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A Spirituality of Peacemaking

By

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

To think about a spirituality for peacemaking in our time means that we have to begin by thinking about what our time is like. We must become aware of the fact we have just come out of an extremely violent century. The twentieth century was the most violent century in all of history. More people were killed in wars than in any other comparable period of time - 160 million people were killed by war and oppression.

In just the last decade of the last century, in the 1990s, more children were killed in war than any other group of people. In the wars of the last decade, two million children were killed throughout the world. More than six million children were left maimed, crippled and disabled. Twelve million children were left homeless. More than one million children were orphaned—all of that in the short period of ten years. Clearly we lived through a century of extraordinary violence.

We moved away during the twentieth century from wars between military forces to the point where war became what a war historian John Keegan called “total war.” It was no longer war between army facing army or naval ships standing off against each other in the midst of the sea. War became “total war.”

Warfare changed from militaries fighting other militaries to warfare where the largest number of casualties were non-combatant civilians. In the first major war of the twentieth century, World War I, 5% of the casualties were non-combatants or innocent civilians. In World War II, the number jumped to 50% non-combatants. In the Vietnam War, 95% of those who were killed were non-combatants.

The shift began in World War II. In the firebombing of Tokyo during World War II, almost 300,000 people were killed—all of them innocent civilians. In the carpet bombing of Europe at the end of World War II, 600,000 people were

Pope John XXIII brought about a dramatic shift in Catholic teaching about war - 1963

killed. Of course, the culmination of World War II brought the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In Hiroshima almost 100,000 people were killed in nine seconds. The result of one bomb that exploded over that city left tens of thousands of others to die slow, cruel, horrible deaths over a period of time. Truly war had become “total war.”

In the first Persian Gulf War, 150,000 Iraqi civilians were killed. And, of course, as the sanctions stayed in place after the war, it was impossible to rebuild all of the infrastructure that was destroyed deliberately in the war. The sanctions resulted in further killing people indirectly, a million-and-a-half Iraqis, and perhaps half of those children who suffered and died as a result of insufficient food and medicine over a period of 12 years.

Catholic Social Thought About War and Peace

In response to this kind of warfare, we were blessed in our world because Pope John XXIII published the encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris* in 1963. I remember very well when this letter was published. I was a student in Rome from 1961 to 1964, and in the spring of 1963, Pope John XXIII was suffering very gravely from cancer.

When *Pacem in Terris* was published, I always thought of it as Pope John XXIII’s last legacy to this world. And what is extraordinary in many ways is that it captured attention all over the world, perhaps one of the first times that an encyclical letter was read, and reflected upon, or listened to by as many people outside the Catholic Church—perhaps more outside the church than within the church. This letter to the world, to all people of good will, a legacy of love to the world, a plea to end war.

Pope John got the message out about the destruction of war and tried to show us how to build peace on earth, but I want now to focus on the words about war, because he brought a dramatic shift in the teaching of the Catholic

Church. I think we have failed to note it well enough. In paragraph 126 and paragraph 127, of *Pacem in Terris* he says: “People are becoming more and more convinced that the disputes which arise between states should not be resolved by resorting to arms, but rather by negotiation.” It is true, he goes on to say, “that on historical grounds, this conviction is based chiefly on the terrible destructive force of modern arms.”

And he goes on to say, this conviction “owes its origin chiefly to the terrifying destructive force of modern weapons. It arises from fear of the ghastly and catastrophic consequences” of nuclear warfare and total destruction and the immense suffering which the use of these armaments would bring.

And then a final sentence in paragraph 127 of *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John declares that in our atomic era, “it is irrational any longer to think of a war as an apt means to vindicate violated rights.”

We must understand well its full implication that in our atomic era, this time of “total war,” the kind of war that had evolved during the twentieth century up to the time of Pope John XXIII, with the use of those weapons of mass destruction culminating in World War II, John XXIII recognized this possibility for total destruction, and he makes that clear statement of justice.

In one sentence we have a dramatic reversal of what had been the tradition of the Catholic Church or had been the tradition the so-called “theology of justified violence or just war.” The clear implication is that even if you are under attack, you may not respond with war.

It is irrational any longer to think of war as the apt or cogent means, even to vindicate violated rights. That teaching of John XIII then continued to be developed and elaborated within the Catholic Church and has brought about our change of just war theory in the teaching

of the Church. A dramatic change.

In 1965 in the document “On the Church in the Modern World,” the Second Vatican Council ruled out the use of any weapons of mass destruction. Total destruction of entire cities or civilian areas are crimes against God and humankind, which bear unequivocal, unhesitating condemnation. War that is aimed against people as Total War is today. Total War is condemned.

Some of us may remember Paul VI at the United Nations in 1965 and his very passionate plea when he spoke to the representatives of all the nations of Europe, “Never again war. No, never again war!”

It’s so clear. We must say no to war. And this is not just rhetoric on the part of the Pope. I believe it is a very clear teaching.

I think of Paul VI in 1976 when he wrote a Peace Day statement for that year in which he recalls what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and he calls that a “butchery of untold magnitude”—one of the harshest and strongest condemnations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that any Pope or any religious leader had called—a “butchery of untold magnitude.” In contrast to what President Truman described the event as a glorious day in the history of the United States. Truly it was a “butchery of untold magnitude.”

Then it’s enlightening what Paul VI does immediately after he makes that judgment for that statement, he goes on to say, “Who is the model for our times?” Who is the model? The poor, weak man Gandhi.” Rejecting war, rejecting violence, the model for this time is the prophet the Hindu prophet and it is so striking that the Roman Catholic Pope would cite as the model for our time a Hindu, Mahatma Gandhi, to show us the way against war; to show us another way to bring peace.

John Paul II continued and again proclaimed

this message that we must reject war. One of his clearest statements came in 1980 in his Peace Day Statement, when he said, “I invite all Christians to bring to the common test that the world be building peace.” The specific contributions of the gospel and he said “In light of that gospel, it goes against, “I was able to say in Ireland”—and he’d just been to Ireland a few months before—he said, “I now repeat, violence is a lie because it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth humanity. Do not believe in violence. Do not support violence. It is not the Christian way. It is not the way of the Catholic Church. Believe in peace, forgiveness and love, for they are of Christ.”

In May of 1991, Pope John Paul II, published an encyclical letter, *Centesimo Annus*, “The Hundredth Year.” It was a letter to commemorate and to reflect upon and to in some way think of the 100 years since *Rerum Novarum*. In that letter Pope John Paul II makes a very powerful statement about the insanity of war and the precariousness of peace. More specifically, concerning the first Gulf War that had just concluded, he says, “I myself on the occasion of the 1991 War on the Persian Gulf repeat ‘Never Again War.’ No, never again war.” He gives reasons—“which destroys the lives of innocent people, throws into upheaval the lives of those who do the killing and always leaves behind a trail of hatred and resentment which makes it all the more difficult to find a just solution to the very problems which provoked the war.”

Consider one of the reasons that John Paul II points out why war must be rejected, it throws into upheaval the lives of those who do the killing.

Just today I read in the paper about a reporter who was in Kuwait watching troops preparing to go into battle and the reporter describes how the troops were being urged on by their officers as they practiced hand to hand killing with bayonets, driving them time after time

“Never again war.
No, never again
war.”
- Pope Paul VI
1965

into dummies, shouting out cries of hatred, working themselves up so that they could kill in that terrible way. What do you think happens to a person learns to hate and kill like that?

One person who in his memoirs described how he learned to hate was Senator John McCain who is a military hero in this country of the Vietnam War. All of you, I'm sure, are familiar with Senator McCain, a Navy bomber pilot in the Vietnam War who dropped bombs on Hanoi a number of times before he was shot down. When he was shot down, his back was broken, shoulders were dislocated and he suffered many cuts and bruises during the seven years of harsh imprisonment. He has said of himself that he hated his enemy, even before he was held captive, and that his hate sustained him in his devotion to their complete destruction. And it helped him to overcome the virtuous human impulse to recoil in disgust from what had been done by his own hand. He had to hate, otherwise he could not have done the killing he was commanded to do.

Remember, we are made in the image of God. God is love. The only way we become full human beings is by loving, by being loved. If you learn to hate, you're destroying the image of God. And it throws into upheaval the lives of those who do the killing, as Pope John Paul II points out so clearly.

Never again war. That message often comes through to us very clearly. John XXIII made it clear that justifying killing in war is no longer acceptable. Since John XXIII, Paul VI, the Vatican Council, John Paul II—more and more we realize that our church is teaching us that we must give up war.

Spirituality of Peacemaking

We need to develop a spirituality of peacemaking that will enable us to confront the hatred, the evil, the violence, and the

sinfulness of war in a time of war, almost constant warfare.

Of course, the spirituality has been there all the time. Mark describes the baptism of Jesus and his temptation in the desert, he then describes Jesus beginning his public life. A very short passage, but it's very powerful: Jesus began to teach. The words proclaimed were "The reign of God is at hand." The reign of God is at hand!—"Change your lives. Believe in the Gospel, the Good News."

The reign of God, the reign is ready to break forth in our world. Jesus proclaimed it, 2,000 years ago. He made it so clear. The only way it would happen would be if we changed our lives. Change your lives. Follow the Gospel. Believe in the Good News.

In the gospel, Mark gives us the message of Jesus, which is about how we must grow in our spiritual life. How we must change.

This requires for most of us a dramatic, radical change because for so long we've been accustomed to the idea that violence must be confronted with violence, hatred with hatred.

Jesus is showing us a different way. The spirituality that Jesus shows us has many elements to it. But when it comes to what it means to confront the violence of war, I think there are two or three parts of the spirituality of Jesus that are especially important.

One of the most basic things that we must do if we choose to follow Jesus is to become aware of how Jesus looked upon every human person as unique, special, gift of God, someone made in the image and likeness of God.

I'm sure you must notice how when we are ready to go to war our leaders use many abstractions to speak about what will happen: collateral damage being one of them.

Jesus shows us a different way - not violence, not war

Numbers are another way we don't think of individuals. But in the life of Jesus, if you examine it carefully, you discover that he never just dealt with people as groups. It was always individuals.

Jesus had an extraordinary sense of the worth of every person. He demonstrated it with respect and reverence for all people, each person. Remember the way Jesus responded when the disciples were trying to push the children away from him. You could almost hear those disciples telling the mothers, "He doesn't have time. He's busy, he's teaching, he's healing. Take the children out of here." Jesus becomes angry. "No," he said. "that's what the Kingdom of God is all about. Each tiny child." So Jesus embraces them individually and blesses them. The gospels are full of examples of this.

That's one of the first things we must do if we're going to develop a spirituality in the time in which we live—a time of such violence against human persons—a violence that happens in war, that will happen in this war. We must think about the individual, the person, the tiny children that this war will kill, the individual men and women who will be destroyed. This has to be true of every situation in which we try to confront the violence, the hatred. We must begin to have that sense of reverence for the individual person.

Something else that must be a part of the spirituality of peacemaking for our time is the strong conviction that Jesus showed for justice. We cannot develop a spirituality in the time in which we live, a time so marked by violence, the violence of war, the violence of what Pope John Paul calls structural injustice, the violence that is carried out in the world today because of economic structures that we have developed in the international global economy.

That violence has caused the wealth of this planet to move from the poor to the rich over

the last 40 years in a dramatic way. In 1960 the difference between the rich and the poor on our planet was 30:1. Then in the 190s it became 60:1. Now it's 80:1. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. 1.2 billion people are in absolute poverty on our planet. That means they're barely surviving on the margins of human life and the situations they're living in are so degrading you can barely call it human. These are the people who try to survive on this planet with 1.7% of the world's resources, whereas, those of us of the rich countries have 87% of the world's resources.

The first time Jesus spoke in Luke's Gospel, he preached a sermon in the synagogue. According to the fourth chapter of Luke, he proclaimed those words of Isaiah, "The spirit of God is upon me. God sent me to proclaim good news to the poor, to give the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to heal the captives, and to proclaim God's year of favor, a year of justice, a time when all will share in the goods of the earth that were made by God for all, not for a few." And Jesus told those people, "This day this Scripture passage is fulfilled, even as you listen." In him this was to be done. Justice was to happen in the world.

So, at the moment of our spirituality in the world in which we live, which is a world marked by war and violence of unjust structures, we must develop a compassion, a passion for justice.

Our Catholic teaching has promoted this over the last three or four decades. Probably the most powerful statement is that contained in the Synod of 1971 which teaches us that "action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world are constitutive dimensions of the teachings of the Gospel." Action for justice is changing the way things are so everyone has the right, has the possibility of a full human life. Action for justice, participating in transforming this

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world into as close an image of the reign of God as possible! We must get that passion as Jesus had it.

But most of all, most importantly, Jesus taught us to reject the violence of killing. John McKenzie, a Scripture scholar, wrote a book entitled the *New Testament Without Illusion*. His book takes the gospel and its radical, clear teaching and sets the Gospel forth with clarity. In regard to violence and non-violence, he said, if we do not realize that Jesus rejected violence for any reason whatsoever, we know nothing about Jesus.

Jesus of Nazareth rejected violence for any reason. It is so clear in the gospel. If we can't say that about him, we may as well say we don't know anything about Jesus. And yet, so many Christians seem not to accept this truth about Jesus.

McKenzie goes on to make a second statement. He said, "Jesus taught us how to die. Not how to kill." In the Gospels, we will never find Jesus teaching us how to kill. But he does teach on how to die. Die loving forgiving your enemy. If only we could get a hold of that way of acting. Rejecting violence for any reason whatsoever.

There are many, many ways in which the gospel brings forth the non-violence of Jesus. The active love, the way he transforms the world by love, not by violence.

Walk with Jesus from the last supper to the agony of the garden, through the whole time of his passion and death. If you do that, you discover Jesus always responding with love to whatever violence he encountered on the journey.

Think of the examples of the violence done to Jesus by Judas, who betrays him, a friend. This friend breaks that bond of trust and love and destroys it. What did Jesus do in response? A short time later Jesus is in the

Garden and finishing his prayer and a mob is coming toward him with swords and clubs. Judas is leading that mob and Jesus walks up to him and addresses him. He still calls him friend. He says, "Friend, why have you come?" He reaches out and reconciles with forgiveness and true love. That's how Jesus responds to this violence.

The same thing happened with Peter. He denied Jesus. Imagine a friend saying, "I don't even know you. I want nothing to do with you." Peter denied him three times. And then you read in Luke's Gospel how Jesus responds to this. Jesus is being taken from one place to another, and he looks across the space and sees Peter and looks into his eyes obviously with a look of love and Peter goes away and weeps bitterly knowing he was loved and forgiven. The healing takes place, right as it needed to happen.

And when Jesus is violently beaten and nailed onto the cross, he prays, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

I believe that if we take those passages of Scripture and pray them carefully, eventually they will inform our Spirit, and we will begin to be changed. Then we will also come to understand that he really meant what he said.

The teaching is so clear. We must reject violence of any means whatsoever.

It is all set forth there in Matthew's Gospel, in chapters five through seven, often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount.

You've heard what was said of Old, "Thou Shall Not Kill." I say to you, you shall not even have hatred, anger in your heart, against your brothers and sisters. Even if you're going to the altar to offer your gift, and then you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go first to be reconciled.

If we do not realize Jesus rejected violence for any reason whatsoever, we know nothing of Jesus

Jesus is telling us nothing is more important - not even the worship of God. Going through the motions for worship if there's hatred in your heart - this is foolish. Go first and be reconciled. Nothing is more important.

You've heard what was said of old. "Love your neighbor, hate your enemy." I say to you, "Love your enemy, do good to the one who hurts you." It's all here. It's all so clear. We must begin to absorb this teaching into us, into our spirit. Let our hearts be transformed and changed.

I urge us to open ourselves to the possibility for this kind of conversion, a conversion to a profound respect for every individual person, a conversion to action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world, and finally a conversion to the profound message of Jesus that only active love can finally bring peace to our world.

I urge us to open ourselves to this conversion and try to develop this kind of spirituality.

Because we are at a point in human history where as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "It is no longer a choice between nonviolence and violence. It's a choice between nonviolence and non-existence."

We have the capacity to destroy our whole planet. Arundhati Roy, the Indian author, shortly after her government successfully exploded a nuclear device and celebrated this achievement, wrote a long article condemning what had happened. And she concludes her article with these words, "The nuclear bomb is our challenge to God." It's worded quite simply, "We have the power to destroy everything you have made." Think of that.

With nuclear weapons, we say to God, the God who out of creative love made this universe, made this planet, made each one of us, called us into being, loved us into being, brought us into being, we say to God, "We can destroy it all."

Here is evil that is almost indescribable, the creature standing up to God, defying the creative love of God, that's the sin we commit with these weapons by building them, deploying them and intending to use them. If we're religious, we realize the ultimate evil of this sin.

Roy also says, "If you're not religious, look at it this way: This world is 4,600 million years old. It can end in an afternoon." Think seriously about what is happening in our world right now, the rush into the war. Think of the war that we are now waging and the continued plans that we have. Think of the one nation that has more nuclear weapons than any other nation in the world and has come ready to be deployed at any time. Think of the nation that has declared that recently that they will use them against non-nuclear armed states and that continues to build new nuclear weapons. Think about that. Think about what will happen if we use them.

I hope we all understand that we must give up war. We must say, as John Paul II says, repeating, what Paul VI says, "Never again war. No. Never again war." Think about that. Grow in a spiritual life. Follow the way of Jesus. Change your lives. Believe in the Gospel. And we will be God's instruments to bring God's world to peace.

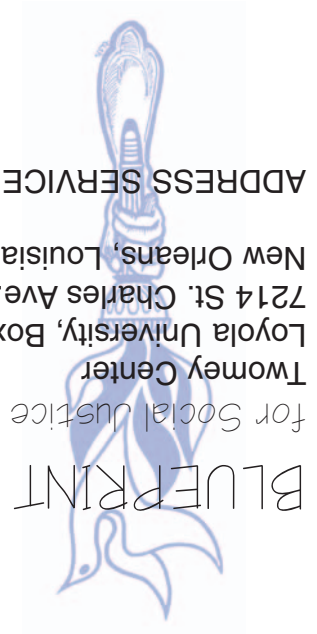
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The nuclear bomb is our challenge to God

In this Issue

A SPIRITUALITY OF PEACEMAKING
by
Bishop Thomas Gumbleton

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, a world-renowned person of peace, writes about how we might develop a spirituality of peacemaking in a world so full of war. Drawing on Catholic Social Thought and Gospel passages, Bishop Gumbleton teaches us how to become instruments to help bring the world to peace.



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