

Advancing Nonviolence Session 6: Creation and Nonviolence

1. *Violence and the Environment: pp.68-71 (The cry of the earth - 'endangers biodiversity').*
 2. *Theological background: pp.148-151 (from '3.Towards a Theology of NV' - 'in the Garden of Eden to care for it'); 171-173 (Pneumatology - 'nonviolent journey for peace rooted in justice'); 178-180 (The Spirit and Trinitarian God - 'our lives and our Church').*
 3. *The Church: pp. 201-203 (Emerging insights - 'the union for which we long'); pp.245-248 (Hearing the Song of the Earth- 'service and solidarity').*
 4. *Case-studies of NV practice: pp.39-46 (Colombia - 'parties to the conflict').*
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Context: Violence and the Environment

When thinking about issues of violence, see the divisions between Earth and humanity as inherently connected. Last time looked at Christology – spoke about concept of the Fall and ideas within salvation history – with the Fall, humanity turns away from living in way that God intended them to - also causes corruption on the social and environmental level. Causes social division amongst each other, but also division between humanity and the earth.

Example of militarism:

- Global conflict caused vast areas to become uninhabitable and infertile, (use of bombs, landmines, pollution, and the destruction of forests and other animal habitats)¹ E.g. Agent Orange in the Vietnam War which caused defoliation - oil spills in the First Gulf War.
- The Conflict and Environment Observatory estimates that militaries worldwide are responsible for [5.5% of global emissions](#) (does not include emissions during wartime which hard to measure).²
- Military preparations/arms trade, have a substantial impact on climate change = use of fossil fuels, plundering of natural resources, and destruction of habitats e.g. plundering of natural resources in Chile, Peru, and the Amazon for use in the US-backed military bases on Jeju Island in South Korea.³
- The testing and manufacture of nuclear weapons - contaminating water and land with radioactive waste, effecting the environment for 100,000 years. E.g. Bikini Atoll tests.

¹ Gospel of nonviolence, 1

² <https://ceobs.org/national-climate-action-plans-must-include-military-emissions/>

³ Nonviolence and creation care/climate justice, Amy Woolam Echeverria

- Conflicts driven through access to fossil fuels, food and water. E.g. illegal mining funded by armed groups in the Congo or the Taliban in Afghanistan.⁴
- Ecological Threat Register (2020) the 19 countries with the highest number of ecological threats, were also least peaceful countries in the world.⁵
- By 2040, a total of 5.4 billion people expected to live in countries facing extreme water shortages - same amount are projected to live in food insecurity by 2050 = mass displacement, competition of resources, increased civil unrest, and political instability.⁶

CST and Care for Creation

- Care for creation developing as increasingly central concern since at least 1971 in Paul VI's apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens*.
- John Paul II - *Laborem Exercens*, *Redemptor Hominis* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* - emphasises stewardship of creation/humanity expresses the image of God by participating in his creative work. *Centesimus Annus* - Genesis 5 - earth is God's gift to the whole of the human family (Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate*).
- Issue of systematic injustice - rich nations monopolise resources that are meant to be distributed equally - causing migration and displacement - often respond with violence, in order to protect the resources.
- Criticism levelled at CST for being too anthropocentric (Lynn White's 1967 essay 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' - idea of dominion over the Earth).

Laudato Si/Biblical Themes

- Pope Francis - *Laudato Si*, first social encyclical to address humanity's relationship with its wider environment in a sustained way.
- Drawing on creation narrative, in which Adam and Eve are banished from the garden, Pope Francis argues this demonstrates how our relationships with God, with each other, and with creation are ruptured through sin =

⁴ Nonviolence and creation care/climate justice, Amy Woolam Echeverria

⁵ Vision of Humanity, 'Countries Facing Most Ecological Threats are Least Peaceful' [<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/countries-facing-most-ecological-threats-among-least-peaceful/>]

⁶ Vision of Humanity, 'Countries Facing Most Ecological Threats are Least Peaceful'

‘the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual’.

- Further reflecting on story of Cain and Abel, Pope Francis illustrates how violence towards each other, and the earth is linked. Here, ‘we see how envy led Cain to commit the ultimate injustice against his brother, which in turn ruptured the relationship between Cain and God, and between Cain and the earth from which he was banished’ (LS 70). ‘The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life’ (LS 2).

Theological Themes

- Francis is clear to denounce, a technocratic mindset that views the world in terms of its usefulness for consumption by humanity, speaking of nature as having its own value in ‘God’s eyes’.
- Aware of Christianity’s role in perpetuating the myth of human domination, insisting that ‘nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and being given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures’, and that ‘the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism’.
- States that every element of creation gives - ‘glory to God by their very existence’ - value placed in creation through God’s love for it and his ‘loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance’ - situating the whole of creation within God’s plan.
- *Laudato Si* implications of ‘universal’ or ‘sublime communion’, as God created through the ‘word’ i.e. Christ, and therefore, everything, humanity and nature alike, finds its ultimate destiny in Christ.

Integral Ecology/Ecological Conversion

- 2017 World Day of Peace Message, Pope Francis argues that nonviolence gives us a style of politics for peace.⁷ Includes the ‘devastation of the environment’ as an act of violence, as well as the injustice of resources being channelled into militarism and away from those who really need them.⁸
- ‘Integral ecology’ - how injustice amongst humanity and injustice towards the Earth are inherently intertwined. Speaks of how the cry of the earth

⁷ 2017 World Day of Peace Message; Paul VI Message for the First World Day of Peace, 1st January 1968.

⁸ 2017 World Day of Peace Message.

and the cry of the poor are inherently intertwined; what harms the earth harms us, and vice versa. This view of an integral ecology links the care of the natural world with justice for the poor and vulnerable.

- Part of larger cultural crisis, a moral not just purely physical problem = need for change of mentality not just a purely material response = “ecological conversion”.
- Suggests ‘that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour, and with the earth itself’ – need to readdress each of these.
- Part of realizing our own dignity is by realizing that of creation. Need to ‘learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves’ - necessary as it is through this world i.e. God’s creation, that we journey towards God. Therefore, we further realise our personhood and relationship with God, not just from relationships with each other, but also with creation.

Creation and Nonviolence

- Act of creation as inherently nonviolent - stemming from an outpouring of divine love, from a relational Godhead made up of the reciprocal communion of three persons, whose love is shared with all of creation. Made in the image of God, our true humanity then, is to reflect this reciprocal loving relationship. Violence towards each other, and towards the earth is, therefore, a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to be human.
 - 2017 World Day of Peace Message - NV is the strategy offered to us by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and exemplified in the Crucifixion - violence encountered in the world, is met with the unconditional, nonviolent love of God.⁹
 - For Francis – ‘concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society’, asserting that ‘a deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings’.
 - Cannot restore harmony to the earth if do not have harmony amongst ourselves - *Laudato Si*’, ‘we require a new and universal solidarity’ (LS 14).
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⁹ 2017 World Day of Peace

Questions:

- How do you understand environmental violence? How does this relate to theology and the role of the Church?
- What do theologies of creation tell us about violence and nonviolence?

'In Genesis there is ... no primordial violence... Creation is good, and human beings are made in the image of God who declares this goodness... Peace, in other words, is ontologically primary; nonviolence is the nature of creation' – p.148.

'Embedded in the primacy of nonviolence is the ultimacy of nonviolence; the ontology of nonviolence is inseparable from the eschatology of nonviolence. The Fall means that the way things are is not the way things are meant to be, and therefore there is hope that things might yet be transformed to reflect their true nature. Any theology of nonviolence therefore looks simultaneously to the beginning of creation and to the final end of creation in the eschaton' – p.149.

'God is unconditional love that grounds, creates and maintains all life, rooted in the infinite goodness that the three Persons of the one God endlessly and inseparably share with one another and with all creation' – p.178.

Case Studies:

1 – Colombia: Militarised commerce i.e. use of military services by companies to provide security – linked to human rights abuses and extractivism. Example from Las Pavas, central Colombia, of land theft by palm oil corporation. Work of Christian Peacemaker Teams in combating this/NV campaign against The Body Shop.

(Land theft/marginalisation/economic injustice/violation of universal destination of goods/displacement/destruction of crops/profit over people/depriving people of resources to provide for themselves).

(Training communities in NV – empowering community/allyship and accompaniment/legal contestation/dialogue/letter-writing/economic boycott/civil disobedience/international solidarity/unarmed resistance/non-cooperation).

2 – Philippines: Central Mindanao – Catholic Relief Services – communal/local conflict over land.

(Displacement/marginalization of indigenous communities/extractivism)

(Supporting/accompanying local communities/dialogue with stakeholder/community dispute resolution/negotiation/role of local Church as stakeholder/negotiator/facilitator)

Questions:

- What types of violence can you see in the example?
 - What NV practices and techniques are used in the case-studies to combat environmental violence? How do these relate to theological understandings of NV?
 - Where else in the Church/world can you see efforts to combat ecological violence?
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Quotations:

‘There are many examples of how the earth is crying out for justice... Some examples include the climate crisis, access to and conflict over water, extractivism, the loss of biodiversity, an increase in ecological martyrs. Each of these cries demonstrates the failure of violence to bring promised peace’ – p.68.

‘The denial of human induced climate change is a kind of violence. It is the violence of ignorance and the violence of isolation, when we fail to see our interconnectedness, that perpetuates policies and lifestyles that keep the world imbalanced and diseased’ – p.69.

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‘The Trinity is not an indecipherable dogma but a powerful articulation of the foundational relationality of God. The eternal communion of Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer is the ceaseless mutuality of ontological nonviolence in action. God is unconditional love that grounds, creates and maintains all life, rooted in the

infinite goodness that the three Persons of the one God endlessly and inseparably share with one another and with all creation' - p.178.

'The nonviolent community of our Trinitarian God models how humanity is to be' - p.179.

'Our Trinitarian doctrine is the foundation for understanding our interconnectedness and communion with all of creation' - p.201.

'... we have only to observe nature's inherent balance and harmony as a model for peace among humans and with all of creation. For billions of years, life, death and rebirth in the earth's ecosystems were sustained in a healthy rhythm that honoured time, space and relationship. We cannot diminish the role of creation itself in reminding us to practise sufficiency, patience, sacrifice, service and solidarity' - p.248.