

**Response to William R. Headley, CSSp and Reina C. Neufeldt  
Catholic Relief Services:  
Catholic Social Teaching and the Practice of Building Peace**

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I am most grateful to Bill Headley and Reina Neufeld for their excellent paper. Their analysis of the experience of Catholic Relief Services in peacebuilding makes a very important contribution to our understanding of how the Catholic community can fulfill the call directed to all Christians to be peacemakers. Their reflection is deeply rooted in the experience of thousands of CRS workers around the world and in the serious reflection of CRS personnel and leadership over years since 1994, when the Rwanda genocide lead CRS to develop the justice lens that it uses to focus its development work and the peacebuilding efforts that have flowed from that. So I approach my task as a respondent with humility. I spend most of my time in classrooms and an office, not one the ground with the people suffering from the consequences of conflict as CRS workers do. So my response must necessarily be modest and marked by humility.

Headley and Neufeldt have drawn seven lessons about peacebuilding from the four cases their paper examines. I find these lessons most valuable but would like to suggest two things that could broaden their relevance for a Catholic theology of peacebuilding.

First, the cases that Headley and Neufeldt reflect on are situations where CRS efforts have been directed toward building peace where conflict had already broken out. Viewed through the justice lens, they are cases of working for justice in the midst of or

following conflict (*jus in medias bellum*, or *jus post bellum*). My question arises from an observation made by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in its important report of *The Responsibility to Protect*. The commission stated that protecting people calls not just for reacting to conflicts in the midst of or following. It implies a responsibility to work to prevent conflict from arising. In the Commission's words, action aimed at preventing conflict

may come in the form of development assistance and other efforts to help address the root cause of potential conflict; or efforts to provide support for local initiatives to advance good governance, human rights, or the rule of law; or good offices missions, mediation efforts and other efforts to promote dialogue or reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>

These recommendations bear a remarkable resemblance to some of the lessons the Headley and Neufeldt draw from their reflection on the cases of CRS action, such as working for a *holistic humanitarian response* to people and their problems, seeking to *bridge differences* among groups whose differences could lead them into conflict, nurturing *peacebuilding partnerships* at the local as well as the national and international levels.

Of course, the work of CRS, as an organization founded primarily to provide relief, is necessarily mostly responsive to already existing conflicts. But the role of the Catholic church at large should surely be aimed at preventing such conflicts from emerging in the first place. So perhaps we could take the lessons that have been learned from CRS peacemaking work in conflict situations and use them to indicate some of the ways the larger church could work to prevent conflict from emerging. Let me comment

on how several of Headley and Neufeldt's lessons could be extended in this way. Let me draw on my experience in Kenya to illustrate my points.

Their call for *holistic humanitarian response* to people and their problems surely suggests that the church's commitment to development is a key component of its commitment to peace. Thus in Kenya some of the explosive tensions between ethnic groups could have been more effectively addressed if the church had more adequately addressed the issue of land distribution.

Their call to connect and amplify voices for just peace suggests that the church could have been a more effective voice for less privileged ethnic groups in recent Kenyan politics.

Doing this could have drawn on the church's ubiquitous presences among the diverse ethnic communities. But getting to the point where the church could do this would have called for serious efforts to overcome the continuing ethnic consciousness within the church, including among its leaders.

Finally, addressing the issues of ethnicity and economic inequality would have called for serious effort to address the pitfalls of Kenyan politics from a moral point of view, firmly grounded in the Gospel. And this would have required the church in Kenya to firmly integrate the social and spiritual dimensions of its mission.

In other words, I am suggesting that the church at large could learn from the rich experience of CRS and the lessons drawn from it by Headley and Neufeldt to become a more active agent for the prevention of conflict and the avoidance of war. Becoming such an agent of peace will be no easy task. But much can be learned from CRS as the church seeks to move along this path.

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<sup>1</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect: Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* (Ottawa, ON, Canada: International Development Research Centre, 2001), 19.