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## A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence

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**Book Review:**

***A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence***

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*A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*. Eli S. McCarthy. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020. Paper, 275 pp., \$49.95, ISBN 978-1-62616-756-8.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, Catholic theological discussions of war tended to be framed in terms of an opposition between just-war theories and pacifism. Just-war theories began with a general presumption against war and argued about the conditions in which it might legitimately be overridden. Arguments over pacifism focused on whether there might be extreme cases which offered exceptions to its blanket moral prohibition of war. In both cases the emphasis was on the question of the moral justification of war.

For some time that emphasis has seemed inadequate. Modern warfare has become so indiscriminately destructive that church leaders are reluctant to justify it even in cases of blatant aggression. And conflict resolved by military means has tended to give rise to further violence. Theologians thus have increasingly been asking not whether and how war can be justified but, given that there will always be conflicts within and among human societies, how conflicts can be kept from becoming violent and quelled if they do become violent.

Eli McCarthy's *A Just Peace Ethic Primer* represents the newer approach. It grows out of an April 2016 conference at the Vatican on Gospel nonviolence and just peace, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Pax Christi International, and several organizations of superiors of religious communities, and two years of follow-up roundtable sessions. The conference resulted in "An appeal to the Catholic Church to re-commit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence," which called on the Church, among other things, to abandon the just-war theory.

The book is divided into three sections. First come three "framework essays." Gerald Schlabach, following Glen Stassen, presents the Sermon on the Mount not as an impossible ideal but as a practical "manual" for just peacemaking. "Key to both the practicability of the Sermon on the Mount and to contemporary just peacemaking practices is the power of *transforming initiatives* that break us out of *vicious cycles* of violence and sin in ways that the *traditional righteousness* 'you have heard it said' cannot do" (p. 17). Lisa Sowle Cahill reviews the development of Catholic teaching on war and peace and argues that "just peace" best characterizes the ideal of recent papal teaching. She defines "just peace" as "the ideal of peaceful and just political life, accomplished through human solidarity, commitment to the common good, respect for the dignity of all persons, and inclusion in participatory and equitable social, legal, and political institutions" (p. 35).

McCarthy follows with a chapter on a virtue-based just peace ethic. He recognizes that just peace requires more than the following of rules; it requires the formation of people who have certain

*Book Review:*

*A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence*

habits of mind and inclinations to act in peacemaking ways in the ever-changing circumstances of personal and public life. He proposes a unique virtue of nonviolent peacemaking and complements it with eight traditional virtues: mercy, humility, compassion, empathy, solidarity, hospitality, courage, and justice. He then states fourteen “norms” of just peace. These are not norms in the usual sense of rules or propositions stating what is to be done and not done; rather they are a very mixed lot. One of them is the nine just peacemaking virtues themselves, while others include patterns of practice such as nonviolent direct action, ideals such as human dignity and human rights, social institutions, and other components of sustainable peace. The result is that the chapter seems cluttered and diffuse, and this has an impact on the whole book, as I will explain below.

The remaining eleven essays in the collection are labeled as case studies. All but one focus on specific conflicts or conflict areas. The exception, “Making Just Peace Possible: How the Church Can Bridge People Power and Peacebuilding,” by Maria J. Stephan, uses examples from many parts of the world to show how to combine nonviolent resistance, which intensifies conflict, with peacebuilding practices that reduce it. It argues cogently that nonviolent action is more effective than violence in challenging injustices and resolving conflicts, even those involving extremist groups.

Four of the other essays concern cases in the United States. Leo Guardado examines the problem of immigration at our southern border and endorses the continuing relevance of the ministry of sanctuary developed by Jim Corbett in the 1980s. Unfortunately, most of the sources of this article predate the Trump administration’s intensification of repressive practices against would-be immigrants. Nancy M. Rourke studies the Flint, Michigan, water crisis through the lens of environmental justice. Daniel Cosacchi reviews the developing opposition in the Catholic Church to the death penalty and applies it to the United States conflict on that issue. Alex Mikulich’s essay on a just peace approach to anti-Black violence, though it cites no sources after 2018, is remarkably timely in 2020, in the light of the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others. He draws on the work of Cedric J. Robinson to argue that a Catholic just peace ethic “must take up [the] enduring history of violence that is rooted in racial capitalism” (p. 110). “The Black radical tradition,” he says, “offers a way to refine just peace norms of conflict transformation in the American context” so as to enable “white people and institutions to acknowledge and redress the history of racial harms” (p. 118).

Seven essays are case studies of conflict situations in other countries. They vary in focus, with some concentrating more on the origins of conflict, others on successful peacemaking efforts, others on the type of peacemaking efforts needed. Peggy Faw Gish’s article on ISIS and the Ezidis (also called Yazidis) stands out for its rich detail, based partly on personal experience, of successful nonviolent resistance to a group that would seem, on the surface, to be one of the least promising opponents. Léocadie Lushombo draws attention to rape as a weapon of war, a subject largely neglected in ethical analyses of war. She pays special attention to the Democratic Republic of Congo and efforts made there to curb the practice and heal the damage that it does to individuals and societies. Teresia Wamũyũ Wachira studies violent conflict arising from traditional cultural practices of cattle raiding in Kenya’s North Rift region. Other articles concern unarmed civilian protection in South Sudan, gang violence in El Salvador, and women’s Track II

(informal and unofficial) diplomacy in establishing the Bangsamoro autonomous region in Mindanao, Philippines.

Each conflict situation is unique, but a measure of coherence is afforded to the book by the fact that all chapter writers were asked to relate their essays to McCarthy's framing chapter on a just-peace ethic. That chapter, however, with its nine virtues, fourteen norms, and associated practices and skills, too easily becomes for some authors little more than a store of labels to paste onto their studies. The least satisfactory parts of several chapters occur when their authors attempt to fit their accounts into McCarthy's framework, in the manner of tenure candidates shoehorning their narratives into university mission statements.

In a class, there would be opportunities to enhance the coherence. I imagine, if I had a large enough class, assigning each case study chapter (except Stephan's) to a group of students for a class presentation answering the following questions:

1. What is the conflict discussed in the chapter?
2. What are the roots of the conflict? How did the conflict originate and intensify?
3. Were violent means of settling the conflict tried? What was the result?
4. What nonviolent means of resolving it have been tried?
5. How successful were they? What accounted for their success or failure?
6. What just-peace virtues or norms figured most importantly in the nonviolent efforts?
7. What further efforts do the authors think should be made?
8. (Since these articles are already a couple of years old and will be older by the time students read them): How does the situation stand today? How has it changed from what the article describes?

In all, McCarthy's book is a valuable resource for teachers of peace studies, especially in Catholic theology-related programs, and indicative of the way the field is developing. I know of nothing else that is at once so concrete and so comprehensive, and I recommend it highly.