

Response to Prof. John Paul Lederach's Paper

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I would like to begin my remarks by citing the very well worded paper, "**The Long Journey Back to Humanity**" that provides, I believe, the correct locus for a theology of "Catholic" peacemaking. Yes, it is a journey back to humanity that is done in full cognizance of the nature and context of contemporary armed conflict and the unique location of the Catholic Church within that given context.

The four cited narratives – two in Colombia, one in Southern Philippines and one in Uganda speak for themselves. There are, however, common strands in these four stories that I wish to highlight as I re-affirm this journey. They are the following:

First is the dynamic nexus between word, context and action. I agree with Prof. Lederach in pointing out that "this is particularly true of areas of life and action in a context where details of belief and doctrine are not explicitly developed. A continuing journey captures not only the dynamic movement of the peacemaking but also the reality that peace making is a process. It is not the "*Pax Romana*" of old, nor is it the "mission civilisatrice" during the colonial times. Rather, peacemaking, especially in a protracted and identity conflicts, is a continuing process of "see, judge and act". I believe that the theology of peacemaking, specifically amid armed conflict, will continue to be at the "edge". Theologians of peacemaking need, however, to make sure that "doing theology at the edge" will be sharp enough to be able to "cut through" the mainstream sacramental and systematic theology that would keep them "uncomfortable". After all, this precisely is the legacy and the dangerous memory that the prophetic ministry keeps alive in the church.

Second is the "historic" and "privileged" location of the Catholic Church in actual peacemaking on the ground. In all four narratives, the Catholic Church enjoys not only high social capital with high trust level to serve as a sort of "bridge" between and among diverse actors/protagonists in the conflicts but also, historically, is the alternative institution outside the state. John Paul Lederach expresses this in a fascinating phrase, "Ubiquitous Presence". Yes, it is a sociological term yet theologically loaded that holds the church accountable and responsible. It is something akin to the parable of the Talents... "To whom more is given... more shall be accounted!" That ubiquitous presence serves as a critique and an imperative for the Church.

Moreover, the victims and the protagonists in the armed conflicts notwithstanding ideological or faith identities, rightly or wrongly, fall within the "service" or "ministry" that the Church claims. In many ways, this peace making ministry or service that claims a prophetic root is another "dangerous" strand that follows yet another beautiful and equally dangerous strand, the liberation theology, that is now a patrimony of the Catholic Church (for good or bad).

Third is the dialogical dimension of the journey. Here, I would simply reiterate what Bishop Serna and Archbishop Castro of Colombia have already articulated: "dialogue is

the most worthy human experience”. In fact, we are encouraged “to envision dialogue in the arrival of Jesus as the word made flesh and the only way that human community creates meaning both within and with God.” The “*dialogos pastorales*” developed in Colombia with armed actors do not only aim to humanize the conflict but also to re-build relationships that are more humane, just and equitable.

Ultimately, what does it mean to be human? How might we reclaim our humanity? Allow me to quote Pope Benedict XVI, who in his latest encyclical, “*Spe Salvi*”, has written: “the capacity to accept suffering for the sake of goodness, truth and justice is an essential criterion of humanity, because if my own well-being and safety are ultimately more important than truth and justice, then the power of the stronger prevails, then violence and untruth reign supreme. Truth and justice must stand above my comfort and physical well-being, or else my life becomes a lie. For this we need witnesses. We need them if we are to prefer goodness to comfort, even in the little choices we face each day. Our Holy Father concludes: “the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity.” Our peacemakers on the ground are, indeed, witnesses to that attempts to retrieve our common humanity amid the cruelties and destruction of war and armed conflicts.

The fourth is the ethical road map in peacemaking. The engagement is oriented to restoration/retrieval of humanity, community, family and individual lives. It is an ethical road map that challenges the prevailing violence, killings and other criminalities that often mar armed conflicts. This ethical road map is, as presented in the paper, rooted in our identity and dignity as children of God – the very prominent theme in Social teachings legacy albeit little known or “our best kept secret”.

When we speak of ethical road map it, basically, involves truth and morality. This leads us to the imperatives of witnessing to the truth. In his encyclical, “*Pacem in Terris*”, Pope John XXIII exhorts that it is the fundamental duty of the government to uphold the truth: “A political society is to be considered well-ordered, beneficial and in keeping with human dignity if it is grounded on truth.” Moreover, the encyclical explains that unless a society is anchored on the truth, there can be no authentic justice, charity and freedom.

No, we cannot have peace based on aggression! No, we cannot have peace based on killing and crimes against humanity! Respect for life; Recognition of their human dignity as God’s sons and daughters; and holding their basic rights as inalienable are non-negotiable landmarks of an ethical road map in any peacemaking.

The fifth is the grounding of the journey in hope. I can identify with the “haiku” formulated by Sr. Mary:

*“For all the children
We smile amidst suffering
To give them courage.”*

In many cases, where we feel our own powerlessness and vulnerability vis-à-vis the powers that be and the “mighty”, our presence, our tears and smile give courage amidst suffering that give the weak and poor that courage and hope to rise anew and face the new day.

But this path opens a new aspect... it requires not only a theology of peacemaking but also the spirituality of peacemakers. Since we have in the audience two religious traditions – the Dominicans and the Jesuits, I will cite the Dominican “*contemplatio veritatis*” and the Ignatian “*familiaritas cum Deo*”. The contemplation of truth and the familiarity with God involve the illumination of the intellect, coming to know who God is and what God wills. They also involve the conversion of the heart and the reconfiguration of the same heart. Beholding God and becoming familiar with God entail transforming and conforming my thinking, my feeling and my doing in accordance to the Lord's, which can only be the work of grace.

Contemplation of God and Familiarity with God thus entail rejoicing in what God delights - the truth; abhorring what God detests - falsehood; being pained by what breaks the heart of God - the persecution of truth-seekers. Contemplation of God and Familiarity with God means sharing the passion of God for the truth and the pathos of God whenever the truth and the bearers of truth are overcome by the forces of the lie.

When everything is said and done... the theology and the spirituality of peacemakers is, precisely, the theology and the spirituality of martyrs... Last Holy week, my uncle, the doyen of Philippine journalism – Juan Mercado – wrote in one of his passionate columns in the Philippine Inquirer that the increasing number of people who have shed their blood and have died for peace and justice are the “Good Friday” people. Yes, they, like Jesus, willingly gave up their lives as a “ransom” that others may live and live to the full! More than ever... in a world broken and fractured by armed conflicts on the basis of poverty, ideologies, ethnicities, beliefs and races, we need “Good Friday” People!

April 13, 2008
Catholic Peacebuilding Conference
University of Notre Dame
South bend, Indiana