

Are the Popes Leaving Behind Just War and Embracing JustPeace?

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Since the mid-19th Century there has been a significant, though not yet complete, shift in both the politics and the teachings of popes regarding war and peace in an increasingly pacifist direction. More specifically, the emphasis of the papal office has noticeably changed from endorsing violence and war toward embracing the essential coupling of peace and justice, holistic peacebuilding, and active nonviolence. Moving beyond the tendency in academic literature to focus solely upon the Catholic Church's teaching on just war, this essay demonstrates how the papacy went through a transformation in their attitudes to war and peace since the accession of Pius IX (r.1846-1878). Mapping developments from the mid-19th Century down to the time of writing in March 2018, this essay attempts to intervene in normative academic conversations concerning religion and peace. It does so by demonstrating that while the contemporary popes have left intact certain aspects of the teaching of just war, they nonetheless lend a large measure of support to JustPeace outcomes, defined by the authors as combining peace and social justice in a mutually-enhancing and creative tension. We begin with some context.

As a result of the loss of the Papal States in the wake of Italian Unification and the consequential freeing of the bishops of Rome from temporal power over a large lay population during the 19th Century, it became easier for the spiritual and political heads of the Roman Catholic Church to clearly read the signs of the times. In doing so, rather than focusing upon justifications for armed combat, they were able to teach an ethic that worked towards an essential recovery of what the Catholic priest and peace activist, John Dear, names as the gospel values of peace. Thus, released from the burdens of monarchical state rule, the papacy was freer to become an ambassador for substantive peace. The importance of taking up this space for a papal peace witness should not be underestimated. Subsequently, the popes have employed their teaching office to frame a duty for peacebuilding as imperative on a number of levels: from geopolitical conflict transformation to supporting the family as the primary unit of peace. Here, there have been numerous areas of confluence with the Peace Studies concept of positive peace, which understands any meaningful peace as consisting of more than merely the absence of war and other forms of direct violence. In that light, an underlying premise of this essay comes into view: that the concept of JustPeace provides an appropriate means to highlight how papal teaching and action began to integrate insights that serve to downplay the importance of just war in Catholic traditions. To illustrate that point and to map a constructive alternative, this essay takes a thematic approach that allows it to demonstrate some of the facets of JustPeace that have been upheld in contemporary papal teaching, namely in the interlocking areas of: (1) international peacebuilding and political systems; (2) problematizing revolts and revolutions; (3) roles for non-state political actors in incarnating

substantive peace; (4) integral human development; (5) social justice; (6) the question of just war, modern warfare, and its human cost; (7) ecological health; (8) active non-violence; and (9) roles and duties in responding to the call to be peacemakers. Following that sequence, this essay will devote a paragraph to briefly mapping each of these facets of JustPeace.

The popes' have long been involved in, and made recommendations concerning, geopolitical peacebuilding. Since the 19th Century, the evolution of papal interventions in state-based and ethnic conflicts has more firmly moved toward embracing JustPeace principles. For instance, Benedict XV (r. 1914-1922) crafted plan for a fair peace during the Great War (1914-1918), which, in part, inspired Woodrow Wilson's 14 points, and John Paul II's (r. 1978-2005) efforts to prevent the First Gulf War. Such papal peacebuilding actions have influenced the Catholic laity, who in turn, have formed their own organizations that seek to promote international conflict transformation. Examples of such lay organizations include (1) the British-based Guild of the Pope's Peace, which, despite opposition from their local ecclesial leaders, promoted Benedict XV's aforementioned peace plan in Great Britain as World War I raged and (2) Pax Christi International, which since 1945 has grown into worldwide peace movement that actively supports social justice, nonviolence, disarmament, human rights, and reconciliation. Also relevant to this area is the papacy's reactions to ideologies such as fascism and communism, which can be placed within the context of papal actions and discourse on peace. In this light, consider how John Paul II extolled many principles associated with a JustPeace ethic when seeking the peaceful integration into global society of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet states as full and independent actors.

The pontificates under consideration in this essay were characterized by revolts and revolutions beginning with the challenges posed to the Papal States by the Italian *Risorgimento*, and the further political unrest that swept through Europe in 1848. With the French Revolution still within living memory, these uprisings were closely monitored by Pius IX and his advisors. Admittedly, as a result of such suspicion also being carried forward into Leo XIII's (r. 1878-1903) pontificate, papal teaching surrounding political and social rebellion was well developed in its opposition to violent revolt by the end of the 19th Century. However, the rapidly changing nature of the geo-political landscape in the 20th Century, which saw, for instance, the formation of the USSR, revolutions in South America, and the Spanish Civil War, all of which were driven by the ideologies named above, meant that the popes were confronted by changing definitions of international statehood. This changing context, in turn, shaped papal teachings on war and peace in a more pacifist direction. In this light, the popes' condemnations of revolution were driven not merely by a desire of 'prisoners of the Vatican' to return to secular power as had been the case in the late 19th Century, but also by a growing sense of justice and the importance of promoting human dignity, in its economic and social aspects, as a duty for governments. These commitments are brought forward by John XXIII (r. 1958-1963) in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which names imperatives for peace on earth and was promulgated after 'Good Pope John' helped to broker an end to the Cuban Missile Crisis. In this landmark encyclical addressed to all people of good will, John XXIII decried state leaders who pursue arms racing as policy and named the duties of governments as centering upon the promotion of both participation and a full range of social and economic rights for all their citizens. More recently, these orientation have transferred into an explicit support for human rights regimes, so that Paul VI (r. 1965-1978), is able to characterize human dignity thus framed as an essential part of any substantive peace. Such teachings have ripened in Pope Francis' (r. 2013-present) advocacy for cultures of dialogue and encounter, which encourage the transformation (rather than revolt-style destruction of existing governmental structures) so

they better support inclusive participation, social justice, ecological health, and substantive peace.

A framing of positive peace also helps to remove an elitist and statist bias in terms of who can count as a peacebuilder, given the many facets of peace that are in need of enhancement in specific contexts. As such, it is not surprising that popes have extolled the value of NGOs and non-state actors undertaking the task of building peace in this world. Here, papal teaching has sometimes led thinking, for instance proposing the family as a unit of peace, but has mostly kept pace with developments in secular thought in this area. Nonetheless, this is an important but relatively under analyzed area of Catholic Social Teaching because, in many ways, where one falls on war and peace issues acts as the litmus test for the ‘culture wars’ between so-called conservative and liberal ideals within the Roman Catholic Church. However, placing developments in the contemporary papal peace witness within a wider context of formal Catholicism’s attitude to peace serves to illustrate a non-linear development of doctrine, moving toward a fuller endorsement of a JustPeace ethic with the potential to remove war and peace issues from their entanglements in ‘liberal vs. Conservative’ dichotomies. Such an ethic is able to hold, in a mutually-enhancing tension, the differing views within the Catholic tradition itself, including the Vatican’s potential as a quasi-state actor that nonetheless has observer status at the United Nations, sits on a number UN committees related to JustPeace concerns, and has its own diplomatic corps. The Catholic Church, which is sometimes described as the world’s largest NGO, also has a geographical presence throughout most of the world, in the forms of parishes and dioceses with a plethora of education and health organizations under its control. The promise of such a wide reaching organization being more fully transformed toward incarnating JustPeace is tantalizing for those concerned with peace and justice in this world.

A glimpse of the potential activity here has been evident ever since the 1967 release of Paul VI’s landmark encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, that named imperatives for the integral development of whole human persons in all of their physical, spiritual, social, and moral dimensions has been at the forefront of papal teaching related to peace issues. However, the roots of an engaged ethic of integral development run deep. They also extend in multiple ways from Paul VI’s encyclical on the development of peoples. Both before and after Paul VI’s reign, the popes have addressed dominant notions of economic and social progress, problematizing both the assumption associated with free market capitalism and those connected to communist-style command economies. For example, in 1931, Pius XI’s (r. 1922-1939) encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, extolled the common good and subsidiarity as compelling principles to aid and properly navigating the challenges posed by modern economic and political systems. Recently, Pope Francis’ notion of integral ecology, along with its antecedents supporting deep sustainability, has served to shift the treatment of integral development in papal teaching to include an ecological dimension that acknowledges the connectivity of all things.

An aspect of such connectivity is on display in Paul VI’s rather famous coupled social justice to peacebuilding efforts with his World Day for Peace Message for 1972 entitled “If You Want Peace, Work for Justice”. This phrase served to solidify an already existing dimension of papal teaching on peace, which has subsequently been further developed by those occupying the chair of St. Peter. As highlighted in Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, ‘the social question’ concerned with how society should be organized so as to maximize social justice and the common good has been a prominent theme in papal social teaching related to positive peace. Indeed, the various answers to the social question offered by the popes since 1846 and have been significant for a JustPeace ethic. For instance, in 2009, *Caritas in Veritate*, promulgated by Benedict XVI (r. 2005-2013) framed

the social question in radically anthropological terms, concerned with the dignity of persons in relationship to not only society but also to the ecological world and God.

The concept of 'just war' dominates popular understandings of papal teachings on peace and, indeed, for much of the period under consideration, was synonymous, in part because of its association with the work of both Augustine and Aquinas, with the sole permissible Roman Catholic stance on war and peace. Drawing on the weight of this tradition, Pius IX called on young male Catholics to enlist in the papal armies to defend the Holy See's territory. Furthermore, in the period leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq by coalition forces, John Paul II employed just war language when calling upon world leaders to refrain from military action against the country. Yet, at the same time, papal condemnations of the developments in military technology, which have led to incremental increases in the human costs of war, including the targeting of non-combatants when combined with the changing nature of conflict from the mid-20th Century, have made the bishops Rome's endorsement of just war theory increasingly qualified. For example, based upon such concerns, in late 2017, Pope Francis explicitly decried the possibility of holding nuclear arms, even as deterrents in large part due their non-discriminatory nature.

Perhaps because of the obvious cost felt by the natural world as a result high-technology warfare, prior to Pope Francis's landmark 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, the main venue for introducing ecological thought into papal teaching had been the World Day for Peace Messages, particularly those for 1990 and 2010. This venue is indicative of how, since the reign of John XXIII, peace and ecology have been coupled with an increasing frequency by the popes in the past half-century. Moreover, this relatively new feature in papal teaching, ecology's connection to peace, has been central to the last three popes' exercise of their magisterial office. As a result, this development shows how the bishops of Rome now argue that work for peace cannot ignore ecological stressors, including anthropogenic climate change, the displacement of peoples by extreme weather events, access to clean water and air, and shortages of nutritious food. John Paul II thus stated peaceful responses should be based upon the premise that responding to the ecological crisis is a moral duty. Benedict XVI then employed the World Day for Peace Message for 2008 to introduce the concept of caring for our common home taken up with gusto by Francis in 2013 and with a particular intensity in 2015, when Francis explicitly connected several imperatives for social justice and peace with relational language extolling the need care for Earth understood as both our mother and sister in order to build peace with all of creation.

Francis' World Day for Peace Message for 2017 unambiguously endorses principled nonviolence, morally-inspired and focused efforts to bring about social change without the recourse to directly violent means, as a path for incarnating the politics of peace. While some Catholic commentators collapse nonviolence and peace, retaining the active meaning connoted by a distinction between the two terms is essential to tracing and connecting the roots in papal teaching that allow Francis to extol the transformative value of nonviolence. In that regard, the surprisingly numerous antecedents for supporting an ethic of active nonviolence that are found in papal social teaching include: contemporary papal condemnations of the ultimate efficacy of violent revolt and support for diplomatic rather than military solutions to conflict, Paul VI's advocacy of international development as a path to peace, John Paul II's 1979 call for peaceful reconciliation in Northern Ireland twinned with his condemnation of the IRA's use of just war doctrine, and Benedict XVI's noteworthy support for interreligious dialogue.

One fruitful way to read papal teaching on peace is as providing a list of virtues and qualities that are present in those who authentically respond to the call to be peacemakers. A sample of the virtues and qualities that the bishops of Rome name when contemplating

their ideal peacemaker include: (1) responding to the call to be instruments of God's peace through the practice of humility, gentleness, forgiveness, and love of enemy; (2) the imitation Jesus Christ's work to spread the Gospel of Peace; (3) being active in the work of reconciling the human family; and (4) discerning the signs of the times in order to embody a unified peace witness and establish institutions that bring the practice of nonviolence alive in public life. In the popes' writings, these virtues and qualities co-occur with the duties that they invoke when calling upon on all people to take up the call to be peacebuilders. The JustPeace-oriented link sought here is between the personal and the political, insight and virtue, and activism and action, in dialogue with papal teachings on positive peace, thus providing an appropriate transition to our conclusion.

John Paul II specifically rejected the label of pacifist in 1991, stating that Catholics do not want peace at any price and adding that peace without justice was untenable and even in his World Day for Peace Message for 2017, Francis was seemingly careful to name nonviolence as a path, presumably amongst many, for the politics for peace (positions that are, in fact, compatible with pacifism from a JustPeace perspective). Notwithstanding, both popes are widely known for their opposition to war under current technological conditions showing how even the lingering aspects of the just war tradition, for example the criterion of proportionality and discrimination against non-combatants, are impossible to maintain in contemporary warfare. When such criteria is applied, the result is thus a functional pacifism. Adding positive content to such a conclusion and in answering the exploratory question named in its title, this essay presented a sampling of the support within Catholic traditions offered by popes for JustPeace. The interrelated themes mapped in broad brush strokes above are indicative of the quality and potential of the popes' past, present, and possible future contribution to helping to foster a JustPeace ethic in this world. Indeed, while it must be conceded that a JustPeace option is not the only take on matters of war and peace in Catholic traditions, it is in many senses emerging as the preferred option in papal teaching. As such, this essay contributes to a process of debunking the myth that just war is the sole acceptable Catholic position on war and peace.

This is no mere academic exercise. Rather, it can be taken as a preview of eight representative themes that are likely to be explicitly coupled and systematically addressed soon in papal teaching. Indeed, at the time of writing, Pope Francis is consulting for an encyclical on peace and nonviolence, which may be promulgated as early as in 2019. The 'Francis effect' stands well poised to generate international and widespread interest in this topic. Encyclicals are the most binding and authoritative level of papal teaching. If this new encyclical can accomplish for a JustPeace ethic what Francis' 2015 social encyclical on caring for home did for linking social justice and ecology, then the themes presented in this essay will be more firmly coupled together, growing the content of peace consciousness amongst the world's over a billion Catholics. Further, with implications beyond Catholic contexts, such a JustPeace witness articulated by this particular pope holds the tangible promise of fostering inspired transformative action for a more substantively peaceful on individual, familial, community, and political levels.

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