

BLIND SPOT

War
and Christian Identity



Dorothy Garrity Ranaghan

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Second Edition

Dorothy Garrity Ranaghan



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*To Kevin:
my wise, humorous and beloved friend / husband*

Blind Spot . . . condenses a lifetime of wisdom garnered from theologians, exegetes, spiritual writers and peace activists. . . . Ms. Ranaghan's small book provides a path into the mind of the church on peace and war today.

Drew Christiansen, S.J.
Distinguished Professor of Ethics and
Global Human Development
Georgetown University, Drew Christiansen, S.J.
Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Global
Human Development Georgetown University

“Blind Spot is a remarkable book — well-written and totally engaging.”

Charles Whitehead
Past Chairman, National Service Committee
for the Charismatic Renewal in England

“In this well-researched and well-reasoned book, Dorothy Ranaghan challenges us and offers healing for a major blind spot in our contemporary understanding of the teachings of the church and scripture on war and violence.”

Bert Ghezzi
Author of *Voices of the Saints: A 365-Day Journey
with our Spiritual Companions*

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Preface

Blind Spot: War and Christian Identity

Reflecting on the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe through the nonviolent revolutions of 1989, Saint John Paul II concluded with this aspiration: “May people learn to fight for justice without violence, renouncing class struggle in their internal dispute[s] and war in international ones.”

Pope John Paul took nonviolence seriously, devoting three paragraphs in *Centesimus annus*—nos. 23, 25, and 52—to the topic, with perhaps the most trenchant critique of war to be found in modern Catholic Social Teaching (no. 52), and one of the most compelling spiritual interpretations of Christian nonviolence (no. 23). In part, he wrote,

It is by uniting his own sufferings for truth and freedom to the suffering of Christ on the Cross that man is able to accomplish the miracle of peace and is in a position to discern the narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil and the violence, which under the illusion of fighting evil, only makes it worse (no. 25).

“[T]he violence, which under the illusion of fighting evil, only makes it worse” suggests the “blind spot” that Dorothy Garrity Ranaghan identifies and explores.

Pope John Paul made very limited allowance for war to defend against injustice; he did not consider himself a pacifist. For her part, Ms. Ranaghan would call herself

a pacifist because she considers war to be incompatible with Christian existence. A charismatic Catholic and a longtime member of the South Bend ecumenical covenant community People of Praise, she believes that the re-birth of Christians through baptism requires that they act in the world like Christ—nonviolently. Likewise, connected to the Catholic Worker and the Catholic Peace Fellowship, both active in South Bend, she presents community prayer and peace witness as essential to Christian life.

Among her heroes are Dorothy Day, whose presence converted Ranaghan to nonviolence when they met at Duquesne University. Another is Joshua Casteel, a West Point graduate and Iraq War veteran who converted to Catholicism and pacifism while serving as an interrogator at Abu Ghraib. After he was separated from the military as a conscientious objector, Casteel became a writer and speaker, but died young from illnesses he contracted while burning toxic trash outside the Abu Ghraib compound. Joshua and his disabled and deceased G.I. comrades are among those Saint John Paul regarded as the victims of war:

No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, [and] throws into upheaval the lives of those who do the killing . . .

Joshua's death in 2012 exemplifies what we have learned about the damage war inflicts on those who wage it: physical trauma, PTSD, moral injury—obsessive feelings of guilt for deeds of war some consider morally permissible—the indignity in having to justify healthcare for damage done at the behest of their government and fellow citizens. Despite their sacrifices, many have become the discards, in Pope Francis' famous phrase, of "our throw-away culture."

General readers will find *Blind Spot* a personal chapbook on Christian peacemaking, a slim volume that condenses a lifetime of wisdom garnered from theologians, exegetes, spiritual writers and peace activists. It provides a helpful survey of how Catholic and ecumenical Christian thinking on peace and war have been evolving since the U.S. bishops' 1983 pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace." It will assist readers in understanding the full import of Pope John Paul's oracular statement that nonviolent activists must discern the difference between the cowardice of submission to injustice and "the violence, which under the illusion of fighting evil, only makes it worse." They may also begin to grasp what the U.S. bishops affirmed in their 1993 pastoral, "The Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace": "In situations of conflict, our constant commitment ought to be, as far as possible, to strive for justice through non-violent means." Ms. Ranaghan's small book provides a path into the mind of the church on peace and war today.

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18 July 2018

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Prophetic Discomfort

“They carried the same Bible. They believed in the same God. One side fought for God’s glory, the other for His Kingdom on Earth. But for the duration of the war, God refused to take sides.”¹

The trailer for *Gods and Generals*, which focuses upon the devoutly religious “Stonewall” Jackson, opens with these words. What follows in this Civil War movie is bloodshed. Believers all. Watching it left me with disturbing questions. Does God have a “side” in any war? How can one tell? Should a Christian take up arms to smite the enemy? Should other Christians be the enemy? Are there answers to these questions?

In a March 6, 2018 article for the Catholic New Service, Mark Pattison reported that a 2018 Pew Research poll of United States Catholics noted “signs of growing discontent with Pope Francis among Catholics on the political right.” The survey, he said, reflects the fact that political leanings affect the approval ratings of the pope.² The same reality seems to be happening among Catholics regarding war or gun control or immigration. The pope, the councils

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1. *Gods and Generals*, dir. Ronald F. Maxwell, Warner Brothers, 2003.
 2. Mark Pattison. “U.S. Catholics’ Political Leanings Affect Their Approval Ratings of Pope,” <https://cnstopstories.com/2018/03/06/u-s-catholics-political-leanings-affect-their-approval-ratings-of-pope/>.