

Opening Remarks

Gerard Powers

June 20, 2022

9:00 am

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening. Thank you for joining us.

Welcome to the Opening Plenary of this global conference, **Catholic Peacebuilding in Times of Crisis: Hope for a Wounded World.**

Before I begin, note that simultaneous translation for this session is available in Spanish and French. Please choose the appropriate translation room to hear the entire presentation in your preferred language. The button is located along the bottom of your zoom screen on the right. A portion of today's plenary will be in Spanish, so English speakers should also choose a translation channel if they would like to hear the translation for that presentation.

I am Jerry Powers. I chair the Steering Committee of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network (CPN) and am Director of Catholic Peacebuilding Studies at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, of the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of

Notre Dame in the United States. With a secretariat at the Kroc Institute, CPN is a network of two dozen bishops' conferences, academic institutions, development agencies, and peace organizations. For the past twenty years, CPN has sought to enhance the study and practice of Catholic peacebuilding. We have done this through global conferences like this, our seventh, as well as more focused events; through publications, including a new book on peacebuilding and mining and a forthcoming book on nuclear disarmament; and through accompaniment of Catholic peacebuilding efforts, especially in Colombia, Mindanao in the Philippines, and central and east Africa.

On the conference site is a moving *prayer of the faithful* by over a dozen peacebuilders from around the world, each praying in their own language. This prayer of the faithful highlights many of the crises the Church's peacebuilding work seeks to address. Similar litanies of today's crises, global and local, are repeated in the prayers of the faithful in our churches around the world every day. No need or time to repeat

the litanies of crises here. But can anyone be surprised that the Global Peace Index is at its lowest level in 15 years?

The good news is that the Catholic community -- almost always working closely with other religious actors, civil society groups, multilateral institutions, and governments -- is responding to the many crises we face in many different ways. This conference highlights a broad spectrum of the Church's response.

My hope is that you leave this conference *inspired* – convinced, if you aren't already, that the Catholic Church *is* a peacebuilding church. It is a church that, in its teachings and how those teachings are lived out, is engaged in preventing violent conflict, limiting and stopping it when it occurs, and promoting rebuilding, healing, and reconciliation after the violence ends. We *are* a peacebuilding Church.

I also hope that you leave this conference *challenged* – because too much of the Church's peacebuilding work is unknown, unheralded, and under-analyzed. Moreover, we *know* that there is much more that the

Catholic community can be doing to realize its full peacebuilding potential.

This conference convenes a wide range of Catholic peacebuilders from around the world – artisans of peace who are trying to bring the Sermon on the Mount into the lives of individuals, communities, and nations torn by conflict.

We have invited some 75 of the world's most creative, committed, and courageous peacebuilders who are working on some of the world's most intractable problems to participate in 20 sessions over four days. No doubt, we have *too many* panelists and *too many* sessions for a world suffering from a crisis of *too many* webinars. But we have far *too few* to represent even the work of CPN and its affiliated institutions, much less the full breadth of peacebuilding being done by the 700 or so of you who are registered for this conference – not to mention the countless other Catholic peacebuilders around the world.

One who wanted to be with us but cannot is **Archbishop Gabriele Caccia**, the Holy See's representative to the UN. He has graciously

taken the time to record a 20-minute special message for this conference on the Holy See's work for peace at the UN. It will be posted on the conference website this morning. I encourage you to take the time to watch it. It's an excellent message.

Two other peacebuilders who are not with us are **Fr. Drew Christiansen** of Georgetown University's Berkley Center, and **Fr. Bob Schreiter** of the Catholic Theological Union, both of whom passed away in the last year. This conference is dedicated to them, in recognition of their indispensable peacebuilding work and their two decades of work with CPN. May they rest in peace.

Before turning to the substance of this Opening Plenary, I want to thank the two dozen co-sponsors of this conference; they are too many to name so please consult the list in the conference program. I want to especially thank Notre Dame's Kroc Institute, which funds CPN's secretariat and has devoted considerable resources to this conference.

In particular, I want to introduce and thank **Caesar Monteverchio**, **Veronica Vos**, and **Fr. Bill Headley** of CPN's secretariat, who have

worked tirelessly to make this conference a reality, along with **Tim Checkley** and Notre Dame's IT specialists. They will be working from early morning until late at night this week to ensure that things run smoothly.

The conference site – which is called the Lobby – has all the information you need for this conference.

Note that the Lobby includes an Expo area, with information on a variety of peacebuilding organizations from around the world.

That's an overview of the conference. Now to today's program.

We begin with **Archbishop Luis Jose Rueda**. He is Archbishop of Bogota and president of the Episcopal Conference of Colombia. This conference was originally to be hosted by Caritas Colombia and the bishops' social pastoral secretariat, along with Javeriana University in Bogota. But due to ongoing Covid restrictions, we reluctantly decided to hold the event virtually.

We are fortunate that Archbishop Rueda, who would have welcomed us to Bogota, took time to send us a recorded message of welcome and prayer. He did so two days ago, just before Colombia's run-off election for president, an election that could have a major impact on prospects for cementing the peace there. Let's watch his video message.

9:08 AM SHOW VIDEO OF ARCHBISHOP RUEDA'S MESSAGE

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/12YAXj3pSCGD7cSbotUXt7RuLvSbnqnqq/view?usp=sharing>

9:15 AM

Again, we are grateful to Archbishop Rueda for taking time amidst a critically important moment in the peace process in Colombia to share his message and prayers with us.

I now turn to our keynote speaker for today. **Cardinal Charles Bo**, a Salesian priest since 1976 and a bishop since 1990, has been Archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar, since 2003. In 2015, Pope Francis named him the first-ever Cardinal from Myanmar. He is president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar as well as the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, and is co-president of Religions for Peace. He has

been an outspoken advocate for the poor, marginalized, and persecuted as he has worked for democracy, human rights, and peace in Myanmar and around the world. We are proud to be able to claim him as a faithful citizen of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network for two decades.

He is with us on-line but because the internet is unreliable and subject to shutdowns without notice, he pre-recorded his talk a few days ago so as to ensure no interruptions.

9:16 AM SHOW VIDEO OF CARDINAL BO'S TALK

9:55 AM

Peacebuilders must speak truth to power. We just saw a demonstration of that. Thank you, Cardinal Bo, for such a comprehensive overview on the crises facing the world and your beloved Myanmar, and for sharing your perspective on how to maintain a sense of hope amidst the repression, violence, and injustice that surrounds you.

As you see in the program, we asked two peacebuilders doing very different kinds of work in very different contexts, to respond to Cardinal Bo's talk. Unfortunately, one of our respondents, **Marguerite Barankitse** had to cancel on short notice due to illness. She is a renowned peacebuilder, the founder of Maison Shalom, which has helped thousands of orphaned children in Burundi. Please keep her in your prayers.

Scott Appleby is the Marilyn Keough Dean of the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame. From 2000-2014, he served as the Regan Director of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. A professor of history, he specializes in religion and global affairs. He is the author of 15 books, including seminal work on religion and violence, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*. One of the founders of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, he is editor, with Fr. Bob Schreiter and me, of *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics and Praxis*.

9:56 AM SCOTT'S REMARKS

10:05 AM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (or questions from audience)

You leave us with two questions, so back to you on those but let me ask them in a slightly different way.

I sent a friend, a good Catholic, the program for this conference. He replied that the conference looked really interesting for those who are artisans of peace, but I'm a business consultant; "I don't do peace."

While that answer might sound a bit flippant, I think it reflects a legitimate point: that peacebuilding amidst complex crises is serious business that requires some specialized expertise, the expertise of diplomats, or specialists in trauma healing, or human rights lawyers, or climate change scientists. If I specialize in finance, farming, or construction, shouldn't I prioritize what I know best and not get into things I know nothing about?

Others, especially pastors or bishops or agencies providing humanitarian relief in conflicted areas, see peacebuilding as too political and divisive, and thus a threat to their ministry and mission.

And others are not willing to invest money and time in peacebuilding if they can't measure the results more precisely than you suggest is possible.

How do you respond to these and other legitimate concerns?

In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis echoes a lot of peacebuilding experts when he says that an integral approach is needed to peace, development, and ecology because the cry of war's victims, the cry of the poor, and the cry of the earth rise as one (*Laudato Si'*, no. 49). Our Wed. plenary on the Church and peace processes, our Thursday plenary on climate, development and peace, and many other sessions this week will focus on the need for integrated, complex responses to complex problems. So what do you think it will take for Catholics engaged in a wide variety of social justice work at all levels to integrate and collaborate better?

10:28 AM CONCLUDING REMARKS

A forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Social Encounters* will be devoted to peacebuilding bishops. We are fortunate today to have heard from two peacebuilding bishops who are courageously working for a just peace in two of the most challenging conflict situations in the world.

We are also fortunate to hear the insights of Scott Appleby, who has done more than almost any scholar in helping the world understand the complex dynamics of religion, conflict, and peacebuilding.

This opening plenary has reinforced two convictions that underlie this conference:

First, a *theology of hope* matters. The sheer magnitude of the world's interconnected crises generates denial, indifference, despair, cynicism, and fatalism. The antidote is to combine a sober realism and concrete plans of action with more effective efforts to cultivate a theology, ethics, and spirituality of hope.

Second, *Catholic* peacebuilding matters. The world's crises require concerted action by all of humanity; Catholics do not have a corner on the peacebuilding market. But the Catholic community brings something distinctive to the peacebuilding enterprise, something that can be celebrated and cultivated, and that is always in need of strengthening.

Thank you for being with us for this opening plenary. I hope you can join us for our other plenaries, which will be the next three days at the same time.

I also hope you can join us for the four other panels today:

At **1:00 ET USA**, we have panels on the **church's role in truth and reconciliation processes** and on **shaping a culture of peacebuilding through spirituality**

And

At **8:00 pm ET USA**, we have a workshop on **Catholic Relief Services'**
social cohesion tool and a **panel on environmental peacebuilding**