

The open question I'll discuss here is tied to one of my goals for this course, how to integrate my deep identity as a Roman Catholic and my passion and deep interest in Peace Studies, especially nonviolence. The modern teachings of the Church don't always leave much room for aligning the Church to Peace Studies. But I see both *Saving Paradise* and *Betrayal* as course materials/sources one can use to assist in this integration.

The core thesis of *Saving Paradise* is that for Christianity's adolescence there was a solid sense of paradise on Earth. Only into the time of Imperial Christianity and the Crusades did this paradise get expelled as a focus on Jesus' crucifixion became central (Brock & Parker, 2008, p. 223). In the time of the early Church, before the monarchical Vatican even existed, the focal point for believers was on the resurrection; they entirely avoided focus on Jesus' execution. Trying to at least hold onto that young time in Christianity before it adopted atonement theology and the crucifixion is one way to maintain the true sense of yourself as a Roman Catholic yet believe that all the violence the Church (and secular governments) are assisting in is immoral, unjust, and wrong.

Saving Paradise also does a good job of showing that even once the crusades imposed an imperial war ethic on the otherwise peaceful Christianity there was always some resistance to this from within Christianity. This resistance remained even as the trashing of pagan traditions in the crusades led to the very symbol of the Church today, the crucifix (the first crucifix was indeed carved from a pagan holy tree). This resistance has remained a sideline effort beside any violence the Church (or any other group) may commit. It is that strain of the faith that those of us

committed to peace can draw off of, and it is one example of such resistance that I turn to now.

During the Nazi regime though the German Christians went along with National Socialism, the Confessing Church was the resistance. Before going further, I realize that Roman Catholics and Protestant Church are different Christian groups, but much the way our whole nation comes together despite political party affiliation in tragedy we can discuss any Christian denomination as reasoning for the integration I'm discussing here. The Confessing Church resisted the forces of the Nazis and directly rebuked their assertions (Ericksen & Heschel, 1999, p. 97). In such resistance, which is a mirror of what *Saving Paradise* notes, the resisting group really is asserting what the religion was established as instead of kneeling to the desires of the dominant forces. As people striving for a nonviolent world we can take examples of resistance like this not just as historical branches to keep in mind but also as templates for how to stay Roman Catholics yet believe in a peaceful world.

The Roman Catholic Church appeared to be standing on the sidelines doing nothing in the Holocaust, and this has become a trend, but we must consider what reconsideration does to this integration. In other words, the Second Vatican Council was in part a response to their lack of response in the Holocaust. Here the Church vowed to meet the needs of the modern world and be relevant to us free and independent humans. But can such a turnaround (if indeed it has truly been that) sway the Church to make integrating an identity of a peaceful, nonviolent Catholic easier? I don't think so because the historical realities of the crusades and how

they've shaped the modern world stain the Church when looking at it with a peaceful and nonviolent lens. But certainly the acceptance of all members of our world aid in the dual identities that at times seem to clash. So let me now return to the course texts for final ways they aid in this integration task.

One other way to integrate these identities is to look at some of the current teachings of the Church that do reflect the early Church versus this crucifixion-centric institution that *Saving Paradise* describes the Church as currently being. What I'm saying is that even without using the course texts someone can look into issues that are important to the Peace Studies aspect of their identity and use the official Church position as a guide for integrating Roman Catholicism into a more nonviolent existence. The views on capital punishment affirm the dignity of each person, and this affirmation is one that the Church let go of when it focused on the crucifixion. Likewise we can see that the German Christians were carrying on that tradition over the Confessing Church hanging onto the more peaceful roots of faith.

This essay has provided some insight to how both *Saving Paradise* and *Betrayal* can aid in understanding how you may go about integrating your Roman Catholic identity with one of peace and nonviolence. But it is merely the icing on a cake-worth of ways in which these books, and the Church teachings themselves, help to show how these two seemingly different identities can be merged as part of the unified whole we are all supposed to be. The historical account in *Saving Paradise* lends us the foundation on which we can explore the modern incarnations of these threads in *Betrayal* and indeed the other books we looked at this semester as well.

References

Brock, R. N., & Parker, R. A. (2008). *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire*. Boston, Mass, United States: Beacon Press.

Ericksen, R. P., & Heschel, S. (1999). *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers.