

# What is “Just Peace”?

## A Synthesis based on Catholic and Ecumenical Christian Sources

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### Key background assumptions:

- Peace is not the absence of conflict. It is the presence of creative processes by which human communities become ever-more skillful and habituated at working through their conflicts without recourse to violence and without demeaning one another’s dignity.
- All Christian peacemaking begins and finds its continuing source as forgiven sinners gather together around the table of Eucharist; as they do so, they recognize the nonviolent self-giving of Jesus Christ and receive the grace of his real and abiding presence, which they need to “pass the peace” first to one another and then to the world.
- To confess particularly Christian sources of peacemaking is not to depreciate the spiritual resources or active contributions of other religious and secular traditions toward peace, but rather to welcome analogies and to invite collaboration grounded in respect for the particularity of every culture and tradition.
- A central task of any ethical position is to keep means congruent with ends, or else accept the burden of proof needed to explain any disjunction. “Just peace” expects human beings to thrive when ends and means are closely integrated, such that the means chosen in the pursuit of ends are consonant with or reflect those ends (a.k.a. the principle of reflexivity). The very term “just peace” responds to this principle: A social order will be truly peaceful only to the degree that it is just; the pursuit of justice will sow new seeds of injustice unless done through peaceful means.
- Jesus’ ethical teachings thus offer realistic and paradigmatic “transforming initiatives” for breaking out of the vicious cycles that result when just ends are pursued through incongruent means. (Cf. Glen Stassen exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount.) As St. Paul summarized Jesus’ ethic in Rom. 12:21, these initiatives are transformative because they resist being “overcome by evil, but [instead] overcome evil with good.”
- Just peacebuilding will sometimes fail. There are no risk-free options; any promise of perfect security is illusory. But military solutions fail at least half the time, even on their own terms, insofar as at least one side always loses to the other or else – more often – both sides lose. The potential of just peacebuilding must thus be assessed according to a single rather than a double standard.
- If a just peace framework appears to be more complex than a “just war” framework, this is “a feature not a bug,” Justice, as defined by Cardinal Peter Turkson, means “attending to the requirements of relationship.” Insofar as a just peace framework attends to the root causes of war and social injustice, while recognizing the interconnectivity of all creatures (as Pope Francis has emphasized) it is being realistic and rejecting simplistic solutions that are often what make violence deceptively tempting.
- Nevertheless, wide reflection by Christians about the social conditions and priority practices that nurture just peace – informed by findings from the maturing field of justice, peace, and conflict studies – yields an emerging set of patterns that are amenable to summary. What follows is an attempt to be accountable to the insights of other scholars, collectives, and religious bodies that themselves have been attending to grassroots practitioners in diverse global settings, to discern emerging points of consensus and to summarize them with what aspires toward a certain pedagogical elegance.

## **JUS IN CONFLICTIONE**

**In order to act justly and wisely amid conflicts, at all stages, cultivate the dispositions, skills, and virtues that help resist pressures of the moment, which tempt actors to dis-integrate ends and means.**

**Sustaining spiritual practices:** To become consistent, life-long peacemakers and peacemaking communities, invite God's formative work through sacraments and spiritual disciplines.

**Core dispositions and habits:** Amid any conflict at any level, choose actions that signal and further develop the dispositions and habits that will make one's self, community, and culture one that respects the dignity of all and nurtures creativity in pursuit of peace.

**Participatory processes:** Decisionmaking about prospective action must be as participatory and inclusive of as many key stakeholders as possible, especially women, young adult leaders, and other marginalized groups

**Skillsets:** Long before conflicts become acute, churches, schools, other organizations, and individuals themselves should develop the skillsets that enable creative responses to conflict and injustice, both as participants and advocates practiced in active nonviolence, and as impartial mediators or facilities practiced in conflict transformation.

**Priority of building of peacemaking communities:** To act with integrity as effective peacemakers, churches and other communities must be seeking to embody "the change they seek in the world" (Gandhi).

## **JUS EX BELLO**

**Seek every opportunity for creative actions that will allow actors on every side to escape vicious cycles of violence and retribution that may seem justified by the past, but that nonetheless invite continuing cycles of violence in the future. Such cycles may include direct, structural, or cultural violence.**

**Creative gospel nonviolence:** Use nonviolent direct action to resist injustice without responding in kind.

**Conflict transformation:** Look for every opportunity to turn adversaries into partners shaping a new future.

**Independent initiatives:** Take risks to cultivate trust as they surprise adversaries by doing what one's own side wishes others would do first.

**Acknowledging responsibility:** Publicly recognize one's own part in creating the conditions for conflict, seeking repentance and asking forgiveness.

**Reduction of weapons and weapons trade:** Reduce and remove the fuel that makes violent conflicts easier to start and harder to stop.

**Rebuilding of social norms and infrastructure:** Facilitate trauma healing, reparations, and reconciliation.

## JUS AD PACEM

**At every stage of conflict – from prevention to post-conflict – attend to the social and ecological conditions that promote and sustain human thriving.**

**Relationality:** The peace that is God's *shalom* is preeminently the peace of right relationship; therefore act always in ways that invite, create, strengthen and heal relationships in ever-wider (horizontal) and deeper (vertical) directions.

**Environmental sustainability:** action must contribute to the long-term interconnected well-being of human and non-human communities by addressing root causes of conflicts and nurturing ecological conditions that are life-giving.

**Just governance and the rule of law:** Respect and anticipate the need for positive social change to be institutionalized through robust civil society if it is to be sustainable.

**Respect for human dignity and human rights:** cultivate actions that cultivate appreciation and are consistent with the equal dignity of all people, including adversaries, by ensuring human rights and cultivating empathy.

**Human economics:** Direct marketplaces toward human ends and promote economic development with a focus on the poor and marginalized.

## Addendum: Criteria to distinguish just policing from war

**To qualify as policing, not warmaking, any exercise of armed force that risks the life of either enforcement officers or alleged criminals must be consistent with larger just-peacemaking efforts and just-peace norms that build and strengthen humane and participatory social structures.**

**Recognizing that it is also necessary to sanction inhumane and antisocial behaviors, keep potential risking of life exceptional, by developing unarmed civilian protection units and reserving any use of armed force to de-militarized policing wherein any risk of life or use of potentially lethal violence can truly be last resort.**

*Note that criteria previously elaborated by just war theory may also be applicable, and even prove all the more operative once that theory is reframed within a just policing rubric, within a larger just peace framework.*

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\*for full collation, see <http://www.geralschlabach.net/documents/justpeacecollation.pdf>