

REMEMBERING DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.**David Hollenbach, S.J.****Presented at****“Carrying Forward Drew Christiansen’s Legacy: Catholic Social Teaching,
Environmental Justice, Just War, and Peacebuilding”****Georgetown University, November 14, 2022**

It is a privilege to begin this remembrance of Drew Christiansen, where we give thanks for his many contributions to our social life and to the church’s public role. Drew’s work helped make our world more peaceful and less marred by conflict, more just and less distorted by oppression. His voice on issues of social ethics and on the role of Christianity in society was very important over the past decades. His contributions covered such an array of issues that it is impossible to mention more than a few of them. I hope my words will help each of us recall ways he made a real difference in the areas we are most concerned with.

My gratefulness in being asked to share my reflections is particularly deep because Drew and I were close friends as fellow Jesuits for over fifty years. I first came to know Drew when we began our studies of theology together at Woodstock College back in 1969. At Woodstock, Drew, I, and several other young Jesuits worked under the mentorship of the distinguished theologian Avery Dulles in an innovative program that explored the implications of the theology we were studying for social and political life. Thus it was not surprising that Drew decided to pursue further studies in social ethics. After our ordinations as Jesuit priests, we ended up together again at Yale University, where we both studied for the Ph.D. in religious ethics. Our shared desire to understand the practical and policy implications of our academic work came to

the fore in an article we published jointly as grad students that sought to clarify how the Catholic church could make a positive contribution the UN World Population Conference held in Bucharest in 1974.¹ Given the controversies concerning official Catholic teaching on birth control, this effort showed that Drew did not hesitate to become engaged in disputed issues. Drew's work at Yale also showed his strongly pastoral concern. His dissertation was on the deeply humanistic and pastoral concern of how we should care for the elderly in our society. He argued that the reigning US commitment to respect for autonomy as the central concern in ethics could limit our commitment to those whose autonomous freedom was diminished by aging.

Following his graduate studies Drew launched into work that took him to academic institutions such as the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University, the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, and the University of Notre Dame. In those settings he taught his students with great devotion and pursued creative research. He subsequently moved into important work outside academia at church agencies like United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, where he led the Office on International Justice and Peace, and to the Jesuit-sponsored journal *America*, where he was editor-in-chief from 2005 to 2012. Following his editorship at *America* he returned to Georgetown as Senior Fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs and as Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Human Development in the Walsh School of Foreign Service. His final contribution on peacemaking was written here at Georgetown, appearing just weeks before his death. This article shows the continuing importance of Drew's work for us today. It was titled "We have a moral duty to protect Ukrainian civilians—but that doesn't mean going to war with Russia."²

Christiansen's peacemaking work flowed both from deep intellectual interests and also from his ministry as a Catholic priest and Jesuit. His many contributions reflected the vision of

the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, which declared that "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts."³

The Council's affirmation that both human achievements and human struggles are central concerns of the Christian community was echoed in the Jesuit order's declaration at its 1975 32nd General Congregation that "The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement. For reconciliation with God demands the reconciliation of people with one another."⁴

These commitments by the Council and by the Jesuits led Drew to bring his theological and ethical expertise to bear on a broad range of social issues. For example, early in his work with the US Bishops he supervised the drafting of the bishops' pastoral letter on Catholic social teaching on the environment, "Renewing the Earth," and he co-edited with Walt Grazer a volume published by the Bishops Conference titled *And God Saw It Was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment*.⁵ Drew's love of the outdoors surely contributed to his work on environmental issues. His care for nature was evident from the fact that he often made his week-long Jesuit retreat camping with several fellow Jesuits in the mountains of California. Drew's work on the environment anticipated both the Jesuit 35th General Congregation's declaration that "reconciliation with creation" is a central goal of Jesuit ministry and Pope Francis' powerful call in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* to care of the earth as our common home.⁶

Another area of concern affirmed by the Council and central to Jesuit ministry that engaged Drew deeply was the need for reconciliation among diverse religious communities. The

Jesuit's 34th General congregation called Jesuits to help “develop a culture of dialogue in our approach to believers of other religions.”⁷ This call has been deepened in Pope Francis's recent insistence in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* that a “culture of encounter” is essential to the peace of the world today and to the justice between religious communities required for this peace.⁸

Drew's commitment to dialogue was powerfully evident in his work concerning the Middle East. For example, he participated in the Atlantic Council's Middle East Strategy Task Force on Religion, Identity, and Countering Violent Extremism, and he served on the Leadership Council of the ecumenical organization Churches for Middle East Peace. He knew well that Christians have been on the receiving end of violence in many locations in the Middle East, and that interreligious understanding is essential to justice and peace for Middle East Christians.

Perhaps the most important contribution of Drew Christiansen to peacebuilding has been his effort to rethink the ethics of war and peace from a theological perspective. Much of his recent work was devoted to rethinking the Catholic tradition's understanding of whether the promotion of justice might sometimes justify the use of armed force to defend innocent people from serious threats, or whether Christians are called to make a commitment to nonviolence.

There has been a very lively debate in recent years about whether the Catholic church should continue its commitment to the just war tradition or should take a firm stand for nonviolence. Some hold today that the non-participation of Christians in military activities in the earliest period of church history remains normative today. They argue that the legitimation of Christian participation in the military in the post-Constantinian era was a kind of cooptation by the ruling powers and a betrayal of the gospel. This leads them to endorse of nonviolence as the only legitimate Christian option. In this vein, a conference held in Rome under the sponsorship of the Catholic peace group Pax Christi argued that the just war tradition long held by

Catholicism should be replaced with a firm commitment to nonviolence. The conference's concluding document stated that "the time has come for our Church to be a living witness and to invest far greater human and financial resources in promoting a spirituality and practice of active nonviolence and in forming and training our Catholic communities in effective nonviolent practices. In all of this, Jesus is our inspiration and model." Indeed the conference went on: "We believe that there is no 'just war'. . . . Suggesting that a 'just war' is possible also undermines the moral imperative to develop tools and capacities for nonviolent transformation of conflict. We need a new framework that is consistent with Gospel nonviolence."⁹

Some recent papal teachings also suggest that the Catholic church is moving away from the just war tradition and deepening its commitment to nonviolence. Pope Francis is surely a strong advocate of nonviolence as the appropriate response to injustice and on a number of occasions he has questioned the adequacy of the way the just war tradition has been employed. Very recently, in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis declared that "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'."¹⁰ Francis echoed this stance in his conversation with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow concerning the war in Ukraine when he stated that "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."¹¹ Indeed in his 2017 World Day of Peace Message, titled *Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace*, Francis strongly endorsed nonviolence as the way to grapple with issues arising in international settings. In the Pope's words: "may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms."¹²

In these statements, Pope Francis is echoing statements of several of his recent predecessors. Pope John Paul II appeared to reject the legitimacy of the use of force shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq. He stated that the true path of peace “never passes through violence and always through dialogue. Everyone knows, and particularly those who come from the countries that hostilities are bathing in blood, that violence always spawns violence.” John Paul II declared that war “must always be considered a defeat: a defeat of reason and of humanity. Thus, may there soon be a spiritual and cultural impulse that will induce people to ban war.”¹³ Papal statements like these from Francis and John Paul II suggest the Catholic leadership is moving toward the adoption of a firm commitment to nonviolence and an abandonment of the classic just war tradition.

Such a move, if it is in fact occurring, has been rejected by a number of commentators both within and outside the Catholic community. For example, Mark Allman and Tobias Winright maintain that the statement resulting from the Pax Christi conference in Rome reads scripture, Catholic tradition and recent church teachings selectively, fails to give sufficient attention to cases where force is needed for legitimate defense, and draws a mistaken dichotomy between a commitment to nonviolence and the just war tradition’s recognition that force can regrettably sometimes be morally legitimate.¹⁴ In the same vein, James Turner Johnson has asked “Is the Catholic Church About To Abandon Its Just War Teaching?”¹⁵ His answer to this question clearly indicates that he thinks such an abandonment would be a serious mistake.

Despite Pope Francis’s strong suggestions that war can no longer be justified today, the Pope has indicated that his position is not absolute. Most tellingly, in a press conference during the flight returning from his recent trip to Kazakhstan, when Francis was asked whether Ukraine should be given weapons to defend itself, he replied affirmatively. In his words: “This is a

political decision, which can be moral — morally acceptable — if it is done according to the conditions of morality. . . . To defend oneself is not only lawful but also an expression of love of country.”¹⁶ It seems that when Francis speaks here of the “conditions of morality” he is referring to the norms of the just war tradition. Indeed, he went on in the press conference to suggest that we need to “think more about the concept of just war.”¹⁷ I take this to mean that we need to think more carefully about how to understand and apply the norms for legitimate use of force traditionally proposed by the just war tradition.

In Drew Christiansen’s judgment, and in mine as well, Francis is not calling for an abandonment of the just war tradition but rather calling us to recognize the immense destructiveness of war and to have a deep reluctance to resort to force. Francis is advocating an interpretation of the just war norms that is so stringent that many if not most of today’s conflicts cannot be justified and ought not to have been launched. But he is not rejecting the exceptional use of force when it is necessary to defend innocent people, as he implied is the case in Ukraine.

Thus Pope Francis’s teaching on the ethics of war is close to what was said by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in their 1993 Statement *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, which was issued on the tenth anniversary of their earlier pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*. This Statement is surely relevant to our remembrance of the work of Drew Christiansen, for in his role leading the bishops’ Office of International Justice and Peace, Drew played an important role in drafting the statement. Especially related to our considerations about peacemaking is the statement’s insistence that moral assessment of conflict should begin from a recognition of “the terrible human and moral costs of violence.” Such recognition leads the bishops to insist that standing up for human life wherever it is threatened is “the starting point for genuine peacemaking.”¹⁸

This recognition, as well as the bishops' attention to Jesus's call of Christians to be peacemakers, leads to strong support for non-violence in a Christian ethic.¹⁹ Indeed it leads both the US bishops and Pope Francis to suggest that commitment to nonviolence should be where Christians begin when they seek to defend innocent people against grave injustice. As the bishops put it, likely with Drew Christiansen's help,

- In situations of conflict, our constant commitment ought to be, as far as possible, to strive for justice through non-violent means.
- But, when sustained attempts at nonviolent action fail to protect the innocent against fundamental injustice, then legitimate political authorities are permitted as a last resort to employ limited force to rescue the innocent and establish justice.²⁰

Thus the US bishops and Pope Francis both see nonviolence as central to a Christian approach to international affairs. However, the U.S. bishops also recognize that the world is marred by sinfulness that leads to conflict. Therefore the strictly limited use of force may sometimes be necessary if it is for a just cause, carried out with a right intention, by proportionate means, with probability of success, and as a last resort. One can read Pope Francis's treatment of war in a similar way. Only when nonviolent means of achieving justice have been exhausted does Pope Francis permit overriding the "presumption against force" in seeking a peace that protects human dignity and human rights, as he has suggested is the case in Ukraine.²¹

Some recent authors, such as James Turner Johnson, have argued that the recent stress on nonviolent approaches to injustice in papal and episcopal teaching is an abandonment the just war tradition.²² Johnson holds that the Catholic tradition makes a presumption in favor of the protection of justice, even by the use of force, rather than a presumption in favor of nonviolence. I think,

however, that Johnson's argument is incorrect. St. Thomas Aquinas develops his treatment of the ethics of peace and war in response to the question of "whether it is always a sin to fight in war?" (in Latin: "*utrum bellare semper sit peccatum?*")²³ To ask if war is always sinful is surely to presuppose that war is to be avoided if at all possible. Indeed Johnson himself recognized this in an article he wrote back 1979. There Johnson said that Aquinas's original just war question suggests "the somewhat startling discovery that pacifist and non-pacifist just war Christians have something profoundly in common: a searching distrust of violence."²⁴ Regrettably, Johnson seems to have forgotten this earlier view on the relation between nonviolence and just war ethics.

Drew Christiansen himself certainly held that nonviolence and the just war ethic have a complementary relationship. Indeed he argued that a commitment to nonviolence strengthens the impact of the just war norms in several ways. First, the presupposition for a nonviolent response to injustice strengthens the rigor with which the just war norm of "last resort" should be applied. Second, a presupposition in support of nonviolence was evident when the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty first articulated the doctrine of the "responsibility to protect." The Commission's "precautionary principles" stress that force should be used resist crimes against humanity and genocide only after diplomacy and other non-military means have been exhausted. Finally, Christiansen stressed that commitment to nonviolence should strengthen "post bellum" peacebuilding in the aftermath of conflict, including efforts to bring about reconciliation through reconstruction and even forgiveness.²⁵ Christiansen's reflections thus show that the commitment to nonviolence has much to contribute to the actual political situation and should not be seen as "unrealistic."

The same can be said of Christiansen's strong support of Pope Francis's recent insistence that not only is the use of nuclear weapons morally unacceptable but their very possession must be

morally rejected as well.²⁶ He worked closely with the Holy See on matters of nuclear disarmament, leading to two recent books that he co-edited.²⁷ He served as an expert advisor to the delegation of the Holy See that participated in negotiating the UN's 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. He has also worked with the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and with distinguish foreign policy leaders who are working to abolish nuclear weapons.

Pope Francis's teaching that the very possession of nuclear weapons is morally unacceptable raises the question of whether the Pope means that nuclear armed nations must disarm from these weapons immediately, even unilaterally, independent of the political and military consequences of such a step. This was the position advocated twenty-five years ago by John Finnis, Joseph Boyle, and Germain Grisez, even if the consequences were to be a nuclear attack on the West that could lead to the end of Western civilization as we know it.²⁸ Christiansen argues that Pope Francis does not draw this sort of conclusion. In Christiansen's view, the position of Finnis et al. results from an older, legalistic model of moral theology which Pope Francis has replaced with "a less narrow, non-apodictic style of moral deliberation" that is built on discernment of which alternative courses of action are likely to lead to better outcomes.²⁹

In my view and I believe in Christiansen's as well, the Pope's stance rejecting the very possession of nuclear weapons seeks to strengthen the judgment that continuing possession of nuclear weapons, including for deterrence, runs an unacceptable risk of bringing serious harm to humanity and is thus morally unacceptable. But the Pope's stand also recognizes that we need to discern prudent ways to move effectively to the abolition of these weapons. This calls us to recognize that the nuclear threat, like the danger of war more generally, is embedded in the larger social system that shapes the likelihood of conflict. The abolition of nuclear weapons thus calls for a range of social and political steps that will lead nations to become less convinced that they need

these weapons for self-defense. The abolition of nuclear arms is therefore closely linked with broader forms of social transformation that are needed for peacebuilding. This linkage has been called “integral disarmament” by both Pope John XXIII and Pope Francis. Gerard Powers has argued that this approach “assumes that the long-term goal of abolishing nuclear weapons has to be part of a much larger cosmopolitan project of developing a global ethic of peace and solidarity that can ground a system of cooperative security.”³⁰

Such an approach to nuclear disarmament calls for a broad range of steps that one hopes will lead to the gradual transformation of the social, economic and political conditions of our world. Nuclear disarmament, like peacemaking in its full range, is a multidimensional challenge. It calls for initiatives that both reduce the danger of war and that move societies to the greater justice needed to enhance the prospects for peace.

Undertaking the steps needed to build the peace will require a considerable amount of hope. Drew Christiansen always brought hope to his work, so we can learn from him on this matter as well. Drew’s hope was not a simple optimism. It was deeply rooted in his faith as a Christian. As he wrote in an essay on Jewish/Christian relations, to address the challenge of peace in our time, we need more than adequate ethics. Even more importantly, we need to grow in our living relation to God and to the “depths of divine compassion.”³¹ I am sure that Drew’s appreciation of that divine compassion kept his hope for peacebuilding alive.

Notes.

¹ See David Hollenbach, Drew Christiansen, Ronald Garet and Charles Powers "Moral Claims, Human Rights and Population Policies." *Theological Studies* 35 (1974): 83-113.

² Drew Christiansen, "We have a moral duty to protect Ukrainian civilians—but that doesn't mean going to war with Russia," *America*, March 08, 2022, online at: <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2022/03/08/r2p-responsibility-protect-nato-ukraine-242537>

³ Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1., Online at: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

⁴ Jesuit General Congregation 32 (1975), Decree 4: "Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice," no. 2, online at: https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1975_decree4gc32/

⁵ Drew Christiansen and Walt Grazer, eds. *And God Saw It Was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment*. Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1996.

⁶ See Society of Jesus, General Congregation 35 (2008), Decree 3: "Challenges to Our Mission Today," section title at no. 31, online at: https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/2008_decree3gc35/, and Pope Francis, encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, online at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html .

⁷ Society of Jesus, General Congregation 34 (1995), Decree 5: "Our Mission and Interreligious Dialogue," no. 17, online at: https://jesuitportal.bc.edu/research/documents/1995_decree5gc34/.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Encyclical issued Oct. 3, 2020, nos. 30, 215, 216, 217, and 232. Online at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html

⁹ Pax Christi International, "An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Re-Commit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence," released at the end of the *Nonviolence and Just Peace conference in Rome*, April 11-13, 2016, Rome. Online at: <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/2016/05/17/an-appeal-to-the-catholic-church-to-re-commit-to-the-centrality-of-gospel-nonviolence/>

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no. 258.

¹¹ See Richard Ostling, “Pope Francis Tells Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, ‘Wars Are Always Unjust,’” *Religion Unplugged*, March 29, 2022, online at <https://religionunplugged.com/news/2022/3/28/no-longer-a-ukraine-news-sidebar-pope-francis-asks-if-combat-can-ever-be-moral>.

¹² Pope Francis, Message for the Celebration of the Fiftieth World Day of Peace, *Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace*, no. 1. Online at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20161208_messaggio-1-giornata-mondiale-pace-2017.html

¹³ John Paul II, Letter to Cardinal Kasper On the Occasion of the 18th International Meeting of “Peoples and Religions,” Sept. 3, 2004, no. 4, online at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_20040903_card-kasper_en.html

¹⁴ Mark J. Allman ad Tobias Winright, “Protect Thy Neighbor,” *Commonweal* 143.11 (Jun 17, 2016): 7-9, online at: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/protect-thy-neighbor>

¹⁵ James Turner Johnson, “Is the Catholic Church About To Abandon Its Just War Teaching?” *Providence*, April 26, 2016.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, Press Conference on Return Flight to Rome from Visit to Kazakhstan, September 15, 2022, online at: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/september/documents/20220915-kazakhstan-voloritorno.html>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1993), 3.

¹⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, 11.

²⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, 10.

²¹ See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Harvest of Justice is Sown in Peace*, 12.

²² See, for example, James Turner Johnson, “Just War, as It Was and Is,” *First Things*, January, 2005, online at: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2005/01/just-war-as-it-was-and-is>

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 40, art. 1.

²⁴ James Turner Johnson, “On Keeping Faith: The Use of History for Religious Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7, 1 (Spring, 1979): 113.

²⁵ For Christiansen’s treatment of these matters, see his, “Just War in the Twenty-First Century: Nonviolence, Post Bellum Justice, and R2P,” *Expositions: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 12, no. 1 (May 17, 2018), online at: <https://expositions.journals.villanova.edu/article/view/2319>

²⁶ See Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the International Symposium “Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament,” Rome, 10 November 2017, online at:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/november/documents/papa-francesco_20171110_convegno-disarmointegrale.html, and “Address at the Peace Memorial in Hiroshima,” Hiroshima, Japan, November 24, 2019, online at:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20191124_messaggio-incontropace-hiroshima.html

²⁷ Drew Christiansen and Carole Sargent, eds., *A World Free from Nuclear Weapons: The Vatican Conference on Disarmament* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020); Drew Christiansen and Carole Sargent, eds., *Forbidden: Receiving Pope Francis's Condemnation of Nuclear Weapons* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, forthcoming, 2023).

²⁸ See their *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality, and Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. chap. XII.

²⁹ Christiansen, “Introduction,” in Christiansen and Sargent, eds., *A World Free from Nuclear Weapons*, p. xvii.

³⁰ Gerard Powers, “Papal Condemnation of Nuclear Deterrence and What Is Next,” *Arms Control Today*, May 2018, online at: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2018-05/features/papal-condemnation-nuclear-deterrence-what-next>

³¹ Christiansen, “Jacob and Esau Embrace: An Orthodox Rabbinic Declaration on Christianity, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, English edition, May 26, 2021, online at: <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/jacob-and-esau-embrace-an-orthodox-rabbinic-declaration-on-christianity/>