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# Biblical and Ethical Perspectives on Christian Peacemaking

**Instructor**

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**Institution**

Fuller Theological Seminary  
 Interdenominational Seminary

**Course Level and Type**

Elective course in the Master of Divinity program

**Hours of Instruction**

Two meetings per week, two hours each, for a 10-week term

**Enrolment and Last Year Taught**

23 students; 1997

**Explanation of Institutional Context**

Fuller Theological Seminary, a large, progressive-evangelical, interdenominational seminary where most students plan to work in churches or church-related agencies or advocacy groups. Therefore we pay attention to biblical grounding, and to praxis in churches, including two weeks of conflict-resolution role-playing. I first taught this in a university and two colleges; it can readily be adapted to that context. Elective course; most students have already taken *Introduction to Christian Ethics* or *Christian Discipleship in a Secular Society*; an objective is deepening comparison of the methods of some different kinds of ethics on one set of questions. About 30 students gather in a circle for regular interaction. Initially co-taught with Nancey Murphy. Meets twice a week for two hours each meeting--for four credits in one quarter.

**Brief Description**

We'll compare and contrast the approaches of several types of Christian ethics to peacemaking and war. The types include pacifism, just war theory, and just peacemaking theory. Liberationist and realist themes will be included. Hence in the process we'll learn not only about the ethics of war and peace, but about differing methodology in different types of Christian ethics. We'll study biblical, ethical, and theological grounding for a Christian ethic of peacemaking. Insightful new directions in biblical studies and ethics are developing new paths of peacemaking.

We'll also study some of the peacemaking forces in the new, post-cold-war world, which are developing new opportunities and new urgency for the Christian calling of peacemaking; and some of the "how to" in preaching, teaching, and forming peacemaker groups. Peacemaking is not merely an ideal, but a normative Christian

practice in churches and in the world.

Our study of elements of Christian peacemaking will work better if we can adopt an action/reflection model of learning; that is, if we can follow the Christian ethical theory that we learn by reflection on actual involvement in peacemaking. It would seem strange if Alcoholics Anonymous merely taught various theories about alcoholism and recovery, and did not become engaged in actual practices of recovery and reflect on members' experiences seeking recovery. Why should it be different for waraholics or nucleaholics? Therefore if you can be involved experientially in a church peacemaking project or Christian peacemaking group this semester, it will make this a more interesting and helpful course for preparing to do Christian peacemaking. You will be given help in finding an involvement in Christian peacemaking. You will also receive addresses and sample literature for national and ecclesiastical peacemaking networks so you can get connected.

We will learn from each other, as a community. Therefore listening to insights and probing questions from each other is important. Come to class prepared to analyze and probe the readings for the day and make your contribution. On discussion days, each person should bring a probing response to the reading assignment for that day. It should not be longer than one page. These will be used to initiate discussion that day. Hand in a copy at the beginning of class. I'll come to class ten minutes early so I can scan your one page in advance, if you get there early also, to get a sense of the discussion questions being raised.

## **Schedule**

### **I. The Context in Church Practice: Inward/Outward Peacemaking**

#### Groups

(March 31--initial meeting): In class we'll read two brief handouts on how to organize peacemaker groups from the World Peacemakers Group Manual (2025 Massachusetts Avenue, DC 2036) and "How to Organize a Peacemaker Group" by Ken Sehested (Baptist Peace Fellowship, P.O. Box 280, Lake Junaluska, NC 28745), and make a group decision about how much our class can organize ourselves into a peacemaking group. Supplement: Glen Stassen, Journey into Peacemaking (Brotherhood Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (1548 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38104), is based on the Church of the Savior model of mission groups, and on a reading of Paul's Letter to the Romans as a peacemaking letter. It is ten years old, but it is cheap, and easy, concise reading, and does illustrate the how-to guidelines for a peacemaker group. So it serves as a back-up resource for the two brief handouts. For reading on how to do small groups as a key to church renewal, read Carl George, "Prepare Your Church for the Future" and Julie Gorman, "Community That is Christian".

### **II. The Context in Preaching and Teaching**

**April 2:** Read two sermons of your choice in Ronald Sider and Darrel Brubaker, Preaching on Peace, on reserve in the library.

Discussion: Come with one-page discussion of the approach of the sermon that you read, and its strengths and weaknesses.

**April 7:** Read two handout essays on Paul's Letter to the Romans as a peacemaking letter. Read John H. Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, chapters 10 and 11, also focusing on Romans.

Lecture on the readings on Romans. Discussion: How can you preach Peacemaking based on Romans?

### **III. A Biblical Argument for Faithful Nonviolent Witness, and a Biblical Grounding for Peacemaking as**

## Following Jesus

Read John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Second edition, Eerdmans, 1994). This book has already become a classic, and has been greatly influential for Christian ethicists. We shall discuss it sequentially, chapter by chapter. We should each follow its biblical interpretation: it asks us to assess it on the basis of its faithfulness to the New Testament. Let us do so.

**April 9:** Lecture on chapter 1.

Discussion of chapter 2.

**April 14:** Discussion of chapters 5-7.

**April 16:** Discussion of chapter 12. I will bring some concepts from Yoder's presidential address at the Society of Christian Ethics, "To Serve God and Rule the World," pp. 127-140 in his *The Royal Priesthood* (on reserve). You might to read it in advance.

For further reading in parallel with *The Politics of Jesus*, see Yoder's *He Came Preaching Peace* (biblical lectures on peacemaking themes), *Nevertheless* (brief descriptions of about 27 varieties of commitment to nonviolence), *What Would You Do? (If a Violent Person Threatened to Harm a Loved One)*, *The Royal Priesthood* or *The Priestly Kingdom* (both on the mission of the church and nonviolent practice) or *For the Nations* or *Christian Witness to the State* (on how a nonviolent witness relates to governmental policies). And especially interesting to read is Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Augsburg/Fortress, 1992). This intriguing and powerful book makes a parallel case, based on the New Testament, an analysis of the powers and authorities in our world of domination and redemptive violence, and spiritual peacemaking with the warfare within Wink and us. It is the climactic book in a quadrilogy, *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa*; *Naming the Powers*; *Unmasking the Powers*. Another fine and parallel argument for nonviolent witness based on the New Testament is Ferguson, *The Politics of Love*.

## IV. Just War Theory and Nuclear Weapons

Read U. S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*.

**April 21:** Lecture--Notice how the biblical discussion in I A. points to peacemaking initiatives, and the justification for Just War Theory and the Just-War criteria in I C. point to the restraint of war. We shall look for these two theological themes--initiatives and restraint--in the rest of *The Challenge of Peace*. For today, we need to be very clear on the meaning of each criterion.

**April 23:** Lecture--the nuclear threat is very much with us still. (Based on my paper at the Religion, Peace, and War group of the American Academy of Religion, Nov. 20, 1994, on reserve.)

Discussion: *The Challenge of Peace* section II, "War and Peace in the Modern World." Let us see how just war theory guides the bishops in assessing nuclear weapons and deterrence.

**April 28:** Discussion--apply just war theory to the movement to ban landmines and the U.S. government's refusal; and to the Gulf War; and assess just war theory. I will distribute handouts on landmines. Supplemental reading: Geyer and Green, *Lines in the Sand*, and Sifry and Cerf, *The Gulf War Reader*, analyze the Gulf War in terms of just war theory. They are on reserve.

Discussion: *The Challenge of Peace* points toward peacemaking initiatives, or a positive theology of peacemaking. Sections III and IV. Note: sections III and IV may be discussed on May 7 in relation to the

Euromissiles if we run out of time today.

Take home exam on units I through IV distributed; due at next class meeting.

Further understanding of Just War Theory may be supplemented by reading Ralph Potter, *War and Moral Discourse*, who presents a clear and understandable explanation; Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars*, who presents a more extensive and more innovative explanation, basing it on human rights and historical examples; and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, who compares two kinds of just war theory with two kinds of pacifism. John H. Yoder assesses just war theory in his *When War is Unjust: Being Honest in Just-War Thinking*. Paul Ramsey and James T. Johnson's several books develop an Augustinian/Princetonian understanding of just war theory. Further understanding of *The Challenge of Peace* and its basic argument come from David Hollenbach's *Nuclear Ethics* and Ronald Musto, *The Catholic Peace Tradition*, and Joseph Murnion, *Catholics and Nuclear War*. All these books are on reserve.

## V. Just Peacemaking Theory

Twenty-three scholars from different disciplines and denominations have now developed a third paradigm, just peacemaking theory, which we saw *The Challenge of Peace* calling for. Many argue that the debate between faithful nonviolence and just war theory is inadequate to biblical teaching and to our situation under the threat of nuclear and chemical and biological weapons, and the threat of local wars. Just peacemaking theory, the new paradigm, is rapidly gaining attention and support.

Read Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Westminster/John Knox, 1992). Read essay (handout) from the Council of the Societies for the Study of Religion Bulletin on the forthcoming book from the 23 scholars, *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices to Abolish War* (Pilgrim Press, 1998).

**April 30:** Lecture on chapters 2 and 3 setting forth the transforming initiatives interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

**May 5:** Discuss chapter 4, setting forth seven steps of just peacemaking. Supplement with the CSSR Bulletin essay, and chapter 1 of *Just Peacemaking*. Optional: Chapter 9 of *Just Peacemaking* shows how just peacemaking theory has been emerging in the major church statements on peacemaking.

Discuss the Gulf War in the light of just peacemaking theory, chapter 10.

**May 7:** Discuss the end of all the Euromissiles (reduced to zero) and the ending of the Cold War in light of just peacemaking theory, chapter 5. (Note: no international relations scholar predicted the end of the Cold War when it happened; I wonder why not?) Discuss steps toward abolishing more nuclear weapons (reducing toward zero). We may refer back to *Challenge of Peace*, sections III and IV.

Further reading on just peacemaking theory or on one or more of its practices: Duane Friesen, *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Herald Press, 1986); Donald Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies* (Oxford University Press, 1995); Daniel Buttry, *Christian Peacemaking* (Judson Press, 1994); David Cortright, *Peace Works: The Citizen's Role in Ending the Cold War* (Westview Press, 1993); Ronald Stone, *Christian Realism and Peacemaking* (Abingdon, 1988); Edward Leroy Long, Jr. *Peacethinking in a Warring World* (Abingdon); Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, three volumes (Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973); Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Abingdon, 1996).

## **VI. The Struggle for Justice is Crucial to Just Peacemaking (with special reference to developing nations, and to the Old Testament)**

**May 12 and 14:** Discussion of Perry Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Faith and Life Press, 1987). Optional: Perry Yoder and Willard Swartley, eds., *The Meaning of Peace* (Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

**May 19:** Compare Marvin Tate essay on Old Testament and peacemaking in *Review and Expositor*, Fall, 1982 (on reserve), and John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, chapter 3. Optional: read chapters on the peacemaking strategies of the prophets in Norman Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth*, on reserve. Supplementary readings by Nidich on reserve.

**May 21 and 26:** discuss *Just Peacemaking*, chapters 6 and 7, on the Christian origin of human rights; and Michelle Tooley, *Voices of the Voiceless: Women Struggling for Justice and Human Rights in Guatemala* (Herald Press, 1997). Compare Todd Salzman, "Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia," *Religion, Peace and War Group*, American Academy of Religion, 1996 (on reserve). Optional: Allan Boesak, *If This is Treason, I am Guilty* (Eerdmans, 1987).

## **VII. Conflict Resolution in Churches**

Read Roger Fisher, *Getting to Yes*. Read handouts on conflict resolution in churches from the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. (Notice how cleverly, or providentially, the reading assignment gets lighter in the last week and a half, when you are pressured in other courses.)

**May 28, June 2 and 4:** We will do role-playing of several church conflicts drawn from McCollough, below, and from real church experiences. Your ability to resolve these conflicts insightfully will depend on your having read the material in advance.

For another resource, read Charles McCollough, *Resolving Conflict with Justice and Peace* (Pilgrim Press, 1991), or Hugh Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

## **Final Exam**

The Final exam will focus primarily on the second half of the course, since the midterm takehome. It will have several essay questions, and some short-answer questions, giving you an opportunity to assess what we have studied and show insights you have developed in your thinking about the readings and in class discussions. You will be able to omit one or more of the essay questions, so that you can choose questions that will best show your thought and your understanding of the readings, and supplementary readings if you did some.

## **Experimental Dimension and Journal/Reflection-Paper**

Please write an approximately 10-page reflection paper or journal on your participation in a peacemaking group in your church or a community organization during the time the course meets. It would be helpful if you would choose one person who is a knowledgeable member, and interview that person four times during the term about what the group is doing, its history, its methods, its peacemaking theology or strategy; what successes it has had and what problems; why that person is involved; how that person came to peacemaking; what breakthroughs or religious experiences that person had in the journey into peacemaking. Make notes on these experiences and on your analyses of their meaning for Christian peacemaking, for the church's witness and programming, and for you. Due June 6.

For the paper or journal, please use critical insights from the course, your reading, and your experience to evaluate & suggest how the group might sharpen its focus and strengthen its action. It will be better if you team up with one other class member to be involved in the same group so that you can think together about what you are learning, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the way the group defines its mission and work to fulfill it. I'd like to encourage you to include the experiential dimension if you can, so I'll probably grade this more appreciatively than the other parts of the course.

## Optional Paper

If you like writing papers better than tests, or have a special interest you'd like to research more than preparing for one of the tests, or are unable to participate in a peacemaking group and write the journal, you may choose some topic in peacemaking and write an approximately 15-page paper, substituting it for any part of the course.

The paper should use research to back up a thesis that you want to argue for. You should develop some thesis, not merely report what others have written. Let me know; maybe I can help. Due June 2.

## Grades

Midterm exam 20%

Journal 20%

Informed class participation 30%


Final exam 30%

Total 100%

## Pedagogical Reflections

Students thought the readings were excellent. We mixed some lecture with more discussion of readings in a circle and thus got to know each other fairly well, with good spirit. We did conflict resolution role-playing for two and a half weeks, and the students did this very well and were much engaged. Each student was asked to get engaged for the term in a peace and justice group, or a peace and justice action in their own church. I gave them contacts for a dozen possible involvements. This helped the level of engagement; but I should have scheduled times for sharing of the experiences more frequently during the term, and analysis of the practices they engaged in. I will teach this again next year, using most all of the same.

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