

## **Response to Cardinal Bo's keynote for CPN conference**

Thank you, Jerry, and greetings from Bologna, Italy, where the European Academy of Religion is meeting this week; among the signs of hope *here* are the panels exploring and advocating for a new initiative on interreligious encounter, dialogue, and collaboration between religious communities and European governments in pursuit of human fraternity and inclusive citizenship—an initiative inspired by and resonant with Pope Francis's vision of Fraternity and Social Friendship presented in *Fratelli Tutti*.

I begin with an expression of heartfelt gratitude to Cardinal Bo, from all of us, for his inspiring, moving—indeed, *soul-stirring*—keynote presentation which we just heard. It was a tapestry woven from seemingly unconnectable threads—a sobering tour of the many evils ravaging the world and its most vulnerable peoples, a lamentation electrified by the Cardinal's prophetic, unsparing indictment of the brutal regime oppressing his own people; and yet, somehow, also a vivid tapestry of resilience, stitched together from so many sources of Christian resistance to darkness—St. John's Gospel, the letters of Paul, the stubborn compassion of Mother Teresa, and the Cardinal's own insistence, which can in no way be called naïve, on faith, hope and, most of all, love as the source of redemption for the suffering people of Myanmar and beyond.

How can these things go together? Only when love casts out fear. Your Eminence, I have attended many conferences in my time and have forgotten many details of what was said, but I shall never forget the CPN conference of some years ago which focused on human rights violations around the world and the call to nonviolence in resistance to evil. During the final session, you gave witness to the vocation of a bishop in so many regions of the world, the number increasing year by year, where human life seems to be worth nothing, where bloodshed, murder and impunity is taken for granted: in such settings, you implored us, a bishop's vocation is *martyrdom*. I shall never forget the tone of your voice, neither triumphant nor self-pitying, but quietly determined and yet somehow filled with hope in the final victory of the Risen Lord. If we witness no other signs of hope in these four days together, your Eminence, your life and ministry is perhaps all we need to know where true hope lies. Thank you for your ministry, your courage and your faith.

## Measuring Hope

Catholic peacebuilders are frequently called upon to document their progress, to measure concrete change for the good as a result of their labors, in order to reassure their donors and other supporters that “faith, hope and love” are not “abstract concepts,” as Cardinal Bo cautions.

To be sure, there ARE demonstrable, data-like, pieces of evidence to suggest why sustained peacebuilding matters *enormously*. Cardinal Bo enjoins “the provision of humanitarian assistance – food, shelter, medicine, education – all the means of survival for those who need it.” “Without food on the table, a roof over their heads, some basic treatment for illness and basic schooling for their children” . . . peace means little or nothing, he says. “These values must be tangible.” And indeed, we CAN count food delivered, homes rebuilt, schools opened, farmers restored to their livelihoods.

But Cardinal Bo also emphasizes two additional imperatives of peace: first, progress in “the sphere of dialogue, peace-building, conflict-resolution and reconciliation” and, second, “the *pursuit* of justice, accountability and truth.” In these spheres, measuring hope is a trickier business: if we are to measure progress “over time,” what is the appropriate deadline to show “progress” for peacebuilders who attend to victims traumatized by violence, broken and in need of healing? And what does “progress” look like, anyway, in such cases? The restoration of a victimized individual or community to something like pre-trauma flourishing of healthy, reciprocal relationships? And for peacebuilders who focus elsewhere—say, on processes of dialogue, reconciliation and reparation, or on the postwar rebuilding of courts and the justice system, or, on the de-mobilization of armed groups or the provision for youth of alternatives to gangs—the question looms: What are realistic criteria for success? That democracy in some form, or human rights in some form, will prevail in places like Myanmar or Afghanistan, Venezuela, Ethiopia or Ukraine? That power in such places, and in the West as well, will be wielded by honest leaders who will resist the petty or grand larcenies? That villains like Putin will not prevail? Only the naïve would make these our metrics. Yes, there are moments when history and hope rhyme, even on this grand scale—North Ireland, the South Africa of Mandela, the Philippines after the first Marcos regime. But these

moments are rare, often fleeting, and we return to the familiar refrain: *Power and greed and corruptible seed seem to be all that there is.*

And yet Cardinal Bo's surprising tapestry beckons us: "Whether we are carrying our cross or rising from it, we must hold on to hope. Not a false hope. Not a Hollywood hope. Not a hope of romantic happy endings that we see in the movies. But a gritty, earthy, real hope, grounded in our real source of strength – our Crucified and Risen Lord."

Some years ago, after directing the Kroc Institute for many years, I finally had a long-delayed A-Ha! Moment, thanks to a group of Maryknoll sisters on retreat who were reading John Paul Lederach's masterwork, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, under my supposed direction. But I was the one needing direction and they provided it, by explaining what it is to build peace. It is NOT so much the definitive ending of war, the redress of all wounds, the triumph of justice in the state, the nonviolent resolution of decades-long conflict; rather, it is the creation of small and vulnerable but determined communities of nonviolence; networks of activists and advocates that create opportunities for resistance and platforms for peace small at first but scale-able. It is the very act itself of "the *pursuit* of justice and truth" in Cardinal Bo's precise term. It is the striving, the pursuit, the commitment to the thing itself, to the unconditioned horizon of hope, whatever the cost, the eventual outcome.

Vaclav Havel's well-known reflections on Hope are relevant here:

*Either we have hope within us or we do not. It is a dimension of the soul and is not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world. HOPE is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. It transcends the world that is immediately experienced and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons. HOPE in this deep and powerful sense is not the same as joy that things are going well or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not because it stands a chance to succeed. HOPE is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the*

*conviction that something will turn out well, but certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out. It is HOPE, above all which gives the strength to live and continually try new things.*

Nonetheless, the question looms: what have peacebuilders to promise, in terms of concrete, constructive, lasting change? I join His Eminence in challenging this conference to address the question “Wherein lies our hope?” As people pf faith, we affirm that our hope lies in Christ. And what do we hope *for* in Christ? It is one thing to celebrate the swelling tide of religious actors, networks and churches that seem more invested today than ever in peacebuilding. It is quite another to address concretely the question: And what *will* we be able to accomplish if we succed in strengthening the Church's sense of peacebuilding as the mission and vocation of all Catholics, not just the bishops and select laity? What is possible for us if that sense of mission and vocation shape the priorities of Catholic institutions, groups, and individuals of all kinds and at all levels -- not just a small cadre of dedicated peace and justice activists. What will it take for Catholic engaged in disparate and largely uncoordinated action scattered across the peacebuilding spectrum, to integrate work on climate and peace, relief and development, spirituality and peace?

A world in crisis awaits our answer.

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July 20, 2022