

The possibility of Christian Satyagraha

A Comparison between Gandhian Non-violence and Contemporary Christian Peace Ethics

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Violence is never a proper response.
Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity.
Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings.
The contemporary world too needs the witness of unarmed prophets.

(The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 496)

INTRODUCTION

With this little paper I actually have three aims. First of all it is meant as a general discussion and analysis of the Christian peace ethics as the magisterium has published it in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (hereafter simply referred to as 'the compendium').¹ I am convinced the reader will find my approach to this quite straightforward as I simply take several subjects or themes that are present in the compendium and elaborate a bit on them one at a time. For clarity's sake I have divided the concepts I discuss into two sets. The first set are those that form what could be called the 'spiritual fundamentals' of the peace ethics in the compendium. The second set is about the 'concrete expressions' the magisterium proposes. The latter therefore discusses things like conscientious objection, just war and disarmament, while the former is centred around peace, justice, *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*.

These last two concepts bring me to my second aim, which is to assess the compendium from an explicitly Gandhian perspective. I therefore use Gandhian thinking and spirituality to evaluate the ethics the magisterium puts forward. As the reader will notice, this is far from absurd, for although the Gandhian themes of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* are of course never explicitly mentioned in the compendium, the ideas and spirituality behind them can be found throughout the different passages that will be discussed.

That is why I can perhaps also succeed in my third aim, which is to propose the possibility of *Christian satyagraha*. This might perhaps be considered as my main goal, as this paper then becomes somewhat of an extension to my thesis.² Although this paper can easily be read on its own, I thus hope to enlarge the work I have started with my thesis and will hereby offer some sort of 'prequel' where I try to show the theological possibility of this ethical mixture between Gandhi and Christ and where I explain some of the basic aspects of *Christian satyagraha*.

Combining these three aims a fourth aspect pops up quite naturally, for once the possibility of *Christian satyagraha* is determined, this theological concept inevitably brings up a constructive criticism on the compendium that leads to an effort to go beyond it. Why and how exactly can be read in the third and concluding part of this paper.

But whatever the conclusions, please keep in mind that the questions once again form the backbone of this paper: What could it mean for us, when we take *Christian satyagraha* as a starting point for our peace ethics? Would it change our thoughts? Would it change our deeds? And the most important question is of course: would it offer a possibility to evolve and grow closer to God?

1 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria editrice vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 2004.

Any subsequent reference to the Compendium will state the number of the paragraph and not the specific page.
2 My thesis focusses more on one possible concrete expression of *Christian satyagraha*, namely fasting, and thus does not go into the theoretical matters discussed in this paper.

1. THE SPIRITUAL FUNDAMENTS

1.1 PEACE

In biographies, web articles and ethical literature, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is often called 'the apostle of peace'. Perhaps unknowingly most people thus give the Mahatma the credit he deserves for he can indeed be considered as a true 'apostle' when we keep in mind that the word apostle is used to denote a follower of Christ. It might seem inappropriate to attach such a description to a Hindu, but it actually is not. First of all it is a known fact that Gandhi had an enormous reverence for Christ, and secondly, not only did he think of himself as a follower of Jesus' life and teachings, but his never ending advocacy for peace made him quite an excellent one because according to the compendium

peace, in fact, is the messianic attribute *par excellence*, in which all other beneficial effects of salvation are included.³

That the magisterium holds peace in such high regard should not wonder as they rightfully remark that it was Jesus himself who, on the eve of his death spoke

of his loving relation with the Father and the unifying power that this love bestows upon his disciples. It is a farewell discourse which reveals the profound meaning of his life and can be considered a summary of all his teaching. The gift of peace is the seal on his spiritual testament: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (*Jn* 14:27). The words of the Risen Lord will not be any different; every time that he meets his disciples they receive from him the greeting and gift of peace: "Peace be with you" (*Lk* 24:36; *Jn* 20:19,21,26).⁴

Hence even Christians should acknowledge that Tagore was not stepping out of bounds when saying that Gandhi, who made an effort to bring peace wherever he went, had a "Christ spirit". It certainly would not do any harm if we questioned the peacefulness of our own dealings from time to time and wondered how strong our own "Christ Spirit" actually is. As Christians, we are obliged to think about the peace in our own hearts and the effort we put in creating more peace around us because peace is not just a nice word in Christian faith, it is not just something Christians should pray for, but it is in fact something true Christians should continuously strive for, considering it

a value and a universal duty founded on a rational and moral order of society that has its roots in God himself, "the first source of being, the essential truth and the supreme good".⁵

When the compendium offers us such words and thoughts, it becomes very easy to show the conformity with Gandhi's views, as he, a firm believer of the fact that God is the source of our being once literally stated:

I gather that God is life, truth, light. He is love. He is the supreme Good.⁶

3 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 491.

4 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 491.

5 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 494.

6 M. K. GANDHI, *God Is (11.10.1928)*, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Government of India, vol. 43, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, <http://www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/cwmg.html>, s.d., p. 96. (All following references to the Collected Works will be abbreviated with 'CWMG'. The Title of the document written by Gandhi will be mentioned with the date between brackets. Volume nr. of the CWMG as well as page nr. of the concerned volume will also be given. Let the reader also note that this series is a more recent and revised version than the more widely known series printed between the 60's and 90's. The revised CWMG used here as a reference can easily be consulted on the web address mentioned above and in the bibliography.)

1.2 AHIMSA

Ahimsa derives from the Sanskrit and literally means 'not harming'. *Ahimsa*, strictly speaking then, is avoiding injury to any sentient creature through act or thought. It is a principle of basic importance for Indian religions, especially for Jains and Buddhists and is normally translated as 'non-violence'. But Gandhi broadened the meaning of the word so that

ahimsa did not merely mean a negative state of non-violence and non-hurting, it meant a positive state of dynamic love of doing good to the evil doer. But it does not mean helping the wrong doer to continue to be oppressive. "On the contrary love, the active state of *ahimsa*, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend or injure him physically." This attitude of *ahimsa* may be compared to the practice of Christian love. Just as love of the neighbour is motivated by the Love of God, so also, *ahimsa*, a positive state of love for the neighbour (even the oppressor), is motivated by the conviction of achieving Truth as its end. For Gandhi, *ahimsa* is the supreme duty of man.⁷

Again the compendium does not state anything different, as according to the magisterium too,

Love (...) must be reconsidered (...) as the *highest and universal criterion of the whole of social ethics*. Among all paths even those sought and taken in order to respond to the ever new forms of current *social questions*, the "more excellent way" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:31) is that *marked out by love*.⁸

The very reason why Love is so central to ethics of peace is based on two very gentle principles, inspired by strong faith. First, where there is conflict, change will be needed to attain harmony and peace. Second, the only thing really capable of changing a situation that has got stuck because of hate, envy, anger, violence, oppression, and so on, is love. All other 'structural' changes will only be at the surface, and thus will only remove the symptoms. Unless the deeper relational and existential causes are removed, the problem will never really be gone, and to remove these causes, one needs love. That is the basic assumption.

Men and women who are made "new" by the love of God are able to change the rules and the quality of relationships, transforming even social structures. They are people capable of bringing peace where there is conflict, of building and nurturing fraternal relationships where there is hatred, of seeking justice where there prevails the exploitation of man by man. Only love is capable of radically transforming the relationships that men maintain among themselves.⁹

Again, this is exactly what Gandhi meant time and again. To quote only one example:

God is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it.¹⁰

1.3 JUSTICE

A comprehensible example of how love can transform certain conflicts into a renewed possibility for peace can be found in the the movie "Gandhi" by Richard Attenborough. The event this scene pictures, to my knowledge, never really occurred (and I must admit having searched for its historical basis quite a bit), but in a way it summarizes in a very focused and insightful way, the depths of Gandhian thinking and the transcending power of *ahimsa*, just as Gandhi wanted to show it to the world. So even if it is a romanticized movie scene, it certainly conveys the "Gandhi Spirit" in a genuine way.

[It is the time of the riots in Calcutta at the end of Gandhi's life. He is fasting for some time now,

7 M. ETUKURI, *Towards an Indian Christology of Liberation. A Critical Analysis of Jon Sobrino in a Gandhian perspective*, (unpublished doctoral dissertation in Theology, K.U.Leuven), Leuven, 1991, p. 106-107

8 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 204.

9 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 4.

10 M. K. GANDHI, *God Is (11.10.1928)*, in *CWMG*, vol. 43, p. 96.

to calm down the masses and to make the leaders of the fighting gangs stop their violence. Suddenly a man called Nahari enters and says:]

“Eat.”

Mirabehn and Azad start to move toward him – the man looks immensely strong and immensely unstable. But Gandhi holds up a shaking hand, stopping them. Nahari's face is knotted in emotion, half anger, half almost a child's fear – but there is a wild menace in that instability.

Nahari: “Eat! I am going to hell – but not with your death on my soul.”

Gandhi: “Only God decides who goes to hell ...”

Nahari (stiffening, aggressive): “I – I killed a child ...” and continues with an anguished defiance: “I smashed his head against a wall.”

Gandhi stares at him, breathless, and answers in a fearful whisper: “Why? Why?” It is as though the man has told him of some terrible self-inflicted wound.

Nahari, in tears now, answers with wrath: “They killed my son – my boy!”

Almost reflexively he holds his hand out to indicate the height of his son. He glares at Suhrawardy and then back at Gandhi. “The Muslims killed my son ... they killed him.” He is sobbing, but in his anger it seems almost as though he means to kill Gandhi in retaliation. A long moment, as Gandhi meets his pain and wrath.

Then Gandhi replies: “I know a way out of hell.”

Nahari sneers, but there is just a flicker of desperate curiosity.

Gandhi: “Find a child – a child whose mother and father have been killed. A little boy – about this high.” He raises his hand to the height Nahari has indicated as his son's and goes on to say: “...and raise him – as your own.”

Nahari has listened. His face almost cracks – it is a chink of light, but it does not illumine his darkness.

But Gandhi continues: “Only be sure ... that he is a Muslim. And that you raise him as one.”

Nahari's face stiffens, he swallows, fighting any show of emotion; then he turns to go. But he takes only a step and he turns back, going to his knees, the sobs breaking again and again from his heaving body as he holds his head to Gandhi's feet in the traditional greeting of Hindu son to Hindu father. A second, and Gandhi reaches out and touches the top of his head. Mirabehn watches. The Goondas watch. Suhrawardy watches. Finally Gandhi says (gently but exhaustedly): “Go – go. God bless you...”¹¹

The movie does not tell us whether the man really did raise a Muslim child as his own, but that is of no consequence here. The point is that certain conflicts can be solved and healed only when there is a willingness to step out of the boundaries of normal logical and reciprocal thinking. It is a beautiful example of how reasoning out of love can break the self-sustaining circle of violence. But it's a very hard teaching as well, as it expects the person to transcend his own fear, hate and anger, it expects a willingness to be changed by love. Quite heroic and inspiring in a movie, but it seems nearly impossible to do in real life. Nonetheless, this example of *ahimsa* is again in great conformity with Christian ethics, as the magisterium too is convinced that

true peace is made possible only through forgiveness and reconciliation. It is not easy to forgive when faced with the consequences of war and conflict because violence, especially when it leads to the very depths of inhumanity and suffering [and when it] leaves behind a heavy burden of pain. (...) The weight of the past, which cannot be forgotten, can be accepted only when mutual forgiveness is offered and received; this is a long and difficult process, but one that is not impossible.¹²

True reconciliation might always seem very difficult, but it is never impossible. Non-violence in times of conflict might sometimes look like complete absurdity, but it is never exhausted. Even more so, it is the only *real* solution, as everything else won't remedy the cause of the conflict that resides in the heart of the persons involved. *Ahimsa*, as Gandhi conceived it, might thus be very difficult to attain, but the compendium as well believes it is the only truthful option because

11 BRILEY J., *Gandhi. The Screenplay*; <http://n.1asphost.com/cinemaobsession/read/Gandhi.html> (access 25/01/06). I slightly altered the text to augment the readability of the screenplay.

12 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 517.

Love presupposes and transcends justice. (...) If justice is in itself suitable for 'arbitration' between people concerning the reciprocal distribution of objective goods in an equitable manner, love and only love (including that kindly love that we call 'mercy') is capable of restoring man to himself. *Merciful love* is so much the essence of the Gospel and Christianity.¹³

Therefore, according to Christian ethics it is love that can make people transcend the mere reciprocity of 'an eye for an eye'. This could remind us once again of the movie 'Gandhi' where at a certain moment is said: "an eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world go blind." This metaphorical wisdom seems to be one the Church is very willing to subscribe, and as such the compendium often repeats in different words that "Human relationships cannot be governed solely according to the measure of justice."¹⁴ It needs (merciful) love, forgiveness and charity as well. Love above all is what should form our relationships – also in times of conflict – as it is also the basic constituent of our relationship with God.

1.4 SATYAGRAHA

In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm of all activity.¹⁵

The word activity inevitably brings us to *satyagraha*, for *satyagraha* could be seen as 'acted out *ahimsa*'. *Satyagraha* is a term invented by Gandhi and his fellows at the start of their struggle in South Africa. Gandhi very often used the expression 'soul-force' to describe it. Thus, it means the permanent insistence on the laws of God as they are considered to be the essence of our very being. If *satyagraha* is used in political struggle it becomes a method which necessarily implies non-violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness and honesty (*sat*) and willingness to sacrifice yourself (*tapasya*). This means that a *satyagrahi* is supposed to be firm and resolute in what is good, non-violent and truthful, even up to the point where such insistence would cause suffering to the *satyagrahi* him- or herself. That is why *satyagraha* literally means '*holding on to truth*'.

A concept of 'holding on to truth' is of course only conceivable when truth is not considered as a mere rational and intellectual idea. To Gandhi, truth was something to be lived. Just like justice, as we just saw, is not about reciprocal measures, truth is not about being 'right' or 'wrong' in an intellectual sense but needs to be infused and transcended by love.

When derived out of love, truth becomes a matter of fundamental openness to God, the world and people. *Satyagraha* then is an effort of people to retain that fundamental openness and love in times of conflict and distress, it is an effort to uphold *ahimsa* always. The same line of thinking is expressed in the compendium:

"Peace itself, is an *act* and results only from love."¹⁶

When peace becomes an act that results from love, *ahimsa* becomes *satyagraha*, because *satyagraha* means to hold on to those principles that we know to be in accordance with God's will in all of our actions. Thus, instead of just offering some new 'orientalised' Christian philosophy, *satyagraha* could (or should) inspire Christians to

denunciation, proposals and a commitment to cultural and social projects; it prompts positive activity that inspires all who sincerely have the good of man at heart and make their contribution.¹⁷

13 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 206.

14 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 582.

15 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 582.

16 PIUS XI, *Encyclical Letter Ubi Arcano: AAS* 14 (1922), 686 quoted in PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 494. Emphasis added.

17 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 6.

Hence we can even conclude that *satyagraha* for Christians is not just a *possibility*, but, like *ahimsa* more of a *duty*. And not only because Gandhi thought of it that way, but also because the magisterium quite literally tells this to Christians by writing in the compendium that

*men and women have the specific duty to move always towards the truth, to respect it and bear responsible witness to it. Living in the truth has special significance in social relationships. In fact, when the coexistence of human beings within a community is founded in truth, it is ordered and fruitful, and it corresponds to their dignity as persons. The more people and social groups strive to resolve social problems according to truth, the more they distance themselves from abuses and act in accordance with the objective demands of morality.*¹⁸

'A community founded in truth' is exactly what *satyagrahis* envisage. Gandhi would have phrased it in no other way. This means that 'holding on to truth' is an imperative for Christians as well.

Keeping in mind that *satyagraha* is about putting *ahimsa* into action, thus Christians have the *obligation* to act in times of conflict in favour of a more peaceful world. Christians should not just sit back and relax, while a whole lot of conflicts on every level of society are still going on, they should find novel ways to help, serve and love. In itself, this is nothing new because it actually only implies once again that we should bring the message of the gospel to the world not only with words, but also with deeds. Only thus will we attain what we are striving for. As the compendium states:

Evangelizing the social sector then, means infusing into the human heart the power of meaning and freedom found in the Gospel, in order to promote a society befitting mankind because it befits Christ: it means building a city of man that is more human because it is in greater conformity with the Kingdom of God.¹⁹

Or in the words of Gandhi

When the practice of *ahimsa* becomes universal, God will reign on earth as He does in heaven.²⁰

¹⁸ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 198.

¹⁹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 36.

²⁰ MERTON, T. (ed.), *Gandhi on non-violence* (Shambhala Pocket Classics), Shambhala, Boston & London, 1996, p.73

2. THE CONCRETE EXPRESSION

2.1 CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

The question could be asked of course, what exactly 'actions of *ahimsa*' could be. What specific form could *satyagraha* take in this day and age. In the compendium one possibility that is offered is conscientious objection, as it is stated that

citizens are not obligated in conscience to follow the prescriptions of civil authorities if their precepts are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or to the teachings of the Gospel. Unjust laws pose dramatic problems of conscience for morally upright people: when they are called to cooperate in morally evil acts they must refuse. Besides being a moral duty, such refusal is also a basic human right which, precisely as such, civil law itself is obliged to recognize and protect.²¹

We can note two things. First of all, the magisterium allows conscientious objection as a morally just option, thus opening a possibility for those Christians that want to uphold *ahimsa* always. And secondly the magisterium considers it

*a grave duty of conscience not to cooperate, not even formally, in practices which, although permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to the Law of God.*²²

It seems almost a definition of *satyagraha*. It obliges not to engage in clearly immoral acts that defy the laws of love and truth. This of course bears the consequence that

No one can escape the moral responsibility for actions taken, and all will be judged by God himself based on this responsibility. (cf. *Rom* 2:6, 14:12)²³

In § 503 this principle is specifically adapted to people in the army and thus they as well remain

fully responsible for the acts they commit in violation of the rights of individuals and peoples, or of the norms of international humanitarian law. Such acts cannot be justified by claiming obedience to the orders of superiors.²⁴

The compendium even obliges legislation to take such matters into account and make humane provisions whereby conscientious objectors are given the possibility to participate in alternative forms of service. Thus every Christian must decide individually where the line should be drawn and when an act of *satyagraha* is called for. According to the compendium then, non-violent resistance should always be an option that the individual can take. This certainly does not contradict Gandhi's point of view.²⁵

We could almost conclude here and see the stance of the compendium on this matter as a fine example of *Christian satyagraha* but some strange twist of wording and thinking must draw our attention because in § 400 we can read:

Recognizing that natural law is the basis for and places limits on positive law means admitting that it is legitimate to resist authority should it violate in a serious or repeated manner the essential principles of natural law. Saint Thomas Aquinas writes that "one is obliged to obey ... insofar as it is required by the order of justice." Natural law is therefore the basis of the right to

21 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 399.

22 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 399.

23 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 399.

24 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 503.

25 A discussion about Gandhi's subtle change of view about alternative forms of service between his time in Africa (where he volunteered in the ambulance corps during the Zulu wars for example) and his later life in India (during the second world war where he refused cooperation until independence would be granted) would only lead us too far. It should suffice to remark that concerning this subject only this small aspect (i.e. the obligation to do alternative service) could perhaps be a point of discussion between Gandhian thinking and the ideas put forward in the compendium.

resistance.²⁶

All of the sudden 'natural law' and the 'order of justice' become the basic axioms in the reasoning. This is all too strange, as the spiritual basis of the peace ethics of the compendium – as was shown above – is completely centred around love and the transcendence of justice through it. Not natural law but God should be the basis according to the spiritual fundamentals. Even when one takes the stance that God instigated natural law, still they are not the same, and above all does the concept of natural law lack the mercy and humanity that is inherent in the peace-theology the compendium supports in other parts.

Quite unexpectedly therefore the nice and deep spirituality that we came across is left behind and out of the blue some older scholastic reasoning is brought in. If it were only one paragraph where this happened, it could be considered an anomaly in the compendium, but sadly enough this 'change of hearth' happens more when other views on different topics have to be defended. There is of course nothing wrong with introducing a new approach to the same idea, but such a new approach should not conflict with previous concepts and maintain overall consistency in the compendium. What do ethics of peace, love, *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* matter when they can suddenly be 'overruled' without much argument? As the reader will see, this is exactly what happens in the discussion about warfare.

2.2 JUST WAR

When one reads “natural law is therefore the basis of the right to resistance”²⁷, it is only normal to expect that the next step will be to support a theory about war based on the very known act of double effect, as proposed by Saint Thomas Aquinas. This step is exactly the one the compendium takes. The peace ethics thus change from peace into war ethics because the magisterium acknowledges that there can be situations where the ultimate option to save completely inhuman situations from deteriorating any further would be to resort to violence. Still recognizing the intrinsic immorality of an aggressive war, they must admit that

in the tragic case where such a war breaks out, leaders of the State that has been attacked have the right and the duty to organize a defence even using the force of arms.²⁸

So, after all, violence is allowed in certain cases – and thus the obligation to adhere to *ahimsa* ceases to be absolute. But of course, according to the compendium, there must be some good reasons to give up *ahimsa*. “To be licit, the use of force must correspond to certain strict conditions.”²⁹ The conditions that the compendium gives on two occasions (§ 401 & § 500) can be summarised as follows: 1) there is certain, grave and prolonged violation of fundamental rights, 2) all other means of redress have been shown to be impractical or ineffective 3) such resistance will not provoke worse disorders (thus raising serious doubts in case of the use of some modern means of destruction – like, for example, the atomic bomb), 4) there is well-founded hope of success and 5) it is impossible to reasonably foresee any better solution.

These are of course “the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the 'just war' doctrine”.³⁰ And as some sort of summary the compendium also states:

In every case, exercising the right to self-defence must respect the traditional limits of necessity and proportionality.³¹

But however limited the compendium tries to make the use of violence, it inevitably gets caught in a contradiction with its own spiritual basis. Whether just or not, a war is violent and thus the

26 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 400.

27 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 400.

28 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 500.

29 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 500.

30 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 500.

31 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 501.

basic focus of *ahimsa* must be left behind. Whether an act of double effect or not, harming can not easily be seen as an act of love. Isn't a war for peace a bit like having sex for celibacy or like telling lies to reach the truth?

So when the compendium takes the stance of the possibility of a just war, an internal conflict in its ethical construct clouds the Christian love and *ahimsa* that is supposed to back it up, for how can war ever be accepted by the magisterium when it is also convinced that

violence is *never* a proper response [and that] “violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings.”³²

Such expressions categorically deny the use of violence, while just war thinking obviously does not, and even has to acknowledge the logical consequence that “the requirements of legitimate defence justify the existence in states of armed forces, the activity of which should be at the service of peace.”³³ It becomes very difficult then to practice *satyagraha* when things are allowed that “go against the truth of our faith”.

The magisterium thus gets stuck in its own premises, for the quote above is not the only one of its kind. In the compendium it also condemns

“the savagery of war” and asks that war be considered in a new way. In fact, “it is hardly possible to imagine that in an atomic era, war could be used as an instrument of justice”.³⁴

So what is a reader of the compendium supposed to think of concepts like 'legitimate defence' and 'armed forces at the service of peace' when at the same time it makes clear that

War is a “scourge” and is never an appropriate way to resolve problems that arise between nations, *it has never been and it will never be*, because it creates new and still more complicated conflicts. (...) “Nothing is lost by peace; everything may be lost by war” The damage caused by an armed conflict is not only material but also moral.³⁵

The moral damage is of course what Gandhi too was so opposed against. For him “the essence of religion is morality”³⁶, and thus the loss of morality meant the loss of religion, the loss of religion meant the loss of God and the loss of God meant the loss of the very fundament of our being. That is exactly why, whenever one of his *satyagraha* campaigns resulted in violence, he immediately called the whole thing off, even though at certain moments such violent retaliation might have won them independence a whole lot earlier. Gandhi simply refused to go on when there was violence because he'd rather have no independence than an independent India built on *himsa*. His search was Truth (God), not material gain – and thus the gain of land nor wealth could convince him, only augmented *ahimsa* and love could prove to him that the Indian people were ready for independence.

One difference between Gandhi and the compendium thus seems to be that he stayed true to the basic principles until the very end.³⁷ The compendium seems incapable to do so, even in its own theory. That can lead us to two conclusions: Perhaps the faithful words and *satyagrahic* focus on love and *ahimsa* that we encountered in the spiritual fundament of the peace ethics of the compendium are not to be taken too 'radically' or 'seriously'. Those faithful expressions must then be moderated, symbolized or made more realistic. But, let us not try to hide from it and

32 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 496, quoting JOHN PAUL II, *Address at Drogheda*, Ireland (29 september 1979), 9: AAS 71 (1979), 1081.

33 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 502.

34 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 497 quoting the SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, 77: AAS 58 (1966), 1100 and JOHN XXIII, *Encyclical Letter Pacem in Terris*: AAS 55 (1963), 291.

35 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 497 quoting Pius XII, *Radio Message* (24 august 1939): AAS 31 (1939) 334

36 M. K. GANDHI, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. (29.11.1925), in *CWMG*, vol. 44, p. 90.

37 Of course a series of eight articles, titled “*Is this humanity?*”, that Gandhi once wrote, could according to some prove him to be a just war thinker as well. But this is discussed in part 3 of this paper.

admit that if this is so, then, what we discussed before was nothing but a bunch of hollow phrases that are easy to say because they sound nice, but that are not to be believed too much. The other option is that the compendium very honestly conveys the spiritual convictions of the magisterium and thus that they truthfully believe in the transforming power of love and the duty of *ahimsa*. But if this is so, then a simple just war thinking like the one proposed is completely out of its place.

2.3 DISARMAMENT

The same contradictory and problematic reasoning can be found in the compendium when it discusses the problem of disarmament, for without much hesitation it states:

Any excessive stockpiling or indiscriminate trading in arms cannot be morally justified. Such phenomena must also be evaluated in light of international norms regarding the non-proliferation, production, trade and use of different types of arms. Arms can never be treated like other goods exchanged on international or domestic markets.³⁸

Mark the word “excessive” in the first sentence. Isn't it rather slippery? Does this not mean that 'normal' (but not excessive) stockpiling of weapons *is* morally allowed? For a peace ethics that is based on *ahimsa* this is quite contrary to basic Christian intuition that “all who draw the sword will die by the sword” (Mt. 26:57). And not only such a scriptural passage can be quoted, for the Compendium also expresses a very sane intuition where it says

The *arms race* does not ensure peace. Far from eliminating the causes of war it risks aggravating them.³⁹

Nonetheless, the magisterium goes on to say that

Policies of nuclear deterrence, typical of the Cold War period, must be replaced with concrete measures of disarmament based on dialogue and multilateral negotiations.⁴⁰

This might seem in accordance with the idea that the arms race does not ensure peace, and thus should come to an end, but one can wonder: is negotiation still in order? Should true Christians not simply break through such a status quo and give up weapons with or without negotiation. Should there even be a dialogue between scared (deterred) state officials when the dialogue that was asked for in the first place was the one between a person and God, resulting in the answer of love and charity? It seems that the former dialogue is only needed when the latter didn't really take place – and thus when *satyagraha* has been left behind.

So what the magisterium seems to do here is to refrain from saying: “uphold your *satyagraha* and believe in the changing power of love.” Suddenly it holds up a teaching little finger and whispers: “boys, boys, just you watch out what you're doing, because you could hurt each other!” It's a bit like a Christian mother whose son is being pestered, suddenly would not think about non-violent (and more educational) possibilities to help him and therefore advises her boy to overcome the conflict with his classmates by simply pestering back. She only adds that he isn't allowed to use knives when doing so – thus allowing the throwing of rocks. Or even worse, she just tells him to discuss and negotiate with his classmates what kind of biting and scratching they will or won't use and after what period of time they will start to use only 'soft' choking instead of harsh hair-pulling.

The very same attitude becomes even more clear when the compendium goes deeper into the problem of disarmament and goes on to say that it

38 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 508.

39 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 508.

40 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 508.

must include the banning of weapons that inflict excessive traumatic injury or that strike indiscriminately. This includes anti-personnel land-mines, a type of small arm that is inhumanly insidious because it continues to cause harm even long after the cessation of hostilities.⁴¹

To disapprove of certain weapons, is to allow others. Even more so, what is condemned here is weaponry that still causes harm after the war, thus allowing weaponry that causes harm during the war. All in all, this is rather strange for a theory that seeks truth, justice and charity. In face of love, an artificial line between 'during' and 'after' the war, is highly irrelevant. The only relevant distinction is whether it is violent or not, because as the magisterium themselves state:

Peace and violence cannot dwell together, and where there is violence, God cannot be present (cf. 1 Chr 22:8-9).⁴²

So again we can only conclude that there is a conflict within the text of the compendium. It seems the magisterium did not dare to draw the (theo)logical or at least radical conclusions its own spirituality implies. Once practical advice has to be given, there is a noticeable turn from a spiritual language based on love and non-violence to a philosophical language based on natural law. All in all, such a twist shows much comparison with the very thing Gandhi blamed the Congress for doing when he wrote

Non-violence is my creed. It never was of the Congress. With the Congress it has always been a policy.⁴³

It looks as if the non-violence propagated in the compendium is only being supported as a philosophical idea, and not as a true creed. The compendium makes it a policy of non-violence by eventually reducing it to a just war theory because as such non-violence and peace become things that are attainable by following a set of rules and conditions. Hence one could conclude that the compendium does not promote a non-violence of the brave, which Gandhi so strenuously tried to defend. The magisterium simply isn't brave enough when it comes down to it and only holds on to *ahimsa* when it is easy to do so – and we only discussed theoretical problems, which makes one wonder what they would do in real life.

41 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 510.

42 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 488.

43 MERTON, T. (ed.), *Gandhi on non-violence*, p. 173

3. TO GO BEYOND THE COMPENDIUM

I do not wish to imply that the only true Christian option in violent conflict would be a radical and uncompromising pacifism. Real life most of the time confronts a *satyagrahi* with dilemma's that are far more complex than theoretical problems. Blind pacifism therefore is just as absurd as limited just war thinking, as both are derived from a narrow vision on ethics where one tries to find the 'proper' and 'correct' guidelines that could serve as the absolute rules in every possible situation. The complexity of reality will inevitably collide with the simplicity of the theoretical rules one imposes on him/herself. A useful ethical theory needs openness to the unforeseen. And this goes both ways. Sometimes staunch pacifism can't imagine violence as the morally correct option while it perhaps is, and sometimes just war thinking does not take into account a non-violent option where it would indeed be a possibility.

Considering the former, we can point out the fact that even Gandhi himself could conceive of situations where violence would be the only moral option. A lot of Hindu's accused him of being a hypocrite on the matter but Gandhi remained convinced of his truthfulness. The whole problem originated when Gandhi had to allow rabid dogs to be killed, as they were too great a threat to the people in their vicinity. It turned into a polemic that was completely published in his periodical *Young India* and it eventually came down to Gandhi writing that

Even man-slaughter may be necessary in certain cases. Suppose a man runs amok and goes furiously about sword in hand, and killing anyone that comes his way, and no one dares to capture him alive. Anyone who dispatches this lunatic will earn the gratitude of the community and be regarded a benevolent man. From the point of view of ahimsa it is the plain duty of everyone to kill such a man.⁴⁴

Shouldn't we conclude then that Gandhi eventually was a just war adept? I don't think so.

I admit that it clearly shows that Gandhi did *theoretically* allow violence in *some* cases. But one should put this in the right perspective, as Gandhi himself made some nuances here. First of all, Gandhi only allowed violence when it was completely inevitable. Yet this 'inevitability' is not the same as what is meant with the 'last possible option when all other means of redress have been shown to be impractical or ineffective' in just war thinking. Gandhi is talking more about an inevitability that is more a matter of fact than a moral choice. It has to be placed in those other forms of violence (*himsa*) that he considered to be inevitable as well. He offered the examples of having to eat – and thus harming vegetables or animals for our food (which clearly can be considered as a form of *himsa*), having to move and thus walk on plants like grass or even having to breath and thus 'violating' the existence of certain micro-organisms.

A second nuance is that Gandhi did think of one exception to this inevitability of *himsa*, and thus he wrote:

The *yogi* who can subdue the fury of this dangerous man may not kill him. But we are not dealing with beings who have almost reached perfection; we are considering the duty of society, of the ordinary erring human beings.⁴⁵

The moral ideal remained therefore complete and absolute *ahimsa* but his realism made him admit that not everybody was able to take the ideal option when faced with a sudden dilemma like what to do when one encounters a 'lunatic' like the one described above.

On top of that he offered the following guidelines to make sure that the *himsa* would not deteriorate or be allowed to easily.

This *himsa*, calculated to take us on the onward path, must be spontaneous, must be the lowest minimum, must be rooted in compassion, must have discrimination, restraint, detachment at its back, and must lead us every moment onward to the path of *ahimsa*.⁴⁶

44 M. K. GANDHI, *Is this humanity?* - IV (31.10.1926), in *CWMG*, vol. 36, p. 449.

45 M. K. GANDHI, *Is this humanity?* - IV (31.10.1926), in *CWMG*, vol. 36, p. 449.

46 M. K. GANDHI, *Is this humanity?* - VIII (28.11.1926), in *CWMG*, vol. 37, p. 357-358.

Some of these again look a lot like the classical conditions of just war thinking, like for example the idea of 'the lowest minimum' and the double effect that *ahimsa* is the goal and the necessary *himsa* therefore only a very sorry side effect. But let's take another close look. He also says it must be rooted in compassion, so it must be an act out of love – which is clear in the given example, for it is to save the lives of other people – and it should have detachment at its back – so it should not so much be to save one's own life but more to rescue that of others. This is not by definition implied in just war. Just war can be applied to cases where the object of the violence is to save a third party⁴⁷ but this is not necessarily so.

And last but not least, Gandhi says the *himsa* should be 'spontaneous'. This might at first seem like a rather discardable condition, but in fact it most certainly is not. This condition actually goes into the psychology of violent conflict. Just war thinking doesn't say anything about this at all, although the psychology of persons involved in violent conflicts is of rather obvious and huge importance.

Spontaneity of violence will only be present on moments where the violence is immediately needed. This spontaneity therefore is directly linked with the inevitability we just discussed, for violence will be spontaneous when it is not so much a moral choice but more a matter of fact. In the same example of the lunatic running amok the bystanders don't even have a second to think about it before they react, otherwise more completely innocent people will have died. The same thing can be imagined in the case of witnessing a rape where the only option is to hit or wound the rapist to stop him – and thus the only option would be to resort to *himsa*. In the very moment of such extreme cases the moral option will be clear (because it is actually *no* option, but a necessity) and there will thus be little to consider or discuss.

But these extreme cases don't often come up in one's life. Most of the times the dilemma is far more complex. On such moments, (much) deliberation about the course of action will be needed and in those situations, spontaneous action won't even present itself as an option. This is because cases of possible violent conflict quite often arise out of a tension between personal desires, attachments, the means, the ends, and so on. On top of that communication errors, misinterpretations and too narrow views on certain things are never far away.

Conflicts like the ones between Israel and Palestina, America and Irak, India and Pakistan, and so many more have a long history that can never be reduced to one single aspect. A lot of economical and political factors determine the situation. In these kinds of conflicts it is impossible to spontaneously decide who is threatening who, let alone to conclude that one party is obviously the most dangerous one and should therefore be wiped out without further ado. Of course some people in both parties may consider things as being that simple, but those people most of the times are not the ones in charge of the decisions. Even when the leaders of the groups or states involved in the conflict would resort to extremist (and false) dichotomy of the good and the bad, they probably still have an idea of the complexity of the situation and they will not be able to 'spontaneously' manoeuvre the army or the forces needed in the conflict as that thing needs (tactical) planning, discussion with other people in charge and well thought of orders.

This is of course an example on the macro level, but also on an individual level most cases of violent conflict are not like the 'lunatic problem'. More frequent will perhaps be things like a man, being very jealous of another guy that is talking to his girl-friend or wife, suddenly rushing to hit that person upon which that person has the option to receive the blows or to turn the situation into a bar fight. Discounting the possibility of a pathological lover that suddenly draws a gun in sheer frenzy, I think it would be fair to state that such situations often also have a certain history behind them. Perhaps the seducing man is an ex boy-friend of the woman. The

47 In the compendium we can read for example: “The international community as a whole has the moral obligation to intervene on behalf of those groups whose very survival is threatened or whose basic human rights are seriously violated. As members of an international community, states cannot remain indifferent; on the contrary, if all other available means should prove ineffective, it is legitimate and even obligatory to take concrete measures to disarm the aggressor”. (PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 506)

man that attacks, perhaps knows the other guy, or maybe it even was one of his friends. Of course there is also the woman that is perhaps someone that flirts often, or maybe she is actually someone very capable of standing up for herself so when she does not push her seducer away, that means she's not really minding the seduction. Or maybe he just isn't seducing and the jealous man is simply imagining things. Or, why not, perhaps they just all are very drunk.

Still a whole lot of other aspects could add to the complexity of the situation, and a thousand situations like this can be imagined. Most probably because it are these kind of situations (whether on individual level or between groups) that most people are confronted with, and they certainly are not the same like rape or as clear-cut as the case of the lunatic with his sword. It can hardly be said that such complex contexts imply the same kind of 'inevitability' of violence. The same 'just *himsa*' reasoning as was used in the first examples is therefore not applicable in complex moral dilemma's. When we still uphold the stance of 'violence as a last resort' in such complex situations, then we will narrow down the complexity to the simple question whether the conditions for just war/violence are met or not. On top of that, *because of* the complexity one will always be able to *interpret* the situation and context until they fit the proposed conditions. *Because of* the complexity we can always make violence look like a justifiable option. And once the conditions are met, and violence thus seems justifiable, then just war philosophy can not conceive any other options. Once violence is allowed, it suddenly seems to be 'the right thing to do', even when this is not necessarily so.

Perhaps this crucial paragraph should best be given a clear, poignant and concrete example, which can again be derived from Attenborough's film about the Mahatma.⁴⁸ When the young Gandhi is still in South Africa, and still experimenting a whole lot with the principles that would eventually determine his life, he happens to walk on a road where he approaches some youngsters who are eager to beat up this 'coolie'⁴⁹ walking on 'their' street and pavement. But Gandhi, in the presence of his Christian preacher friend Charlie Andrews⁵⁰ does not want to back up and walk away. Instead he takes the opportunity to make a point about non-violence.

Gandhi: "Doesn't the New Testament say, 'If your enemy strikes you on the right cheek, offer him the left'?" He starts to move forward. Charlie hesitates, then follows nervously, more nervous than Gandhi himself.

Charlie: "I think perhaps the phrase was used metaphorically ... I don't think our Lord meant..."

They are getting closer. The youths laughing, whispering.

Gandhi: "I'm not so certain. I have thought about it a great deal. I suspect he meant you must show courage – be willing to take a blow – several blows – to show you will not strike back – nor will you be turned aside ... And when..."

One youth flicks his cigarette – hard. It lands at Gandhi's feet. He pauses, looking at the youth.

Gandhi: "... and when you do that it calls upon something in human nature – something that makes his hate for you diminish and his respect increase. I think Christ grasped that and I – I have seen it work." He starts forward again, he is almost on the youths – clearly frightened.

Gandhi: "Good morning."

First youth: "Get off the pavement, you bloody ..."

And he reaches forth to haul Gandhi from the pavement, but a women's voice suddenly shouts: "Colin! Colin! What are you doing?" A woman is leaning out of an upstairs window, looking down at the fracas disconcertedly. It is the first youth's mother and her presence reduces the pitch of his hostility considerably.

First youth: "Nothing ... nothing. We were just cleaning up the neighborhood a little."

A snickering response from the other youths – but they are embarrassed by the questioning disapproval of Colin's mother's attitude. There's no note of apology in her cold stare at Gandhi, but she clearly believes her son should not be doing what he is doing.

Colin's mother: "You're already late for work. I thought you'd gone ten minutes ago."

The moment of crisis has passed. Nothing will happen while she is there. Gandhi steps back on

48 And again, to my knowledge, it never really took place. But that doesn't matter, it is again the "Gandhi spirit" the scene brings across, that matters.

49 A derogatory term the Colonial British used when addressing Indians.

50 This character is a combination of several people Gandhi knew, befriended or lived with during his days in South Africa.

the pavement, addressing the first youth.

Gandhi: "You'll find there's room for us both." And he steps around him, Charlie trailing, as the first youth stares at them sullenly. As they stride on, Charlie glances back and says relieved: "That was lucky."

Gandhi: "I thought you were a man of God."

Charlie (wittily, but making his point): "I am. But I'm not so egotistical as to think He plans His day around my dilemmas." Gandhi laughs as they turn the corner.⁵¹

So when Charlie Andrews wants to say to Gandhi that he does not think that the Lord meant the words to be taken literally, Gandhi does not reply by saying that he thinks they should follow the gospel word for word, but he offers a new way of interpreting the same words which is at the same time true to the letter as well as the spirit. He does not think that what Christ says is to take every blow just like that, without any question or hope, but he believes it is an advise to be brave and trust (God's) love that by taking some blows without retaliation, the hearth of the attacker will be changed. The literalness is thus not in "take the blow" but in "let love do its work". This is true and brave *ahimsa*. Violence would have been of no use at all, and if Gandhi would have resorted to it, he would have taken away his own morality and dignity by lowering himself to the level of his aggressors. Although most people would not even have considered a non-violent option in such a situation, *satyagraha* that comes from a firm believe in *ahimsa* does open the possibility.

Just war thinking like the one in the compendium on the other hand would at such a moment not only allow Gandhi to carry weapons, but would even allow him to defend himself with them when he was attacked, as the needed conditions were present: 1) there's a prolonged violation of fundamental rights (as the Indians were clearly oppressed in the South Africa of those days), 2) there was no possibility to communicate, so all other means would have been ineffective, 3) resistance would not have provoked worse disorders (except perhaps some jail-time, but one can wonder whether that would have been worse then being beaten and scolded), 4) there would be hope of success as the boys were still young and 5) it clearly was impossible to foresee a better solution (unless Gandhi would have taken the option to flee from the scene – but that option discounts the fact that the whole issue was about his fundamental right to walk on the same pavement, and thus it was in fact no option).

The symbolics of this scene can actually be enlarged to the whole of Gandhi's life. Normal just war concepts would for example have justified violence in India's struggle for independence. When Gandhi and the Indians would have followed the compendium, then history would have been completely different – there would probably have been a huge civil war. But Gandhi went way out of bounds of contemporary Christian peace ethics and in so doing took a whole mass with him. So, even if Gandhi intellectually allowed violence in some clear, distinct and extreme cases, in practice he has shown such amazing *satyagrahic* capacity that his life can now shine as an example of how *ahimsa* can indeed always be an option where just war does not even consider the possibility any more. He came across such atrocities (for example the incident with general Dyer) and such inhuman situations (such as the continued oppression of the Indian people) not many people ever encounter, and still he managed to uphold non-violence. He dared to really derive conclusions from his spiritual principles, and on top of that dared to enact them.

It will be clear by now that I, from a Gandhian point of view, must conclude that in (spiritual) theory there is a huge agreement between *satyagraha* and the compendium, with its ethics of peace based on transcending love, but, in the concrete and practical advises there is little to no comparison. Does Gandhian philosophy offer a solution then for these 'holes' in the compendium? I don't believe so. But why should it? One of the points I tried to make was exactly that the complexity of most conflicts can never be reduced to clear moral rules and options. The spiritual foundation of *ahimsa* will always have to find a new form when

51 BRILEY J., *Gandhi. The Screenplay*; <http://n.1asphost.com/cinemaobsession/read/Gandhi.html> (access 25/01/06) I slightly altered the text to augment the readability of the screenplay.

confronted with another conflict in reality. It is impossible (and even dangerous) to create strict rules on the exact form of *satyagraha* before the problem is known. Gandhi always came up with his ideas for *satyagraha* campaigns (like the immensely successful Dandi salt march) after long meditation, prayer and confrontation with reality. *Just like God can show himself unexpectedly in the face of the poor, ahimsa can show itself in the heart of a conflict.*

To genuinely follow a peace ethic based on love and *ahimsa* therefore, no fixed rules and conditions need to be thought of (as is the case in Just War thinking) and as such coming problems will not have an answer before they pose themselves. This might be a bit scary for us human beings who always would like to have security and safety, but life just doesn't work like that. The only certainty a Christian *satyagrahi* has, is that, whatever the problem is, it will have to be solved with (merciful) love and compassion.

On top of this we could add another reason why *satyagrahis* do not really need an answer to all possible conflicts. Theodore J. Koontz expressed it very appropriately when he wrote:

that pacifist prescriptions for policy have normally been ignored in the years leading up to the crisis and then, suddenly, we are asked for a solution to a problem caused by someone else's policies.⁵²

It is indeed rather strange to blame certain people for not having a solution for a conflict when they for a long time proposed to do things that would have prevented the escalation into a conflict in the first place. Gandhi himself also used this argument in the series of articles mentioned above. He thought it wasn't fair of people telling him his *ahimsa* was hypocritical if he would kill dogs when the people saying this were actually responsible for the fact that the dogs got rabies. If the Indians did not take care of stray dogs, let them die of hunger, did not look after their hygiene, and didn't try to improve their conditions, then they were far more guilty of *himsa* than he would be when killing them because he wanted to protect further deterioration of the endangering problem.

The same goes for our current society. Just war thinking only comes up with a 'solution' when the violent conflict has begun. It would serve humanity a lot more to find ethics that prevent conflicts. The compendium also mentions that

it is therefore essential to seek out the causes underlying bellicose conflicts, especially those connected with structural situations of injustice, poverty and exploitation, which require intervention so that they may be removed. "For this reason, another name for peace is *development*. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development".⁵³

If our ethics had tackled the 'causes underlying bellicose conflicts', then perhaps pope John Paul II wouldn't have had to ask:

"How can it be that even today there are still people dying of hunger? Condemned to illiteracy? Lacking the most basic medical care? Without a roof over their head? The scenario of poverty can extend indefinitely, if in addition to its traditional forms we think of its newer patterns. These latter often affect financially affluent sectors and groups which are nevertheless threatened by despair at the lack of meaning in their lives, by drug addiction, by fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, by marginalization or social discrimination ... And how can we remain indifferent to the prospect of an ecological crisis which is making vast areas of our planet uninhabitable and hostile to humanity? Or by the problems of peace, so often threatened by the spectre of catastrophic wars? Or by the contempt for the fundamental human rights of so many people, especially children?"⁵⁴

Nevertheless, even when most of these problems would have been solved, even when

52 KOONTZ, T. J., *Christian Nonviolence. An Interpretation*, in T. Nardin (ed.), *The ethics of War and Peace. Religious and secular perspectives*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 190.

53 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 498 quoting JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Letter Centesimus Annus*, 52: AAS 83 (1991), 858.

54 JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic letter Novo Millenio Ineunte*, 50-51: AAS 93 (2001), 303-304 quoted in PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 5.

everybody would try very hard to live up to the standard of *ahimsa*, conflicts could still arise, and then some 'readiness' will be needed. It will not suffice to say "ah well, you should have listened to us before", because the problem will be at hand and it will need to be solved.

Still this does not mean we immediately should turn to just war theories, for *satyagraha* actually has some things ready. As I said earlier, Gandhi came up with his own ideas for the different *satyagraha* campaigns only after long meditation and prayer. Prayer can thus be a very strong weapon for the *satyagrahi* and should actually always be considered as part of the solution – or at least as something that can give rise to the solution. The same can also be said about fasting, but I go deeper into that matter in my thesis.⁵⁵ Vow taking as well, can be seen thus, and probably countless other things can be thought of.

Therefore what a Christian *satyagrahi* must do in times of conflict is not to start interpreting the situation and assess whether the conditions are met to engage in a just war, but to start fasting and praying to find the novel way in which love can once again break through the conflict. It was already said in the beginning of this paper: it is only love that will bring true change.

That is exactly why it is so sad that, in the compendium, praying is only mentioned in one little paragraph:

It is through prayer that the Church engages in the battle for peace. Prayer opens the heart not only to a deep relationship with God but also to an encounter with others marked by respect, understanding, esteem and love. Prayer instils courage and lends support to all "true friends of peace", those who love peace and strive to promote it in the various circumstances in which they live.⁵⁶

These few lines are far from constitutive for the rest of the peace ethics put forward by the magisterium. Gandhi, on the other hand, on different occasions explicitly said that praying was of the utmost importance. He believed he had

no strength save what God gives me. I have no authority over my countrymen save the pure moral. If He holds me to be a pure instrument for the spread of non-violence in place of the awful violence now ruling the earth, He will give me the strength and show me the way. My greatest weapon is mute prayer.⁵⁷

Without prayer, his 'greatest weapon', he could not conceive the possibility of real change in the hearts of people – which is exactly what is needed if we wish to abolish *himsa* from this world and grow ever more close to the Kingdom of God. As was shown from the very start, this was the goal the peace ethics of the compendium also envisaged. Sadly enough it just does not offer much possibilities for the practice of *ahimsa* (except perhaps conscientious objection), and thus supports *satyagraha* only in theory – which is actually a contradiction in terms.

Therefore I would dare to say that the magisterium did not take the opportunity to go beyond some limitations of the traditional peace ethics. But who am I to throw a stone? None are fully grown in Love, except God. On the other hand, while I do admit that it is very difficult to grasp love in all its fullness because it will always be a paradox, it is not supposed to be a contradiction, and thus the magisterium could (or rather: should) have held on to the truth it formulated itself (and which was already quoted above) in the compendium, for seldom was the concept of *ahimsa* expressed more beautifully – even by Gandhi.

Peace and violence cannot dwell together, and where there is violence, God cannot be present.⁵⁸

55 If the reader would be interested in my thesis, where I try to show how fasting, in many different dimensions, can be a perfect example of concrete and useful *Christian satyagraha*, that can be done by everyone, he or she can always find it on my webpage about *Christian Satyagraha*: <http://satyagraha.halalmonk.com>

56 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 519.

57 -, *The Official Mahatma Gandhi eArchive & Reference Library*;
<http://www.mahatma.org.in/quotes/quotes.jsp?link=qt> (access 04/02/2006)

58 PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 488.

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