



Global Day of Action and Prayer for Syria: September 21st, 2016

Shifting to a Just Peace Approach

By Eli S. McCarthy PhD, Director of Justice and Peace for Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Just Peace is rooted in both human experience and the recognition that peace requires justice-making, but also peacemaking is the way to justice, which is further illuminated by the biblical notion of Shalom/Salaam- “justice and peace shall embrace” (Psalm 85:10). Jesus modeled this approach of nonviolent love of friends and enemies, while living under foreign military occupation. He also leans us toward justice understood as restorative justice, with a focus on the harm done to relationships and how to heal.

A just peace approach offers a vision of human flourishing and an ethic to guide our actions to prevent, defuse, and heal violent conflict, while cultivating just peace. As an ethic, it includes a commitment to human dignity and thriving relationships. It offers a set of core virtues or habits to form our character and shape core practices, as well as to both orient and better apply a set of just peace criteria for specific actions.[1] As a virtue approach, it goes beyond pacifism “understood as a rule against violence” by instead challenging us to become better people and societies in engaging conflict.[2] Core virtues would include nonviolent peacemaking, mercy, solidarity, etc. Some of the core practices include meditation and prayer, solidarity with the marginalized, interfaith collaboration, nonviolent resistance, unarmed civilian protection, trauma-healing and restorative justice, environmental justice, etc. Some of these and others will be described in upcoming educational materials.

A Just Peace approach is also being woven together through ecumenical organizations and interfaith collaborations. For example, the World Council of Churches’ call for turning to a Just Peace approach in [2011](#) and [2013](#), [Interfaith Just Peacemaking](#) published in 2012, and a [Vatican conference](#) appeal toward Just Peace and Nonviolence in April 2016.

A just peace approach has many advantages compared to a just war approach. For instance, it has less risk of abuse as well as better helps us to imagine, develop, and commit to nonviolent practices, while cultivating just peace consistently throughout all stages of conflict.

Just Peace in Syria

How would a Just Peace approach look in Syria? Some of the key questions a just peace approach would raise include: Who are we becoming as a society? What are root causes of the conflict? What core practices might we try to transform the conflict and grow in virtue? How would our action meet the just peace criteria? What actions do we prioritize to reach the goals?

For instance, a group of [65 religious leaders](#) applied a just peace approach to Syria in Aug. 2014, but many points remain relevant today. First, we would recognize our unhealthy habits of engaging large conflicts with armed force and destructive power. Second, we would recognize root causes linked by the environmental crises, food shortages in Syria, global strategic interests, the Syrian civil war, the Iraqi war, etc. Third, we might identify some of the following practices to transform the conflict:

- A. Humanizing rhetoric and reducing cultural marginalization are essential to defuse the violence and see with clear eyes the path forward to a more just peace.
- B. Economic pressure needs to be applied on all armed actors fueling the flames of war.
- C. The U.S. government must make finding a negotiated solution to the Syria crisis a top diplomatic priority, which includes all key stake holders both armed and unarmed.
- D. Humanitarian assistance for people suffering from the brutal impacts of the war is vastly underfunded.
- E. Peacebuilding needs increased funding now for trauma-healing, unarmed civilian protection, and nonviolent civilian resistance.[3]
- F. A coordinated strategy for enticing defections from armed groups, such as ISIS, is a key for defusing the violence.
- G. Significant reduction in, if not complete embargo on, the flow of arms is needed to defuse capacity and will to rely on violent activity.

Towards Concrete Action to Transform the Conflict

Consider funding some of these worthy projects:



- [Unarmed Civilian Protection in Syria](#). The Nonviolent Peaceforce and Cure Violence have been [training](#) Syrian civil society actors in these proven methods.
- [Trauma-Healing in Syria](#). [Mennonite Central Committee](#) has been providing this essential need to help defuse violent responses to conflict.
- [Syrian Nonviolence Movement](#). This broad coalition of Syrian civil society actors has been providing child protection and nonviolent resistance programming.

*To DONATE to any of these organizations [click here](#) and follow the instructions.

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[1] Maryann Cusimano Love: just cause (dignity, all life, common good); right intention- positive peace; participatory process- vertical (between high visibility leaders, middle range, and grassroots) and horizontal (across but within a social level); reconciliation; restoration- material, psychological, spiritual; sustainability.

[2] Eli McCarthy, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers: A Virtue Ethic for Catholic Social Teaching and U.S. Policy*, 2012. <https://wipfandstock.com/becoming-nonviolent-peacemakers.html>

[3] Maria J. Stephan, Ph.D., U.S. Institute of Peace, "Civil Resistance vs. ISIS" in *Journal of Resistance Studies*, 2016.

