Just Peace Framework: A Brief Primer

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This short primer will describe the basic components of a just peace framework. Then I will describe the recent trajectory of Catholic and Christian discourse on just peace, as well as engage a related discourse at the United Nations on sustaining peace.

The Just Peace Framework

This Just Peace ethical framework or process has arisen from and within an approach that listens to the experiences and voices of people in conflict situations across various cultural spaces. This orientation envisions a just peace as a way of cooperation for the common good consistent with human dignity, care for our ecological home, the prevention of violence, and a focus on the transformation of conflict by nonviolent strategies.

Just peace norms operate in three distinct spheres or categories that may overlap in time and space. They apply to all stages of conflict. Strategies and actions chosen must enhance or at least not obstruct these norms, as well as keep means and ends consistent. Such just peace strategies and actions are always contextual with attention to those most impacted by a situation. Sustaining spiritual disciplines are critical to the fruitful exercise of these norms.[1]

1) **Develop virtues and skills for constructively engaging conflict** (*jus in conflictione*)
   ● Virtuous habits: mercy, hospitality, courage, nonviolence, justice, compassion,
   ● Education and training in key skills: nonviolent communication, civil resistance, analysis of root causes, intersectional, and needs-based analysis.
   ● Participatory processes
   ● Form more nonviolent peacemaking communities: institutions, cultures

2) **Break dynamics or cycles of violence** (*jus ex bello*)
   ● Reflexivity: keeping the means consistent and congruent with the ends
   ● Re-humanization of all stakeholders: language, labels, and narratives we focus on.
   ● Conflict transformation: address root causes; consistent dialogue, trust-building initiatives, trauma-reduction, meeting human needs of all
   ● Acknowledge responsibility for harm: via statements or more formal restorative justice mechanisms
   ● Nonviolent direct action: enhance civil resistance, unarmed civilian protection, nonviolent civilian-based defense
   ● Integral disarmament: create conditions and actualize the reduction of armed weapons along with the reduction of bitterness, hostility, and hatred within persons and communities

3) **Build sustainable peace** (*jus ad pacem*)
   ● Relationality and reconciliation: promotes across all sectors of society, such as inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, or truth and reconciliation commissions.
   ● Robust civil society and just governance: re-distribution of political power.

- Ecological justice and sustainability: long-term well-being of people, non-human animals, and the environment
- Human dignity and human rights of all: including adversaries by ensuring human rights and cultivating empathy for all actors.
- Economic, gender, and racial justice: focus on the marginalized and vulnerable

The 2020 *Just Peace Ethic Primer* book provides a set of U.S. and international cases that work with and refine this just peace ethic (McCarthy, 2020). These include U.S. immigration, environmental racism, and the death penalty, along with international cases on the civil war in South Sudan, ISIS in Iraq, gang violence in El Salvador, ethnic violence in Kenya, and gender violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and women led movements in the Philippines.

The just peace framework also draws from and transforms some aspects of the just war tradition. This includes deepening the traditional criterion of right intention within a new framework by requiring deliberate formation of habituated intention and the skill sets needed to carry out right intention effectively. Just peace also calls us to determine appropriate strategies and campaigns that are more consistent with dignity, and thus, protecting life, which includes a priority for civilians, i.e. traditional criteria of discrimination, and those most vulnerable. Just peace also calls us to determine strategies and campaigns that have a higher probability of a more sustainable peace, i.e., including and going beyond the traditional criteria of probability of success.

Compared to just war reasoning, a just peace ethic better forms us as peacemakers by enabling us to imagine, develop, and stay committed to nonviolent practices. It also better enables us to transform conflict, get to the root causes, and build sustainable peace. It is consistent with human dignity and ecological care, whereas any war significantly distorts and damages both. For instance, it generates trauma and moral injury, lowers empathy and a sense of gift of all persons. A just peace approach is less likely to lead to the structural and cultural violence (ex. propaganda, dehumanization of others) generated in the process of being prepared for war(s) as well as a corresponding arms race, whereas both divert needed resources and often exacerbate mistrust. It also helps us better stay out of and break cycles of violence, which even wars that appear just still get us stuck in. For example, World War II led to the Cold War and numerous proxy wars, such as Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan in the 1980s, which led to the conditions and dynamics for 9/11 and 20 more years of war in Afghanistan. In turn, the just peace ethic is more likely to actually prevent, limit, and defuse an ongoing war. The just peace ethic will also better enable us to move closer toward outlawing war, a goal that some leaders including the Catholic Church at Vatican II in the early 1960's called all people to "strain every muscle" (Vatican II, 1965)."

Catholic and Christian Discourses on Just Peace
The way of Jesus has been increasingly reappropriated in contemporary theology toward a way of just peace. For example, in the Catholic Church, most of the earlier documents of Catholic social teaching from Rerum Novarum in 1891 through *Pacem in Terris* in 1963 primarily drew on a natural law framework and used a deontological model of moral theology. However, at Vatican II there was a noticeable shift to draw more readily on the Bible, especially the Christian Scriptures, with its clearer resonance for virtue ethics, and to extend the call to holiness to all persons, not merely clergy or religious orders. This has contributed to positions in Catholic social teaching and

thought that have increasingly integrated the concepts of justice and peace. Thus, the Catholic imagination is opening up to visions of the church as a 'peaceable and nonviolent community,' which also increasingly values the realistic potential of 'peacebuilding,' 'reconciliation,' or 'nonviolent peacemaking' practices for public policy (Katongole, 2016, Schreiter, 2010, Philpott, 2012, McCarthy, 2012). This trend has continued through Pope Paul IV, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and now, in a more pronounced way, with Pope Francis.

Notably, in the context of Vatican II's ecumenical opening in the Catholic Church, the turning to elements of just peace in official Catholic Church teaching has also been coupled with some similar turnings to just peace by other Christian church organizations. For example, the United Church of Christ (UCC) formally declared itself a "Just Peace Church" in 1985 and numerous congregations followed, declaring themselves "Just Peace" congregations (UCC 1985, Thistlethwaite, 1986). Glen Stassen coordinated with a broad range of Christian theologians to develop a "just peacemaking theory," which consists of a set of normative practices arising into view by both tracking effective practices and using the analogical imagination with the scriptural witness (Stassen, 2008, Ilesanmi, 2003, Kimball, 2003, Cahill, 2003). Stassen wanted to address the question of what practices have worked to prevent war. Interfaith approaches to just peacemaking along with other just peace approaches have also developed (Thistlethwaite, 2007, 2012, Sawatsky, 2008, Cusimano Love, 2010). Further, in 2011 the World Council of Churches produced a document titled "Ecumenical Call to Just Peace" (WCC, 2011). They defined" just peace" as "a collective and dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation" (WCC, 2011, par. 11). In 2012 the United Methodist Church recognized that war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ and thus rejected war as an instrument of national foreign policy (United Methodist Church, 2012). In November 2013 the World Council of Churches adopted the "Way of Just Peace" as part of its 10th Assembly (WCC, 2013, Enns, 2013).

In 2016, 2019, and 2022, global conferences on nonviolence and just peace were organized in Rome by Pax Christi International along with agencies and actors in the Vatican. These included many voices from violent conflict zones around the world. In between these global conferences the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative organized many regional gatherings, events at the United Nations, at universities, and encounters with local grassroots organizers (CNI, 2016). A prominent moment and outcome has been Pope Francis' "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace" (Pope Francis, 2017). At the 2019 conference with the Vatican's Dicastery of Integral Human Development, the outcome document called for a robust description of nonviolence and the just peace norms to be added to the Catechism (Vatican, 2019).

In 2020, Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* points to the first Just Peace category of engaging conflict constructively when he proposes "*processes* of encounter that build a people that can accept differences" (Pope Francis, 2020, par. 217). He has also called us "to become nonviolent people and to build nonviolent communities that care for our common home" (Pope Francis, 2017).

Pope Francis points to the second Just Peace category of breaking cycles of violence in *Fratelli Tutti* when he says "every act of violence committed against a human being is a wound; every

violent death diminishes us as people. … Violence leads to more violence. … We must break this cycle which seems inescapable" (Pope Francis, 2020, par. 227).

The conversation and exploration of just peace continues in Christian communities as well as beyond such communities.

Civil Society and UN Discourse: "Sustaining Peace"
In the early 2000's, civil society organizations were finally making significant progress on persuading government leaders that wars and violent interventions, whether deemed "just" or not, were regularly generating cycles of violence and trauma. In 2005, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan recognized a gaping hole in the UN which lacked any systematic way to help countries transition from war to a sustaining peace. In turn, the UN Peacebuilding Architecture was created (United Nations, 2014). As part of the ten-year review in 2015, an Advisory Group of Experts presented a report where they argued that sustaining peace must flow through all organs of the UN and orient activity before, during, and after violent conflicts (UN experts, 2015). In 2016, the UN General Assembly and Security Council adopted the review accepting this integrated approach and described sustaining peace as a goal and a process to build a common vision of society, ensuring needs are considered, addressing root causes, preventing violence, and cultivating reconciliation (UN, 2016).

In 2017, the International Peace Institute which works closely with the UN produced a document explaining sustaining peace. They emphasized that it is not primarily about conflict but rather focuses on building peace where it already exists, i.e., on what is already working. In praxis, they argue that sustaining peace is a meta-policy which must be positioned above other sectors so as to build on and account for economic, social, security policies, etc. They say all policies must be "infused with the intention to sustain peace" (IPI, 2017). They give positive examples of this in Costa Rica's governmental organ the Ministry of Justice and Peace, 2009, Ghana's National Peace Council, 2011, Kenya's National Peace Council, 2015, and Ethiopia's Ministry for Peace, 2018.

In 2018, IPI launched a series of roundtable discussions and a research project on how prevention and sustaining peace had been operationalized in countries. For example, in the case study on Papua New Guinea they identified challenges of self-determination efforts from Bougainville, intercommunal violence, sexual violence, climate change, and poor development. Yet, they found existing UN efforts to build the capacity of government and civil society, facilitate dialogue, assist in weapons disposal, provide peace education, training in human rights law, and cultivate reconciliation (IPI, 2017).

However, important gaps and critical challenges linger in this case and for the sustaining peace agenda more broadly. Regarding this case analysis, it may benefit from more attention to cultivating key virtues such as empathy, compassion, humility, solidarity, nonviolence, etc. Also, it may benefit from more attention to training in key nonviolent skills such as nonviolent communication and nonviolent resistance. These virtues and skills are central to engaging conflict constructively. Further, there is room for more explicit reference or commitment to re-humanization of adversaries in changing language, narrative, and relationships. There is also potential benefit in attention to nonviolent direct action, such as unarmed civilian protection. These practices are central to breaking cycles of violence.

Key challenges or opportunities also arise for a sustaining peace agenda understood and implemented as a meta-policy. For example, without an adequate ethical framework the meta-policy may more likely be neglected and lack commitment. Likewise, the policy may also more readily be abused as representatives of IPI have acknowledged. Another challenge without such an ethical framework is the risk of limiting the imagination about the range of possible nonviolent practices or strategies. The just peace ethical framework or process described above is one critical way to address these gaps and support such a sustaining peace agenda.

Conclusion
This short primer described the basic components of a just peace framework. Then I described the recent trajectory of Catholic and Christian discourse on just peace. Lastly, I described a related discourse at the United Nations on sustaining peace as well as providing initial considerations on how a just peace ethical framework can address key gaps and support such an agenda.

Endnotes

[1] Such as meditation, prayer, discernment, forgiveness, and contextual rituals oriented by nonviolence.

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