] "But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

To go deeper beneath the on-the-surface interpretation, one has to consider the original social context of the three texts. "Turning the other cheek" is preceded by an act of insult. We are not dealing here with a fistfight. While the insult that is perpetrated by someone to another presupposes an unequal relationship like that of master and slaves, the fist-fight presumes equality between the protagonists. The performance-to-humiliate requires a backhand slap, the usual way of admonishing inferiors. Normally the object cowers in submission; if he retaliates he invites retribution. Turning the other cheek was, in reality, a form of resistance that was meant to rob the oppressor of the power to humiliate. The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, "Try again, your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me."[45] The victim's response would discomfit the striker because he could not backhand the cheek with his right hand. If he hits him with a fist, in effect, the makes the other equal to him. Even if the dominant one has the inferior punished, the latter has irrevocably made his point that he is, in fact, a human being.

The Lukan version of the second injunction (Lk 6:27) has the outer garment being seized, while in Matthew, it was the undergarment. The Jewish practice of giving the outer garment as a pledge (it alone would be useful as a blanket for sleeping) makes it clear that Luke's order is correct. Indebtedness was common among the poor in first-century Palestine, and the phenomenon was the first direct

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[43]Wink, "Jesus and Nonviolence," 9.

[44]I condensed Wink's explanation cited in O'Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 28-32. For a detailed reading, see Wink, "Jesus and Nonviolence," 9-11.

[45]Wink, *Engaging the Powers,* 175-176.

consequence of Roman imperial policy. This was the context of Jesus' counsel with the poor and the disenfranchised as his audience. The poor debtors hated the imperial system which humiliated them by stripping them of their lands, their goods, finally even their outer garments. Offering one's undergarment was stripping oneself and marching out of court naked. Nakedness was taboo in Judaism, and shame fell less on the naked party than on the person viewing or causing the nakedness (Gen 9:20-27). The debtor had brought the creditor under the same prohibition that led to the curse of Canaan. The tables were suddenly turned on the creditor. The debtor had no hope of winning the case but he had risen above humiliation and shame. At the same time, he had registered a stunning protest against the system that pushed him to indebtedness in the first place. Jesus here provides a hint of how to take on the entire system by unmasking its essential cruelty and its pretensions to justice.

Jesus' third counsel is a form of resistance as well to the Roman military occupation. Forced service or labour was a constant feature in Palestine from Persian to late Roman times. The Roman soldiers observed the relatively enlightened practice of limiting the amount of forced labour to a single mile. This forced labour was a source of bitter resentment by all Roman subjects. Jesus did not counsel revolt, neither did he fan the flame of hatred even as was surely aware of the futility of armed insurrection against Roman imperial might. Carrying one's pack for another mile was the oppressed way of recovering the initiative by taking back the soldier's power of choice and asserting their human dignity in a situation that could not for the time being be changed. The rules were of Caesar, but how one responded to them was God's, and Caesar had no power over that.

To the poor and the oppressed Jesus had given clues as to how they could liberate themselves from servile mentality and actions without waiting for revolution to happen. Peasants and slaves could begin to behave with dignity and recovered sense of humanity now even with the status quo intact. This signifies the inbreaking of God's reign into the world. It happens, not as an imposition from on high, but as the leaven slowly causing the dough to rise (Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21). Jesus' sense of divine immediacy has social implications, and his teaching on nonviolence expresses the dawning of the reign of God. By this, he laid "the foundations for a social revolution, as Richard Horsely and others have pointed out."[46] The social revolution became

[46]O'Murchu, *Inclusivity,* 32. See Richard A. Horsely, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Order,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

political as it reached a "critical threshold of acceptance; this, in fact, did happen to the Roman Empire as the Christian church overcame it from below."[47]

Beyond Justice: Compassion

The word "compassion" is derived from the combination of the original Latin noun *patior* (literally "to suffer") and *com* ("with"; "together"), hence "to suffer with." In short compassion is empathy for the suffering of others. The word *pathos* indicates intense suffering. Compassion is not pity of the only-feeling kind; it expresses a desire to help those who suffer find release from suffering. It means to share, to feel within oneself something of the other person's pain; it therefore expresses solidarity with the other or others. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a most appropriate illustration of what compassion is all about. While the first two took pity on the victim and did nothing, the Samaritan (inclusivity ironically practiced by an enemy of the Jews) stopped and did something to make sure the injured would fully recover.

The Greek rendition of compassion in the New Testament is *splangnezomai* (literally, "being moved from the depths of one's bowels"). It is a strong visceral word and when applied to Jesus in the Gospels on eight occasions, the word reads as verb, action.[48] In its Gospel usage, it is more than mere caring feeling or disposition but a daring subversive claim to justice and empowerment beyond the crippling legacy that suffering often entails. In more accurate terms it denotes an inner enlightened quality of response that requires action. The action is really meant to right the wrong being felt or perceived. In a more integral sense

Gospel compassion seeks out *empowerment*, a resolution to human suffering requiring an examination of what caused the suffering in the first place, how it can now be rectified, and how a more liberating resolution can be guaranteed for the future. This goes far beyond the immediacy of personal plight, trauma, and suffering. It seeks to address cultural and systemic factors, It considers how social, economic, and political forces facilitate or inhibit empowering deliverance. In a word, it is strongly related to the pursuit of justice.[49]

Maureen O'Connell puts it in stronger terms: "Compassion is not comfortable and private but rather dangerous and political…

[47]O'Murchu, *Inclusivity,* 31-32.
[48]The word occurs 17 times in the New Testament.
[49]O'Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 41-42.

Compassion unleashes the interruptive and liberating power of contrast experiences and hones our ability to feel, to imagine, and to enact alternatives to what is."[50]

For another biblical scholar, Marcus Borg, Jesus opted for compassion as an antidote to the concept and practice of ritual purity in the received Jewish tradition. The Levitical instruction "Be holy as God is holy" structuring the Jewish social world has in the Lukan text undergone a paradigm shift to "Be compassionate as your Father-God is compassionate" (Lk 6:36). Concern with purity intrinsically reaches across boundaries. Like the Spirit, of which compassion is the primary fruit, compassion shatters boundaries. In short the Jesus movement was a community of compassion, and to take Jesus seriously means to become part of such a community.[51] In the Judaism of Jesus' time, holiness required various degrees of separation from everything unclean ensuing in a society structured around a purity system. All too quickly this led to the few deemed worthy to be included and the many deemed to be unworthy and therefore always condemned to be outsiders. This distinction and division has no place within a dispensation of Gospel compassion. Compassion was more than God's quality and an individual virtue. It was a social paradigm, the core value for life in community.[52]

Albert Nolan sees compassion as the motivating inner force of Jesus' preferential option for the poor and the oppressed in his society.[53] For Jesus the basis of solidarity is compassion, that emotion which wells up from the pit of one's stomach at the sight of another's need. Jesus' contemporaries, especially those with religious authority, believed that all misfortunes, sicknesses and other disorders were evil afflictions sent by God as punishments for sin. To be sure there is truth to the link between sin and suffering but the Jews misconceived sin to be a failure to observe the Mosaic laws including by mistake or ignorance. The poor and the oppressed belonged to the sinful lot. There was distinction between the 'righteous' and the 'unrighteous.' 'Virtue', apart from ancestry, wealth, authority and education, was the basis of social stratification. The religion of the day created a layer

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[50] Maureen O'Connell, *Compassion,* New York: Orbis Books, 3, 51 cited in O'Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 38.

[51] See Marcus Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship,* Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International 1994a, 154.

[52] See Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time,* San Francisco: HarperOne, 1994b, Chapter 3.

[53] See Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2008.

of theological justification for the evil of social distinction and unequal relations which made it almost impossible for those in the margins to liberate themselves from the unjust structure. Within the Chosen-People-of-God societal structure, there were actually only the chosen few who at the same time enjoyed prestige, power and for the many of the few wealth. They defined what was right and what was just based on their interpretation to maintain the status quo. Jesus regarded the Jewish boundary-setting teaching (and practice) as 'loveless,' one lacking in compassion. The parables of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1-15), of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32), and of Publican and the Pharisee were a counter-cultural critique to the narrow conception of justice current in Jesus' time and society.[54]

Conclusion

In marshalling the most relevant Scriptural testimonies in my offered biblical-theological reflection I surfaced the essential link between nonviolence, compassion, and the concept of inclusivity. While war and violence divide, generate hate and sharpen hostility, and reduce the adversary as enemy out of sheer egoism or in the name of 'justice', or national sovereignty, the inclusive gospel challenges us Christians to embrace everyone including our enemies.

One does not encounter a Jesus in the New Testament who responded to evil with evil, to violence with violence. His was clearly *nonviolent resistance,* and this did not border on passivity in the face of evil. The resistance was not to defend a self-seeking interest or sense of security. It was one which "embraced a more radical critique, creating among his apostles, disciples, and followers an inclusive liberation and empowerment, inviting Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, men, women, rich, poor, slave, and free into a new sense of freedom and release from bondage and slavery."[55] It must be noted that context-wise, Jesus' public ministry occurred in the political context of Roman domination which was met either with resistance, covert and overt, and accommodation. The Zealots' armed resistance represented the extreme form but Jesus would not have anything to do with violence. He explicitly stated his distaste for the use of arms (Mt 26:47-52;).[56] Neither did he turn out to be the Davidic warrior-king to lead his oppressed people to national liberation.

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[54]Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity,* 119-121.

[55]O'Murchu, *Inclusivity*, 23.

[56]See John Dear, *Put Down Your Sword: Answering the Gospel to Creative Nonviolence*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008; J. Carter Swaim, *War, Peace and the Bible*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982, 74-87.

Donald Senior considers the gospel injunction to love one's enemy not only difficult but most "scandalous" (sic) teaching. He brings us back to the root of the word 'scandal,' which is the Greek *scandalon* which in English is literally "obstacle."[57] How do we give life and concrete expression to the evangelical command in a very divided, highly conflictive national/global social and political situation marked by mutual hostility? Many well-intentioned devout Christians dismiss the love-enemy teaching as unrealistic or irrelevant to the issue of peace and war on the wider plane of the social-societal and the much bigger global. The most they can and will do is to practice it on the level of the immediate human interaction, thereby domesticating or privatizing or merely spiritualizing its inclusive content and direction and stripping it of the subversive and the revolutionary.[58] We need to remind ourselves that in order to make the Kingdom-Vision or companionship-through-empowerment vision of Jesus, he challenges us to be the *salt of the earth* and *light of the world* (Mt 5:13-16). This is the same Jesus who scandalized his contemporaries by the radicalness of his teachings including that which challenged the notion of justice in currency and, instead, embrace compassion that does not set artificial boundaries.

Jesus' fundamental teaching on peace and nonviolence appears to be straightforward and simple. However, the world that Christianity inhabits has never been simple and monochromatic, let alone a vacuum. Neither are Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, determinate, non-historical, non-corporeal beings immune from earth-bound exigencies and interests, self-seeking or egalitarian. The ultimate realization of the *eschaton*, long expected yet unfulfilled, leaves the church with no option but to live out as best, that is, as faithful as it can be to the gospel, and not to intentionally delay the 'not-yet' in this fragmented world. This requires humble yet hope-laden self-critical examination to remain open, sensitive, and receptive to the gentle guidance, at times nudging of the Spirit.

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[57]Donald Senior, "Jesus' Most Scandalous Teaching," in *Biblical and Theological Reflections on 'The Challenge of Peace'*, ed. John T. Pawlikowski and Donald Senior, Wilmington, Deleware: Michael Glazier, 1984, 55-56.

[58]See John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster,* 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: The Paternoster Press, 1994. The author inquired into the question of whether Jesus' teaching or example can offer us the substance of guidance in social ethics. He concludes that his deeds "show a coherent, conscious social-political character and direction, and that his words are inseparable therefrom" (112).