

# Contributing to the Catholic Church's Understanding of and Commitment to Nonviolence

By [Mairead Maguire](#)

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*I come from Northern Ireland and lived throughout the 'troubles' in the city of Belfast, in an area deeply immersed in a violent ethnic/political conflict for over 30 years. The 'troubles' started in 1969 and in the ensuing thirty years over 3,500 people were killed and thousands injured.*

In 1969, the UK government at the request of nationalist politicians sent in British troops to protect the Catholic population. The British government also brought in emergency legislation removing many basic civil liberties of the population, carrying out such draconian measures as internment without trial, torture, etc. However, these measures only served to increase the anger in the nationalist community, and were counter-productive in that many young people joined the 'armed' groups for many reasons, but often in reaction to how they were humiliated by British troops, when their dignity was ignored and basic human and civil rights were removed.

Living as we did between the violence of illegal paramilitary groups and State repression, many people in the civil community found themselves having to make a choice between violence and nonviolence. One young man, Danny, told me he was in the Irish Republic Army and joined the 'armed struggle' because it was a 'Just War' struggle, and the Catholic Church he said, "blesses Just Wars". This conversation with a teenager arguing for the 'Just War' theory had a profound effect on me.

I realized that though I came from a Catholic background, living in a Catholic community, I had never read the 'Just War' theology and had not been taught Jesus's Nonviolence, much less a clear moral calling to reject violence, and follow the Sermon on the Mount. Living in the midst of State violence I was forced to ask myself, 'Can I ever use violence in face of State violence and injustice, is there such a thing as just war, just violence?' I then read the Just War theory, and decided I agreed with the late American theologian Fr. John L. McKenzie 'the just war theology is a phony piece of morality'.

Finally, I went to the cross and there I found my answer. 'Love your enemy, do not kill.' And came into my own belief that nonkilling, nonviolence is the way of Jesus, the way of the Cross, and that Jesus' suffering on the cross calling us to love our enemies is the greatest symbol of nonviolent love in action. I also came to know that my life and every human life are sacred; we have no right to kill each other in armed struggles and wars but must seek alternatives to violence. It was then that I made the conscious choice to be an active

pacifist, and not to kill or support nuclear weapons, militarism and war. I also made the choice to commit myself to finding nonviolent solutions to the injustices in society, which others took up 'arms' to try to change.

Having lived in Northern Ireland, when we witnessed that militarism and paramilitarism did not solve our problems, only deepened the hatred and division. It was only when we began to enter into dialogue and worked on peace, forgiveness and reconciliation that change began to happen in our country. Peace came to Northern Ireland when people rejected the bomb, the bullet and all the techniques of violence, and came to believe that peace is possible, peace is a human right for all.

I would like to see Pope Francis and the Catholic Church call for the total abolition of militarism (an aberration/dysfunction in human history.) Also For Pope Francis and the Church to renounce war and develop a 'Theology of Nonkilling and Nonviolence' rejecting the 'Just War' theology, which continues to lead people to an acceptance of militarism and war as alleged legitimate ways of solving conflict.



Since World War II, over 20 million people have died in wars, and hundreds of wars have been fought often in the name of God and country. Christians have, and continue to participate, in the killing of humans and the destructions of their countries and environment. We are all aware that since 9/11, many countries have been destroyed in wars and proxy wars by allegedly Christian (Western) countries and their armies made up of many Christian men and women. This is truly shameful, and for which we should say 'sorry', and acknowledge it is not in the Spirit of Jesus who was so compassionate and loving to all.

I believe we as Christians need to deepen our spirituality of nonviolence and the Church can help by teaching nonviolence as a theology and way of life in the seminaries, in schools, in Church, and at every level of society, encouraging Christians to live the Sermon on the Mount. In an age of increasing violence and war, how can we Christians choose Jesus' nonviolence if the Church does not teach nonviolence and offer it as an alternative to violence, militarism and war?

However, rejecting violence as a means of bringing about change or as a means of defence, present us an enormous challenge. How do we create human security? We, as the human family, have spent so much of our intellect and our resources on building arms, nuclear weapons and war machinery. We have spent little time on building the architecture of peace and instruments of conflict resolution. The Churches and all faith traditions can provide great spiritual leadership in encouraging people to change their mindsets, deepen their spirituality, and through imagination and creativity move to a new consciousness of

nonviolence and peace building for the sake of humanity's survival and fulfilment committing to a vision of peace and disarmament.

As we continue to work for peaceful interaction, we need a shared constructive goal of a peaceful demilitarized world for the human family. Wars start from dysfunctional conditions and relationships and to solve this we need equality through peaceful interaction. We can build relational equality and for the Catholic Church this will mean justice and equality for women in the Church and rejecting patriarchy, militarism and war.

With fresh thinking, and a new vision, the Church can fulfil its prophetic spiritual leadership role so needed by our human family seeking a world without militarism and war, based on Fraternity amongst people and nations, No Armies, Peace and Love.

*Mairead Corrigan Maguire, co-founder of Peace People, is a member of the [TRANSCEND Network for Peace, Development and Environment](#). She won the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize for her work for peace in Northern Ireland. Her book *The Vision of Peace* (edited by John Dear, with a foreword by Desmond Tutu and a preface by the Dalai Lama) is available from [www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com). She lives in Belfast, Northern Ireland. See: [www.peacepeople.com](http://www.peacepeople.com).*

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