Challenges for

The Challenge of Peace

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Is the 1983 peace pastoral still relevant in today’s globalized, terrorized, ecologically threatened world? How do we build peace when the WTO is arguably the strongest global authority?

The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response was written toward the end of the Cold War, six years before the fall of the Berlin Wall (NCCB 1983). Its focus is definitely the contest between the two “superpowers,” the United States and the Soviet Union. These states were then poised to destroy each other (or their allies) with massive arsenals of nuclear weaponry (no. 125). The Challenge of Peace is probably best remembered for its somewhat uneasy combination of a biblical call to the peace of God’s kingdom, and the use of just war theory to justify what it termed “a strictly conditioned moral acceptance of nuclear deterrence” (no. 186). The bishops ruled out nuclear war absolutely (nos. 138–88). One of the document’s more neglected features is that it foresaw that emerging new structures of global interdependence (“globalization”) would demand new forms of international cooperation, and especially a commitment to peacemaking in cooperation with other peoples, religions, and cultures (nos. 200–201).

A second important marker in developing Catholic tradition on war and peace is the U.S. bishops’ letter on the tenth anniversary of The Challenge of Peace, The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace (NCCB 1993). A post–Cold War document authored

after the 1990–91 Gulf War, it mentions recent threats of terrorism and nuclear proliferation. The letter highlights the need to restrain “just war” licensing of military action. Yet it also affirms the moral rationale for self-defense and for humanitarian intervention in ethnic violence and genocide. Importantly, however, its main focus is the Christian and human obligation of peacemaking, including economic and social development, as the only sure basis for a world without violence (Himes 2005).

In light of subsequent events, one shared assumption of The Challenge of Peace and The Harvest of Justice has become increasingly questionable and even untenable, namely, the progressive investment of international authority in the United Nations. Both documents state that the U.N. should and must come to function as a world government that protects international peace and justice. The U.N., acting analogously to the government of a nation-state, will someday be able to preserve the rule of law and enforce its provisions for the welfare of the entire world community. Without in any way detracting from the view of both documents that the U.S. should support the enhanced authority and stature of the U.N. (The Challenge of Peace, no. 268; The Harvest of Justice, II.A), it is now hardly possible to be optimistic that that body will ever serve as an effective international government with enforcement power. To confirm this judgment, one need only consider the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the U.S.-led Iraq War, with their inflammatory effects in the Middle East; the failure of international resolve in the face of genocides in Rwanda and Darfur; the spread of nonstate terrorism; the spread of nuclear weapons, potentially in the hands of terrorists; and the seemingly interminable suffering of the African continent under civil war, economic exploitation, and corrupt governance.

We shall consider The Challenge of Peace and The Harvest of Justice in light of their central messages and continuing relevance, keeping in mind three new or at least heightened twenty-first-century challenges: humanitarian intervention, terrorism, and nuclear weapons. As we shall see, these present special problems for just war theory. For example, humanitarian intervention overrides the sovereignty of a state, and so calls into question legitimate authority; terrorism involves nonstate actors, and so raises questions about the legitimate targets of self-defense; and nuclear weapons proliferation reveals the acute need for diplomatic over military measures. Finally, we shall discuss some problems and potentials of economic and political globalization, including the realities of decentralized global governance, and its relation to our prospects for limiting war and extending peace.

Humanitarian intervention, terrorism, and nuclear weapons . . . present special problems.
Legacies of the Documents

The Challenge of Peace both defended traditional just war theory and endorsed a more recent Catholic sense that the ideals of the gospel call us to nonviolence. Pacifism is a longstanding and important strand of Christian witness (nos. 111–21). The eschatological gift of peace is already ours insofar as we live “in the reconciliation effected by Jesus Christ.” Hence we, as Christians, are always called to peace and to make peace (no. 55). This document does not set aside evangelical ideals in light of political realism, or in favor of a philosophical “natural law” method of argument. The document reiterates that, since Vatican II, the church recognizes the right to conscientious objection, whether to all war or to a given war (no. 118).

At the same time, pacifist nonviolence is not an absolute. The reign of God is not yet complete in “a world marked by conflict and injustice” (no. 58). The tension between the reign of God and the need to seek justice in a world distorted by sin imbues this document, creating a certain (perhaps unavoidable) paradox at its heart. Christianity represents a “presumption against war,” in the sense that the bias is in favor of ways to avoid violent conflict (no. 70). Military violence must be very strictly justified. Yet such justification is possible if the necessary conditions are met (nos. 78, 83). The bishops describe for a contemporary audience the criteria of justice in going to war and justice of means used in war (nos. 85–110). (See Christiansen 2003.)

Criteria for Evaluating Justice Regarding War

Throughout most of Christian tradition, the major moral considerations in waging war have had to do with the justice of its cause and of the motivations behind it (jus ad bellum or “right to war”). Augustine, followed by Aquinas, taught that war must be waged to seek peace and the common good (i.e., in self-defense or to rectify a clear injustice); with a right intention (not out of hatred or revenge); and under legitimate authority. In premodern times, legitimate authority referred to the emperor, king, or lord; in modern times it has referred to the nation-state. Modern interpreters have also taken the destructiveness of even a just war into account, and have put a special emphasis on “noncombatant immunity,” or “discrimination” between combatants and civilians, as a limit on means used in war (jus in bello or “right in war”). Direct attacks on noncombatants are held to be always and absolutely wrong.

Over the centuries, the “right to go to war” criteria have been developed further. “Last resort” requires that even if the cause is just, war may be chosen only if all other routes to peace have been exhausted. “Proportionality” and “reasonable hope of success” speak to the destruction that protracted or ambiguously resolved conflicts produce. Drawn-out violence can destroy the innocent and undermine
conditions of social life, often to conclude in a situation in which the factors leading to the conflict are worsened, not ameliorated. Recent critics of the tradition have argued that the two categories of justice in going to war and justice in war need to be complemented by a third: “justice after war” (*jus post bellum*). (See Orend 2002; Himes 2004, 154–56; and Allman 2005.) Even a war that has a just cause and is justly waged can further increase misery and injustice if it is not concluded justly, usually requiring investment of resources from outside sources, and long, difficult internal processes of reconciliation and restoration. The specification and achievement of conditions under which conflicts may be justly concluded, and social order restored with justice and peace, are major current challenges for the legacy of *The Challenge of Peace*.

For any war to be terminated justly, the rights whose vindication was the original cause of the war have to be secured; to seek any other or further outcome goes beyond the limits of just cause. Human security (safety from further violence, provision of basic needs, stabilization of political institutions) must be present for a stable and just peace. Defeated parties must not be deprived of the self-respect and self-determination necessary for social rebuilding and cooperation. Necessary political reform must incorporate formerly divided parties. Victors must remember the humanity of their “enemies” and the inevitable wrongfulness of many aspects of war, including their own participation in the war just completed. Prosecution for war crimes pertains to all sides.

*The Challenge of Peace* takes an absolute stand against nuclear weapons on the grounds that they are always disproportionate and always involve the violation of noncombatant immunity. The bishops exclude the idea that nuclear weapons could be sufficiently limited in their targets and effects to meet the criteria of justice in war (nos. 144–45). And while they do not exclude the possibility of legitimate self-defense, they put a much higher value on peacemaking efforts and on nonviolent resistance as ways to counter injustice.

This yields a continuing lesson: even at a less than nuclear level, the means to and consequences of war are difficult to control and always exceed the bounds of what is predicted or justified. Their effects on the innocent are dire, especially on the poor and most powerless. Justifying war should be marginal to any Christian approach to politics; realizing the conditions of peace and the common good must remain central.
The bishops rejected administration arguments legitimizing preventative war.

The Challenge of Peace stresses international efforts at development, international collaboration, and peacebuilding as positive ways to avoid war and strengthen the common good (nos. 234–44). Beyond direct military conflict, the world order is plagued by international economic structures that reduce millions of people to a situation of “absolute poverty.” These include trade, monetary investment, and aid policies (nos. 260–61). World peace and justice demand “multilateral forms of cooperation toward the developing world” (no. 265).

The anniversary document Harvest of Justice takes its lead from what it regards as an unjustly neglected dimension of its predecessor: “the spirituality and ethics of peacemaking” (I; see The Challenge of Peace, nos. 333, 229–30). Peacemaking is a “mandatory” biblical vocation for all Christians (Introduction). Harvest of Justice develops even more extensively the need for (U.N.-led) international structures of solidarity and security to deal with nuclear proliferation and disarmament, a general reduction of arms and militaries, the legitimacy of economic sanctions, the implementation of humanitarian intervention, and agreement on global responses to regional conflicts (II.E). In 1993 the bishops are even more cognizant than in 1983 that world peace requires just and holistic economic and social development, including fair access to world markets (II.C). The U.S. should better address the gap between rich and poor and should be a catalyst for international action on poverty and development. “Generous and targeted assistance, sustainable development, economic empowerment of the poor, and support for human rights and democracy are essential works of peace” (Introduction).

Like The Challenge of Peace, Harvest of Justice recognizes the need for just war criteria to justify armed combat when necessary and just as importantly to restrain it (I.B.2). The bishops note that just war tradition helped shape debate during the lead-up to the Gulf War. That conflict also showed that “a spirit of moderation” is especially called for in modern war, due to the availability and even “glorification” of destructive technology. This technology can be used to target civilian infrastructure. This “afflicts ordinary citizens long after hostilities have ceased,” amounting virtually to “making war on noncombatants” (I.B.2). Both the 1983 and 1993 episcopal letters were written in the strong realization that inevitably war, and even preparation for war, creates conditions, practices, and effects that harm the innocent and undermine the restoration of just and peaceful society. Hence
war is to be avoided by every means possible, while justice is always to be sought as the precondition and corollary of a lasting peace.

**U.S. Bishops’ Response to War**

These themes have influenced subsequent U.S. episcopal interventions on war. During the political process leading up to the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the bishops rejected administration arguments legitimizing preventative war. They repeatedly questioned whether an invasion would meet just war criteria at all (Winright 2007). Several months before the war, they cautioned that “the use of force might provoke the very kind of attacks that it is intended to prevent, could impose terrible new burdens on an already long-suffering civilian population and could lead to wider conflict and instability in the region,” as well as detract from ongoing commitments in Afghanistan and “undermine broader efforts to stop terrorism” (USCCB 2002). As a recent interpreter remarks, these predictions turned out to be “spot on” (Winright 2007). (The bishops offered four major statements prior to the war. See http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/peace/back503.shtml [accessed 8/29/07].

The U.S. bishops’ continued acceptance of war as rarely justified, along with their growing insistence on the priority of peace and peacemaking, should be seen in the context of a similar tension and gradual shift of emphasis in the concurrent thought of John Paul II. In *Centesimus Annus*, the Pope warned that modern means of war are uncontrollable in their results, exhorted the “international community” to find alternative solutions to war, and held up “development” as a solution to the “real and serious grievances” often at the root of war (nos. 51–52). These include injustices, poverty, and “the exploitation of multitudes of desperate people who see no real possibility of improving their lot by peaceful means” (no. 52). Indeed, alluding specifically to the Persian Gulf War, John Paul II proclaims,

> “Never again war!” No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution of the very problems which provoked the war. (no. 52)

In an address to the Vatican diplomatic corps (John Paul II 2003) the Pope cries again, “NO TO WAR! War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity” (no. 4). Instead of military conflict, leaders should resort to international law, dialogue, solidarity among states, and diplomacy. Without excluding the legitimacy of war entirely, the Pope maintains that it must be “the very last option,” held to “strict conditions,” and with care for “the consequences for the civilian population both during and after the military operations” (no. 4).
Developments and Implications

Drew Christiansen calls the emerging Catholic position on the use of military force “a stringent just-war teaching,” rather than a repudiation of the just war criteria. By “affirming the value of nonviolence and strictly interpreting some just-war canons, it makes for a less permissive use of the just-war tradition” (Christiansen 1999, 14). In response to the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, many in this country began to limit their focus to “just cause,” forgetting the equally important limiting criteria of last resort, reasonable hope of success, and even noncombatant immunity. Although terrorists by definition violate the principle of noncombatant immunity both by killing civilians directly and by targeting entire peoples or populations for psychological attack, the impetus to fight terrorism with ill-considered, disproportionate, or poorly aimed responses also runs afoul of just war theory and especially of the peacemaking mandate (Hehir 2001; Hollenbach 2001). As David Hollenbach concludes, “Only a multilateral response with global legitimacy can hope to succeed” (2001, 24).

It is becoming increasingly obvious that peacemaking multilateralism must include partners in the Middle East, especially Muslim peoples and religious leaders. Ideals of peace to be found in every major religious tradition must be identified and developed, in a respectful and ecumenical way, in order to overcome the violence-prone trajectories also found in every religion, including Christianity (Appleby 2000). Still quite relevant is The Challenge of Peace’s call “to recognize our common humanity and the bonds of mutual responsibility which exist in the international community in spite of political differences . . .” (no. 196).

Multilateral legitimacy is only one of the just war standards that the U.S. war in Iraq has failed to meet. The major ground on which we repudiate terrorism, noncombatant immunity, can also be abandoned rather quickly when terrorism’s victims succumb to its agenda. This happens when they let their actions be governed by fear and give up the rule of law and protection of individual rights that are the hallmarks of every democracy. Scandalously, in the minds of many Americans, civilian deaths of Iraqis are of less account than deaths of U.S. military personnel. The imprisonment and torture of people who have not been found guilty (or, in many cases, even officially charged) have been accepted as the necessary price of defense against the terrorist threat. The justification of “preventive
war,” abandoning the moral requirement that acts of self-defense require a clear and imminent threat, greatly, and I believe illegitimately, expands the conditions of “justice in going to war” (see Christiansen 2003, 9–10; and Himes 2004, 141–57). John Paul II’s cautions about the evils of war, its nature as a “defeat” for human morality and politics, his conviction that violence does little to reduce the grievances and hatreds leading to war, and his recommendation of diplomatic means to resolve conflicts, set clear moral warning lights all around the perimeter of any process designed to justify a military intervention.

Still, this increasingly restrictive papal and episcopal treatment of war has not entirely eliminated possible justification, particularly in pursuit of the limited purposes of humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian intervention aims at the cessation of violations of human rights; it does not aim to conquer another country, replace its government per se, or achieve “victory” over its population. The most problematic aspects of humanitarian intervention are determination of “last resort,” violation of national sovereignty, grounds of authority to intervene, and definition of success in accomplishing aims and restoring social equilibrium. There is also the moral problem of apathy when U.S. interests are not perceived as directly involved; and overeagerness or overreaction when they are. The popes and U.S. bishops would support intervention only, but always, when necessary to defend the rights of innocent victims. In cases of genocide, such as Rwanda and Darfur, it seems that the requirement of “last resort” has by definition been met. Yet one could well ask whether the motives of defenders are ever pure, given that choice of interventions is always selective. Legitimate authority in such cases must be multilateral, according to recent tradition, and preferably lodged in the U.N. How to evaluate probability of success and what counts as success have not been addressed in any precise terms by official teachings and remain challenges for the evolving tradition.

Global Governance: Challenges and Opportunities

In the twenty-first century, global governance is assuming ever more decentralized and pluralistic shapes. The U.N. does not have the kind of power the popes and bishops have been predicting for it ever since the 1960s. While the U.N. is no doubt extremely important, both the U.N. and the modern world’s supposedly “sovereign” nation-states are now surrounded and even infiltrated by any number of international, regional, and transnational organizations that share power and limit power. Globalization means integration across national boundaries, enabled by modern communication technologies, but without any “central” control. It is primarily an economic phenomenon, driven by transnational corporations and international financial markets. It has even been said that the “global authority” of the twenty-first century is not the United Nations, but the World Trade Organization (WTO)! The WTO can control the internal policies of nations and the
behavior of their producers and investors by threatening them with exclusion from global markets.

Economic globalization also carries with it a set of political changes. Politics can no longer be said to occur only within nation-states, nor in a megasociety of nations coordinated by the U.N. Political decisions, locally and globally, are highly influenced by economic interests, whether of entities like corporations or business lobbies, or of populations who need to grow crops, mine natural resources, produce and consume goods, and export and import. These economic activities link nations, peoples, and transnational actors to multiple others in the global environment. Networks of interaction for both economics and politics are becoming ever more complex and intense.

The authors of *The Challenge of Peace* foresee many such changes. They realize that, just as the nation-state was an evolution past the feudal system, so “we are now entering an era of new, global interdependencies requiring global systems of governance to manage the resulting conflicts and ensure our common security.” They mention problems that are even more acute a quarter century later, such as “trade and payments deficits, competition over scarce resources, hunger, . . . global environmental dangers, the growing power of transnational corporations, . . . as well as the danger of world war,” which they realize “cannot be remedied by a single nation-state approach” (no. 242).

“Pollution, drugs, money-laundering, human rights and terrorism are among an increasing number of transnational policy issues which cut across territorial jurisdictions and existing political alignments, and which require international cooperation for their effective resolution” (HELD 2004, 8). Many similar issues arise in the area of war and peace. Another is ethnic violence that destroys local communities and natural resources, and drives floods of refugees across borders. Still another is multilateral decisions to intervene in a failed state, a “rogue” state, or a state that seems unable or unwilling to control adverse events or actions going on within its own borders. And potentially most dangerous is the acquisition of nuclear weapons by ever more states, some with seemingly unpredictable leaders, like North Korea; or even by nonstate actors.

The bishops rightly advise that such problems “require the concerted effort of the whole world community.” Again, their recommendation in 1983 was that “the United Nations should be particularly considered” as the authority over a new system of global governance (no. 242). As we have seen, the U.N. has neither the military capacity nor the political power to ensure that cooperation to resolve inequities and recurrent conflicts takes place worldwide. The U.N. Security Council notoriously is divided by the individual interests of its member states. The authority of the Secretary General is primarily a moral authority, not a legal or military one. Many authors have noted that worldwide government today is weakened by three “gaps”: the jurisdictional gap, the participation gap, and the incentive gap. These gaps explain the limited power of the U.N.
First, there are discrepancies among units of policymaking in a globalized world, from nations to regional bodies like the European Union (EU), to global bodies, like the WTO, that only take care of certain aspects of international relations (the jurisdictional gap). Second, the international system as it exists today fails to give a voice to many global actors, especially the common people, and the leaders and populations of the poorest regions of the world (the participation gap). Third, without a supranational entity to require states to do what is best for the universal common good, many will seek to be “free riders,” avoiding their share of collective responsibility for the environment, the AIDS crisis, or the world’s poor (the incentive gap). (Held 2004, 11, citing Kaul et al. 1999, xix.)

If the U.N. does not have the power to require, supervise, and enforce the kind of cooperation needed to resolve life-and-death matters at the international level, then who does? Where does, or might, such power come from? The name of the international political game today is decentralized cooperation. The multiplication of transnational problems and responsibilities (trade, terrorism, the environment) has meant that layers of cooperation across traditional boundaries have grown, such as treaties on the environment or refugees; regional government bodies like the European Union and the Union of African States; intergovernmental alliances like the G7 and G8; international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; international nongovernmental organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent or the Roman Catholic Church (and its charitable and development endeavors). Such organizations themselves often are characterized by hierarchy, inequality, and exclusivity. What is needed to combat global violence, as well as global poverty, a key contributing factor in war, is a commitment of citizens, motivated government officials, church members, and aid workers, to achieve a shift to more participatory and democratic practices. What is needed is “a more transparent, accountable and just form of governance—a socially backed, cosmopolitan multilateralism” (Held 2004, 13). Decentralized but cooperative governance reform will not be achieved in a top-down way, by the U.N. or any other sole authority. It must be built up by all those of “good will” working together in a spirit of solidarity. Such reform would recognize the political interconnectedness of the entire world’s peoples; would understand the importance of collective norms and solutions; and would prioritize transparency, accountability, and democracy (Held 2004, 13).

**Peacebuilding Initiatives**

In this new realm of global politics and governance, it is important not to underestimate the need for and possibility of effective action for peace and justice at both higher and lower levels of political association. Grassroots and midlevel action, including a whole range of civil society organizations, are vital to development,
democracy, and peace. *Harvest of Justice* is perceptive on this point, and mentions “transnational actors” such as “human rights groups, humanitarian aid organizations, businesses, labor unions, the media, religious bodies, and many others,” that can “build bridges of understanding and respect between cultures and can contribute to positive social change and a sense of global community” (ILA).

Responses to the peacemaking mandate of recent Catholic documents can be developed on many sociopolitical levels, from the parish “Justice and Peace Committee,” to the United Nations. Clearly, *The Challenge of Peace* stands within a trajectory that increasingly emphasizes the obligation of heads of state, of multilateral and transnational organizations and alliances, and of the United Nations and its agencies to take diplomatic measures to prevent and resolve conflicts.

But peacemaking is also the calling of a large number of groups in civil society, religious and nonreligious; Catholic and Protestant, Jewish and Muslim; and of many national origins, as well as of international scope. At the urging of *The Challenge of Peace*, Catholic universities are taking a lead (no. 229). (For information and resources, see the website of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, housed at the University of Notre Dame, http://cpn.nd.edu/about_us.htm [accessed 8/29/07].) Realizing that religious ideologies are too often part of cycles of violence, Catholic (and other religious) peacebuilding efforts are forming partnerships among activists, community leaders, pastoral ministers, theologians, and academics, to create a theory and a practice of peacebuilding. International networks share experiences and “best practices” and advocate for political change that serves peace and justice. Usually the starting point is a locality in conflict or in a situation of recently terminated hostilities. In such situations, those who are committed to peaceful coexistence begin to build up structures of trust and social cooperation, including the exchange of personal narratives and histories. Even in societies where violence has been rampant, and there are no uninvolved “sides,” people who hunger for a new start and a different way of life can come together and create the bases of hope. Though separated by ethnicity, religion, or ideology, they are united in a common need to enjoy security, a decent livelihood, and a future for their children.

Perhaps the most important remaining challenge of *The Challenge of Peace* is to lead U.S. Catholics to join with past adversaries, across political “boundaries” and differences, to work for peace at home and abroad. The challenge is to inspire in Americans the kind of genuine solidarity that gives the well-being of the world’s poorest a priority that can compete with our interest in our own access to goods and our own security from attack. The challenge follows from the insight of *The Challenge of Peace*, illuminated even more strongly by John Paul II and by *Harvest of Justice*: global peacemaking means a commitment to transform global structures of inequality and exclusion. A lasting peace is a just peace—a peace in which every person, every community, and every nation has a share in the universal common good.
References


