

# THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC PEACEBUILDING

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These three remarkable days together, providing the opportunity for more than 350 people from 28 countries deeply interested in peacebuilding to ponder its future directions, are now at their conclusion. After the plenary and workshop presentations—but perhaps most importantly, the intense discussions that accompanied them—it is time to take stock of just how far we have come. This event has not been a stand-alone kind of occasion. It is part of a larger project in trying to advance the theology and ethics of Catholic peacebuilding that has been running now for three years. The major presentations here have been papers that will be going into a volume that we hope to publish in 2009. And it is also part of larger and longer discussions represented by the experience and expertise gathered here, and the larger potential of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network.

These closing remarks are in four parts. The first part is about what is meant by *Catholic* peacebuilding. What is specifically Catholic about a way of peacebuilding? How is this developed and sustained? The second part will offer some of the suggestions that have emerged in the Conference about future directions for Catholic Social Teaching in regard to peacebuilding, constructed upon the rich tradition we already have. The third looks to what might be called the “deep theology” of peacebuilding, that is, what sources in our tradition will have to be revisited in order to address some of the theological issues that are arising in the practice of peacebuilding? The fourth part explores the practices

and spirituality that will be needed to sustain peacebuilders and larger populations working to create and sustain a just and lasting peace.

### **What Is Catholic Peacebuilding?**

“Peacebuilding” is a word that has emerged in recent discussions about conflict, war and peace. It tries to propose a more comprehensive approach to peace. Earlier discussion typically focused upon conflict resolution or conflict transformation. “Peacebuilding” attempts to address not only the resolution of conflict, but how to build a culture that includes the prevention of conflict that leads to war, humane intervention during conflict, and perhaps most importantly, the rebuilding of a just society and a lasting peace after conflict. In the contemporary world where many if not most conflicts occur within states rather than between them, where they may subside for a time only to flare up again and again, and where non-combatants are not only harmed (so-called “collateral damage”) but become also part of the warring parties’ conflict strategies, a new approach is needed. “Peacemaking” needs to expand to “peacebuilding” on a longer-term scale.

What is a Catholic approach to peacebuilding, and what is especially “Catholic” about it? Peacebuilding is not Catholic just because Catholics are doing it; nor are elements found in Catholic peacebuilding exclusive property of the Catholic Church. Rather, peacebuilding is Catholic when the resources of the Catholic tradition—institutional, theological, and spiritual—are brought together to create a culture of peacebuilding. The Catholic character in such peacebuilding is not only evident in the vision that guides it, but especially also in the strategies and practices that enacting peacebuilding itself.

In order to set this out a little more clearly, let us look at a few of the most important institutional, theological, and ritual aspects of what is being proposed as Catholic peacebuilding.

*Institutional.* The Roman Catholic Church is “catholic” in one way through its extension throughout the whole world. With more than 1.1 billion people calling themselves Catholic, they are found spread across countries nearly everywhere. But that presence goes beyond sheer geographical expanse. The Church as institution is highly integrated horizontally (into dioceses and prelatures each headed by a bishop), and vertically (all the heads dioceses and prelatures are in the College of Bishops, with the Pope (as Bishop of Rome) at its head. This alone gives the Church a ready-made communication network that transcends national boundaries. Because of historical reasons, the Pope is not only head of the Catholic Church, but also the head of a state, Vatican City State. As a result of this, there is a network of ambassadors or nuncios accredited to governments around the world, with Permanent Observers to the United Nations as well. This gives the Church a political network as well as an ecclesiastical one.

In countries with a significant number of Catholics, the Church is able to be present at all three of the traditional levels of conflict settlement: at the top with elites (nuncios and bishops), at the grassroots (communities and pastoral agents), and at the mid-level mediating between elites and grassroots (the clergy). Thus the Church already has networks that can be utilized for purposes of peace. Its international network of nuncios and the Vatican Secretariat of State provide a transnational dimension. No other religious body in the world has this extent and level of integration that can be placed in the services of peace.

*Theological.* Since the reign of Pope Leo XIII, the Church has been developing a rich body of Catholic Social Teaching. Subsequent Popes have continued to add to this great resource. Of course, there were elements of such social teaching long before the appearance of *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. For peacebuilding, the centuries-old teaching of Just War has been an important resource. But the work of the last century or more has been particularly intense in trying to address the great social questions facing the Church and humanity as a whole. The *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church* issued by the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace in 2005 gives a very comprehensive picture of the state of Catholic Social Teaching. This unique body of teaching is of immense help in trying to build a culture of peace, and has no counterpart among other religious bodies.

*Sacrament, Ritual, Spirituality.* In the United States at least, there have been efforts to define what has been called “the Catholic imagination,” that is, how might one define the ethos and practices of Catholicism, and the imagination that underlies them. Such definitions usually are set alongside what might be called a Protestant imagination. While there is no agreement as to what exactly constitutes a Catholic imagination, there would be consensus about some general features.

First of all, the Catholic understanding of grace sees God’s grace as suffusing the world, rather than standing over against it. Consequently, while we live in a fallen world, the goodness of God’s grace is evident everywhere as well. What this means for peacebuilding is that peace is not something that comes exclusively from outside a conflict; rather seeds of peace can already be found in the actors and events of conflict, and need to be elicited and brought forth. The omnipresence of God’s grace means that

Catholic peacebuilders can and will work on all sides of the conflict. While priority may be given to victims, wrongdoers are not outside the circle of healing and hope.

Second, Catholic practice relies on a strong sense of mediation. The Communion of the Saints, the special role of Mary, and a host of spiritual practices make Catholicism a highly mediated religion. This all has the capacity to reinforce in special ways mediation practices within peacebuilding practices themselves.

Third, Catholic practice gives a special place to ritual and sacrament. Seeing the world sacramentally, as betokening God's saving, healing, and sustaining presence, is enacted and reinforced in the sacraments of the Church, especially in the Eucharist. This sacramental understanding not only of the world, but also of the Church as the "sacrament of the world" (to use the words of the Second Vatican Council) necessarily gives a special place to ritual in Catholic spiritual practices. The Catholic Church is a deeply liturgical church. Ritual always points to something beyond, something that cannot be adequately expressed in words. Ritual, too, allows us to transcend the relentless progression of ordinary time, and return to key events in the past. These capacities to express the inexpressible, to move back and forth in time, to point beyond the present situation to something else are also important dimensions of the peacebuilding process. As peacebuilding tries to overcome the unspeakable damage done to human beings and societies, as it tries to remember the dead even if it cannot bring them back to life, as it tries to reach moments of forgiveness and healing that will allow some measure of a life together in the future, ritual is indispensable to the process of peace. The long habits of ritual and sacrament engraved in the Catholic imagination can be a great resource for building peace.

This is a sketch of only some of the most important elements that Catholic faith and practice bring to peacebuilding. Anyone involved in Catholic peacebuilding knows how much more reflection needs to be done to explore yet unexamined resources in this rich tradition. Let me now turn to the three areas this Conference explored to deepen our use of this resource: Catholic Social Teaching, the deep theology of peacebuilding, and spirituality and spiritual practices.

### **Catholic Social Teaching**

Participants in this Conference were of course not trying to dictate future Catholic Social Teaching. It lies with the Magisterium to present this. But historical experience shows that the Pope and Bishops do listen to those engaged with the pressing social issues for hints and suggestions for areas where Catholic Social Teaching might be further developed. At least three such suggestions emerged from this Conference.

The first is regarding a further developing of Catholic Social Teaching regarding conflict. If one looks to what is already present in Church teaching in this regard, one finds (in *Pacem in terris* and in the teaching of Paul VI) a kind of optimism about conflict being resolved by actors of good will. John Paul II certainly gave us much to reflect on regarding the role of sin, the sinful social structures, and the presence of evil. What is needed now is a deeper reflection on the complexities of conflict in kinds of warfare we are experiencing today, and what role the Church and Catholics may play in the midst of these kinds of conflict. What kinds of intervention are permitted in the context of sovereignty of states? What does it mean to be able to stand even with perpetrators of conflict, in the hopes of bringing about resolution? What about protracted, low-grade conflict? There are a host of questions that call for a deeper reflection.

A second is in regard to developing a *jus post bellum* (a just order after conflict) to match the reflection that has gone into the *jus ad bellum* (conditions for just war) and *jus in bello* (the just conduct of war). A *jus post bellum* is not symmetrical with the other two; it needs to be developed on its own in terms of transitional justice, reparations, and the building of social and civic institutions to sustain a just peace. Here the emerging thinking about Just Peace in various sectors is something to be drawn upon. The Catholic Social Teaching about integral development can serve as a basis for thinking about an integral peace, and the kind of transnational institutions that are needed for the longer term.

Third, there are issues surrounding peacebuilding in the public sphere. What are the grounds in our Social Teaching for national and international public forgiveness as a form of peacebuilding? Terms such as “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” come from the religious sphere, but they are increasingly invoked in the secular sphere as well. The need to rethink the relationship of religion to international relations is something being called for even in academic and policy circles. What should be the Church’s thinking on this? Is it time to rethink the relations of Church and state as the meaning of “state” and “statecraft” is changing? Do such relations need to be moved beyond thinking of the Church’s rights within the State to the role of the Church as a transnational organization in light of a changing configuration of politics and international relations today?

### **The Deep Theology of Peacebuilding**

The Conference also explored the theological underpinnings of new efforts at peacebuilding, especially how they draw upon some of the central doctrines of Catholic

faith. Four areas were proposed for further development by theologians who are involved in thinking about peacebuilding.

First, recent thinking on the doctrine of Trinity, particularly the communion between the Three Persons in the Godhead and the mission of the Three Persons in the world, might help illumine how Catholics see God at work in the various moments in the peacebuilding process. The model of Trinitarian communion is basic to all other theological understandings of communion. How does such communion inform the communion to which we aspire in peacebuilding? Similarly the mission of each of the Persons of the Trinity in the world can be examined in order to discern the appearances of grace in the peacebuilding process. How may understandings of the mission of the Father and the Spirit, for example, inform our actions on behalf of ecology, something that is becoming increasingly important in peacebuilding in light of climate change, and growing scarcity of water, food, and natural resources?

A second area that is opening up theologically for peacebuilding is Christology—and more specifically soteriology, the understanding of Christ’s saving work in the world. Reconciliation is already a biblical theme for describing God’s work in the world through Christ. But how are the experiences of transformation needed to build and sustain peace today understood as works of Christ? One area especially is being opened up: a rethinking of the doctrine of the atonement. While atonement is met with incomprehension and even with hostility in some Western circles today, it is becoming an important site in post-conflict situations to think about how can grievous damage to a society be healed, where violence and the malevolence bred in war have to be worked through and overcome? This is one of the most important theological sites—and

potential resource—for sustaining Catholic peacebuilding today. Another christological theme is that of the cosmic Christ, underpinning (as noted above) the integrating of ecological concerns into peacebuilding.

A third theological area is anthropology, or the Christian understanding of the human person. The dignity of the human person and the defense of human rights were hallmarks of Pope John Paul II's teaching. There are three areas where this teaching might be expanded. First of all, social teaching on *presence and accompaniment*—what it takes to stay with and continue to walk alongside those people caught in protracted warfare, who are mired in refugee and displaced persons camps, who live continually in situations slipping back into overt conflict. How do we reinforce resilience and sustain hope in such settings? Second, building the *agency* of victims of war to have the confidence to imagine peace, rebuild relationships, continue to pursue justice, and hope for the future. A strengthened capacity to act is crucial for the transformation of situations of conflict and violence into a culture of peace. Third, social teaching about the *reconstruction of humanity*, especially creating spaces where forgiveness might become possible, memories might be healed, and some measure of reconciliation might take place? Some of these areas move into largely unexplored terrain, either anthropologically or theologically.

Fourth, a renewed attention to interreligious dialogue is needed, as it has become clear how often religion is enlisted to legitimate violence and conflict today. Pope Benedict XVI seems to want to shift the focus from interreligious dialogue as common social action for truth more toward the pursuit of truth as such. At first glance, this may seem to be a move away from dialogue as peacebuilding, an interreligious theme that was close to

the heart of John Paul II. Pope Benedict's move is an important one, however, since genuine justice and lasting peace must be built on truth. One area where this approach might be expanded is to recognize the complex manifestations of truth that peacebuilding has begun to uncover. What is sometimes called "dialogical truth" (an understanding that has come out of reflection on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission) might be part of this new agenda of interreligious dialogue for the sake of truth. Dialogical truth is building together a narrative in which both sides of the dialogue can recognize the presence of their truth. This could yield an important praxis of peacebuilding that could not only help prevent violence, but also rebuild societies after conflict.

### **Practices and Spirituality**

Furthering Catholic peacebuilding requires involving the institutional and theological resources of the Church, but also must bring forth practices that will sustain peacebuilders. This is more than gathering together useful techniques; the practices must be informed by Catholic ethos, teaching, and spirituality.

The spiritual power of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, is an area that will need further exploration from the perspective of peacebuilding. How the Eucharist at once takes us into another world by returning to Christ's saving work, and at the same time commissions us to go forth and engage the world around us, has not been yet entirely examined from a peacebuilding perspective. Spiritual practices of recollection and contemplation, long part of Catholic spiritual traditions, might be engaged for the sake of imagining peace, build empathetic sensibilities, and nurturing compassion. At the same time, long-standing spiritual traditions associated with peace, such as Franciscan

spirituality, and more recent developments such as the practice of non-violence could bear more reflection. One of the important things that Catholicism can offer other peacebuilders is our experience in developing coherent spiritual traditions based on clear principles and given expression in disciplined practices.

The richness of Catholic experience with ritual might help give rise to rituals that address more directly moments in what was called above the reconstruction of humanity. Catholicism is rich in penitential rituals for the healing of wrongdoers; it has focused less attention on the healing needs for victims. But surely there are resources there to be plumbed. The healing of memories, the performance of social apology, and the enactment of social forgiveness all require ritual form. We need the help of those schooled especially in the liturgy and the Church's spiritual traditions to help us in this regard.

A Conference as rich as this one has been has yielded far more insights than could be recorded here. But those just presented seem to me to open important horizons in the next stage of development for Catholic peacebuilding. They certainly affirm, I believe, that there is a future to Catholic peacebuilding, and have given us some of the next steps into a fuller vision and practice that will be needed.