

VIOLENCE AND INJUSTICE IN SOCIETY: RECENT CATHOLIC TEACHING

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VIOLENCE CAN OCCUR on different scales and in different contexts, from the terrifying forced intimacy of rape to the stunning desolation of nuclear bombardment. It has been one of the great constants in our literature and our history—from Cain and Achilles on. It enters into our understanding of such virtues as courage and patience. It is seen as both the instrument of justice and the enactment of malice. It is linked with the time of founding of the nation and of political order, and it brings about the destruction of empires. It enters into our conception of God Himself and into our account of His judgements on the peoples of the earth. Accordingly, it is and must remain a central topic for theological inquiry and reflection.

But constant though violence is in human history, theological reflection on it always takes place within a cultural, social, and political context which is itself both complex and variable. This context is particularly diverse and rich in the case of Roman Catholicism, which is a transnational church with a long, checkered history and which has strong elements of the political both in its internal structure and in its stance to the larger world. In ministering to the various parts of its vast flock, Catholicism has had in the recent past to deal with the problems created by such different forms of violence as urban terrorism (Northern Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Argentina), civil war (Lebanon and El Salvador), tribal warfare (Africa), conventional naval warfare (the Falklands), the threat of violence implicit in mass political movements (Poland), military coups both actual and threatened (Latin America and Spain), rural terrorism carried on by both revolutionary groups and governments (Central America), the deployment of nuclear armaments (United States, United Kingdom, France), rioting by minority groups (United States, United Kingdom), arbitrary arrests, torture, executions, and disappearances carried on by governments directly or through paramilitary groups (Uganda, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil). There are also continuing forms of violence which are linked with long-standing social conditions, such as rising levels of violent crime in urban societies, or with cultural developments, such as the effects of the representation of violence in the various media. This listing is not intended to be exhaustive, but it does indicate the scale and the complexity of the problem of violence in

contemporary society.¹

What resources does the Catholic Church offer to its members and to society at large for dealing in moral and intellectual terms with such a daunting problem? These fall into two principal categories: some of them are primarily explanatory or interpretative, while others are primarily normative or prescriptive. In what follows here, I will not attempt to draw a sharp line between these categories, since they overlap in significant ways. But we can work with a rough distinction between church teachings that aim at enabling us to understand violence in a certain way and those that offer guidance about when to resort to violence, when to oppose it, or when to endure it. These categories can be fused together if we formulate the issue as what should be our attitude toward violence; but they should be recognized as logically distinct. For it is clear that the correctness of a person's understanding of the causes of violence is independent of the correctness of the norms that are to govern a person's actions with regard to violence. But, as we shall see, the matter requires more subtlety than an absolute distinction between facts and values. It is also important for us to bear in mind the political character of most of the forms of violence enumerated earlier and to recognize that judgments on the moral issues can be both shaped by and shaping for one's political perceptions and priorities.

EXPLANATION AND INTERPRETATION OF VIOLENCE

The starting point in recent Roman Catholic theology for understanding and interpreting violence and other social phenomena is the dual insertion of the Church in the world and of the world in the Church. This is enunciated in the Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), in the following terms:

Thus the church, at once a visible assembly and a spiritual community, goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family. That the earthly city and the heavenly city penetrate each other is a fact accessible to faith alone. It remains a mystery of human history, which sin will keep in great disarray until the splendor of God's sons is fully revealed.²

¹ A recognition of the contemporary diversity of forms of violence and the intractability of the problem can be found in the letter of Cardinal Maurice Roy, "Reflections on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Encyclical *Pacem in terris* of Pope John XXIII," nos. 90-93, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching since Pope John*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1975) 548.

² Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 40.

The framework for interpreting social developments is the broad Augustinian vision of the two cities moving through history together in a relationship in which the Church or Christian community has a priority with regard to ultimate meaning, even while it shares the vicissitudes and learns from the experiences of the world. The Church is placed in the world but then incorporates the world in its theological perspective.

This dual insertion can be seen at work in the document *Justice in the World*, from the 1971 Synod of Bishops, in a passage which bears directly on our topic:

Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures, and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of its Creator, we have shared our awareness of the Church's vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted. The hopes and forces which are moving the world to its very foundations are not foreign to the dynamism of the gospel, which through the power of the Holy Spirit frees men from personal sin and from its consequences in social life. The uncertainty of history and the painful convergences in the ascending path of the human community direct us to sacred history; there God has revealed Himself to us, and made known to us, as it is brought progressively to realization, His plan of liberation and salvation which is once and for all fulfilled in the paschal mystery of Christ.³

In this text we can see a double movement whereby the Church both moves to be present to those who are victims of violence and moves beyond the contradictions of history to the sacred realm. There is also a not very well defined identification of the Church with "hopes" and "forces" moving the world, which are seen as contributing to the task of liberating us from sin and its social consequences. This framework, then, offers several different possibilities for understanding violence in the contemporary world: first, as an indictment of existing systems and structures and as evidence of their injustice; second, as a potentially justifiable instrument of the "hopes" and "forces" which aim to transform society; third, as an incitement to turn from the conflicts of human politics to the divine plan of liberation in sacred history.

This last possibility parallels in more historical terms the classical moves of theodicy in reacting to the evils of this world. But it is not intended to lead to a passive acceptance of evils as inevitable and as an appropriate punishment for the fallen condition of sinful humanity. Rather, as the following oft-quoted sentence in the document makes clear, evils are to be struggled with in an active spirit:

³ *Justice in the World*, nos. 5-6 (Gremillion 514).

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.⁴

These lines are *not* an endorsement of revolutionary violence; but once a movement for justice and social transformation encounters well-entrenched resistance, and even more when it encounters repressive violence, they are bound to raise questions about the limits (if any) on appropriate means for the attainment of social and political goals which religious movements ought to acknowledge. This is a normative question to which recent Catholicism has, as we shall see, given different responses. The second possibility, which envisions violence as an instrument for transforming society, will be considered later when we take up just-war norms governing the use of violence.

The first possibility, which sees violence as evidence of the injustice of structures and which involves a sympathetic identification with its victims, is one important instance of the Church's acceptance and use of the difficult and controversial notion of institutional violence. The most celebrated use of this notion came three years earlier than the 1971 Rome synod, in the second general conference of Latin American bishops held at Medellín, Colombia, in 1968. In their document on peace the bishops stressed unjust development in Latin America as the fundamental source of threats to peace and the necessity of justice as a prerequisite for peace.⁵ They explicitly take issue with an understanding of peace as the "simple absence of violence and bloodshed"; and they denounce "oppression by the power groups" which may "give the impression of maintaining peace and order" but which is, in the words of Paul VI, really a "continuous and inevitable seed of rebellion and war."⁶ More specifically, when they look at Latin American society, the bishops make the following affirmation:

In many instances Latin America finds itself faced with a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence, when, because of a structural deficiency of industry and agriculture, of national and international economy, of cultural and political life, "whole towns lack necessities, live in such dependence as hinders all initiative and responsibility as well as every possibility for cultural

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council II: Conclusions*, 2. Peace, par. 1, ed. Louis Colonnese (Bogotá: General Secretariat of CELAM, 1970).

⁶ Ibid., par. 14. The quotation from Paul VI is taken from his message of January 1, 1968.

promotion and participation in social and political life," thus violating fundamental human rights. . . . We should not be surprised, therefore, that the "temptation to violence" is surfacing in Latin America. One should not abuse the patience of a people that for years has borne a situation that would not be acceptable to anyone with any degree of awareness of human rights.⁷

The concept of institutionalized violence, when it occurs in Catholic documents, should not be taken to imply either an anarchist rejection of authority endowed with coercive power or a pacifist rejection of all forms of violence, though it might have such implications in other contexts. More positively, the notion of institutionalized violence is offered as pointing to an important aspect of certain apparently nonviolent social realities. It is not merely the institutionalization of violence, as, for instance, one might find in the military and paramilitary death squads of the southern cone of Latin America. It is the potential for violence, both repressive and revolutionary, in situations of pervasive injustice where there has been a massive violation of human rights. This potential may be present as the result of both old and new legal, economic, political, and social institutions and forms which were not themselves violent in their operation or application but which can be sustained only on the basis of either traditional passivity or repressive violence. One of the main consequences of this notion is that it enables those who employ it to present certain kinds of revolutionary violence as defensive in character, a response to prior violations of human rights. The notion shifts the burden of proof from those who would resort to force to vindicate their rights to those who would maintain an unjust order. As we shall see, both the Latin American bishops and recent popes have been reluctant to accept the more radical implications of the notion. But they do make clear their belief that the presence of social injustice on a massive scale is a major cause of violence, as well as being an evil in itself.

When they came back to treat this theme eleven years later in their third conference at Puebla in 1979, the Latin American bishops made three important moves in their interpretation of violence. One was to break down the notion of institutionalized violence into a series of distinct moments:

The violence is generated and fostered by two factors: (1) what can be called institutionalized injustice in various social, political, and economic systems; and (2) ideologies that use violence as a means to win power.

⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 16. The material in single quotation marks is taken from the encyclical of Paul VI *Populorum progressio*, no. 30.

The latter in turn causes the proliferation of governments based on force, which often derive their inspiration from the ideology of National Security.⁸

The reader will notice that here the bishops speak of institutionalized injustice rather than institutionalized violence and that they see this producing two different forms of violence, the revolutionary and the repressive. Secondly, the bishops point to the cycle of violence and to the difficulty of controlling it:

The Church is just as decisive in rejecting terrorist and guerrilla violence, which becomes cruel and uncontrollable when it is unleashed. Criminal acts can in no way be justified as the way to liberation. Violence inexorably engenders new forms of oppression and bondage, which usually prove to be more serious than the ones people are allegedly being liberated from.⁹

The course of events in El Salvador since 1979 and the enormous difficulty of bringing those who use violence to account, whether they are guerrillas or paramilitary instruments of the government, only confirm the point that the bishops are making here. The last sentence, it should be noted, effectively shifts the burden of proof back on to those who propose to transform society through violence. The final significant move that the bishops make on this problem is their use of the attitude to violence as a criterion in ideological matters. They write: "But most importantly violence is an attack on life, which depends on the Creator alone. We must also stress that when an ideology appeals to violence, it thereby admits its own weakness and inadequacy."¹⁰ This is a position which puts the Church at a distance from both the communist advocacy of proletarian revolution and from the resort to repressive violence which figures so decisively in the doctrine of national security. The possibility of legitimate revolutionary violence is left unclarified.

Prominent in both Marxism and the doctrine of national security is a very strong emphasis on conflict: this can be seen as a conflict of classes or of parties, a conflict between the oppressed and the oppressors or between the defenders of Christian civilization and the Marxists and their sympathizers who would subvert it. These ideological approaches offer the potential for a modern, partly secularized form of holy warfare in which the adversary is regarded as the instrument or the agent of evil and is to be eliminated from the face of the earth. Such a conception of

⁸ *Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future: Final Document of the Third Generation Conference of the Latin American Episcopate*, tr. John Drury, pars. 509-10, in *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979).

⁹ *Ibid.*, par. 532.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

total ideological conflict leads to the overturning of the rule of law and to rejection of the limitations on violence found in the just-war tradition.

Against this view the Church has in its recent teaching insisted on the central role of human solidarity. This is a notion which figures prominently in the encyclical of John Paul II on human work, *Laborem exercens*, but which is also rooted in the characteristic Catholic stress on the common good and its criticism of liberal individualism. While the theme of solidarity is given some prominence in *Pacem in terris* of John XXIII (1963) as a source of international cooperation,¹¹ in *Populorum progressio* of Paul VI (1967) it is given a central place in human development and in the elaboration of the duties of both individuals and nations.¹² In the words of Paul VI, "The world is sick. Its illness consists less in the unproductive monopolization of resources by a small number of men than in the lack of brotherhood among individuals and peoples."¹³ Insistence on solidarity here and elsewhere is a means of remedying the economic causes of violence and motivating people to work for a just society. It is closely linked to the Church's vigorous renewal of traditional teaching about the universal purpose of material goods. This purpose, which implies that everyone has "the right to a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family,"¹⁴ serves as a criterion for assessing forms of ownership and for restricting the rights of property and free commerce.¹⁵

Some general comments should be made about the uses of this notion of solidarity. First, as a motivating consideration, it is applied mainly to overcome apathy and alienation from others, a sense that their problems are not our problems. It is not used in direct response to the outbreak of violence or to problems of a long-standing conflictual relationship. Second, it states the classic Catholic aspiration to order in a way that is more populist, more participatory, and more affective in tone. Third, it points to a value which is to be used as a criterion in rejecting divisive and particularist ideologies. But the term itself leans to the collectivist side of current political and ideological disputes and runs the risk of capture or manipulation by those who are championing the collectivist side whether in the name of the party or of the state. In this regard, the notion of solidarity is complemented by the emphasis of recent Catholic social teaching on human rights, a notion which normally has an individualist tilt. Fourth, the notion of solidarity needs to be developed in a

¹¹ John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, no. 98.

¹² Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, no. 43-55.

¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 66

¹⁴ Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 69.

¹⁵ Paul VI, *Populorum progressio*, no. 22.

way which is more dialectical, that is, in a way which maintains the appeal of solidarity as a unifying value even after the issues of a conflict have been joined and after acute social divisions have become manifest. This is a need both in the bloody and incendiary situations found in Latin America and in the congealed adversarial relations which provide determining patterns for large areas of our own social reality in North America. The bulk of church teaching tends to minimize the scope and the intermittently fruitful and creative role of conflict in most human societies; this is partly a result of the profound fear of civil discord in classical political philosophy and partly a consequence of the natural concern of the religious imagination with ideal possibilities. Even though I argue that the notion of solidarity needs a fuller and more dialectical treatment, it clearly reminds us of the Catholic understanding of the person as a creature called to a life in community in God's kingdom. This provides us with the basic anthropological and theological framework within which episodes of violence are to be understood.

Within this framework we can discern specific causes of violence, such as those enumerated by Vatican II in *Gaudium et spes*:

If peace is to be established, the primary requisite is to eradicate the causes of dissension between men. Wars thrive on these, especially on injustice. Many of these causes stem from excessive economic inequalities and from excessive slowness in applying the needed remedies. Other causes spring from a quest for power and from contempt for personal rights. If we are looking for deeper explanations, we can find them in human jealousy, distrust, pride, and other egotistic passions.¹⁶

This is a somewhat broader and deeper listing of the sources of violence than we find in the documents which explicitly consider the problem of revolution and the transformation of society, where the assumption is usually that economic injustice is the primary cause of the resort to violence.

A somewhat similar listing can be found in Catholic reflection on violence in a different context and on a different scale, namely, crime in the urban society of the United States. In its 1978 statement "Community and Crime," the U.S. Catholic Conference admits that "no one can determine with precision and certainty the causes of criminal behavior."¹⁷ But it goes on to propose four broad categories of problems that are sources of crime. These are false values, social injustices (primarily

¹⁶ Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 83.

¹⁷ United States Catholic Conference, Committee on Social Development and World Peace, *Community and Crime* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.C.C. Publications Office, 1978) no. 16.

economic), family and neighborhood breakdown, and lack of moral leadership (in government, business, labor, the media, and religion). Of particular theological interest are the factors grouped under false values. These include "materialism, excessive individualism, acceptance of violence and loss of respect for human life," as well as "an ethic of consumption and greed" and "intense personal and corporate competition."¹⁸ We may well feel that there is little that is either controversial or enlightening about such lists. What they do reveal, however, is the interest of church teachers in maintaining an understanding of the sources of both personal and communal violence that will allow both for a religious and theological interpretation of violence as a manifestation of human sinfulness and for a naturalistic and empirical account of violence in terms of the categories of the social sciences and social experience. This extends perennial Catholic conceptions of the relations between nature and grace, and between reason and faith. It also provides room for interpretations on the side of social science and social experience which are usually part of either the conventional liberal wisdom or the conventional radical wisdom, though conservative themes (such as the human costs of breaking up families and neighborhoods and the value of contentment with sufficiency in one's state of life) can also be found. The general Catholic stance with regard to violence as well as to a wide range of social problems is that both theological reflection and religious conversion are relevant, appropriate, valuable, and even necessary responses but that they do not eliminate the need for a broader social response based on social analysis and a reading of "the signs of the times" leading normally through public action to institutional change. This stance allows for learning and co-operation in dealing with common human problems across confessional and ideological lines. The Catholic understanding of human nature, of the political community, and of the mission of the Church itself is incompatible with purely individual and private responses to social problems.

PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE USE OF VIOLENCE

After this review of recent Catholic interpretations of the nature and sources of violence, we can now examine some of the Church's normative teaching on questions of violence. Here the Catholic tradition of just-war theory provides a useful starting point, even though the theory has to be modified in some key aspects in order to fit the different types of violence in society that we are concerned with here. Just-war theory is itself the result of a complex philosophical, legal, political, and theological development; at the same time it provides points of connection with some of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 17.

the more general issues of method and theory in both moral philosophy and Catholic moral theology. The reason for this is that just-war theory provides an analogical framework for assessing justifications for the voluntary infliction or imposition of evils on others, particularly when this results from social and political actions, as well as for assessing violence in relations between states.

In its consideration of the conditions that the use of force must meet in order to be justifiable, just-war theory makes a fundamental distinction between the *jus ad bellum* (the rightness of initiating hostilities) and the *jus in bello* (the right way of conducting hostilities). If one applies a traditional Catholic interpretation of morally good action to just-war theory, all the conditions must be met if the conflict is to be just; failure to meet any of them vitiates the enterprise according to Aquinas' lapidary dictum *bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu* (goodness requires a completely upright source, but evil results from a single defective element). This more stringent interpretation is not, however, beyond criticism within the Catholic community both on general theoretical grounds and because of doubts about the appropriateness of making one aggregate judgment about an extensive social reality like a war or a revolution or a guerrilla movement. It can be supported, however, as one means of giving expression to the Christian preference for peace and as a reminder that in the theory the burden of proof is always on the party that would resort to violence. The principal *jus ad bellum* requirements are: legitimate or competent authority, just cause, right intention, announcement of intention, last resort, reasonable hope of success, and proportionality. The principal *jus in bello* requirements are right intention and proportionality, from which can be derived prohibitions against the killing of prisoners, attacks on noncombatants, and the infliction of unnecessary suffering.¹⁹ One obvious and important difference between the justification of war between states and the assessment of violence within states is the indefiniteness and inconclusiveness that are present in the invocation of legitimate or competent authority in the revolutionary situation.

A clear example of the use of the just-war framework to assess revolutionary violence is found in paragraph 19 of the document on peace from the Medellín conference of 1968. The bishops address themselves to those who turn to violence "in the face of injustice and illegitimate resistance to change" and who are motivated by "noble impulses of justice and solidarity." The cause which engages such people is likely to pass

¹⁹ I am here using the recent formulation in the thoughtful essay by James Childress, "Just-War Criteria," in *War or Peace? The Search for New Answers*, ed. Thomas A. Shannon (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1980) 40-54.

the just-war tests of last resort and right intention. The bishops follow Paul VI in granting the possibility that "revolutionary insurrection can be legitimate in the case of evident and prolonged tyranny that seriously works against the fundamental rights of man, and which damages the common good of the country." But their considered judgment is against revolutions, though there is no direct condemnation of revolutionary movements. They argue thus:

If we consider, then, the totality of the circumstances of our countries, and if we take into account the Christian preference for peace, the enormous difficulty of a civil war, the logic of violence, the atrocities it engenders, the risk of provoking foreign intervention, illegitimate as it may be, the difficulty of building a regime of justice and freedom while participating in a process of violence, we earnestly desire that the dynamism of the awakened and organized community be put to the service of justice and peace.²⁰

The argument that the Latin American bishops are making here picks up both content and language from reflections in numbers 30 and 31 of Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum progressio*. The argument is not pacifist in its premises, though the conclusion is against violence. It is worth noting that many of the considerations brought forward here are subject to change and do not fall within the special competence of either the clergy or the Church as a whole. Implicitly, room is left for alternative readings of the situation and for rejection of the conclusion on nontheological grounds. The course of events in Latin America during the following decade was, however, to show the general correctness of the bishops' view that revolutionary movements of the left did not have a reasonable prospect of success and could not be pursued without disproportionate cost both in the loss of lives and in the distortion of moral ideals.

The Puebla conference in 1979 handled this difficult topic by making two moves which neither rejected just-war theory nor applied it to the question of revolutionary violence. First, it condemned violence both from the side of the authorities and from the side of the revolutionaries. The bishops wrote in strong terms:

Condemnation is always the proper judgment on physical or psychological torture, kidnapping, the persecution of political dissidents or suspect persons, and the exclusion of people from public life because of their ideas. . . . The Church is just as decisive in rejecting terrorist and guerrilla violence, which becomes cruel and uncontrollable when it is unleashed. Criminal acts can in no way be

²⁰ *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council II: Conclusions*, 2. Peace, par 19.

justified as the way to liberation. Violence inexorably engenders new forms of oppression and bondage.²¹

This passage, which should be linked with the criticism of ideologies mentioned earlier, marks a turn away from the use of political-moral categories (tyranny, common good) to the use of legal-moral categories (crime, the offenses listed above). The focus is on the morality of actions for what they are in themselves rather than on the justifications that may be drawn from some larger story or vision. George Orwell would have approved.

The second change was to develop the theme of a distinctively Christian response to the temptation to violence constantly present in the Latin American reality. The bishops say: "Our responsibility as Christians is to use all possible means to promote the implementation of nonviolent tactics in the effort to re-establish justice in economic and sociopolitical relations."²² They repeat both the praise of nonviolence given by Vatican II and the words of Paul VI in Bogotá: "Violence is neither Christian nor evangelical." Here we confront a more general shift in the style and audience of Catholic teaching. The intellectual framework is not the legal-political-philosophical structure of just-war theory with its theological bases and implications, but is a broader, less well defined understanding of Christian values. The social task of the intellectual argument is not so much to build a coalition in a world of moral discourse shared with non-Christians and nonbelievers, especially Marxists, but to keep the distinctiveness of the Christian community and the Christian vision in the face of alien ideological influences and in the face of "the temptation of violence" of which Paul VI had spoken in *Populorum progressio*.

The position that results from these two moves is not so much a repudiation of just-war theory, which, as employed by the bishops, reaches the same conclusion by a different route, as it is an expression of fear and hope in a society and world deeply divided. There is fear because revolutionary movements for justice have not generally done very well either in gaining power or in preserving their moral integrity. There is hope manifest in the appeal to use nonviolent means to transform society, even if such a hope in most of Latin America becomes increasingly desperate.

The transformation of the problem of justifiable revolutionary violence by the Puebla conference is only one manifestation of a much wider tendency in the Christian world to regard nonviolence as the characteristically and centrally (if not exclusively) Christian way to deal with

²¹ *Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future*, pars. 531-32.

²² *Ibid.*, par. 533.

profound social problems of injustice and oppression. One influential expression of this tendency can be found in the following text from *Gaudium et spes* of Vatican II:

We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided that this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself.²³

This text is not an unqualified endorsement of pacifism, but it does indicate an important change of attitude from the time of Pius XII, who refused to endorse conscientious objection, a position which Vatican II explicitly reversed.

While not repudiating the possibility of a just war and while upholding the right of self-defense, the Church has felt increasingly called to speak out against violence. Probably the most remembered words of Paul VI were those he spoke at the United Nations in New York on his visit in October 1965: "War never again!" This is more a matter of exhortation and remonstrance than it is of analysis; but it has become a constant and emphatic theme in both papal and episcopal teaching over the last 20 years. Thus John Paul II denounced violence in the strongest terms in his sermon at Drogheda in Ireland:

I proclaim with the conviction of my faith in Christ and with an awareness of my mission, that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy of man. . . . But violence only delays the day of justice. Violence destroys the work of justice. Further violence in Ireland will only drag down to ruin the land you claim to love and the values you claim to cherish.²⁴

This was unquestionably addressed to the specific problems of the situation in Northern Ireland, but the Pope's willingness to use very general language in discussing these problems illustrates the general and growing ecclesial tendency to oppose all forms of violence. It would be rash, however, to take papal exhortations as resolving the intellectual and practical problems of church teaching in this area or to base doctrinal conclusions on a confusion of literary genres.

There are three tensions that will probably continue to mark the Church's response to the problem of violence in modern society and that will cause a certain instability in Catholic teaching on this topic. The first is inherent in just-war theory. It is the tension between the justness of the cause for which violence is used and the repugnant character of

²³ Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 78.

²⁴ John Paul II, Speech at Drogheda, Ireland, September 29, 1979; cited in *John Paul II: Pilgrimage of Faith*, ed. National Catholic News Service (New York: Seabury, 1979).

the means used to defend and to promote the cause. The simultaneous aspirations to peace and to justice which our faith and our culture encourage are bound to come into conflict when repressive injustice is allowed to continue or when force is used to overthrow it. But we cannot in the light of our common religious heritage give up either value. We may decide for one or the other in a moment of crisis, or we may look for a reconciling strategy, which enables us to continue the struggle for justice under nonviolent means. But the crisis recurs when such strategies break down.

The second tension grows out of the question of legitimate authority. The revolutionary tradition in its various liberal, nationalist, and Marxist forms has maintained that authority ultimately resides in the people and its representatives and that tyrannies or regimes of oppressive injustice lack authority, though they may have power. Roman Catholicism has given up its 19th-century opposition to all forms of revolutionary violence and has moved close to accepting a right of rebellion, a notion that figures prominently in our Lockean and American tradition. But it is clear that in many situations the challenge to established authority by a revolutionary movement puts in peril the entire structure of the rule of law (an admittedly imperfect structure but also one essential for the progress of human civilization). Revolutionary situations allow and often encourage a great deal of unauthorized and unpunishable violence and threaten the order which both Catholicism and bourgeois culture prize. The void which the revolutionary challenge creates may be only temporary, but it is so negative an experience that it can only be crossed when the exactions of repressive injustice have become sufficiently unpredictable and unendurable as to alienate even usually reliable followers of the party of order. There is, it should be pointed out, a nonviolent alternative in which there is a general withdrawal of consent from the established power; in recent times this has occurred in Portugal, Greece, and Poland. It presupposes a society united at least temporarily in opposition to its government. Contemporary Catholicism, despite its brief flirtation with a right of rebellion, will feel more comfortable with such scenarios for internal transformation, even while it accepts the possibility of just wars being waged by the legitimate authority of states.

A third tension arises from different conceptions of the social and political role of the Church. Current debates within Catholicism on this point reveal a cleavage between those who argue for a Church that identifies itself with the popular struggle for justice and those who regard the Church as primarily a distinctive community called to witness to God's saving action. Neither side wants to reject the opposing view completely, but each side is very sensitive to the moral and political

dangers which the opposing tendency is liable to. These dangers are, respectively, a submersion of the Church in political involvement with an increasing acceptance of revolutionary violence, and a withdrawal of the Church from political involvement with acceptance of an unjust status quo. The stance of popular identification need not lead to the religious acceptance or endorsement of violence, as the cases of Ireland and Poland illustrate. This is, in rough terms, the general scope of the debate between Pope John Paul II and the liberation theologians of Latin America. One way of interpreting John Paul II's and Puebla's rejection of ideologies that accept or endorse repressive or revolutionary violence is to see it as a long-term strategy for ensuring the Church a central place in the minds and hearts of people who feel a profound alienation from both repressive and revolutionary regimes and who accord to politics a merely instrumental importance and do not see it as an end in itself.

So long as these tensions remain, there will be a certain uneasy oscillation in Catholic judgments on violence. The Church is trying to send a complex message about the resort to violence—namely, that it is most often wrong but cannot be forbidden in principle. Also, it is trying to send this message to many different societies which are changing in different ways at different rates. Furthermore, the message is perceived differently by different groups in these societies. The result of this complexity and diversity is a teaching which is subtle, flexible, and relevant but which is likely to impress both pacifists and warriors as halfhearted and inconclusive. It may, however, assist the Church to guide its people in a way which condemns the worst excesses of inhumanity and injustice in our times while it deepens their commitment to justice and peace in our common situation.