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The Sixtieth Anniversary of King's "I Have a Dream" Speech

A Theological Exploration: Nonviolence as Intersectional Praxis

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Abstract
This article offers a theological vision of how nonviolence contributes to Catholic social teaching, and offers a crosscutting, intersectional praxis related to two destructive waves in the US: the public health crisis of COVID-19 and systemic racism. First, this article will describe some basic intersections of these two waves, and then draw on a theological description of nonviolence to analyze their intersectionality. Finally, this article will illustrate how nonviolence offers a praxis for a more sustainable transformation.

Keywords
intersectional, nonviolence, policing, Pope Francis, public health, racism

Introduction

In the Hebrew scriptures, it is God's promise that "justice and peace shall embrace" (Ps 85:10). This image is the embodiment of God's vision for our world—God's shalom. Shalom is often translated as peace, but its Hebrew roots imply a deeper meaning of peace that goes beyond a cessation of violence toward a holistic vision of well-being, healing, restoration, and transformation involving all areas of social and economic life—that is, a just peace. This active work of God calls people to participate and reminds us that peace requires justice-making and that justice requires peace-making.

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As we walk with God to cultivate such shalom in our society, we do so in a US context that has been impacted over the past few years by two major waves of destructive conflict: the public health crisis of COVID-19 and a wave of systemic racism. There are other waves, but for this article, the focus is on the intersections of these two. This article will unpack a theological vision of how active nonviolence contributes to Catholic social teaching and offers a crosscutting, intersectional praxis related to these destructive waves. Nonviolence as an intersectional praxis helps us to identify types of violence more clearly, to shift power, such as from the oppressor to the oppressed or from an inequitable to a more equitable distribution, and to focus on a more sustainable transformation, such as public health approaches to security and alternative community protection mechanisms, particularly unarmed civilian protection.

This article will unfold in three main parts. The first part will describe some key intersections of systemic racism and COVID-19 in the US. The second will draw on a theological description of nonviolence to analyze the intersectionality of these waves. The third will build on this analysis to illustrate how nonviolence offers an intersectional praxis to move us toward a more sustainable transformation.

By intersectional praxis, I mean an intersectional way of seeing, responding, and reflecting. This includes interrogating institutions, identities, or systems of power.[1] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge refer to "critical praxis" as an "organizational focus point" for using intersectionality.[2] This praxis entails ways we can use intersectional frameworks in our daily lives and impact our inquiry in terms of "being attentive to intersecting power relations and vital for resisting social inequality," as well as more sustainable transformation.

Martin Luther King Jr., the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Poor People's Campaign have illuminated the intersectionality of violent power relations in terms of systemic, institutional, cultural, and direct forms. For instance, King challenged us by drawing our attention to the intersections of racism, materialism, and militarism.[3] The Black Lives Matter movement has cast a glaring light on the axes of oppression manifested in systemic racism, policing, anti-Blackness, and the killing of Black bodies. The public health crisis of COVID-19 has offered another occasion to draw on intersectionality to interrogate related institutions, identities, and systems of power, especially its impact on Black women.

The scope of this article is focused on the two waves mentioned above and what nonviolence as an intersectional praxis can contribute to our seeing, responding, and reflecting. I will not be addressing all situations of violence or the nuances related to debates regarding justification and violence. This article is less of a rules-based approach to nonviolence and more rooted in virtue, growth, and an orientation toward

1. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan Shaw, *Intersectional Theology: An Introductory Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 2.
2. Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, "Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry and Praxis," in *Intersectionality* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2020), chapter 2.
3. Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches*, ed. James Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986).

human flourishing. In turn, this article will cultivate more space for the praxis of nonviolence and thus, hopefully, the substantial reduction of violence itself.

Signs of the Times: Intersections of COVID-19 and Systemic Racism

COVID-19 has reportedly contributed to over 1,131,000 deaths in the US.[4] Anxiety and depression significantly increased. Millions lost their jobs. Businesses shut down. Domestic violence increased.[5]

COVID-19 has also illuminated and exacerbated systemic racism in US society. Kelly Brown Douglas argues that it "has laid bare this country's ongoing but often ignored pandemic of racial inequity."[6] For example, research has indicated that Black Americans have been hospitalized or have died from COVID-19 at a rate nearly five times that of white Americans. Other people of color also experienced much higher hospitalization and death rates than whites. "More than half of Black individuals have a chronic health condition" such as diabetes or high blood pressure, which increases people's vulnerability to suffer from the COVID-19 virus.[7] Also, Blacks are more likely to live in densely populated areas, to work in jobs that require engagement with the public, and are less likely to have access to adequate health care. Attending to multiple identities, we notice, for example, how Black women are particularly at risk as they are dying at three times the rate of white men. This is a type of cultural violence.[8] Researchers suggest this is caused by a combination of underlying health conditions and lack of access to social determinants such as health care. This is an example of systemic violence.[9] Ndidiamaka Amutah-Onukagha, an associate professor of public health at the Tufts School of Medicine, believes that "the mortality and morbidity that we're seeing in COVID-19 is directly related to decades of systemic racism. Racism plays out in the rationing of equipment for people who are testing positive for COVID and even in backroom decisions about who is eligible to get tests."[10]

4. Center for Disease Control, COVID Data Tracker (June 2023), https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/index.html#datatrackerhome.
5. Leah Rodriguez, "Domestic Violence Increased in the US by 8.1% during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Global Citizen* (March 2, 2021), http://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/domestic-violence-covid-19-increase-us-ncccj-study/.
6. Kelly Brown Douglas, "The Case for Reparations Has Been Made All the More Clear by COVID-19," *Religion News Service* (August 6, 2021), https://religionnews.com/2021/08/06/the-case-for-reparations-has-been-made-all-the-more-clear-by-covid-19/.
7. Taylor McNeill, "Why People of Color are Suffering More from COVID-19," *Tufts Now* (July 10, 2020), https://now.tufts.edu/2020/07/10/why-people-color-are-suffering-more-covid-19.
8. Johan Galtung, "Cultural Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (1990): 291–305, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005.
9. Roz Plater, "Why Black Women are More Likely to Die from COVID-19 than White Men," *Healthline* (April 15, 2021), http://www.healthline.com/health-news/why-black-women-are-more-likely-to-die-from-covid-19-than-white-men#Research-by-the-numbers.
10. Quoted in McNeill, "Why People of Color are Suffering More."

This issue of systemic racism goes beyond the COVID-19 public health crisis. Systemic racism permeates US society, institutions, and structures of power. We can track this within health care, housing, jobs, wages, and access to healthy food and other basic necessities; for example, Blacks are also more likely to live in communities with worse air and water quality compared to whites. We have also become increasingly aware of systemic racism in the criminal justice system through rates of mass incarceration, the imposition of the death penalty, drug arrests, youth arrests in schools, and those killed by police.[11] And unfortunately, these realities are not new. In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. had already drawn our attention to the "horrors of police brutality" in his "I Have a Dream" speech.[12]

The recent police killing of Black persons has stimulated significant organizing and increasing awareness of systemic racism.[13] We remember names such as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson, Eric Garner, Jacob Black, and many others. A Black person is three times more likely than a white person to be killed by police, even if unarmed, even when we factor in the percentage of crime committed by Blacks compared to whites.[14] However, the baneful impact of the problems confronting us is not limited to the more sensational cases. The experience of persistent surveillance by the police, which is often seen as suspicious or untrustworthy by the Black community, has contributed to generational patterns of anxiety, depression, and mental health issues. Here are some illuminating statistics: Black people make up 13 percent of the population, and yet they constitute 25 percent of the arrests; one in three Black men can expect to be arrested before the age of twenty-three; Blacks make up 40 percent of the prison population and are five times more likely to be incarcerated than white people.[15] Attending to the dual, intersectional vulnerability of being Black and a woman, Andrea Ritchie's book *Invisible No More: Police Violence against Black Women and Women of Color* documents how the war on drugs actually increased the rate of arrest of Black women more than it did Black men.[16] Kimberlé Crenshaw illuminates how Black women are often "overpoliced and underprotected,"[17] especially when living in subsidized housing. The US

11. Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).
12. NPR, "Read Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream' Speech in Entirety" (January 16, 2023), https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety.
13. Mapping Police Violence, https://mappingpoliceviolence.org/.
14. Wesley Lowery, "Aren't More White People than Black People Killed by Police? Yes, but No," *Washington Post* (July 11, 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2016/07/11/arent-more-white-people-than-black-people-killed-by-police-yes-but-no/.
15. Kim Farbota, "Black Crime Rates: What Happens When Numbers aren't Neutral," *Huffington Post* (September 2, 2016), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/black-crime-rates-your-st_b_8078586.
16. Andrea J. Ritchie, *Invisible No More*: *Police Violence against Black Women and Women of Color* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017).
17. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "From Private Violence to Mass Incarceration: Thinking Intersectionally about Women, Race, and Social Control," *UCLA Law Review* 59, no. 6 (2012): 1418–72 at 1442, https://www.uclalawreview.org/from-private-violence-to-mass-incarceration-thinking-intersectionally-about-women-race-and-social-control/.

spends over $100 billion a year on policing and $80 billion on incarceration. In some cities, the police allocation is 30–40 percent of the entire budget.[18] Given the disproportionate harm that these heavy expenditures cause for Black lives, our society has to ask whether there are more just and effective ways to reduce crime and protect people.

Nonviolence and Intersectional Analysis

With these signs of the times, I want to shift to what intersectional aspects a nonviolence lens helps us to see in relation to each of these waves of destructive conflict.[19] My goal will be to build on this analysis in order to illustrate how nonviolence offers an intersectional praxis to move us toward a more sustainable transformation.

Before further analyzing these specific issues, I want to share a specific description of nonviolence that orients this approach and shows how it contributes to Catholic social teaching. This description was in part the fruit of discussion among Catholic ethicists from around the world who participated in a multi-year virtual table through the Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC).[20] Yet, it was primarily based on global encounters and consultations, prioritizing people living in violent conflict zones, including those from Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, South Sudan, Congo, Nigeria, Kenya, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. Key contributors in these consultations were Black women and women of color such as Teresia Wamuyu Wachira and Kanini Kimau from Kenya, Sr. Nazik Matty from Iraq, Jasmin Nario-Galace from the Philippines, Sr. Lilian Ehidiamhen from Nigeria, and Shawnee Daniels-Sykes from the US.

The resulting description of nonviolence focused on a positive reverence for dignity, life, and our common home, as well as the constant effort to avoid dehumanization and participation in other types of violence, including structural and cultural violence.[21] This approach to nonviolence brings together many facets of the Christian calling as it takes place within our contemporary context. Nonviolence is the power of

18. Niall McCarthy, "How Much Do U.S. Cities Spend Every Year on Policing?," *Forbes* (August 7, 2017), https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2017/08/07/how-much-do-u-s-cities-spend-every-year-on-policing-infographic/?sh=48814dbce7b7.

19. My positionality is a critical factor in what I attend to, how I reflect, and what I may identify to transform these conflicts. I must be particularly careful of aligning too much with the status quo and enabling unjust systems to stay rooted, even if I seem to be supporting significant change. I also need to be attentive to the voices and perspectives I draw on, so as not to perpetuate a privileged academic cohort. At the same time, I may have some distinct credibility with persons of similar positionality, and thus, a responsibility to hopefully have some constructive influence. Nonviolence has various meanings and connotations, especially regarding situations of oppression and transformation of injustice.

20. Some participants included Maureen O'Connell, LaSalle University, US; Sami Basha, American University of Sicily, Italy and Palestine; Sr. Lilian Ehidiamhen, Justus Lipsius College, Belgium and Nigeria; Leo Lushombo, Jesuit School of Theology, US.

21. Galtung, "Cultural Violence."

love and imagination in action; the path to fuller truth and decolonization;[22] a constitutive part of integral ecology;[23] a crosscutting and intersectional approach to social issues; and a strategic methodology and constructive force for social justice,[24] transforming conflict,[25] breaking cycles of violence (systemic, institutional, cultural, and direct), protecting all people and our common home, and building a sustainable just peace. Ultimately, it is a core Gospel value that embodies the way of Jesus and can become for us, a spirituality, a way of life, and a distinct virtue and capability.[26]

In turn, nonviolence is about engagement, confrontation, constructive conflict, social and structural transformation, and impact. It is primarily a positive and constructive program, as well as an invitation to a way of life orienting our relationships with others, self, God, and ecology. I am not describing nonviolence as passivity or as a lack of conflict. It is not merely or primarily about a lifestyle choice for individuals or about having a good intention. It is not merely or primarily about a lack of violence, nor is it merely or primarily a strategy or tactic. It is not merely or primarily marches or civil disobedience.

Integrating such a praxis of nonviolence more thoroughly into Catholic social teaching (CST) provides some critical, constructive contributions that can deepen and correct some dynamics in CST. A key contribution is illuminating conflict transformation as compared to conflict resolution approaches in CST, which too often enable cycles of violence. The former entails addressing the epicenter of conflicts (root causes, unmet needs) and four critical dimensions: personal, relational, structural, and cultural. In turn, we are more apt to name and see the connections between direct violence (an incident of violence), structural violence (a policy, law, system, or institution that makes direct or cultural violence more likely), and cultural violence (habits, ideas, language, narratives, and symbols that make direct and structural violence more

22. Mohandas Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers*, ed. Krishna Kripalani (New York: Continuum, 1980); Richard L. Johnson, ed., *Gandhi's Experiments with Truth: Essential Writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).
23. Marie Dennis and Ken Butigan, *Gospel Nonviolence for a* Laudato Si' *Future*, https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Gospel-nonviolence-for-a-Laudato-Si-future_ENG_V2.pdf; and https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2022/03/07/gospel-nonviolence-for-a-laudato-si-future/.
24. Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005). Gandhi explains the two arms of nonviolence as constructive program (cooperation with the good, such as care for the marginalized) and obstructive program (non-cooperation with evil/injustice, such as boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience). Michael Nagler, *Hope or Terror? Gandhi and the Other 9/11* (Minneapolis: Great River Nonviolent Communication, 2006).
25. John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (New York: Good Books, 2003).
26. See for example Bernard Häring, *The Healing Power of Peace and Nonviolence* (Slough: St. Paul, 1986); Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1994); and Stanley Hauerwas, "Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

likely).[27] Thus, the praxis of nonviolence helps CST better engage conflict constructively, break dynamics or cycles of violence, and build a more sustainable just peace.

Another key contribution of nonviolence is minimizing the legitimation of violence, which other CST themes—such as option for the poor, solidarity, human rights, peacebuilding, or even human dignity—at times have been used to justify violence. For example, nonviolence helps us see how to act in accord with human dignity, not merely acknowledge the value of it. In turn, nonviolence also strengthens our sense of interconnectedness, interdependence, ultimate unity, and oneness across humanity as well as ecologically. Active nonviolence, as King affirms, manifests the power of love in action,[28] especially how to love our enemies and live out the transforming initiatives in the Sermon on the Mount.[29] Although there can be complexities to love, nonviolence helps CST clarify the way of Jesus and, thus, the focus or mission of the church. Attention to nonviolence focuses CST on the means, particularly keeping the means as consistent as possible with the ends—such as peace, justice, or human flourishing. With this attention to the means, nonviolence illuminates how sustainable peacebuilding is enhanced by a broader horizon and praxis of nonviolence, such as nonviolent resistance, unarmed civilian protection, and civilian-based defense.[30]

Along with the implications of nonviolence for CST, the Catholic sacramental imagination can cultivate a deeper understanding of the role and prominence of nonviolence. For example, as Catholics reflect on the more general need to protect all life, not just some lives, in the context of salvation history, we might more clearly envision healthy protection mechanisms through the lens of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is God's expression through Jesus of nonviolent love and power, risking and offering life for others without killing. Jesus risks his life to save and protect us from the ultimate death of being disconnected from God and, thus, models for us the ultimate and sustainable protection. When participating in the Eucharist, we are empowered and called to embody this kind of risking of life for others. This re-presents Jesus's saving work

27. Galtung, "Cultural Violence." Galtung defines violence as "avoidable insults to basic human needs" (p. 292), although I would specify dehumanization and add significant harm to our common home—that is, ecology, often through domination or destruction.
28. Martin Luther King Jr., "Stride toward Freedom" (1958), in Washington, A *Testament of Hope*.
29. Glen Stassen, "Transforming Initiatives of Just Peacemaking Based on the Triadic Structure of the Sermon on the Mount," http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/Stassen_Transforming.pdf; Martin Luther King Jr., "Loving Your Enemies," sermon delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, AL (November 17, 1957), https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/loving-your-enemies-sermon-delivered-dexter-avenue-baptist-church.
30. Véronique Dudouet, *Powering to Peace: Integrated Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding Strategies*, ICNC Special Report Series, International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, April 2017, https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/resource/powering-peace-integrated-civil-resistance-peacebuilding-strategies/; and United States Institute of Peace, *Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding: An Action Guide* (2018), https://www.usip.org/programs/synergizing-nonviolent-action-and-peacebuilding.

to the world and thus draws us all further into the way of salvation, which is the authentic protection of our lives and the illumination of our sacred dignity. Pope Francis says, "in the silence of the Cross, the uproar of weapons ceases, and the language of reconciliation, forgiveness, dialogue and peace is spoken."[31] With this focus on risking one's life without killing, Catholics seem invited and challenged to promote the saving of every life as the constitutive orientation for any institutional mechanism focused on protection.

With this sacramental imagination and integration of nonviolence more into CST, we can minimize the role of sin in enabling violence while also taking the fullness of sin seriously.[32] For example, although we acknowledge that sin continues in significant destructive ways, and thus, the suffering of various parties may occur in the midst of nonviolent resistance, the ultimate power of reality is grace, even if it does not appear on occasion to work as we may envision in the short term. We know that it works in important ways. This can be at the physiological dimension as our mirror neurons draw our bodies literally into similar energy when we encounter nonviolent love or especially when done with strategic planning.[33] This often comes to light in the longer term. Furthermore, fewer people die through nonviolent resistance approaches. Yet, even when people die with this approach due to the power of sin, it still illuminates human dignity and tills the soil for a more sustainable, just peace. When we live as courageous gifts during intense conflict, we illuminate the giftedness—that is, the dignity—of all those around us and activate the power of grace. Thus, it is also important not to overstate the dominance of sin and understate the reality that grace abounds (Rom 5:17). This power of grace is what nonviolence—as the path to fuller truth—helps us to recognize and actualize. As Benedict XVI observed, Jesus's teaching about nonviolence "is realistic because it takes into account that in the world there is *too*

31. Francis, Vigil of Prayer for Peace (Rome, September 7, 2013), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130907_veglia-pace.html; Raniero Cantalamessa, "Eucharist is God's Absolute 'No' to Violence," 3rd Lenten Sermon (Rome, March 11, 2005), https://centerforchristiannonviolence.org/sites/default/files/media/getstarted/Eucharist_Gods_No2Violence_03.pdf; and Pax Christi International, *Eucharist of Gospel Nonviolence* (n.d.), https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Eucharist-for-Gospel-nonviolence_ENG-V2.pdf. The pontifical household preacher described the Eucharist as "God's absolute 'no' to violence, pronounced on the cross, kept alive through the centuries."

32. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Scribner, 1960). Some theological approaches too often dismiss the language and robust ethical implications of nonviolence by presuming nonviolence is inconsistent with the "truth" of reality. Some claim the pervasive reality of sin makes nonviolence an ideal, naïve, something primarily for interpersonal relationships or for after the eschaton, or simply a limited tool in the politically responsible leaders' toolbox; see "Special Issue: The Future of Nonviolence in Catholic Social Teaching," *Expositions* 13, no. 2 (2019), https://expositions.journals.villanova.edu/index.php/expositions/issue/view/182.

33. The definition for mirror neurons can be found in "Nonviolence Terms and Concepts," Metta Center for Nonviolence (n.d.), https://www.mettacenter.org/glossary.

much violence, *too much* injustice, and therefore that this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with *more* love, with *more* goodness."[34]

Like Pope Benedict's point about Jesus's teaching regarding nonviolence being realistic, political science research has shown that nonviolent resistance is, in reality, two times more effective than violent resistance and at least ten times more likely to lead to durable democracy, including against authoritarians.[35] Other research has corroborated these patterns. Recent research by Erica Chenoweth shows that nonviolent resistance was three times more effective between 2007–2019.[36] The deeper lesson is that the praxis of nonviolence is more likely to cultivate habits such as broader participation, empathy, broad coalition-building, rehumanization, creativity, compassion, integrative power, and engaging conflict constructively in both people and societies. This corresponds to creating more durable democracies and human flourishing. By contrast, the more we lean on violent resistance or war, the more likely we are to cultivate habits that correspond to authoritarian politics. These can include domination, distrust, bitterness, hatred, less empathy, more corruption, domestic violence, generational trauma, and the proliferation of weapons.

Pope Francis calls us to develop a habit, character, or virtue of nonviolence when he asks "God to help all of us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values. May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life."[37] As a virtue, nonviolence is constitutive of human flourishing. As a virtue, it helps actualize key aspects of human flourishing, particularly the conciliatory love that draws adversaries toward partnership and the truth of our ultimate unity and equal dignity. Like other virtues, there are paradigmatic or core practices that enable its cultivation.[38] In turn, Francis calls us to "dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to building nonviolent communities that care for our common home."[39]

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34. Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," Message for the Celebration of the Fiftieth World Day of Peace (January 1, 2017), §3, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-l-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html.
35. Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, *Why Civilian Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 7 and 213–15; Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*.
36. Adrian Karatnycky and Peter Ackerman, *How Freedom is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy* (2005), http://agnt.org/snv/resources/HowFreedomisWon.pdf; and Erica Chenoweth, *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).
37. Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," §1.
38. Eli Sasaran McCarthy, *Becoming Nonviolent Peacemakers: A Virtue Ethic for Catholic Social Teaching and U.S. Policy* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012). Some core practices identified include prayer oriented by nonviolence, nonviolent skills training, restorative justice, unarmed civilian protection, and nonviolent resistance.
39. Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," §7.

Pope Francis also links nonviolence to acting in accordance with human dignity. He prays "that the image and likeness of God in each person will enable us to acknowledge one another as sacred gifts endowed with immense dignity. Especially in situations of conflict, let us respect this, our 'deepest dignity,' and make active nonviolence our way of life."[40] In Francis's encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, he clearly names war itself—not merely terrorist attacks but war—as an "affront to human dignity," which is the central, orienting theme of Catholic social teaching.[41] This recognition that war is inconsistent with human dignity opens the door to a clearer affirmation that nonviolence is a positive reverence for human dignity and life; as well as what acting consistently with human dignity looks like in practice.

Further, Francis reminds us of the One whom Christians follow: "Jesus never promoted violence or intolerance. He openly condemned the use of [violent] force to gain power over others."[42] Therefore, "to be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence."[43] Francis continues that Jesus taught his disciples to "love their enemies" (Mt 5:44) and to "turn the other cheek" (Mt 5:39), which entails asserting our dignity in situations of oppression, not passivity. "When he stopped her accusers from stoning the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), and when, on the night before he died, he told Peter to put away his sword (Mt 26:52), Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence."[44]

In *Fratteli Tutti*, Francis entitled a section "the injustice of war," signaling that war itself is unjust and, thus, not an activity consistent with the ways of justice. He says, "war can easily be chosen by invoking all sorts of allegedly humanitarian, defensive or precautionary excuses, and even resorting to the manipulation of information. In recent decades, every single war has been ostensibly 'justified.'" Francis proclaims, "we can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a 'just war'. Never again war!"[45] More recently, Francis proclaimed, "there was a time, even in our churches, when people spoke of a holy war or a just war. Today we cannot speak in this manner. A Christian awareness of the importance of peace has

40. Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," §1.
41. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship (October 3, 2020), §25, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.
42. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, §238.
43. Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," §3.
44. Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," §3.
45. Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, §258. More recently, Pope Francis declared that "wars are always unjust" and "there is no such thing as a just war: they do not exist!" Francis, Address to participants in the International Congress promoted by the Pontifical Foundation *Gravissimum Educationis* (Rome, March 18, 2022), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/march/documents/20220318-fondazione-gravissimum-educationis.html.

developed."[46] There are ethical nuances around issues of defense; however, my point here is that we need to cultivate a habitual form of Christian practice where we instinctively and regularly return to nonviolence as a lens and praxis for responding to situations of injustice.[47] In turn, Pope Francis pledges "the assistance of the Church in every effort to build peace through active and creative nonviolence."[48] The door is opening wider for centering nonviolence as the orientation of our moral theology.[49]

Public Health: COVID-19

From an intersectional perspective, what can a nonviolence lens help us see in relation to the public health challenge of COVID-19? Since the lethal nature of the disease has left many people feeling increasingly vulnerable, we will turn first to consider COVID-19 in light of the human need for security and related systems of power, such as government. One of the predominant ways the US develops its national security strategies is to pay attention to troop movements and military buildup in places such as Russia, China, Iran, Syria, Somalia, and Korea. The US government attends to the latest weapons technology, nuclear proliferation, drones, planes, ships, and deployments into outer space. The predominant ideas found in national security strategy have often been resource competition, the US first, economic and energy dominance, big power, and

46. "Pope to Russian Patriarch: 'Church uses language of Jesus, not of politics'," *Vatican News* (March 16, 2022), https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-03/pope-francis-calls-patriarch-kirill-orthodox-patriarch-ukraine.html; and "Pope: Difficult to dialogue with those who started a war, but it must be done," *Vatican News* (September 15, 2022), https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-09/pope-francis-kazakhstan-inflight-press-conference-ukraine-china.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NewsletterVN-EN. Pope Francis answered a question about supplying weapons to Ukraine and explained it may be "morally acceptable . . . and [if so] then we can talk about it." He did not clearly say it is moral in this context. However, he did elaborate and focus on how it was "immoral if it is to provoke more war, sell weapons, or discard unused weapons." It is at least arguable, if not pretty clear, that the US and the UK are trying to extend the war. For example, consider Boris Johnson's interference in the early promising negotiations. Francis repeated that we need "to think more about the concept of just war." All of this is still within his overwhelming focus on dialogue, diplomacy, and nonviolent action regarding how to stop the war and break the dynamic or cycle of violence. He is not contradicting or going back on that.

47. Eli McCarthy, "War in Ukraine: Christian Accompaniment and Turning to Diplomacy," *William Temple Foundation blog* (March 16, 2023), https://williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/war-in-ukraine/; and Eli McCarthy, "Looking Past War Using a 'Just Peace' Framework," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* (October 11, 2022), https://conversationsmagazine.org/looking-past-war-using-a-just-peace-framework-19e26c30b376.

48. Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," §6. It is outside the scope of this article whether Francis is against all forms of violence.

49. Rose Marie Berger, Ken Butigan, Judy Coode, and Marie Dennis, eds., *Advancing Nonviolence and Just Peace in the Church and the World* (Brussels: Pax Christi International, 2020).

military dominance as approaches to ensure security.[50] However, with this public health crisis, we face a reality that deeper issues such as health, education, belonging, and respect, particularly for that which is less visible or prominent, need to become the focus in reimagining security.

Because nonviolence entails positive reverence for human dignity and avoiding dehumanization, this lens enables us to see our deeper human needs and the less visible reality more clearly. For example, it helps us see the less visible regarding how violence often functions like a contagion, as René Girard and others have argued, or even the public health language of a contagious disease, which the organization Cure Violence has unpacked.[51] Violence is an energy and contagion of dehumanization, including domination and destruction. Vivian May describes intersectionality as entailing "an eye toward disrupting dominance," such as violent power.[52] Violence, like a disease, clusters and moves through exposure. In turn, prevention of this vicious contagion, interrupting transmission with credible messengers, and shifting community norms become central strategies for security. In other words, nonviolence invites and challenges us to "disrupt dominance" and to shift toward a public health approach as a way of developing security strategies or alternative community protection.[53] Cure Violence utilizes this public health approach of treating violence like a contagious disease and applies it to a narrow scope of challenges, particularly shootings and homicides. This has led to reductions in shootings and homicides of 40–70 percent on average in the US neighborhoods where they work.[54]

With the experience of COVID-19 and by turning to a public health approach, we can better sense the less visible, that is, not only our interconnectedness across borders, such as national borders, but also our deep interdependence. For example, we are deeply interdependent on our health care workers, adequate medical supplies, how others choose to prevent the transmission or not, and how other states and countries respond. The policy discourse has been increasing regarding national security and

50. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: White House, December 2017), https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf. President Biden signaled some shifts in this approach. White House, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: White House, March 2021), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf.
51. Gary Slutkin, "What If We Treated Violence Like a Contagious Disease?" Filmed at TEDMED 2013, TED video, 15:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lYPOZ0EfaJo. For theological accounts of violence as contagion, see René Girard's works in *The Girard Reader*, ed. James Williams (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1996); also see *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* (Michigan State University Press, 2006–2019).
52. Vivian May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 228.
53. Slutkin, "What If We Treated Violence Like a Contagious Disease?"
54. Cure Violence, *The Evidence of Effectiveness* (August 2021), 4, https://cvg.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Cure-Violence-Evidence-Summary.pdf.

pandemics, as well as national health security strategies.[55] With a public health approach, we better sense how destruction and violence are rooted in systemic failures of public health through issues such as health care, education, and environmental inequity. This approach calls us to focus on cultivating healthy persons, communities, and cross-border relationships. In turn, we can become more attentive to the well-being of those who have been less visible and on the margins of our communities, the *anawim*, such as the elderly; persons experiencing homelessness; persons living in poverty; persons with impaired immune systems; persons with mental, emotional, and behavioral health challenges; persons without legal status; persons in prison; persons who are Black, indigenous, or people of color; women; and others.[56] With a public health approach, we are more attentive to the intersections of less visible factors such as class, gender, race, and ability. In turn, our investments, priorities, and strategies would better reflect such attentiveness, especially in national security strategies and foreign policy.

This shift in national security strategy is also fundamentally embedded in and enabled by a shift of our gaze toward the question of how we flourish as human beings and less about political interests, economic, and military dominance. Our national security strategies and foreign policy need to become more oriented by this question if they are to be more effective and relevant to our reality. The public health approach illuminated by nonviolence moves us in this direction. To enhance this movement, we may draw on a just peace framework for normative guidance.[57] Such an ethical framework offers norms that better enable us to engage conflict constructively (*jus in conflictione*), break cycles of violence (*jus ex bello*), and build a more sustainable peace (*jus ad pacem*). Racial justice and the skills of racial, as well as intersectional, analysis are crucial norms of this just peace ethic.

Therefore, in relation to the public health challenges of COVID-19, a nonviolence lens helps us to identify key aspects and constructive practices. This includes focusing on our human needs, such as belonging, respect, and security. This attention to the deeper dynamics helps us recognize violence as a contagion and the value of public health responses, which correspond to practices of interrupting the transmission of violence, front-lining credible messengers, and changing community norms. This approach helps us attend to the less visible of society and our interconnectedness. It

55. Sara E. Davies, "National Security and Pandemics," *UN Chronicle* (August 2013), https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/national-security-and-pandemics; US Department of Health and Human Services, "National Health Security Strategy" (n.d.), https://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/planning/authority/nhss/Pages/default.aspx; and William Aldis, "Health Security as a Public Health Concept: A Critical Analysis," *Health Policy and Planning* 23, no. 6 (2008): 369–75, https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czn030.

56. Marcus Mescher, *The Ethics of Encounter: Christian Neighbor Love as a Practice of Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2020). This work provides a resource for a culture of responsibility and belonging.

57. Eli S. McCarthy, ed., *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020).

also helps to shift our national security strategy gaze toward human flourishing and public health while leaning into a just peace normative framework.

Systemic Racism: Policing

In turn, from an intersectional perspective, what does nonviolence help us see in relation to systemic racism? Nonviolence contributes to more clearly and readily seeing racism as a distortion of the *imago dei*, that is, a form of dehumanization, and thus, as violence. With its focus on establishing the conditions for social human flourishing, nonviolence highlights that racism destroys the conditions for humans to flourish and, thus, itself must be considered a form of violence. Because nonviolence illuminates aspects of reality consistent with structural and cultural violence, it also helps to identify systemic racism as structural violence and to see the importance of naming, as well as ending, police violence. For example, referring to the "anti-Black narrative" embedded in police violence like a contagion in the US, Kelly Brown Douglas explains that "any narrative that dehumanizes or degrades another person is violent, and violence breeds violence."[58] Thus, nonviolence—understood as rehumanization—contributes to illuminating the violent characteristics of this anti-Black narrative and its propensity to generate further violence. In turn, nonviolence, as a positive reverence for dignity and life, helps to expand what we see as possibilities for responding to these patterns, such as developing alternative community protection mechanisms that are more consistent with nonviolence. That is, a nonviolent lens further heightens the injustice of both the underlying dynamics of racism and violent police interventions by highlighting the systematic alternatives that could be pursued.

Regarding the naming of police violence, the term most often used is "excessive force." The officers involved in the killing of George Floyd are regularly described as having used "excessive force"; the officer who kneeled on his neck had a history of "excessive force."[59] Officers in Atlanta were fired for "excessive force" after responding to protesters.[60] Police officers are being called to intervene if they see another officer using "excessive force."[61] Advocacy groups and theologians promote reform of

58. Kelly Brown Douglas, "We Need to Declare a National Emergency on Deadly Policing," *Religion News Service* (September 2, 2020), https://religionnews.com/2020/09/02/we-need-to-declare-a-national-emergency-on-deadly-policing/; and Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015), chapters 2–3.

59. "Fired MPD Officer Chauvin Has Been Involved in Use-of-Force Situations Before," *CBS News Minnesota* (May 27, 2020), https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/fired-mpd-officer-chauvin-has-been-involved-in-use-of-force-situations-before/.

60. Amir Vera, "2 Atlanta Officers Fired after Video Shows Them Tasing Man and Using 'Excessive Force' on Woman, Mayor Says," *CNN* (June 4, 2020), https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/01/us/atlanta-cops-fired-excessive-force/index.html.

61. Paul Egan, "Whitmore: Require Police to Intervene if They See Officers Use Excessive Force," *Detroit Free Press* (June 3, 2020), https://eu.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2020/06/03/whitmer-police-intervene-officer-brutality/3137042001/.

the "use of force" policies. Now, there is some truth in these descriptions. However, we are missing a more complete truth and the underlying power dynamics by primarily leaning on and reinscribing such descriptions. What we miss about truth and power can limit the persistent energy of our collective resistance and our imagination about concrete alternatives.

One aspect of the truth we may miss by descriptors such as "excessive force" in situations of police killing is that killing people is a form of direct violence. Descriptors such as "excessive force" are only partial truths that ignore the complex impact that such killing has—not only on the victims themselves but also on the perpetrators. It is destructive and dehumanizing both to the one killed and the one doing the killing. For instance, the advancing scientific recognition of trauma, perpetrator-induced traumatic stress, moral injury, and brain damage to the one who kills illustrate this reality of dehumanization.[62] It is also dehumanizing by obstructing empathy, failing to be a gift to others, devaluing the sacred gift of others, and creating ongoing trauma in the parties directly involved as well as other community members. Even if killing is considered legal, it is still violence. This is crucial. Because if we refuse to name killing as violence, then we may become collectively less resistant to it, and we may obstruct our imagination about alternatives in such situations.

A more profound truth we may miss is that in so far as killing itself dehumanizes, as described above, it is inconsistent with human dignity. In addition, Lisa Sowle Cahill argues that killing "involves an offense against the dignity of human life," even in difficult dilemma situations.[63] She also points out that "killing is patently incompatible with love of neighbor and the example of Jesus, even if Jesus's example and teaching also urge us to take risks to help those in mortal danger."[64] Recent magisterial voices agree with Cahill's assessment about human dignity and violence. Pope John Paul II argued that "violence destroys . . .[our] dignity,"[65] while shortly before becoming Pope Benedict, Cardinal Ratzinger argued that violence degrades the dignity of the victim and perpetrator.[66] And Pope Francis calls us to "respect our deepest dignity and

62. Rachel MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing* (New York: Author's Choice Press, 2005).

63. Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: Pacifism, Just War, and Peacebuilding* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 125; see also Cahill, 153. The question of the possible justification of killing even though it violates human dignity, as others may argue, is a further question that I do not engage directly in this article.

64. Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Catholic Tradition on Peace, War, and Just Peace," in McCarthy, *A Just Peace Ethic Primer*, 42.

65. John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church" (2004), §496, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html; and John Paul II, Homily Holy Mass in Drogheda, Ireland (September 29, 1979), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790929_irlanda-dublino-drogheda.html.

66. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'" (August 6, 1984), section XI (Orientation), §7, https://www.newadvent.org/library/docs_df84lt.htm.

make active nonviolence our way of life."[67] In turn, it appears increasingly clear that the violence of police killings is also inconsistent with, distorts, and obstructs our sense of sacred human dignity.

Another significant truth we might miss with the "excessive force" or "use of force" descriptors is the notion of force itself. These descriptors in the context of armed police or military actions can devalue the powerfully effective alternatives or force provided by nonviolent de-escalation tactics, nonviolent conflict, and social movements, as well as restorative justice.[68] Nonviolent conflict can generate not only discomfort but also confrontation as well as non-cooperation, such as boycotts, strikes, tax resistance, and civil disobedience. The civil rights movement with Martin Luther King Jr. is one example of such nonviolent conflict. As previously mentioned and important to reemphasize here, research has shown that nonviolent resistance is two times more effective than violent resistance and at least ten times more likely to lead to durable democracy.[69] Restorative justice approaches and programs in the US have significantly reduced recidivism compared to retributive justice models.[70] We have numerous stories of the power and force of nonviolent de-escalation, such as Antoinette Tuff drawing on her Christian spirituality and de-escalating a heavily armed person threatening her school.[71] We must recover more clarity with our language to explicitly identify violent force and nonviolent force.

Some physical force could be described as nonviolent force, that is, as constructive and humanizing. For instance, if I push someone out of the street before they get hit by a car, hold someone back from beating up another person, physically block someone from harming another, or pull someone off another person, then these could be examples of nonviolent physical force. However, if I use or threaten to use a chokehold, put a knee to the neck, or use tear gas, rubber bullets, or regular bullets toward a person, then I am exercising violent force.

However, there is an even more insidious intersectional truth behind the "use of force" curtain regarding policing. It is this: When we describe police killing in terms of "use of force" or "excessive force," we may reinscribe and help maintain established wealth and power in our society. We can better understand how this occurs when we consider how US policing, especially in the South, has significant roots in the system of slavery, that is, systemic violence that maintains established wealth and power structures. Kimberlé Crenshaw unpacks this systemic violence in regard to the breeding of

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67. Francis, "Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace," §1.
68. Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Good Books, 2015); Fania E. Davis, *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice: Black Lives, Healing, and US Social Transformation* (New York: Good Books, 2019).
69. Stephan and Chenoweth, *Why Civilian Resistance Works*; also see Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*.
70. Daniel W. Van Ness and Karen Heetderks Strong, *Restoring Justice: An Introduction to Restorative Justice*, 4th ed. (New Province, NJ: Matthew Bender and Co., 2010).
71. Eli S. McCarthy, "Transformation at Gunpoint," *America Magazine* (January 17, 2014), https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/transformation-gunpoint.

Black women, which ultimately is what slavery became.[72] Victor Kappeler explains, "The institution of slavery and the control of minorities, however, were two of the more formidable historic features of American society shaping early policing. Slave patrols and Night Watches, which later became modern police departments, were both designed to control the behaviors of minorities."[73] Meanwhile, a prominent, if not the primary, characteristic of the origins of organized policing in the North entailed controlling labor, particularly using violence against strikers and for union busting.[74] Thus, as Angela Davis explains, the institutional pattern of US police maintaining established wealth and power, even if not always intended, goes way back to the origins of US policing. This is how systemic racism continues to infect us today and how its destructive power operates.[75] This remembering of otherwise neglected histories illustrates what Vivian May calls the "resistant imaginary" of intersectionality.[76] When we rely on the terms "use of force" or "excessive force" rather than "violence" to describe when police kill others, even unarmed others, we minimize the issue and may reinscribe the patterns of maintaining established wealth and power in our society. In contrast, when political leaders describe those who burn property, break windows, or breach police barricades as part of a resistance movement to injustices, such as police brutality, as doing "violence," they amplify the issue and often claim that we need more "law and order." In other words, we need to maintain established wealth and power structures.

In summary, in relation to systemic racism and policing, a nonviolence lens helps us to identify key aspects and constructive practices. This includes recognizing that racism is rooted in dehumanization and, thus, is not merely a sin but a form of violence.[77] In turn, it helps us to name systemic racism as structural violence. In addition, this approach in the context of policing helps to clarify how killing seems inconsistent

72. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "What Does Intersectionality Mean in 2021?," interviewed by Kelly Moffit, *Columbia News* (February 22, 2021), https://news.columbia.edu/news/what-does-intersectionality-mean-2021-kimberle-crenshaws-podcast-must-listen-way-learn.

73. Victor Kappeler, "A Brief History of Slavery and the Origins of American Policing," *EK Online* (January 7, 2014), https://plsonline.eku.edu/insidelook/brief-history-slavery-and-origins-american-policing; and Ben Fountain, "Slavery and the Origins of the American Police State," *GEN* (September 17, 2018), https://gen.medium.com/slavery-and-the-origins-of-the-american-police-state-ec318f5ff05b.

74. Chenjerai Kumanyika, "The History of Police in Creating Social Order in the U.S.," interviewed by Alisa Chang, *NPR: All Things Considered* (June 5, 2020), https://www.npr.org/2020/06/05/871083599/the-history-of-police-in-creating-social-order-in-the-u-s; and Gary Potter, "The History of Policing in the United States, Part 1," *EKU Online* (June 25, 2013), https://plsonline.eku.edu/insidelook/history-policing-united-states-part-1.

75. Angela Davis, "From Michael Brown to Assata Shakur, the Racist State of America Persists," *The Guardian* (November 1, 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/01/michael-brown-assata-shakur-racist-state-of-america.

76. May, *Pursuing Intersectionality*, 53.

77. Francis, General Audience (Rome, June 3, 2020), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200603_udienza-generale.html. Francis connects racism with dehumanization when he says, "we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life."

with human dignity, as well as the importance of acknowledging the reality of nonviolent force. In turn, rather than merely using "force" to describe killing by police, this lens helps us to explicitly name such killing as police violence. This helps us better challenge established wealth and power structures and, thus, more urgently address such violence by strengthening our collective resistance and our creative imagination about alternative structures of protection.

Nonviolence: Intersectional Praxis toward Sustainable Transformation

By weaving these threads of intersectional analysis, nonviolence also offers us an intersectional praxis to provide a more sustainable way of transformation.

This analysis interrogated institutions, identities, and systems of power, with particular attention to Black women, as I discussed how COVID-19 exacerbated and illuminated systemic racism, as well as how systemic racism exacerbated the public health crisis of COVID-19. Theologically, I described how nonviolence contributes to Catholic social teaching and deepens the intersectional interrogation by helping us to see these interconnections, as well as how power interlocks across structural and cultural forms of violence. In relation to COVID-19, this was primarily illustrated by an analysis of our national security strategies and the logic for shifting to a public health approach. In relation to systemic racism, this was primarily illustrated by an analysis of the particular security challenge of police violence. In relation to both waves, nonviolence helps to illuminate shared aspects, such as structural violence and dehumanization. Within this intersectional analysis, nonviolence contributes to the value of generating alternative community protection strategies consistent with a public health approach to security. Such a move manifests the praxis of nonviolence in the form of unarmed civilian protection and even restorative justice, which contributes to a more sustainable transformation by addressing direct, structural, and cultural violence.

In the US, there is a significant movement to explore such nonviolent alternatives. In Eugene, Oregon, a program called CAHOOTS responds to mental health crises.[78] Denver has successfully completed a six-month pilot project similar to CAHOOTS called STAR, which is now an expansive program.[79] San Francisco has implemented a CAHOOTS-type program called the Street Crisis Response Team with unarmed professionals that respond on "noncriminal matters involving mental health, the homeless, school discipline and neighbor disputes."[80] Brooklyn Center, Minnesota,

78. White Bird Clinic, "What is CAHOOTS?" https://whitebirdclinic.org/what-is-cahoots/.

79. Aidan Trump, "Denver's STAR Program Offers Alternative to Police Response," *The Warrior Online* (2021), https://www.thewarrioronline.com/2021/02/25/denvers-star-program-offers-alternative-to-police-response/.

80. Maura Dolan, "London Breed Pushes San Francisco Reforms: Police No Longer Will Respond to Noncriminal Calls," *Los Angeles Times* (June 12, 2020), https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-06-12/san-francisco-police-reforms-stop-response-noncriminal-calls; Chris James, "There's a New Approach to Police Response to Mental Health Emergencies: Taking Police out of It," *CNN*, April 2, 2021, https://edition.cnn.com/2021/04/02/us/mental-health-police-response-go-there/index.html.

has created a Department of Community Safety and Violence Prevention as well as unarmed units to deal with a variety of situations, such as mental health, social need, and traffic enforcement.[81] Ithaca, New York, has proposed a Department of Community Solutions and Public Safety to replace the police department, and to include unarmed community solution workers.[82] In August 2020, thirteen cities signaled a plan to defund their police departments.[83] As of March 2021, more than twenty major cities have defunded police in some form, while twenty-five cities have moved to remove police from schools.[84]

By seeking alternative community protection with a public health approach oriented on nonviolence, it enables us to address the issue of policing more fully from the perspectives of those most affected, the common good of all people, and the equal, sacred human dignity of all. So, I turn here to voices and perspectives of those most affected by police violence.

Philip McHarris and Thenjiwe McHarris, strategists with the Movement for Black Lives, wrote this response to the police killing of George Floyd:

> More training or diversity among police officers won't end police brutality, nor will firing and charging individual officers. Look at the Minneapolis Police Department, which is held up as a model of progressive police reform. The department offers trainings for implicit bias, mindfulness and de-escalation. It embraces community policing and officer diversity, bans "warrior style" policing, uses body cameras, implemented an early intervention system to identify problematic officers, receives training around mental health crisis intervention, and practices "reconciliation" efforts in communities of color.[85]

Likewise, the Movement for Black Lives wrote a piece on the topic critiquing reform efforts and arguing that "it is quite simple: the way to reduce police violence is to reduce the scope, size, and the role of police in our communities."[86] Along with Rev.

81. Andy Rose, Sarah Sidner, and Alass Elassar, "Brooklyn Center City Council Approves Sweeping Police Reforms in the Wake of Daunte Wright's Death," *CNN* (May 15, 2021), https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/15/us/brooklyn-center-city-council-police-reform-daunte-wright/index.html.
82. Wesley Lowery, "The Most Ambitious Effort Yet to Reform Policing May Be Happening in Ithaca, New York," *GQ* (February 22, 2021), https://www.gq.com/story/ithaca-mayor-svante-myrick-police-reform.
83. Jemima McEvoy, "At Least 13 Cities are Defunding their Police Departments," *Forbes* (August 13, 2020), https://www.forbes.com/sites/jemimamcevoy/2020/08/13/at-least-13-cities-are-defunding-their-police-departments/?sh=5c8db0f229e3.
84. Sam Levin, "These US Cities Defunded Police: 'We're transferring money to the community,'" *The Guardian* (March 11, 2021), https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/07/us-cities-defund-police-transferring-money-community.
85. Philip V. McHarris and Thenjiwe McHarris, "No More Money for the Police," *New York Times* (May 30, 2020), https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/30/opinion/george-floyd-police-funding.html.
86. "Defunding Police, What It Takes to End Police Violence," Movement for Black Lives (June 6, 2020), https://m4bl.medium.com/defunding-police-what-it-takes-to-end-police-violence-bb164a70e89b.

William Barber and the Poor People's Campaign, they call for a shift of focus in our investments and how our communities creatively imagine and practice community security.[87]

This helps illuminate why predominant reform arguments may often have good intentions and yet may also need a deeper systemic, intersectional analysis. For example, Black Lives Matter has criticized President Biden for his police reform attempts that include increased funding for police rather than a cut in funding, although the bill he supports does include some minimal enhancements for measures of accountability.[88] Further, the US Department of Justice created the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services in 1994, and it has been getting more attention, again, from some politicians and officers.[89] Former police officer and moral theologian Tobias Winright identifies helpful insights that police are "not supposed to dominate and be adversarial." Instead, they need to be "preventive" with a necessary "shift in model." He also offers his own confessions related to white privilege.[90]

Nevertheless, impacted communities are often critical of what Winright and others advocate as community policing because the visibility of police in the community heightens the feeling of surveillance and, with it, the power of police.[91] This expansive surveillance by police often takes the additional form of deputizing certain powerful and connected residents as the "eyes and ears" of the police. Critics also argue that community policing does not address structural violence and can even "create the false idea that structural issues can be addressed by building partnerships."[92] Others have

87. "A Moral Policy Agenda to Heal and Transform America: The Poor People's Jubilee Platform," Poor People's Campaign (July 2020), https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/about/jubilee-platform/.

88. Erin Logan, "George Floyd Anniversary: BLM Got a Plaza in Washington. Will It Get Police Reform?," *Los Angeles Times* (May 24, 2021), https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-05-24/george-floyd-anniversary-black-lives-matter-got-a-plaza-in-washington-but-can-it-get-police-reform; George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021, H.R. 1280, 117th Congress (2021), https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1280.

89. Office of Community Policing Services, *Community Policing Defined* (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, 2014), https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/RIC/Publications/cops-p157-pub.pdf.

90. Tobias Winright, "A Better Way to Serve and Protect," *US Catholic* (May 23, 2016), https://uscatholic.org/articles/201605/a-better-way-to-serve-and-protect/; Tobias Winright, "Faith, Justice, and Ferguson: Insights for Religious Educators from a Law Enforcement Officer Turned Theological Ethicist," *Religious Education* 113, no. 3 (2018): 244–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2018.1450608; and Tobias Winright, "White Privilege—A Confession," *The Tablet* 274, no. 9356 (2020): 4–5, https://reader.exacteditions.com/issues/88498/spread/4.

91. Philip V. McHarris, "Community Policing is Not the Answer," *The Appeal*, December 2, 2019, https://theappeal.org/community-policing-is-not-the-answer/; Brendan McQuade, "Against Community Policing," *Jacobin* (November 18, 2015), https://jacobin.com/2015/11/obama-chicago-black-lives-matter-police-brutality/.

92. McHarris, "Community Policing is Not the Answer."

called community policing "a public relations strategy, which keeps control [of the resources] in the hands of the current structure."[93] Kelly Brown Douglas calls for "shifting from community police to community responders such as social workers, mental health workers, pastors, and teachers."[94] Philip McHarris argues that "the solution to public safety lies in the troubling idea that policing equals safety."[95] Thus, the issue may be even more systemic than community policing. Unfortunately, the pattern of abusing power to harm Black communities is both horrendous and consistent over time in the US, including too often in declared "community policing" models, as we saw with George Floyd.

Therefore, it seems that a more significant commitment to alternative community protection mechanisms is required. Nonviolence as an intersectional praxis helps us to shift power and to move to such a commitment—one that is rooted in the human need for safety and oriented by a public health approach. It also helps us to acknowledge racism as violence, the role of structural violence, and the naming of police violence. If violence functions like a contagion or a contagious disease, as the public health approach illuminates, then an institution that, over generations, trains for and readily uses violence is literally infected. In turn, it may require a more nonviolent-oriented theological vision of transforming our deeper system of security, including shifting money from the policing institution to community protection investments elsewhere, to see what our communities might be able to create.

The theological vision of nonviolence as integral to human flourishing described above invites us to focus on the proven and existing alternative security mechanisms that could be further studied and promoted to help transform our system of public safety.[96] For example, there are more than sixty-eight professional organizations in over twenty-nine countries practicing unarmed civilian protection and accompaniment.[97] This practice leads us into and generally illustrates key contributions of nonviolence, such as "how" to live in accord with human dignity, strengthening our sense of interconnectedness, exercising the power of love in action (including adversaries), keeping the means consistent with the ends, and modeling conflict transformation.

The Nonviolent Peaceforce is the most advanced. Their largest deployment is a local and international team of over two hundred persons in South Sudan, as well as

93. Pan-African Community Action, "The Radical Practicality of Community Control over Policing: A Reply to Our Critics," *Black Agenda Report* (March 3, 2021), https://www.blackagendareport.com/radical-practicality-community-control-over-policing-reply-our-critics.
94. Brown Douglas, "We Need to Declare a National Emergency on Deadly Policing."
95. McHarris, "Community Policing is Not the Answer."
96. Eknath Easwaran, *A Man to Match his Mountains: Badshah Khan, Nonviolent Soldier of Islam* (Petaluma: Nilgiri Press, 1984); Reuven Kimelman, "Nonviolence in the Talmud," in *Roots of Jewish Nonviolence*, ed. Allan Solomonow and Stephen Schwarzschild (Nyack, NJ: Jewish Peace Fellowship, 1981); Shanti Sena Network, "Alternative Community Security Brief" (July 6, 2020), https://www.mettacenter.org/shantisenanetwork.
97. "UCP Database," Selkirk College, https://selkirk.ca/unarmed-civilian-peacekeeping-database.

deployments in Iraq, Myanmar, Ukraine, and the US. They get direct funding from the US government, UN agencies, and other countries.[98] In the South Sudan civil war, they have directly saved people's lives by refusing to leave fourteen women and children as armed persons threatened them. Also, through their direct accompaniment of women seeking firewood and water, they protected women from sexual assault by armed groups.[99] They have also cultivated numerous women-led unarmed civilian protection units in South Sudan. I previously mentioned the considerable impact that Cure Violence has had in over twenty-five American cities as well as abroad. They hire credible messengers from the local community, who are often returning citizens from being incarcerated, to serve as violence interrupters and outreach workers. Other examples in the US are the DC Peace Team, the Portland Peace Team, and the Meta Peace Team.[100]

A related example of modeling conflict transformation is the practice of relying primarily on unarmed policing, which is found in nineteen countries such as Britain, Ireland, Norway, New Zealand, Scotland, Iceland, Mauritius, Botswana, and most Pacific Island countries.[101] Notably, in Iceland, about 33 percent of residents own guns, likewise in the US, there is a similar rate of gun ownership.[102] Proponents of unarmed policing in New Zealand argue that "arming the police would inevitably lead to an arms race with criminals and a spike in casualties."[103] In most of these countries, the vast majority of the officers are unarmed, while others may remain on call for very rare responses. The overall approach is normally grounded in the idea of "policing by consent." This means their legitimacy and authority are determined by maintaining respect and approval from the public rather than by the threat of violent force, or serving the state.[104] Such unarmed police find their approach allows them to build better trust with the community, better de-escalate threatening situations, better prevent

98. Nonviolent Peaceforce, "Unarmed Civilian Protection Across Generations," https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/; Nonviolent Police Force, "Unarmed Civilian Protection," YouTube video, 2:29 (October 24, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwqKOuZuR-w.
99. Nonviolent Peace Force, "NP Workers Andres Gutierrez and Derek Oakley on Their Experience of the Violence in South Sudan," YouTube video, 14:33 (May 12, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WcFwpcIMcE.
100. Shanti Sena Network, https://www.mettacenter.org/shantisenanetwork.
101. Kara Fox, "How US Gun Culture Compares with the World," *CNN* (July 19, 2017), https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/19/world/us-gun-crime-police-shooting-statistics/index.html; and Rick Noack, "5 Countries Where Most Police Officers Do Not Carry Firearms—and It Works Well," *Washington Post* (July 8, 2016), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/18/5-countries-where-police-officers-do-not-carry-firearms-and-it-works-well/.
102. Nanna Arnadottir, "90,000 Guns but No Gun-Related Crimes," *Grapevine* (July 6, 2017), https://grapevine.is/mag/feature/2017/07/06/90000-guns-but-no-gun-related-crimes.
103. Noack, "5 Countries."
104. Melissa Godin, "What the U.S. Can Learn from Countries Where Cops Don't Carry Guns," *Time* (June 19, 2020), https://time.com/5854986/police-reform-defund-unarmed-guns/.

crime, and, thus, protect people.[105] Building a more authentic trust through generating alternative community protection mechanisms is one of the crucial aspects in addressing dehumanization and systemic racism.

In terms of steps or phases of systemic transformation of community protection, Black Lives Matter offers initial steps, which include shifting funding from policing and reinvesting in Black communities.[106] Such reinvestment in health care, housing, jobs, and education is a crucial step in addressing conditions such as the structural violence that exacerbates public health crises such as COVID-19, as well as systemic racism. In the 1967 Poor People's Campaign, Martin Luther King Jr. advocated addressing such material and structural conditions of poverty that exacerbate systemic racism.[107] More recently, Black Lives Matter has proposed a more substantial program in national legislation called the Breathe Act.[108] This legislation includes divesting by moving significant funding from policing and incarceration and instead investing in new approaches to community safety; allocating new money to build healthy, sustainable, and equitable communities; and holding officials accountable while ensuring the self-determination of Black communities.[109] This bill challenges us to imagine schools free of police and full of restorative justice programs; trained, trauma-informed interventionists to respond to domestic violence situations; and 911 operators dispatching mental health experts rather than police in situations of behavioral health crises.[110]

Building off these illustrations of nonviolent praxis, an additional way to imagine a three-phased approach around alternative community protection might include the following phases. These respond to the intersectionality of violence in terms of structural, cultural, and direct forms, as well as shifting the systems of power more equitably. These phases, oriented by nonviolent praxis, are particularly important for the US context due to the prevalence of guns in our society.

Phase 1 could entail investment in marginalized communities and reductions in policing, along with the diversion of many cases to professional mental health and

105. Jon Kelly, "Why British Police Don't Have Guns," *BBC News Magazine* (September 19, 2012), www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19641398; and Barak Ariel, Cristobal Weinborn, and Lawrence W. Sherman, "'Soft' Policing at Hot Spots—Do Police Community Support Officers Work? A Randomized Controlled Trial," *Journal of Experiential Criminology* 12, no. 3 (2016): 277–317, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-016-9260-4. Other studies challenge the misconception that routinely armed police officers are safer than routinely unarmed police officers; see Ross Hendy, "Routinely Armed and Unarmed Police: What Can the Scandinavian Experience Teach Us?" *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* 8, no. 2 (2014): 183–92, https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pau012.

106. Black Lives Matter, https://twitter.com/Blklivesmatter/status/1277628597306626048.

107. *Britannica Online*, s.v. "Poor People's Campaign," https://www.britannica.com/topic/Poor-Peoples-March.

108. "What is the Breathe Act?," The Breathe Act, https://breatheact.org/learn-more/.

109. "The Breathe Act: Federal Bill Proposal," https://breatheact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/The-BREATHE-Act-V.16_.pdf. The divesting section of the bill includes repealing the Office of Community Policing in the Department of Justice.

110. "What is the Breathe Act?"

social workers, perhaps through a hotline or by rerouting 911 calls; or by broad community training in nonviolent communication, active bystander intervention, restorative circles, trauma-healing, unarmed civilian protection (UCP), and strategic nonviolent resistance; and an increase of restorative justice in both the judicial and school systems.[111] We have already seen much of this happening piecemeal and in various locations, especially in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Portland, Oregon; and Washington, DC.[112] Twenty-one states have statutory support for restorative justice in schools,[113] while thirty-seven states have some statutes related to restorative justice in general.[114] Yet it is difficult to identify a location that is doing all of this in a substantial way and as a coordinated package. By mapping the impact of such programs along with regular community forums, communities can learn, be motivated, adapt, and transition into Phase 2 at their own pace with different iterations.

Phase 2 might include developing more peace teams or neighborhood community safety units to deal with various types of conflicts and to work with violence interrupters who focus on shootings and homicides;[115] adding a professional UCP member to the local government's rapid response teams of mental health workers, social workers, and paramedics to divert more 911 calls; piloting unarmed policing in neighborhoods or for events; institutionalizing restorative justice in most schools as well as state and legal judicial systems; developing structural and cultural programs focused on reducing guns in society; and increasing structural changes to improve education, housing, health care, and jobs in affected communities. As training, capabilities, and the demonstrated impact of nonviolent de-escalation, bystander intervention, and unarmed civilian protection units become mainstream, the tendency for residents, as well as police, to cling to guns will likely mitigate to some extent. It will also take an increasing commitment to peace education, community building in our neighborhoods, mental health resources, trauma-healing, and restorative justice approaches in all sectors to help generate momentum for reducing guns in US society.

Phase 3 might include deploying mostly unarmed police officers; restorative justice programs across nearly all schools, as well as federal, state, and local judicial systems; and neighborhood peace teams with violence interrupters in most communities.

A critical aspect for this sustainable transformational process, which nonviolent praxis opens up, is how to form and motivate communities into and along this path.

111. "Core Training," DC Peace Team, https://www.dcpeaceteam.org/training.
112. *Decentering Police to Improve Public Safety: A Report of the DC Police Reform Commission* (Washington, DC: DC Police Reform Commission, April 1, 2021), https://dccouncil.us/police-reform-commission-full-report/.
113. Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality, *School-Based Restorative Justice Legislative Trends* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Law Center, 2020), https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/School-Based-RJ-Legislative-Trends-1-1.pdf.
114. "Restorative Justice Laws," Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, https://socialwork.du.edu/content/restorative-justice-laws.
115. DC Peace Team, *Community Safety Unit Data Sheet, Columbia Heights Civic Plaza: Qualitative and Quantitative Description* (August 5, 2021–May 30, 2022), https://www.dcpeaceteam.org/_files/ugd/cc289c_265a95cf0db44e32ac162a9af971457c.pdf.

One component of this formation is the fuller integration of nonviolence into Catholic social teaching, as previously described. A second component is the practice of intersectional analysis and understanding. A third component is the phased approach described above that better provides resources for disadvantaged communities and offers local experience across communities with robust nonviolent skills training, restorative circles, and unarmed civilian protection deployments.

Conclusion

In this article, I began by describing the intersections of systemic racism and the public health crisis of COVID-19 in the US. Next, I offered a theological exploration of active nonviolence as an intersectional praxis with key contributions to Catholic social teaching. With this theological lens of nonviolence, I then provided an intersectional analysis of these two waves. Within this intersectional analysis, nonviolence contributes to the value of generating alternative community protection strategies consistent with a public health approach to security. I described how such a move manifests the praxis of nonviolence in the form of unarmed civilian protection. In turn, I argued that nonviolence offers an intersectional praxis for moving us toward a more sustainable, just transformation.

As theologians, we can help create the moral architecture and intersectional praxis for this deeper systemic transformation in solidarity with the cries and vision of many of our Black sisters and brothers, as well as other persons of color. Universities and colleges can make considerable contributions to nonviolence as an intersectional praxis. This can include creating or increasing resources for a Nonviolence and Just Peace Studies Program, as well as offering regular training sessions or skills courses in unarmed civilian protection, nonviolent communication, bystander intervention, and restorative justice circles. Gerald Schlabach has encouraged the church, and perhaps we could start at some universities, to develop "a nonviolent peace force of its own" as a model for communities in making the transition to alternative protection mechanisms.[116]

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116. Gerald Schlabach, "Just Policing and the Christian Call to Nonviolence," in Duane K. Friesen and Gerald W. Schlabach, eds., *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security, and the Wisdom of the Cross* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 413.