

## *Advancing Nonviolence* Session 1: What is Nonviolence?

### Preface & Appendix 3

- What has drawn you to take part in this reading group? What are you hoping to get out of it?
- Do you have any experiences of nonviolence/reasons why you are drawn to nonviolence etc.

#### Intro to the Text

- Developed by the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (a project of Pax Christi International). Launched at [Nonviolence and Just Peace Conference](#) in Rome in April 2016.
- CNI core mission is mainstreaming nonviolence within the Church, and as part of this mission published [Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace within the Church and the World](#) in 2020.
- The text is a result of a three-year global consultation with activists, organizers, Church leaders, social scientists, and theologians.
- Explores how the Church can return to the tradition of Gospel nonviolence. Surveys the scriptural, historical, and theological roots of nonviolence, intertwining these with lived experience and examples of nonviolent practice, and academic research on its effectivity, providing the foundations for understanding nonviolence within the Catholic tradition, as well as how to implement it within the Church, drawing on examples of where this is already being done.

#### What is (Catholic) Nonviolence?

A theology, a spirituality, a way of understanding scripture, the way of Jesus, an enactment of Gospel values, a positive reverence for human life and dignity, a way of living, both for within community as well as for approaching those outside our communities, a way of challenging and changing unjust and violent structure, a set of strategies and methods, a form of witness.

#### Terminology:

- Long history in other traditions, but relatively new in Christianity. Has been come to be seen by its advocates as constitutive of way of Christ.

- Comes from translation of Sanskrit word 'ahimsa' – used by Gandhi. 'Ahimsa' not a negative term, but positive – a 'kind of double negative' like other Sanskrit words e.g. Buddha's use of 'avera' or 'non-hatred' which means 'love'. Ahimsa signifies idea of 'the comprehensiveness of love in action' whilst also naming that which undermines this i.e. violence, like how hatred undermines love.<sup>1</sup>

### **In the Church:**

- Just war thinking has dominated the Church's stance on issues of peace. However, early Christianity tended to reflect a pacifist approach, through a 'general pre-Constantinian consensus that Christians should abstain from military service'.<sup>2</sup>
- Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century this pacifist position comes to forefront in appraisals of nonviolence.
- Particularly emphasised in papacy of Pope Francis, seeking to further mainstream this teaching. In his 2017 World Day of Peace Message, Pope Francis called on the Church to 'make active nonviolence our way of life' and to make nonviolence the 'hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions', pledging 'the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence'.<sup>3</sup>

### **Understandings:**

- Moves beyond a passive approach and rather is typified by a struggle towards global unity and peace, which is not simply realised through the cessation of violence.<sup>4</sup>
- Aiming to form a methodology that actively challenge structures of violence, as well as the cycle of violence in which violence begets more violence, and instead build spaces/processes of peace that interrupt this. Not about doing nothing/retreating, but rather active engagement in challenging unjust structures of violence, whether that be economic, political, cultural or religious.
- Michael Nagler: violence as 'a tendency that pulls us back, away from the recognition of unity'; nonviolence on the other hand 'pulls us forward,

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<sup>1</sup> *Advancing Nonviolence* p.20, footnote 5.

<sup>2</sup> Theodora Hawksley, *Peacebuilding and Catholic Social Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020) pp.21-22.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *2017 World Day of Peace Message*.

<sup>4</sup> CNI, 'Gospel Nonviolence for a Laudato Si' Future', p.6.

toward the recognition of unity'.<sup>5</sup> Nonviolence understands violence broadly i.e. that which destroys unity – and directs itself to challenge/change anything that threatens unity/could create or sustain conflict e.g. root causes such as unequal access to resources, economic inequality etc. Therefore, confronts anything that disrupts such unity, from excessive economic consumption to the destructive nature of war.<sup>6</sup>

- Not just a static end goal, of a peaceful society. Nonviolence not the same as peace, but peace is the aim of nonviolence. Rather NV is typified by a struggle towards global unity and peace, which is not simply realised through the cessation of violence.<sup>7</sup>
- 'Nonviolence is not simply a stance or an ideal; it is a relentless *process* of struggle and transformation that resolutely challenges violence without using violence; transforms and resolves conflict; and seeks justice, peace and reconciliation for all'.<sup>8</sup>
- Nonviolence as an ongoing method and process of achieving peace/resolving, minimizing, preventing, ALL forms of conflict (personal, cultural, structural etc.). Happens at all stages of conflict, occurring before, during<sup>9</sup>, and after.
- = method of way of living to build sustainable culture of peace/ method for governing relationships.

### Methods:

- Plurality of methods that encompass nonviolent practice - based on premise that there is an inevitability of conflict, but that it is not inevitable that we have to respond with violence.
- Obstructive practice e.g. direct confrontation - strike, protest, civil disobedience, non-cooperation, vigils, and boycotts.
- Constructive methods that promote long-term community adhesion and building of alternatives nonviolent structures e.g. nonviolent communication, dialogue, restorative justice, and reconciliation.
- Both approaches important, and have differing uses, but need constructive to work alongside to ensure alternative structures in place to help break away from reliance on unjust systems.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Nagler, *The Third Harmony*.

<sup>6</sup> CNI, 'Gospel Nonviolence for a Laudato Si' Future', p.6.

<sup>7</sup> CNI, 'Gospel Nonviolence for a Laudato Si' Future', p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> CNI, 'Gospel Nonviolence for a Laudato Si' Future', p.7.

<sup>9</sup> *Advancing Nonviolence* p.34.

<sup>10</sup> *Advancing Nonviolence* p.34.

- Essentially, means condemning violence not enough; have to engage in alternative practices to show another way is possible. <sup>11</sup>

### **Nonviolent Spirituality:**

- Proponents argue that violence directly contradicts the example of Christ. Can see as grounded in an understanding of faithfulness to the Gospel - direct obedience to the teachings of Jesus, to 'turn the other cheek', 'love your enemies', 'blessed are the peacemakers', placing particular importance on the Sermon on the Mount. Seen here as part of the message and mission of Jesus and how we are called to act, emulating Jesus' example.
- Links to sense of solidarity with the whole human family that shares in the new life of Christ. Based on premise of recognizing humanity of the other - both oppressed and oppressor - grounded in human dignity of each person and their inherent relationality, the common good, solidarity and universal membership of Body of Christ, in which journey together towards God.
- An ethic for faithful action; to act violently is to act out of accordance with our God-given purpose; 'Violence is not in accord with human dignity'<sup>12</sup> i.e. violence violates the other's human dignity when they are harmed, but also our own if we enact violence.
- Mode of Christian witness - Christian's as called to live according to the laws of the Kingdom of God, rather than laws of the world.
- Goes beyond addressing issues of conflict, or promoting theories for achieving peace, but rather constitute a 'a way of life'.<sup>13</sup> Different to just war theory in this sense - which deals with what to do during conflict - nonviolence about how to live. About relationships on personal, interpersonal, communal/societal, global levels.
- = personal conversion - confronting the violence within our own hearts (where nonviolent practice starts) and trying live more in line with Gospel values/ethic of nonviolence - but also part of Church's unique message/witness to the world.

### **Questions**

(You may also want to refer to Appendix 3 to help you answer these questions).

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<sup>11</sup> *Advancing Nonviolence* p.84.

<sup>12</sup> *Advancing Nonviolence* p.7.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, 'Theological Contexts of Just War Theory and Pacifism: A Response to J. Bryan Hehir', *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 20.2. (1992) p.261.

- What do you understand by nonviolence? Are there any areas in which you can see examples of nonviolence in your own lives?
- How do you think the following quotations define nonviolence? What do they tell us about what nonviolence is? What aspects of nonviolence can you see within these extracts?
- What do you think about these definitions? Is there anything you would add/exclude? Is there a particular quote that stands out to you?

### Quotations

‘Nonviolence engages violence and injustice, not by retreat, accommodation or more violence, but by the power of love in action. It seeks to create the conditions for revealing the truths at stake in the conflict and to foster the possibility for resolution and reconciliation’ (p.9).

‘Nonviolence is personal, interpersonal and social-structural. It includes nonviolent strategies, nonviolent resistance and nonviolent action for social change – but also everyday techniques and practices...’ (p.10).

‘Nonviolence strengthens a culture of peace by helping it to resist the temptation to establish peace through violence ... the goal of nonviolence is peace in its fullest sense... This nonviolent core will encourage the residents of a culture of peace to acknowledge their own violence; to let go of their belief in violence...’ (p.11).

‘Nonviolence is a paradigm of the fullness of life with which we are called to respond to monumental contemporary challenges, from the destruction of the Amazon to the threat of nuclear weapons; from the systematic oppression of migrants to the unspeakable suffering cause by human trafficking; from the violence of rampant poverty to the catastrophe of war. Nonviolence is a theological and practical framework that cuts across these and many other forms of violence’ (pp.11-12).

‘The modern term “nonviolence” names a central dimension of the vision and mission of Jesus: the thorough rejection of violence combined with the power of unconditional love in action’ (p.8).

‘Nonviolence – a core value of the Gospel; our calling as Christians; a toolbox for change; and a universal ethic...’ (p.11).

'We seek to live nonviolently because that is the way God calls us to live, no matter the outcome' (p.12).